Title
Revisioning Philosophy: An Inquiry into Better Ways of Knowing—in the Humanities, in the Arts, in the Sciences, and in the World

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Revisioning Philosophy: An Inquiry into Better Ways of Knowing—in the Humanities, in the Arts, in the Sciences, and in the World

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

PHILOSOPHY

by

Nickolas Knightly

June 2019

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Revisioning Philosophy: An Inquiry into Better Ways of Knowing—in the Humanities, in the Arts, in the Sciences, and in the World

A dissertation by

Nickolas Knightly

Abstract

An inquiry into the cultivation of an ethically-, aesthetically-, ecologically-rooted way of knowing and a meditation on philosophy as a way of life. This text considers how the climate crisis and general ecological degradation (along with other phenomena) indicate the need for a better way of knowing. The text begins with the multidisciplinary scientist Gregory Bateson’s suggestion that “the most important task today is . . . to learn to think in [a] new way.” This may sound like a platitude, but Bateson was a careful scientist who was sensitive to the unprecedented social and ecological challenges humanity now faces. His suggestion was meant as a sober, perhaps even a sobering imperative. He was not alone in making this suggestion. Perhaps philosophy always demands this of us, and it seems to have become incredibly important, given the state of the world. But how can we actually think differently, and what is wrong with our current ways of thinking and known? To find out, the dissertation engages in a “philosophical meta-analysis,” a kind of archaeology of the soul, considering various spiritual artefacts from western and non-western, Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures, including insights from Eihei Dogen, Plato, Buddha, Blackfoot epistemology, C.G. Jung, John Dewey, Friedrich Nietzsche, E. Richard Sorenson, Gregory Bateson, and others. The inquiry offers steps toward an ethically and aesthetically embodied, ecologically and spiritually embedded epistemology of practice and realization that amounts to a paradigm shift out of the forms of life and forms of discourse not only of the western academy, but of the dominant culture as a whole.
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The multidisciplinary scientist Gregory Bateson said that “the most important task today is . . . to learn to think in [a] new way” (Steps, 469). This may sound like a platitude, but Bateson was a careful scientist who was sensitive to the unprecedented social and ecological challenges humanity now faces. His suggestion was meant as a sober, perhaps even a sobering imperative. He was not alone in making this suggestion, and in conducting the research for this project and presenting some of the findings, I have encountered a sincere interest in new ways of thinking and knowing, both within the academy and beyond. Because of the evident success of the ways of thinking and knowing we already employ in science and scholarship, some of the findings of this dissertation have come as a surprise, and this has allowed a deeper appreciation of what Bateson and other scientists and philosophers have been asking for when they called for—or tried to introduce—a “new way of thinking.” In fact, the continued surprise involves both the ease with which one can slip into old ways of thinking, and the challenges of not only thinking more wisely and effectively, but conveying to others how we might go about doing so.

The call for a new way of thinking and knowing in the sophisticated sense Bateson and others had in mind has its source in one of the most important philosophical insights of all time—a philosophical insight that became one of the greatest scientific discoveries of all time just last century. The discovery is this: Knowledge depends on our way of knowing. Scientifically, this discovery is central to cybernetics and quantum physics, and it plays a key role in ecology, biology, evolution, cognitive science, and developmental systems theory—indeed, any developmental theory seems to need to take it into consideration. In a strange twist of fate, this crucial discovery has not really sunk into the culture. It has become almost stale, passé, or something dismissed as a fascination of new-agey thinkers. However, as our inquiry will
indicate, we haven’t really come to terms with the meaning and implications of this finding, especially as it relates to epistemology, ethics, and philosophy in general. This book tries to get at the philosophical meaning of this discovery, and it does so while considering various reasons for suspecting that our current ways of thinking and knowing need improving, and both of these things in turn unfold in the process of trying to offer and exemplify a new epistemology—a *practical* theory of knowledge—that can help us accomplish the task of thinking and knowing in a genuinely new way. Developing this epistemology required a somewhat unconventional approach to scholarship, and it yielded some unanticipated implications. It in fact demanded a shift in forms of discourse and even forms of life.

One of the issues at play has to do with the paradoxes that can arise when we try to shift to a new way of thinking and knowing. The case I try to make draws on non-western philosophy, but it can be approximated with a western philosophical analogy. If we take our current epistemology as a paradigm in the Kuhnian sense, then the theoretical and empirical challenges discussed in the work can be seen as anomalous data. As anomalous data builds up, it may indicate an impending paradigm shift. However, as Kuhn argued, the new paradigm will be nonsensical from the standpoint of the present paradigm. But it would make for a useless book if all I could offer were nonsense. How can we try to accomplish something here? We somehow need to think ourselves into a new paradigm, and the situation is far more challenging than a paradigm shift in a scientific discipline, which itself often takes genius-level insights. A cultural shift is another order of challenge altogether, one that requires that we metabolize significant scientific and philosophical insights. Such a shift, if we can draw near to it, will have many immediate implications for science and for every other aspect of the culture. How could we shift our whole
way of thinking and knowing—not merely our particular theory about this or that, but our manner of theorizing in the first place?

For the past several years I have been working on how to get at the importance of this shift, why it seems necessary, what it would mean for philosophy and the broader culture, and how we could get it to happen. This has resulted in a series of relative failures and relative successes (very relative in the latter case), along with a series of significant insights, often humiliating ones. I have in fact begun to stress the importance of the relationship between human, humus, humility, homo sapiens, and (somewhat more poetically perhaps) Om, the sacred syllable that holds such an important place in many philosophical and spiritual traditions of the east. These words all share a common root (more mysteriously in the case of Om, since no one seems to be able to agree on its meaning and etymology . . . but we can certainly hear “Om” in “humus” if we have an ear for poetic resonance—and a heart for spiritual or philosophical resonance). It began to seem to me that philosophy needs more rootedness in humus, and that philosophical growth involves a certain degree of humiliation that gives rise to a gentle humility in place of the hyper self-criticism and even self-loathing cultivated by many a western mind.

As I discussed my work with extremely supportive readers, we kept wrestling over issues of style and structure. It became clear to me that I could not accomplish the work using more academic forms of discourse, but I could not seem to explain what I was trying to do with the forms I developed to replace the academic forms. These were not “stylistic” choices in the usual sense. It seemed that something deeper directed me to philosophize in a certain way, and this will make more sense as we proceed in our inquiry together. Suffice it to say, I was trying to use the new
epistemology in the process of doing the textual discussion of it, and it kept proving difficult in
ways that writing doesn’t usually seem so difficult. I found that I could explain things in person
in a much clearer way, but this seemed to be due to two factors: On the one hand, I would tend to
oversimplify to fit something into a timed talk or into the rhythms of conversation, and on the
other hand, I had the advantage that always comes with intimacy. This is more important in
philosophy than many of us want to admit, even though Socrates, a great patriarch of western
wisdom, made such a big deal about it. If I could just deliver an oral dissertation on this subject,
we might all feel better about it—except of course for those pesky simplifications, the
transcendence of which would make the oral dissertation a totally impractical event (it would
take too many hours). There was also the crucial issue that I myself have not, by any means,
mastered a new way of knowing. I often struggle as much as anyone to get out of old habits, and
need much more practice to realize a better way of knowing. As Nietzsche warns us,

Beauty no accident. The beauty of a race or family, their grace and graciousness
in all gestures, is won by work: like genius, it is the end result of the accumulated
work of generations. One must have made great sacrifices to good taste, one must
have done much and omitted much for its sake . . . and good taste must have
furnished a principle for selecting company, place, dress, sexual satisfaction; one
must have preferred beauty to advantage, habit, opinion, and inertia. Supreme rule
of conduct: before oneself too, one must not “let oneself go.” The good things are
immeasurably costly; and the law always holds that those who have them are
different from those who acquire them. All that is good is inherited: whatever is
not inherited is imperfect, is a mere beginning. (TI 47)

Though we can find problems in this formulation, we can acknowledge a difference between, on
the one hand, growing up in a family completely devoid of musical interest, and then maybe by
age 20 or 30 becoming interested in music and trying to teach oneself, and on the other hand
having parents who were musicians, played music while we were in the womb, financed a
Suzuki style musical education, and supported and encouraged us to grow up with this most vital
mother tongue.
Nietzsche wrote in the preface to Antichrist: “Some are born posthumously.” In light of Tibetan philosophy (e.g. the so-called Book of the Dead), that’s a funny comment. If we take it to mean interest in the recognition of one’s “work,” it sounds, in his case, sad but true, and in the case of most of us a mere wishful thinking. If we take it as an interest in the realization of results in one’s philosophical practice, one’s whole way of life, it’s something we should keep an eye on. I am not so worried about this sort of book as a book, as something that may or may not draw attention and interest, but I am interested in trying to fulfill the demands it makes on me to live more beautifully—in this life. Maybe even as part of that demand, I would like to write at least successfully enough that someone could find something genuinely valuable here, something useful. But what to make of the struggle to communicate when I kept setting out to be ever more precise?

I finally managed to write a draft of the work, and to deliver a talk, that seemed much more functional for most of my current audience. But it had problems, in part related to what I saw as a lack of precision in the language. I also felt that the audience were still missing some of the key things I was trying to get across.

One of my readers, Dr. Heather Shearer, suggested that perhaps if we thought of the work as a kind of meta-analysis, this would give people a framework for making sense of it. I began to think about what a philosophical meta-analysis would entail. At first, I simply used the term to provide an academic description of what I was trying to do. In so doing, I found I had run the risk that people might think the substance of the work as academic—even though it actually
presents a challenge to academic ways of thinking, and thus does not seem very academic, but rather seems to disrupt (or invite disruption of) academic ways of knowing. Of course, an academic description of dancing does not mean one will dance in an academic fashion, or merely describe without ever dancing—not if one wants to demonstrate dancing and invite others to experience dancing. It may seem we in academia don’t dance, but rather we comment on dancing or analyze it or muse on the conditions that make it possible. This is maybe not quite the analogy we need here, but I wouldn’t mind a reader’s receiving this project an invitation to dance, as the description of a few basic moves—for the purpose of trying them, to experience dance.

In any case, I hadn’t committed to making the term “philosophical meta-analysis” a part of the text itself. In general, it seems easier to play with words than to come to insights that transform us in a deep way—part of Plato’s criticism of poetry, and one that many other philosophers have made. However, we can try and clarify the term and make some advantage of its meaning as a way of orienting toward and within the text and its attendant epistemology. Reading the text in light of the term will hopefully help the reader to navigate the project—with the caveat that the term itself matters very little.

So, what is a philosophical meta-analysis?¹

First, let’s recall the common meaning of the term, which is not “philosophical” but more mathematical and scientific. Meta-analysis is a powerful tool in the sciences for resolving

¹ It will seem as though we are going to speak about the meta-analysis, and then engage in it. We have already begun it. Introductory remarks in this and other works are already the heart of the matter, just in a certain arrangement.
apparent contradictions and tensions in sets of data. Meta-analyses can be very interesting. They do not provide a “last word,” because surprises do happen, and we have a talent for perpetuating unskillful ideas. But they can help. Just as scientists may find apparent contradictions in their data and their theories, we humans, and we professional philosophers too, have apparent contradictions and tensions in our philosophical ideas about knowledge. (Terms like “ideas” and “knowledge” already have problems, but let’s keep going, and we can come back to some of those concerns later.) These ideas are not “empirical” data in the usual sense, and are thus not amenable to the statistical study a standard meta-analysis would employ. Though we will draw from various sciences in this work, the mix of theory and empirical findings does not allow for computation. Philosophical meta-analysis takes a relatively large set of thinkers and empirical findings as offering conceptual “data points”. That may not be the right term. Maybe we should call them “philosophical data points,” or maybe and even “philosophical artefacts”. In any case, this set of artefacts does two things: It offers a criticism of the general way of knowing that manifests throughout the dominant culture while ultimately revealing a shared space, a pluralistic space, that can be defined as the space of a new and inclusive epistemology (many valid ways of knowing, many beautiful ways of life). Let us clarify that “philosophical artefacts” does not mean material exclusively intellectual or academic, and it includes insights, suggestions, inspirations, images, and more from a wise variety of human and non-human beings, including humans who worked with or produced texts in ways quite different from the ways academics do, and also including those who didn’t produce any texts at all (it would be hard to include, for instance, Socrates or Siddhartha (the Buddha) if we had to rely on written texts, because they didn’t produce any, and we would have a hard time including works of art (painting, poetry, dance, and so on), which a fuller meta-analysis should include). The “data points” of our meta-
analysis are not as much “empirical” in terms of “scientific” “data” as they are qualitative and philosophical. They are still *experimental* in an important sense, and more properly scientific (when “science” gets revalued), but our meta-analysis appreciates “data” in the sense of what is given—in the philosophical or spiritual sense of what is given to us like a *gift* or an act of *grace*. This sense of givenness has to do with realization, and with a sense of sacredness. These things will become clearer as we proceed.

This is not quite the way to put it, but we can helpfully say the meta-analysis invites us to sense the need for concrete *practices* (beyond the analysis and production of texts or arguments) that allow us to access this different way of knowing, and it shows that these practices can serve as a bridge to shifting into a new way of thinking and being. This shift is important. Let us recall that any apparent contradictions in the data, any apparent anomalies, may signify that we stand on the threshold of a paradigm shift. It seems possible—probable—that we need one.

This new thinking and living we seek to get some sense of can be seen as the new epistemology in action, grounded in our embedded, embodied nature. But, we still need to understand the role of “practice” in the new epistemology. As we will see, the epistemology that will interest us here is an epistemology of practice and realization. So, we are not just talking about “practices” in a conventional sense. For instance, I take a conventional discussion of practices to be something like the growing field of contemplative science. Scientists and philosophers are working hard to show how meditation can improve cognitive performance and help us be more rational and more compassionate. We will consider a few artefacts from that research, but it merely forms a small part of a proper philosophical meta-analysis. Lots of people have described, from a more
conventional standpoint, the practices we shall also describe. We need to get at deeper issues in our way of knowing, and I will try to explain this further.

First, let me mention some of the “data points” this project seeks to integrate and account for. The book is part of a whole program of research. That program of research would not merely extend the meta-analysis itself. It would begin to apply the new epistemology, both inside and outside of the academy. So, the data points listed here are not all the data points I would prefer to have in the analysis itself or as influences in its application. Some valuable things did not or could not make it into this text. But here are some examples of the disparate thinking and knowing the present version of the meta-analysis does seek to connect: Plato’s general views on philosophy and knowledge and those of the Japanese philosopher Dogen; Dewey’s concepts of habit and use, the Chinese philosopher Zhuangzi’s ideas about spontaneity and uselessness, and ideas about cognition developed by Francisco Varela, J.J. Gibson, and others; the thinking of physicists David Bohm and John Wheeler, the collaboration between Wolfgang Pauli and Carl Jung, and the epistemologies and linguistic patterns found in the Blackfoot and Navaho traditions; the work of those involved in horse-human epistemology and the work of Sorenson, Levi-Strauss, and other anthropologists; the work of ecologists like Paul Shepard and psychologists like James Hillman and Chellis Glendinning. Many of these connections are obvious, but they all include subtleties that future work could elaborate. In any case, these sets of relations are in turn related to each other, interwoven with each other, so that all these figures and more come together to delineate (to sketch and adumbrate, to scry and descry) a space of inclusiveness that can bring new vitality to our ways of thinking and knowing, allowing for advances in science, scholarship, and education. The work actually includes more figures,
especially in terms of influence, but also in terms of direct presence, as in the case of Nietzsche. A fuller meta-analysis would include many more. And we should get clear that these data points are more than merely “conceptual,” since they attempt to get at experience—and that is the sense in which they show up as philosophical artefacts. Because of this intimate relationship with experience, the meta-analysis involves our basic relationship to time, space, mind, body, emotions, perceptions, self, agency, health and healing, creativity, Nature, and more. All of these dimensions will need further development, but they receive enough attention to convey, evoke, or conjure what we might call “the image” of the meta-analysis, that which it tries to help the reader sense, touch, taste, see in some way—even if just to “sense its presence,” the presence of something that remains at a distance.

Art, broadly construed, has had a major influence on the meta-analysis, and the work could not be what it is aside from artists such as Hakuin, Rikyu, Ikkyu, Andy Goldsworthy, John Daido Loori, Minor White, Henri-Cartier-Bresson, Isadora Duncan, Loie Fuller, Martha Graham, Jackson Pollock, Leonard Cohen, Duke Ellington, Howlin’ Wolf, Gary Snyder, and many, many others, as well as my own creative practice, however embarrassingly modest. But more works of art should be overtly included, and this marks another, major limitation of the present version—as well as a limitation in current ways of knowing in much of science and philosophy. A principal recommendation of this text is that research should be conducted in teams that include scientists, artists, and philosophers in particular, along with members of the local community, meeting often outside of offices and laboratories, in natural places, responsive to the land. Perhaps one of the most important things we can do in order to know better is to contentiously cultivate more ecologically balanced (diverse) and mutually nourishing communities of
researchers. But, it will not help as much if those researchers try and apply the old epistemology, just in a new group setting, or even a “natural” one. They will need to also make use of a shared vision, ethical orientation, and practices of knowing that may carry them to potentially startling insights. Thus, they require the openness to suddenness, openness to being startled and to being in some sense at risk, which goes beyond the “open mind” that all academics proclaim they have.

Suffering also has a central role in the meta-analysis, as suffering has in various philosophical traditions been related to ignorance—in other words, bad ways of knowing, or what we might call active misknowing of ourselves and reality. Though it appears throughout the meta-analysis, it needs to eventually have its own more concentrated discussion, which tentatively I would call, “Why We Need a Philosophy of Suffering.” There is a reason why the basic teachings of the great philosophers are called basic teachings. As we mature in our lives, we come to understand these basic teachings ever more intimately, and with increasing appreciation.

As a subject for academic study, such a wide range of thinkers could be written off as “mile wide, inch deep” scholarship, mere dilettantism, or the worst kind of hodge-podge. However, we have here a conscientiously curated and carefully arranged constellation of philosophical artefacts—not an academic analysis. Thus, the seemingly disconcerting breadth is meant to serve as the source of the work’s cogency, because, although the work examines a broad range of theories and phenomena, insights and experiences, it remains focused on a single question: How can we implement better ways of thinking and knowing? (It thus also carries the question: In what sense and in what ways might our current processes of knowing be problematic?) We must be clear that it does this in the context of noting tensions in the data, noting ways in which we
might be miskno wing ourselves and the nature of reality, ways in which we might grasp at limited and limiting habits of thinking, speaking/writing, and moving in the world. It is as if the meta-analysis were a kind of archaeology of the soul, and we were inquiring into a large cache of artefacts and trying to see trends, resolutions, resonances, correspondences—not quite as simple as doing something mathematical, but somehow analogous. I say this having experienced a certain amount of disappointment when reading Foucault’s attempt at archaeology. He seems to hold up a series of artefacts without making a very compelling case for anything. Having engaged in the present version of philosophical archaeology, I can better appreciate the challenges he faced, even though I still disagree with Foucault in some fundamental ways. To put it too strongly, he leaves alternative ways of knowing something like a matter of personal whim, and he seems to reduce philosophy as a way of life to a matter of style, but in the more pejorative or limited connotation of doing something “in style” as opposed to a deeper sense of living “with style.” Kurt Vonnegut, drawing from Nietzsche, makes this distinction in Sirens of Titan, and the one I make here is even more rigorous than what he and Nietzsche meant. Foucault, also influenced by Nietzsche, didn’t seem to see that Nietzsche’s greatest failure was his inability to express what a fully non-dualistic philosophy offers us as a vision and demands from us as a way of life. Philosophy is about our uniqueness, but that uniqueness only fulfills itself in, through, and as a process of attunement with something that transcends us. Another way to say it is that someone like Hadot seemed to favor the analogy of life as a sculpture, in which we uncover something that seems to be “there,” in the stone, waiting to be freed from its encasement, and someone like Foucault seemed to favor the analogy of life as a painting, a blank canvas which we paint however we fancy. The meta-analysis suggests neither analogy captures
the fullness of life, and neither analogy gives us a sufficient answer to the question of how we can know better.

Our inquiry seeks to give a certain kind of concrete answer or set of answers to that question (How can we know better?), answers that can function in our research and our everyday lives, answers that in some cases seem startling, and have equally startling empirical data to support them. However, it also gives something like a non-answer. I mean that two things happen: Our inquiry makes a concrete recommendation of practices that will help us become more rigorous philosophers and begin to know better right away, and at the same time it offers an insistence that these practices are not, in themselves, any kind of genuine medicine. I want to put that stronger: Anything that seems like a concrete answer comes with a stringent warning that should be put in bright red 100 pt. font. I will spare the font but give the warning: This is not the answer, and if you just pick it up and start “using” it (i.e. using yourself and the world) the wrong way, you will likely create trouble for yourself and others. Any concrete answers can only come by means of a holistic practice-and-realization, in a process of co-discovery and co-creation. In other words, we have to shift into this space of new ways of knowing, with all of the attendant issues of ethics, aesthetics, and worldview that it evokes, and thereby, together, make the world better, in a process that is not only mutual (i.e. it is itself interwovenness), but (for that reason) is both discovery and creation at once. There are simply no short-cuts of the kind we might wish for, including any short-cuts of understanding the meta-analysis and the epistemology it seeks to help us shift into.
Given the central status of our ways of thinking and knowing, the work’s admittedly broad net in fact must be broad. I mean that first and foremost to indicate that it catches up everything in its web, and it tries to present a broad vision of the dominant culture and the possibility for alternatives. It should help explain knowledge in the current paradigm, help us understand how insights happen in general. But it must do this as it challenges that paradigm, holistically, showing how extensive our revolution must be if we want to truly know better. In this work of challenging our current ways of thinking, it extends the insights we have already had in our culture. Philosophers like Nietzsche, Jung, and even analytic figures like Quine, Davidson, and Danto have come remarkably close to the space we are talking about (I argue that they all drew from it, but I mean they got close to being able to talk about what it is). I am less interested in the analytic figures. It might be genuinely interesting to me and to some analytic philosophers if we could undertake a study of how the analytic tradition has in its own way traced the edges of the space the meta-analysis seeks to help us enter. The difficulty is entering though, and I have not seen any reliable tools of entry in the western analytic tradition (based on a limited sampling, the continental tradition does not seem any better), and this seems to me to have cut off a certain kind of understanding. The “toolkit” of mainstream western philosophy (analytic or continental) seems less rigorous than it needs to be, and showing this is part of the meta-analysis.

At any rate, by locating a common space for such a broad range of ideas, practices, experiences, and even languages—many of which were completely isolated from each other as they were developed—the insights of a variety of cultures and individual thinkers (an inclusive, ecological diversity) get carried forward into our present historical moment, so that we can make the best use of them. I am in fact much more excited by the prospect of doing further work (i.e., in the
future, as a way to continue the program of research initiated here) to help western philosophers understand, for instance, the epistemology of the Blackfoot people and that of someone like Dogen, than I am in doing further research in analytic philosophy per se. That is in part a matter of personality, so to speak, for the view here is inclusive . . . it’s just that one cannot do everything one might like or wish to do. But I also need to emphasize the fact that one of the basic tensions at work in the meta-analysis is the tension between how philosophy is currently done in the academy and how it has been done in other contexts, and further how it could be done in our own revitalized context. So, as part of its uniqueness, the meta-analysis importantly incorporates us.

In fact, it does this in two ways, and we need to understand them both in order to understand what a meta-analysis is—perhaps it surprises the reader that we still haven’t defined it! We have attempted to define it in part, but we need further clarification.

The meta-analysis of this book works with tensions and resonances between ways of knowing (“apparent tensions and contradictions in the data”). The principal tension lies between the current way of doing things and what we might need to do instead, if we want the conditions of life to begin to flourish again, if we want to navigate climate collapse with greater skill and poise, if we want to be more realistic, rigorous, and so on (in scholarship and science too), and if in general we want to cultivate greater wisdom, love, beauty, creativity, peace, and general well-being. The meta-analysis is novel in several ways. For one thing, it incorporates tensions not only “outside” of us, “out there” in “the data,” but tensions “inside” of us, tensions in the soul that have to do with our own unconscious, with the imperatives of spiritual growth, with the
empathy distress we feel in relation to the world, with the ways the sickness of the world manifests itself in us, with the ways the sickness in us manifests in the world, and so on. This is crucial. I cannot overstate its importance, and the reader will very quickly detect a strong emphasis on psychology, without which I would have no idea how to even begin. This also explains why many psychologists and neuroscientists have influenced the work, and why some appear quite prominently in this version.

Maybe the reflections so far have helped to clarify to some degree what we will mean by a meta-analysis. But we should consider a few more things. Since this is a philosophical meta-analysis, the reader needs to understand the meaning of philosophy the work here encourages us to open up to, before we can get going, as it were. But, as we consider that meaning, we are already underway. We will find ourselves trying to sense the tension between the more narrow kind of philosophizing we do in the academy, and something more rooted in experiment, experience, and practice-realization (all of these are in some sense “technical” terms we will have to define). In other words, the meta-analysis is not only oriented toward experience, but it is already something from the new epistemological space, a new practice of reading and thinking. It is contentiously done, not weird for the sake of being “avant garde”. So, a philosophical analysis is experiential (invites us to taste, touch, enter more fully our own experience), and a text like this has its success as our own experience, not in the apparent “logic” of its “arguments,” nor in the “analysis” of “terms” or in the activity of “making distinctions” or describing “conditions of possibility”.
We have touched on this before, but let’s say again that this project emphasizes interwovenness. Grasping this is essential for any proper understanding of what the meta-analysis seeks to reveal (offer as an experience), and what the new epistemological space demands (or will demand)—again, it’s a space of many ways of knowing, each unique but meeting a shared set of demands. We could happily call interwovenness the core idea of the project, and the meta-analysis comes to a way of bringing out the tensions that arise when we try to escape, ignore, or actively deny interwovenness. In any case, each step and each turn of our inquiry is interwoven with the rest, and each in its own way tries to explain and even in moments to embody interwovenness, as well as to evoke a greater awareness of interwovenness and its consequences in the reader.

In our inquiry, we seek a non-local epistemology. The meta-analysis is as much “in” the reader as “in” this text. In fact, it is “in” neither, but arises relationally, in, through, as practice-realization, which means the meta-analysis is in the world and of the world. The Japanese philosopher Dogen touches (or invites us to touch, taste, feel, fully enter) the essence of this in a profoundly challenging essay that itself seems to express (or invite us into) the essence of his philosophy as well as any text of his might be said to do so. These lines get at certain key aspects of a non-local epistemology:

To carry the self forward to verify [or, practice-realize] myriad things is delusion. That myriad things come forth and verify the self is enlightenment.

. . . . To study [to practice] philosophy is to study [to practice] the self. To study the self is to forget the self. To forget the self is to be verified by all things. When verified by myriad beings, your body and mind and the body and mind of myriad beings fall away. A traceless trace of verification [realization] remains—ungraspable. The traceless trace of verification expresses itself without end. (translation adapted from Waddell and Abe)²

² In all cases of Dogen’s work, multiple translations have been consulted, and in some cases a painstaking character by character examination has been attempted, but I have no fluency in
We ordinarily try to localize knowledge in the knower, and we then have the problem of justified true beliefs and so on. We relate to the world as an object, and we go “out there” to poke at the world and verify it (“know” it, “save” it, take from it). Dogen seems to indicate here that the essence of a non-local epistemology expresses itself as we realize ourselves, paradoxically by forgetting ourselves. Forgetting the self is not the same as “losing oneself”. We might lose ourselves in addiction, in a movie, in all sorts of hedonic pursuits and medications. We might also lose ourselves in doing science, in practicing politics or activism, in designing computers, in reading books. One of my own university science teachers in fact described science as an extremely pleasurable form of escape, and I think the life of the mind allows for a significant degree of escapism (that teacher had a very successful laboratory, and thus initiated many graduate students into the practice and realization of science-as-escapism—and I would suggest he is not alone, and that consciously or unconsciously many scientists practice this way). Forgetting the self is radically different from anything like this or anything like our typical experience. We could call it an achievement, a consummation of philosophical practice. It is an experience that is a realization. It is the consummation of knowing, knowing as consummation or realization. Many subtleties appear here, and the meta-analysis has to do with trying to help us understand just these sorts of things.

Medieval Japanese or Classical Chinese, and only a basic competence in Dogenese (many who claim fluency in the former two have no idea what to make of the latter). As far as I can tell, I have consulted every available translation, including the rarely cited, but incredibly helpful, collection done by Hee-jin Kim. Carl Bielefeldt’s group pulled all of their translations off the internet because they will be published, supposedly in the next year or so. These were tremendously useful, and I look forward with great excitement to their publication.
In the end, “philosophical meta-analysis” is not a term that one defines in the manner of supplying a proposition of the form, “Philosophical meta-analysis is __________.” Though Heather Shearer deserves credit for helping me coin the phrase, I must take responsibility for its meaning, and that meaning comes from the new epistemological space, and my own still-limited practice within it. I therefore expect misunderstandings. This is not an evasion or obfuscation. It is very easy to begin to hide behind an alternative way of knowing, to begin to “mystify” things, not because of real subtleties and nuances, but because one doesn’t know what one is talking about, and also because of the general problems of human fallibility, including thinking we know what we’re talking about when we don’t and also including all the daunting phenomena captured by the term “spiritual materialism”. Genuine mystical insight defies explanation not because the mystic seeks to “mystify,” but because the insight ruptures paradigms, and that is what we are after here, something that ruptures paradigms, a kind of divine madness. But, it is in fact rather easy to understand this notion that “philosophical meta-analysis” defies initial understanding. It means something like how marriage or tango dancing defy any preliminary understanding, and almost laughingly so when we have nothing but words to offer. “You are going to live with this person for perhaps 40 or more years. You may have to undergo some humiliation in order to truly appreciate them. What you call “love” now will not mean the same thing 20, 30, or 40 years from now. This person will shape what you become or fail to become, and vice versa.” Does that really capture it?

Similarly, I have often said to people when they ask how I am, “Well, at bottom I am well. But I have lately been quite astonished at the extent of my own stupidity. Thankfully, I have recently begun practicing philosophy, and I feel rather inspired.” People of course laugh because I say
this *as* a philosopher. Yet, however strangely, these words seem more true when I say them today than when I would say them ten years ago (and I have been truthfully saying it for over 15 years now—an incredibly short time that can seem like a long time). Those receiving a black belt in Aikido may hear from their teacher, “Now you can really begin to practice Aikido.” *Begin,* mind you. Ueshiba, the founder of Aikido, said in his seventies, “From now on, I can perform real aiki” (Sunadomari 2004: 128). Previously he could rely on physical strength (something “personal” rather than transpersonal; something controllable rather than inspired), and this, in the aikido context, means a danger of self-delusion and a set of limiting ideas that still have us in their grasp (with a strong unconscious dimension . . . it is like a highly intelligent person who can rely on cleverness where they lack wisdom). We all face these dangers, and we all enjoy the possibility of transformative insights. Suddenly realizing that, “Before, I was not really practicing philosophy,” or, “Hey! *That* was Tango just now,” or, on one’s third marriage, “I finally understand how to love someone” . . . such experiences are part of our general experience of life, and they are the essence of a genuine spiritual, philosophical, and I would specifically say mystical approach to life.

With respect to these and other aspects of what I mean by meta-analysis, two very short poems by Gary Snyder come to mind:

**The Trail Is Not a Trail**

I drove down the Freeway  
And turned off at an exit  
And went along a highway  
Til it came to a sideroad  
Drove up the sideroad  
Til it turned to a dirt road  
Full of bumps, and stopped.  
Walked up a trail
But the trail got rough
And it faded away—
Out in the open,
Everywhere to go. (from *Left Out in the Rain*)

How Poetry Comes to Me

It comes blundering over the
Boulders at night, it stays
Frightened outside the
Range of my campfire
I go to meet it at the
Edge of the light (from *No Nature*)

We look for things close to the fire, because we think we can see there. In philosophy, Sophia Herself invites us to meet Her at the furthest edge of the light, to begin to enter the darkness. We can work with this text as a voice calling us into darkness, into wilderness, into Rumi’s, “Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing, there is a field. I’ll meet you there.” We don’t just have everywhere to go; we also have somewhere to go. It is something specific. For each of us it is unique for the life we live and the particular landscape we have to find our meaning in.

When the text calls the reader into the darkness, it asks them to give up their ordinary notion of understanding. By venturing into the darkness, we may come to “understand” things not currently understandable if we remain close to our cozy campfire. More significantly, we might enter a way of knowing that involves a nonduality of the knower and the known, such that a not-knowing emerges. When we walk into darkness, our senses heighten—*because* of the darkness. The hundred sacred senses come alive and alove; we ourselves come alive and alove (we are not our senses, but not apart from them . . . and sentience is inherently sense-making). This coming alive and alove is the heart of philosophy, and it is through this, as this, that we make real the
things we wanted to understand in the first place, but which would have died there by the
campfire (and in the World), while we too sat wilting to death (there and everywhere). We have
to go into the wilderness, to make a vision quest, to find the soul’s nourishment, to arrive at
“Wonderstanding” that goes beyond ordinary “understanding,” where Wonderstanding includes
the inconceivable, includes our becoming real in, through, as the inconceivable (all of which
should become clearer as we go).³ It is a knowing, even though it does not fall under the umbrella
of “the known” as we now use that term. Many things, endless things, can be brought under the
branches of the known (the “known” as revitalized and revalued), but it always comes with an
unknown. We seek a nondualistic mode of being, in which darkness and light appear in their
interwovenness. This nondualistic knowing underlies all the “knowing” we have ever done, and
now we may try and work with it more directly, allowing it to transform us.

All of this is another way of saying a true philosophical inquiry should invite us to sense, to
verify, the universality of wisdom, love, and beauty. The philosophical artefacts of any work that
fulfills the spirit of what we endeavor here shows that wisdom, love, and beauty function as a
common ground. While the Dalai Lama has done a tremendous amount of work trying to show
the universality of compassion, to show how compassion (an aspect of love) can function as a
secular, scientific common ground of ethical awareness (“secular, scientific” here indicating, first
and foremost, inclusiveness, not “atheisticness”), I think we can do the same with wisdom and
beauty. No serious spiritual, philosophical, or religious tradition lacks a reverence for these or

³ As a Gnostic text puts it, “If one does not stand in the darkness, he will not be able to see the
light.”
fails to give them a central place. These are not universals in the spirit of a rigid “truth” or absolute. But they function as a common ground.

By the time we in the west get to talking about knowledge as we do now, things have gone seriously wrong, because our focus should be on this common ground. Epistemology is almost a symptom from the outset, in that it functions as if wisdom had been abandoned. We want wisdom, but we don’t feel up to it, and we attempt to mimic wisdom with science and technology—with knowledge and cleverness. To foreshadow our discussion of Hadot: Philosophers become professors of philosophy.

We want to consider philosophical artefacts and practices that lead to wisdom, not “knowledge”—wisdom, love and beauty, since the three are totally interwoven. A better way of knowing must be a way of living—one that seeks to practice and realize wisdom, love, and beauty—which in turn has to involve cultivating healthy ecologies, ecologies of practice and realization. All of this the meta-analysis seeks to help us to sense. But, again, we are speaking of something in a different mode of philosophizing.

With respect to that, it will help to read the text with the understanding that it embodies an alternative hypothesis regarding the nature of language and argument. Indeed, the text can be seen as rejecting the notion of “argument,” inviting us to see “argument” as an artifact of the old epistemology, and inviting us to experiment with a different sensibility. While we seem to naturally engage in a kind of “exchange of reasons,” we end up limiting ourselves and the world if we get captured, colonized, conquered by the “principle of reason.”
In place of argument, we experiment according to the hypothesis that language is the activity of inviting resonance and intimacy, rather than the sending of messages. I do not mean the sorts of gestures I have seen discussed in literary theory, rhetoric, and writing studies. Though I am not an expert in these fields, I have not encountered there the kind of spiritual-ecological practice we will try to evoke the outlines of in our inquiry, and try in some moments to practice ourselves. We might call it an activity of *synchronization*, in ourselves and between ourselves, one that ultimately opens us into *synchronicities*. This is a synchronization of heart-mind-body-world-cosmos that depends on a spiritual *way of life*.

In a more simplified form, we could consider the example of Tango dancing, which does not involve a sending of messages between the partners, but a synchronization of heart, mind, body, and world. The training of heart, mind, and body are more limited in this case, since Tango is rarely taken up as a spiritual discipline—e.g. Self, World, and Cosmos are left spiritually unexamined for the most part, and things like ethics and meditation are not considered integral. Nevertheless, each dancer must learn a degree of attunement of the heart, mind, and body, and in dancing each dancer already attunes themselves, and must open to mutual attunement, and this often reaches remarkable levels of skill. It is all in mutuality, which is not easy to understand. But let us at least say that the dancers can—only in, through, as synchronization—*experience* Tango, a certain consummation of Tango. Tango can *happen*, almost “to” them, but more “as” them. An experience of resonance and intimacy arises, thus empowering a co-creation, co-discovery of the dance. The leader doesn’t simply “send” “signals” to the follower as to what to “do”. Rather, a kind of *mutual* attunement arises, so that invitations to feel the music in particular
ways, invitations to experience life in particular ways become practiced and realized. This arises not only “within” and “between” any two dancers, but also in, through, as, with the other dancers on the dance floor, and the ones watching, and the band playing, and the Earth supporting them, and the trees outside, and the moon and stars and wind. To experience Tango is not to understand an argument. The same holds for philosophy.

An argument is usually a clumsy attempt at attunement. A more general sense of attunement might contrast it with an attempt to convince, and even an attempt to conquer (again, contemporary challenges might also agree, but without more of the elements of our meta-analysis, they do not seem to offer us enough to dispel the dominant epistemology—within us and outside of us). An attunement (in any form) invites us to allow the tuning fork of the soul (the soul’s aspect as tuning and tuned, as mutual resonance) to resonate in particular ways. The reader of a text can begin to allow such resonance, and an experience can then begin to emerge. It is not something to be told or explained, but something coming alive through the hundred sacred senses, something brought to fruition as one’s one body, mind, life, and World, something we could even call Cosmic.

We must experiment in order to test this out, to verify if such an orientation helps us philosophize better and ultimately live better. We could say we have decided to restrict experimentation for the most part. We seem to think we can only function with “arguments” and “evidence” as we have so far emphasized them. We didn’t understand the need for attunement (so the present hypothesis goes), even though such a vision runs through much of ancient philosophy, including Indigenous traditions, where it can be more clearly understood as
involving an experience of initiation (the tuning of our attunement—and we can note Plato’s modeling of philosophy on this template of initiation, or what we could call “mysticism”). If our activity has to do with attuning ourselves to life and to all the living beings, we don’t have an argument on our hands. Bears don’t offer us an “argument” for how we should live. When Aldo Leopold wrote about “Thinking Like a Mountain,” he related an experience, a conversion, a transformation in his thinking, and a becoming-attuned. A person might choose to offer what look like “arguments” to orient us toward and bring us closer to such an attunement. In any case we need to allow the tuning fork of the soul to resonate, in our own octave, in our own unique music and dance, and “argument” all by itself will not likely accomplish this, which is why we find arts of awareness revered and centrally rooted in all spiritual, philosophical, and religious traditions outside of the style that gradually took hold in the west. We have to presence the thinking of the mountains, the wolves, the deer, the trees. All of this is our unique thinking, the unique thinking of the Earth.

At this point, having given some sense of the difficulty in saying what a meta-analysis is, but having still tried to give some helpful discussion of it, we have entered into the question, What does a meta-analysis look like? In the present case, not quite as I would prefer, but it does have some major features intact. Again, our inquiry is already underway. As it proceeds, the experience of engaging with it could be likened to walking a labyrinth or entering a mandala. To appreciate a mandala, we have to see the whole, see how the major parts relate to one another. As the inquiry makes its way, philosophical artefacts emerge, often in the form of long quotations. Presenting long quotations is somewhat analogous to curating insights and inspirations. The longer passages allow for more meaning to come through, exhibiting the
interwovenness of things. It is sort of like organism and environment in some cases, as if one might be tempted to focus down to a line or two, or even a few words (the organism) but then begin to see how more of the text carries meaning than one might at first feel comfortable admitting (the environment). Of course, even larger webs could be sensed by various historians, anthropologists, psychologists, and other specialists. But these long passages have been chosen so that they can hang together and give a sense of the mandala our inquiry invites us to enter.

The elements gathered here are insufficient for the fuller understanding we will eventually need, but they can still render the spirit of the image. It is like something pixelated or loosely sketched that we can still recognize. Higher resolution, or a detailed painting or sculpture or dance, might give us a clearer image, a clearer feel, a deeper insight, with much rewarding fullness, but we can still make sense of what we are seeing, and helpful insights may come in time.

The meandering feeling of the inquiry relates to making turns in a labyrinth. When walking a labyrinth, we seem to draw close to the center, but then move back out to the periphery. The slow process of meandering, walking mindfully, walking in sacredness, for some reason helps us enter a different way of knowing, and insights suddenly arise. One can try reading as if walking a labyrinth. In many ways, knowing better involves revitalization of habitual practices. We can notice that something which seems like a tangent is just a bend in the path, and also that we are seeing something fractal-like in the vision the inquiry offers. This fractal-like quality is rather meaningful. A fuller inquiry would bring it out in more detail.

As a side note, one of the readers of this text mentioned that it has an oral quality which comes alive when a text-to-speech program is used. It may prove helpful to have the text read in a
neutral voice and follow along with your eyes, or to read it out loud or have someone else do so (part of the issue has to do with avoiding prejudice we might project into the text when we project into the voice of the text).

By the end of our inquiry, we will have some deeper appreciation for the possible limits of our epistemic situation, and some concrete suggestions regarding how to move forward. Though we will make some concrete suggestions, the inquiry overall is evocative, and it asks for philosophic license to get at some subtle points that need to hang together to make more sense.

The discussion of arts of awareness in this version of the inquiry has changed from its original intention. I had wanted to include something that one of my readers has been enthusiastic about for some time, namely a kind of catalogue of maybe 20 arts of awareness which, upon reading it, might provoke an analytic philosopher to say, “Wow! There really are all these other ways of knowing, and real people, and even actual philosophers have used these in order to know. Maybe there is something to this . . . . Maybe I should look into it further . . . .” That would surely be helpful. At the same time, I also think we need to get at the essence of what an art of awareness is and how these arts function in a philosophical sense (after all, lots of people engage in these practices, often with little in the way of truly “revolutionary” results, so we need to get clear on how more significant results can come about). Why we need these arts of awareness and what they are (in a general sense) should come across as the inquiry proceeds, and we should also sense why they might fail to function in any given case.
In an appendix the reader will find the outline of one essential practice that I teach to all my students, one that has a lot of scientific and cultural support, namely compassion practice. It is given in enough detail that it might be tried by any reader. A few other practices will be given in enough detail in the inquiry itself that the reader can get a feel for them, but they will require other resources in order to go further into them. We focus our energy on a sense of what the arts of awareness do. This happens by keeping in mind an example Dewey gives (discussed below), as a touchstone for considering a version of Meno paradox: How do we know better, how do we get out of our stuckness in doing the wrong thing, as a deeply rooted misknowing? Everything we “do” might be just a different version of wrong if we haven’t shifted in the ways the meta-analysis seeks to invite, and which it invites us to see many traditions of philosophy—east, west, and beyond—as also inviting us to see.

The challenges of our inquiry can be more vexing and subtle than we at first might think, and because they go so thoroughly into our way of living and our sense of what philosophy is and how to properly do it, considering them can feel strange. This gets amplified if the process of inquiry draws on things that come from the perspective of a different way of knowing, because that different way of knowing will itself seem strange to the current way of knowing. For these and other reasons, our work will present possible frustrations, and, in a way, I find them humorous and embarrassing. We question here the meaning of philosophy, and we challenge an entire way of knowing (an entire culture, really—not as if every single aspect of it needs repudiation, but still in a way that seems radical), doing so in language that may often feel all-too-human, all-too-breezy, all-too-simple. In trying to understand other ways of knowing and a new epistemic space that includes them, we will almost inevitably try to do so through the lens of
our current way of knowing—in other words, trouble is practically a guarantee, no matter how
we handle these things, and the best we might hope for in our present context is to try and remind
ourselves of that fact. We are not just going to read a book like this and suddenly become better
knowers. That fact is explained in the structure of the epistemology the book invites us to
contemplate. However, the situation is far from helpless. We can indeed become better knowers,
become more wise, loving, and beautiful.

To get more properly going into our work, let us say again that we will inquire together into
knowledge. But “knowledge” is already a problematic term. I might rather say we will inquire
into “ways of knowing,” and how our “ways of knowing” are failing us. But then we will need to
understand “ways of knowing,” and what it means that they are “failing us”. We further need to
understand how a “Revisioning of Philosophy” would help us to know better. With regard to all
of these things, I find what I want to say rather difficult to say, not least because a genuine
challenge to any form of “knowledge” would unsurprisingly appear radical from within the
accepted forms of discourse that take that “knowledge” or “way of knowing” somehow as given.
For instance, as we already see, to talk about knowledge we need to employ terms, but the terms
we use in academic discourse (and even in ordinary discourse) come with a particular kind of
baggage in the case of “knowledge,” “knowing,” “experience,” and other items of interest in
epistemology. And, as Wittgenstein noted (to a certain extent, within the old epistemology, or
reflecting its limits), “It is what human beings say that is true and false; and they agree in the
language they use. That is not agreement in opinions but in form of life” (PI 241). How can we
work together to skillfully and productively challenge our very form of life—in a way that feels
like progress, or the amelioration of suffering, or both?
Though all philosophers struggle with terms in one way or another, John Dewey gives us an excellent example of one who struggled with them in relationship to epistemological/ethical/aesthetic themes and radical suggestions that may yet reverberate throughout the whole of philosophy, and even throughout the culture, including science. In a letter to Arthur Bentley, his collaborator on the major work, Knowing and the Known, Dewey wrote,

“Organism” as “an organized body” is as late as the middle of the nineteenth century; harmless enough as a synonym for a living creature, but I’d be inclined to bet that it was through use in anatomical study of the living body that “organism” got so overloaded on the isolated side that even the hyphenated expression, organism-environment, fails to strike people as a name for what anyone can directly see when he opens his eyes. . . . I am inclined to think we should try to find and use a word that wouldn’t be handicapped, as the word “organism” (like other Isms) has now been loaded down. I’ll bet ninety readers out of a hundred wouldn’t stop to think twice, coming across the expression “a dead organism.” The damn “body” has got away with it. (in Ratner & Altman, 1964, p. 592, cited in Palmer 2004: 336)

The reserved Dewey swearing over terms . . . Isn’t that funny? But Dewey seemed to seek a revolution in philosophy, and in a real revolution, terms can get extremely tricky, because we face everyone’s habitual tendency to think with old connotations. The Dalai Lama said something interesting that weaves together the very notion of revolution with the need to challenge the duality of “organism” and “environment”—the very duality that provokes Dewey to swear. These words appear in a book appropriately titled, A Call for Revolution:

I have been inspired by the ideas of the French Revolution that were adopted as the motto of the French Republic: Liberté, égalité, fraternité. I adopted the same motto. As a Buddhist, the aim of my spiritual quest is to free myself of the fundamental ignorance that has led to the notion that there is a division between people and the natural world, which is at the root of all our suffering. (2017: 36-8)
Trying to accomplish a revolution that overturns this kind of separation (and I think Dewey in his own way tried to do this—though he may have lacked the spiritual vision to see it as the root of all suffering, which itself marks a radical suggestion), one would naturally encounter all sorts of difficulties with language and terms. Thus, “organism” is not the only term Dewey may have sworn over, and in the end, his use of terms like “knowledge” and “experience” may have forestalled (and in some cases stalled) a wider interest in his work.

Dewey’s style didn’t help. I don’t think of him as a stylist in the manner of Nietzsche or Plato, but his challenge to major currents in philosophy may have contributed to a style of writing that does not exhibit the kinds of argument we have come to expect in academic philosophy. And he did, after all, claim that, “philosophy like art moves in the medium of imaginative mind” (LW 10: 301). What an interesting suggestion—one that resonates with the sense of “vision” we will get at here, as part of Re-Visioning Philosophy. But, such a sense of philosophy could rub some readers the wrong way.

Defending Dewey’s style, Aldrich (1944) argued that at least some philosophers should be given “philosophic license” in a manner analogous to the “poetic license” granted the artist. For Aldrich, “philosophic license” did not imply any distortion of reality (of which we might naïvely accuse the poet), but rather allowances made because a philosopher may philosophize quite explicitly to “induce the having of those experiences that I called achievements—the task of calling into being (evoking) those impressions of mind and its place in nature and of nature and its place in mind, the having and preserving of which are necessary conditions of important and sane philosophizing” (270). We might call these consummatory experiences (as Dewey does in
Art as Experience and elsewhere). Experience in general plays an important role in our inquiry, one not too far from its role in Dewey’s work—I would even go so far as to say that certain experiences that merit the term “achievement” play a central role, even if we will not analyze or embrace Dewey’s technical notion of consummatory experience—and thus it, too, can very easily become misunderstood, or may even begin as misunderstood. We will need some degree of philosophic license in order to proceed, and we will have to clarify things slowly. As Aldrich suggests, a certain mode of philosophizing has as its function “to evoke experiences to be tasted and seen, like the Lord, for what they are worth, experiences not to be stretched on the rack of ‘discursive reason.’ Thus [Dewey’s] notion of philosophy tends to coalesce with the classical one of philosophy as vision” (269). That doesn’t mean our inquiry will lack reason—but Dewey placed “reason,” too, in his alchemical retort, and he ended up finding the term too problematic to maintain, and I have come to agree (at times I, like Dewey, transmute the lead of “reason” into the revalued term “intelligence,” “total intelligence,” “original mind,” or “original thinking,” but that will come later).

We thus proceed on no firm ground here, and the groundlessness may get worse before it gets better—I say that in part because some of the things we will consider in a serious way together would have struck me as rather weird even a few years ago. But, this is a quite reasonable situation if we really do want to inquire into apparently “deep” epistemic issues, and if we want to do so in a way that may lead to some sort of philosophical, scientific, or cultural progress. Every step we take needs some qualification, because each step will become inflected by later steps, as we attempt to draw closer to new experiences, new experiences that count as new achievements for us, and thus may require a new kind of philosophical effort.
To begin with a very simple step, we can accept that there are various kinds of knowledge. We could talk about a priori knowledge, “knowing how,” “knowing about,” and so on. In a general way, like a lot of contemporary philosophers, I have long looked to science as a gold standard of knowledge in perhaps the most “serious” sense. To this day, if I want to “know” about a topic, I look to available scientific research—not as the last word, and maybe not even as the first word, but certainly as a touchstone. As an undergraduate, intending to specialize in philosophy of science, I spent many hours in science classes and laboratories. I found physics, biology, astronomy, and psychology as fascinating as anything I studied in philosophy courses. The philosophical training, it seemed, offered a way to critically reflect on the methods and the knowledge claims of the sciences, and perhaps most importantly to try and understand the meaning of scientific theory in human life.

Maybe such a view marks off an important task in philosophy. By sticking close to the sciences, one might in effect make philosophy more “scientific” or “naturalistic,” keeping away from metaphysical speculation (however well-argued) and remaining rooted in the apparent success science has demonstrated in its methods. On the other hand, philosophy might help resolve some of the issues that a wide range of philosophers have noted in the sciences themselves as well as in the culture. With respect to some of these issues, I have at times found the reflections of Dewey and Husserl rather helpful, and they do not stand alone in some of their criticisms and concerns. Both gave interpretive histories of the rise of science and the development of modern philosophy. Husserl spoke of the “crisis” of European sciences, but he made it clear that he did not really mean a crisis as far as the fundamental methods of science:
A crisis of our sciences as such: can we seriously speak of it? Is not this talk, heard so often these days, an exaggeration? After all, the crisis of a science indicates nothing less than that its genuine scientific character, the whole manner in which it has set its task and developed a methodology for it, has become questionable. This may be true of philosophy . . . But how could we speak straightforwardly and quite seriously of a crisis of the sciences in general—that is, also of the positive sciences, including pure mathematics and the exact natural sciences, which we can never cease to admire as models of rigorous and highly successful scientific discipline? (3-4)

In contrast to the admirable stature of science, Husserl suggested that “the ‘unscientific’ character of philosophy is unmistakable,” even in the case of comparison to the somewhat lowlier humanistic sciences (4-5). Perhaps some philosophers dislike the comparison to begin with, but the question remains whether more than a few philosophers have a measure of “physics envy” (maybe physicists have it too). Given the stature of science, Husserl wanted to make clear that the “crisis” of science had to do with “the loss of its meaning for life” rather than any crisis of method per se (5). By a “crisis,” then, he meant, “that of the general lament about the crisis of our culture and the role here ascribed to the sciences,” and his inquiry had to do with “subjecting the scientific character of all sciences to a serious and quite necessary critique without sacrificing their primary sense of scientific discipline, so unimpeachable within the legitimacy of their methodic accomplishments” (5). Husserl’s interests seemed to lie not in “the scientific character of the sciences but rather what they, or what science in general, had meant and could mean for human existence” (5).

In this same lecture, Husserl proceeds to give a provocative summary of the move from the medieval period to the Renaissance to the modern period. Conventionally, we think of the Renaissance as the rebirth—idealistically speaking, a rebirth out of superstition and oppression and into rationality and freedom (one might ask, “If you think you are in a womb of delusion,
what will become of you when you are born?”). “Freedom” and “reason” somehow get linked in this movement, at least in our interpretation of it. But Husserl emphasizes that the rebirth had to do with birthing anew the vision of Ancient philosophy. Husserl asks, What did the Renaissance hold to be “essential to ancient man”? He answers that, after a certain degree of “hesitation” (perhaps we could call it cultural hesitation, or the hesitation of the collective psyche?), the Renaissance comes to embrace,

nothing less than the “philosophical” form of existence: freely giving oneself, one’s whole life, its rule through pure reason or through philosophy. Theoretical philosophy is primary.

A superior survey of the world must be launched, unfettered by myth and the whole tradition: universal knowledge, absolutely free from prejudice . . . Philosophy as theory frees not only the theorist but any philosophically educated person. And theoretical autonomy is followed by practical autonomy. According to the guiding ideal of the Renaissance, ancient man forms himself with insight through free reason. For this renewed “Platonism” this means not only that man should be changed ethically [but that] the whole human surrounding world, the political and social existence of mankind, must be fashioned anew through free reason, through the insights of a universal philosophy.

In accordance with this ancient model, recognized at first only by individuals and small groups, a theoretical philosophy should again be developed which was not to be taken over blindly from the tradition but must grow out of independent inquiry and criticism.

It must be emphasized here that the idea of philosophy handed down from the ancients is not the concept of present-day schoolbooks, merely comprising a group of disciplines; in the first centuries of the modern period—even though it changes not insignificantly as soon as it is taken up—it retains the formal meaning of the one all-encompassing science, the science of the totality of what is. Sciences in the plural, all those sciences ever to be established or already under construction, are but dependent branches of the One Philosophy. In a bold, even extravagant, elevation of the meaning of universality, begun by Descartes, this new philosophy seeks nothing less than to encompass, in the unity of a theoretical system, all meaningful questions in a rigorous scientific manner, with an apodictically intelligible methodology, in an unending but rationally ordered progress of inquiry. Growing from generation to generation and forever, this one edifice of definitive, theoretically interrelated truths was to solve all conceivable problems—problems of fact and of reason, problems of temporality and eternity. (9)
So, on this interpretation, the Renaissance has to do with *a rebirth of the philosophical form of life*—at least, a certain *conception* of that life. The crisis Husserl invites us to contemplate, the general crisis of European culture, has to do with the relative success of science precisely as it contrasts with the relative failure of philosophy itself—in spite of the fact that philosophy somehow gave us the motivating image that fostered science and its cultural context (as if we could separate the two). It may seem unfair to say philosophy “failed,” but Husserl means, very loosely speaking, the proliferation of systems and ideas in philosophy, with no sense of how to evaluate them (who’s got the best theory?), in contrast to an apparent series of successes in the sciences, a capacity to explain more and more phenomena in clear, testable theory, and the concomitant appearance of practical applications that ordinary people come to rely on (Einstein gives us a compelling, testable theory, and we also end up with radar systems and microwave ovens . . . we could ask of philosophy, “What have you done for us lately?”).

Over time, Husserl suggests, scientists became increasingly “unphilosophical” people in some sense, and maybe the whole culture did, in that we got oriented to “facts” and began to find ourselves living in what Jung (following William James) repeatedly referred to as a “nothing but” world. Nietzsche had already called our attention to the “nihilism” that this whole situation presented us with, and though opinions may vary, it does not seem unjust to interpret our current historical moment as plagued with some significant degree of nihilism, perhaps symptomatic of a relative failure of philosophy. This talk of failure needs more context to make sense, I think, but we can certainly entertain the notion.
Of course, historians of all kinds might vigorously deconstruct such sweeping claims as Husserl makes, but one can still hold open the possibility that they capture something that might yet affect us. Aside from nihilism, we might suggest that, somehow, what we could refer to as “theōria” got seized upon as the essence of philosophy. That seems to form part of Husserl’s diagnosis. But does the characterization of ancient philosophy Husserl gives—one that, surely, we all can at least admit we recognize and sense running through modern and contemporary intellectual life, perhaps even recognize in ourselves—does this accurately capture ancient philosophy to begin with? Dewey argues that it does, in an important way (at least once we get to the divide between the Eleatic and Heraclitean schools of thought), and that it thus leads us to error. As we shall see, the French philosopher Pierre Hadot thinks that this characterization fails to capture ancient philosophy, perhaps in an even more important way (one that Dewey might have taken great interest in), and thus leads us into error. Either way, what might such an error, if it exists, mean for philosophy today, and for the broader western culture?⁴

I am surprised to find myself suggesting that there is a kind of deep and systemic error here, and that it relates to a potentially significant epistemological/ethical/aesthetic problem. Nothing I want to say hinges critically on the historical claims made by Husserl or Dewey or Hadot, but those historical framings can give us a way to at least begin to picture the problem I would like us to try and see. I don’t rest anything on their particular claims, but I do find some interesting resonance between some of the things they wanted to get at and some of the things I would like us to consider.

⁴ “western culture” is not monolithic, but we shall see that a certain style of consciousness might legitimately be said to prevail among the collective of cultures we could call “western”
So, let us turn to Dewey now, as a way to frame some key features of our inquiry into knowledge. If Dewey could time travel to our historical moment, he might express some dismay at contemporary philosophy in the sense that he would wonder why, as science has continued to arrive at knowledge of all sorts of things since Dewey’s time, we still have debates about whether knowledge is even possible, and we seem to remain entangled in certain “dualisms” that Dewey sought to dispel, such as the dualism of mind and body, organism and environment. In this way, he echoes the diagnosis that Husserl makes of our general cultural crisis.

In the book *Unmodern Philosophy and Modern Philosophy*, Dewey gives his own sweeping history of western thought. In a move that resembles one of Nietzsche’s criticisms of philosophy, Dewey tells us that Plato and Aristotle framed their philosophies in a way inflected by their culture. No surprise there. But he wants to say that, in particular, both of them let their aristocratic status shape their philosophical vision. They both end up valorizing theōria, celebrating the intellect, while condemning the body—as if Plato really did take the musings in the *Republic* more literally, he (and Aristotle too) project a “higher” and “lower” of the society onto reality itself. Nietzsche put the matter this way:

Gradually it has become clear to me what every great philosophy so far has been: namely, the personal confession of its author and a kind of involuntary and unconscious memoir; also that the moral (or immoral) intentions in every philosophy constituted the real germ of life from which the whole plant had grown.

Indeed, if one would explain how the abstrusest metaphysical claims of a philosopher really came about, it is always well (and wise) to ask first: at what morality does all this (does he) aim? Accordingly, I do not believe that a “drive to knowledge” is the father of philosophy; but rather that another drive has, here as elsewhere, employed understanding (and misunderstanding) as a mere instrument. But anyone who considers the basic drives of man to see to what extent they may
have been at play just here as *inspiring* spirits (or demons and kobolds) will find that all of them have done philosophy at some time—and that every single one of them would like only too well to represent just *itself* as the ultimate purpose of existence and the legitimate *master* of all the other drives. For every drive wants to be master—and it attempts to philosophize in *that spirit*. (BGE 6)

In the *Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche also speaks of the ascetic impulse that lodges itself in the philosopher and the scientist, a will to truth, and those reflections are companions to these. They also resonate with Dewey. In a line that Dewey claims paraphrases William James, he warns us that, “The sickliest way in which a student of philosophy can approach his subject-matter is that of a search for ultimate impersonal revelation of truth” (16)—precisely Nietzsche’s diagnosis of western philosophy’s and western science’s disease. On the same page, Dewey tells us that philosophy is not “one with” science, but that we can justifiably hold that philosophy must somehow be “at one” with science, not as much in the conclusions that science has drawn, but in its intellectual attitude and methods. Dewey wanted philosophers to become scientific, but not scientists. However, Dewey’s own work certainly raises questions about whether science itself searches for an “ultimate impersonal revelation of truth,” following in the “Platonic” mode (which, perhaps even Plato would have qualified).

For Dewey, ancient Greek thought told its people “the story of Nature as an embracing whole, operating according to principle in all its varied changes, a story in which traditional beliefs were revised in the light of new observations” (24). But, by the time we get to Plato and Aristotle, something has shifted. Dewey’s criticisms hold for both giants of the ancient world, but here he frames it specifically around Plato, since Dewey might very well accuse many a modern philosopher and scientist of Platonism in his pejorative sense:

Plato may have erred. But at least for well over a millennium of years Europe trod the path he marked out. A corrupt and fallen world could be organized and ruled
only by principles drawn from a supernatural realm of Being. It is, at all events, not for those who accept the traditional Christian theology to rail at Plato’s metaphysics. Special revelation was substituted for the disciplined reason of Plato, but the conception of the relation of the natural to the transcendent is the same in both systems. The modern Platonist, he who accepts the intuition of essences apart from existence, may reject the Christian scheme as well as the Platonic idea of philosophy as the supreme political art. But in so doing he only repeats in himself acceptance of the modern tradition of an egoistic individualism of mind, and adopts also that isolation of knowledge from action which demarcates modern thought from Platonic assertions of their indivisible union.

Dewey’s history links the intellectualist tradition he sees running from at least Plato with an atomization of human beings, a rise and entrenchment of dualities like mind-matter, organism-environment, individual-collective, and more. We may not see how all these things go together, but we will consider further suggestions later. For now, we might at least notice the possibility that, seen from a certain perspective, “reason” in western culture takes on a kind of “supernatural” quality that looks very ironic given the conscious impulses of the Renaissance and the “age of enlightenment” or “age of reason.” Did western science and philosophy become inadvertently “Platonic,” in a way that helped keep the broader culture very “unmodern,” as Dewey claims? After all, many of our scientists still seek a grand unified theory, and our various equations and abstractions do resemble Platonic forms in a way. More specifically, we maintain the hierarchical dualisms of a narrowly interpreted Platonic view: Theory-practice, reason-

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5 To be clear, the quotations around “Platonic” have to do with my own sense that Plato is consistently misread by most philosophers (particularly after the decline of Neo-Platonism), in part for reasons suggested by Hadot, and, perhaps relatedly, because of the gradual default readings that ignored the mystical dimension of Plato’s vision. It seems Dewey, too, misreads Plato. The oversimplified “Plato,” which those of an Aristotelean or rationalistic bent like to make fun of, then becomes an ironic figure, because it looks like the will to truth that Nietzsche rightly critiques (and the “quest for certainty” Dewey rightly critiques). Oddly, that “Plato” also sounds a bit fascist, which makes it possible for scientists, analytic philosophers, and many avant garde intellectuals (including continental-style philosophers) to evade certain suggestions and challenges a more spiritual reading of Plato presents us with.
emotion, reason-labor, mind-body, pure-applied, civilized-primitive, city-wilderness, and so on.

The God of many western philosophers seems to have been a sort of pure rationality, and we cannot simply brush off the possibility that our commitment to science and rationality has remained a matter of faith, a dogmatic religion in which “science” and “reason” become gods, and we become like gods for having eaten from their fruit.

Even if we aren’t sure what to make of these claims, we might still turn to Dewey for a nice statement of the clash between the modern and the unmodern, which Dewey, in Art as Experience, frames as a clash between the vision of the world science seems to give us on the one hand, and the vision of the world we inherit particularly from the Christian tradition:

Science has brought with it a radically novel conception of physical nature and of our relation to it. This new conception stands as yet side by side with the conception of the world and man that is a heritage from the past, especially from that Christian tradition through which the typically European social imagination has been formed. The things of the physical world and those of the moral realm have fallen apart, while the Greek tradition and that of the medieval age held them in intimate union—although a union accomplished by different means in the two periods. The opposition that now exists between the spiritual and ideal elements of our historic heritage and the structure of physical nature that is disclosed by science, is the ultimate source of the dualisms formulated by philosophy since Descartes and Locke. These formulations in turn reflect a conflict that is everywhere active in modern civilization. From one point of view the problem of recovering an organic place for art in civilization is like the problem of reorganizing our heritage from the past and the insights of present knowledge into a coherent and integrated imaginative union.

The problem is so acute and so widely influential that any solution that can be proposed is an anticipation that can at best be realized only by the course of events (LW10: 340-1).

Given the course of events since Dewey’s death, we may need to actively acknowledge that this problem remains acute, and that whatever solutions we thought we proposed have failed spectacularly—at least in light of things like the collapse of ecologies and the rise of a post-truth
politics. It may also serve us well to recall that the vast majority of the people on this planet are religious, and that even so-called “non-religious” people may not think of themselves as atheists. If atheism somehow goes together with a secular, scientific, rationalist view of the universe (which in some ways it might, even by unconscious association), then we must realize the clash of worldviews holds for vast numbers of people. And all of us face issues related to the meaning of life, even though such questions as “the meaning of life” don’t seem to occupy philosophers in the manner they used to. For Dewey, such a shift away from “the meaning of life” might be part of how unmodern we modern philosophers remain.

But Dewey seems to emphasize how our unmodernness manifests quite clearly in epistemology. Arguably, everything we do depends on knowledge in some way, such that, if we thought we had a systematic problem with how we know things (maybe one that somehow pervaded all the forms of knowledge we distinguish), then we might have a very big problem indeed. That is what we will consider in our inquiry. And we will try to see how our current way of knowing contributes to our spectacular failure to find a workable solution to the “acute” and “widely influential” problem Dewey and Husserl describe. But, in a way, we will go further than Husserl and say that the crisis actually implicates science more than we might think it could. Given that many of us share Husserl’s and Dewey’s respect for science, and that many philosophers actually hold philosophy itself in a rather high regard as a rigorous and rational discipline, some of the strangest possibilities we will uncover have to do with problems in *science as a way of knowing, and philosophy too*. This follows naturally once we really see and accept that we question *forms of life* as we question forms of discourse and epistemic practices. It is not merely the meaning of the world that we must turn toward, but, turning toward that, we turn toward the meaning of
science itself, and philosophy too. Once we see them clearly, we will be able to suggest that, in an important sense, our science and our philosophy lack rigor, and what we think we know, scientifically or philosophically, has some deep, systemic issues, with serious ethical import.

Perhaps we could begin by mentioning a few aspects of the new epistemology. One might think we would need to undertake a major critique of current epistemological theories and practices first, and then make suggestions for a new way of knowing. But it will serve us to plant a few seeds that will have a chance to germinate as our inquiry moves along. The basic epistemology offered here requires a few deeply interrelated terms to describe it, none of which is easy to explain beyond a surface understanding. For one, this epistemology is the epistemology of practice-realization. The term already brings out a problem: We will tend to think of practice, and then realization. That is an error. However, it also offers us a way to begin to understand the epistemology. So, we can try in a preliminary way to work with the error.

To do that, let us first note that “realization” carries two connotations, and one way to understand the difference realization makes to knowing abides in the difference between them. We might say to someone, “I realize that what you are saying has to do with an epistemological problem.” There it functions like a synonym for “know,” so that we could have said, “Now I know what you mean.” But the other connotation of “realize” allows us to say, “My dream has finally been realized.” A bringing-to-fruition has occurred.  

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6 Nishitani Keiji (last name first) makes a similar distinction. See his Religion and Nothingness. He also deals with the problem of nihilism as diagnosed by Nietzsche. Both Religion and Nothingness and The Self-Overcoming of Nihilism are worth reading in this regard.
We will eventually want to see that what we know amounts to what we practice-realize, and that we never avoid this, no matter if we practice skillful knowing or unskillful ignorance. What we practice is what we realize. In ordinary experience, we could distinguish three aspects of this movement to knowing something: Receiving, reflecting, and realizing. At any stage, we might talk about a certain measure of “knowledge,” but we will find it helpful to begin to say that we only really know something when we reach the stage of realization. In the case of learning philosophy, we first receive a philosophical teaching, resolving basic questions. With a text, we might ask, “Do I understand the thesis? Did I misread anything? Do I have a basic sense of what the author tried to say?” Just as we wouldn’t want our students to think they “know” very much about a certain book or article because they can state the thesis and basic arguments of the work, we wouldn’t want to call this anything more than a preliminary understanding. From reception we turn to reflection. Although we might read the text critically all along, reflection involves more extended sitting with the ideas, invitations, suggestions, evidence, nuances, and alleged conclusions of the text. Here we might apply careful analysis, engage in discussion and debate with others, turn to a commentarial literature if available, and do all that we can to test the text and its ideas. In the modern academy, we typically stop there (this is what we practice, and thus it is what we bring to realization), and one suggestion of our inquiry comes to this: Leaving the process of knowing at these two stages involves a lack of rigor, leading to consistent misunderstanding of at least some philosophers, and constituting a systematic limitation of our epistemic situation.

Before saying more about realization, let us pause to note another term: epistemic situation. Let’s not obsess over any of the terms in this text, but we will pause for some of them when helpful.
For now, let us say that our epistemic situation has to do with what we know along with our state as knowers and the context in which we find ourselves. To improve our epistemic situation would mean to improve ourselves as knowers, to improve the context of our knowing (a context which must extend to the larger cultural and natural ecologies), and thus improve our understanding and our experience of life, reducing negative side-effects from our way of knowing. It means coming-to-know something we find significant, and which we did not previously know.

This brings us back to our stages of knowing. The third stage is realization, and we will need some extended contemplation of it in order to genuinely appreciate (perhaps to realize) what it means for epistemology. Realization tends to involve the application of specific practices (usually non-textual ones) that carry us from a more intellectual understanding (which marks a preliminary or provisional understanding) to a fuller insight—as if all reason could possibly do, in the end, was to bring us to the gateway of true understanding, and then some sort of “transrational” process had to carry us across the threshold. It will take some time to explain what any of this means and why it might be important.

Again, we noted that one way to understand the difference realization makes to knowing abides in the word itself. In the case of saying, “My dream has finally been realized,” we may ask: What dream? and, What does it feel like to realize a dream? It may feel very differently from what we thought or what we told others or ourselves. Realization in this second sense *cuts through* words and ideas, and may then restore them, giving them a depth of meaning they previously lacked.
Among other things, I want to suggest that our way of using words—and in general our thought, speech, and activity—can become something like a froth that covers over the potential clarity of experience and the possibilities for more intimate experience, a froth that obscures certain aspects of what we are and what life is. Thought, speech and activity do not have to function this way. Even Indo-European languages do not have to act as rubble covering over a priceless treasure, but these languages in particular, and the culture of conquest in which they have been practiced and which they perpetuate, may both embody and encourage (*seduce us into*) a kind of ignorance (even, a pattern of insanity) that we need to overcome. Furthermore, there may be things in various cultural and philosophical traditions (even our own)—and there may be things yet for us to discover—that in some significant way *defy* our words and concepts, things that burst the boundaries of language, identity, logic, and worldview—and perhaps any time we even draw near such things, we keep them at bay, busy as we make ourselves with knowing, labeling, analyzing, critiquing, tidying up, making things expedient, reading in “causal” links, reasoning, rationalizing, and so on.

We will deal with some of these issues of language increasingly as our inquiry proceeds, but let us sense at the outset that it takes time to deal with language as a froth—not just here, but in our lives—and the froth keeps us at a distance from the deep waters of the soul. We become trapped in the froth, trapped at a distance from things we may very much like to know, even need to know, as a matter of survival and/or maturation. And there is just no “easy way around” these

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7 This is like an inversion of the claim that all experience is theory-laden. We can begin to see how all theory is experience-laden, and we may conclude that, if we suffer from an impoverishment of experience, we will produce impoverished theories about ourselves, others, and the world. Impoverished experience means impoverished knowledge. What are the richest, most vitalizing kinds of experience?
challenges—though there are practices that can at least temporarily blow the froth aside, so that we may glimpse some new clarity, touch some heretofore unknown intimacy—which, again, we designate as realization.

We might say that all the discussion here (the whole of the book) in the end amounts to a bit of froth that somehow might invite us into the water rather than keeping us at the surface, that it could lead to a moment of blowing the froth aside and glimpsing a new clarity and even touching or entering the water to experience a new intimacy. We might say that all spiritual or philosophical traditions engage in this froth-making, which in skillful cases seduces people into the water, and in less skillful cases keeps them clinging to the cliffs, covered in foam. We can live immediately, but in many cultures (maybe all of them) the spiritual or philosophical traditions must mediate for us, becoming a gateway to our own life, our own fresh experience.

In our own culture, time grinds on, developing in us a resistance to realization. We get into a groove of habit and routine, a groove that can become so deep we might despair of ever knowing differently—or maybe the groove seduces us into simply resting easy in our skepticism regarding anything beyond the procedures for knowing we already employ. In our culture, too, the philosopher could function as a medial figure, one who mediates between realms, so to speak, mediating the process of realization. Think of Socrates, who described himself as a midwife of the soul, but also gave us, through Plato, the image of the philosopher mediating between our imprisonment in a cave of delusion, our bondage in suffering, and the bright light of “Goodness,” which he seemed to revere as something sacred, and something deeply healing and transformative for the psyche. That sort of mediation can make us think we should devalue this
world, but “this world” remains a delusion. We might say that the “ultimate realm” is always “reality,” however we might try to understand that, and, in many traditions, this “reality” is here-and-now—this world, this heart and mind, this body, this cosmos, these fellow beings, all our relations. The philosopher thus mediates an intraworldly transcendence (as opposed to an “otherworldly” one). Even a Christian philosopher may mediate such a transformation—such that the divine becomes realized here-and-now, in, through, as this moment, arrived at when we cut through, dive through the froth of words and habits that cover over our own nature, cover over the sacred, cover over reality, cover over the living world.

All of this may sound a bit woo-woo. But we can try to treat it very pragmatically, as it is intended. For instance, the Buddha as a philosopher did something truly wondrous: He made explicit his medial function, even more beautifully than Plato did. In the famous Water Snake Discourse (Majjhima Nikaya 22), Buddha did two incredible things: He put a warning on his teachings, and he put a caveat on them. The warning gives the discourse its name: He said we should handle his philosophy the way we would handle a poisonous snake. What a thing to say! And yet, every philosopher from every tradition should say the same thing, for every philosophy, every religion, every concept, every practice, every political orientation, every idea can be used to perpetuate and even deepen structures of domination and oppression, both “inside” of us (the psychological, the spiritual, etc.) and “outside” of us (the social, the political, the familial, etc.). This is called the problem of spiritual materialism, and it seems to me the most troubling of philosophical issues, the fertile ground for countless evils and delusions, and something every
rigorous epistemology, ethics, and aesthetics should seek to address. Buddha’s direct facing of this problem stands as yet another example of his sophisticated genius.\footnote{It’s all-too-easy to point at, for instance, Christian rationalizations for war or for economic policies that perpetuate inequality as examples of spiritual materialism, or to point out that yoga, once a serious spiritual practice or set of practices, has become mere exercise and socialization, something trendy and distracting, or that hedge fund managers and coders practice meditation. But it would behoove us to see that, even though Buddha addressed this problem directly, Buddhists can still get hooked by it. Though Buddhism has no equivalent of the Crusades that I can think of, Buddhist philosophy was distorted incredibly in Japan during WWII, and it continues to be distorted in places like Burma. This precisely proves Buddha’s point. Christians, militant atheists, and all “scientific” thinkers should remind themselves of this problem of spiritual materialism with respect to their own traditions and their own lives, and also with respect to Islam, which, in relationship with the dominant culture, has often been distorted in incredible ways. In speaking of such distortion, we never need to get pulled into notion of a “one true religion,” such as created bloodshed between Protestants and Catholics, as well as between Christians and Muslims, for we mean by spiritual materialism anything that leads to rationalizations for violence, control, conquest, domination, inequality, aggression, and so on. Many misreadings of Plato that would accuse him of fascism may themselves be a brand of spiritual materialism, for Plato’s spiritual tendencies present challenges to internal and external domination which some part of us may prefer to avoid.}

So does his caveat, which appears throughout the Buddhist spiritual and philosophical traditions as the concept of \textit{Upaya} or Skillful Means. Buddha said we should treat his philosophy like a raft. He made it with what he found lying about, not from any special components, and he made it just for the purposes of crossing a river—let us think of it as the crossing from ignorance to relative wisdom, from not knowing something important to knowing it such that we can embody it . . . we can even think of it as getting out of the cave of delusion. We are talking about something concrete here, the concreteness of our suffering and confusion, and how we might transform that. We are just talking about a process of mediation, practice-realization, that gets us to know something we currently don’t know—something significant enough that our feeling for life somehow shifts. It is like a shift in how everything seems to hang together, a shift in our

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basic vision of life, our basic feel for life. Perhaps an analogy would be the shift from Newtonian physics to relativity and quantum theory. In an important sense, the latter put us in a very different world. In philosophical or spiritual matters, this shift should feel healing, invigorating, inspiring, insightful, and heart-opening. We will say a little more about that below.

The point for now is that, once we get to the “other side,” once we experience realization, we would err if we carried the raft around with us. It would only weigh us down and become a new kind of bondage. Likewise we err in treating the raft as precious and carrying it around with us on this side of the river—never bothering to put it in the water and undertake the crossing. The raft must carry us across—to the here-and-now (as if arriving in our lives for the first time), to our own true nature, to reality, to skillful and realistic living, to attunement with wisdom, love, and beauty, to atonement with Sophia. We use the raft to arrive at a beautiful life, not to show off the raft as a beautiful thing—though it can be essential to value and revere sacred teachings.

These extensive contemplations related to realization signify its importance. That stage matters the most, but we cannot start there. Perhaps we can leap into some taste of realization at any moment of our lives. But the practices that “lead to” realization are often powerful, and they can end up getting us further into delusion rather than helping us become truly wise, loving, and beautiful, and making the world more beautiful, loving, and wise in the process. This is why the most philosophical of these practices have not been taught without a great deal of ethical grounding and the framing of a worldview.
The epistemology we inquire into is thus relative, relational, and non-local (even though it emphasizes rootedness in place, in landscape, in moments). It does not deal in ultimate truth in the way the west has typically pursued this notion, and we cannot simply take up these “arts of awareness” and think we can apply them willy-nilly to solve our problems or come to insights. Or, let us say that we can in fact do that (we most certainly can, and even western science has documented instances of this, for at least some of the practices), but, considered from a broad perspective, it will likely create more suffering and ultimately perpetuate a pattern of insanity (as evidenced, for instance, in the case of all the meditating hedge fund managers, or the techies who micro-dose or go on ayahuasca vacations in South America). All of this also matters because a thoroughly relational epistemology is actually so strange that we must remind ourselves again and again that we misunderstand it until we bring it to realization, and this only happens relationally, dependent on our ethical practices and our basic intentions and vision of life.

To make the strangeness of a relational epistemology clear, let us consider an excerpt from a lecture Gregory Bateson delivered:

Look at your hand now . . . very quietly, almost as part of meditation. And try to catch the difference between seeing it as a base for five parts and seeing it as constructed of a tangle of relationships. Not a tangle, a pattern of the interlocking of relationships which were the determinants of its growth. And if you can really manage to see the hand in terms of the epistemology I am offering you, I think you will find your hand is suddenly much more recognizably beautiful . . . I am suggesting to you, first, that language is very deceiving, and, second, that if you begin even without much knowledge to adventure into what it would be like to look at the world with a biological epistemology, you will come into contact with concepts biologists don’t look at at all. You will meet with beauty . . .

It’s not a new idea that living things have immanent beauty, but it is revolutionary to assert, as a scientist, that matters of beauty are really highly formal, very real, and crucial to the entire political and ethical system in which we live.

. . . . Is the word “possession” applicable at all to relations?
Perhaps it will suffice to show that what I am saying, if taken seriously—and I say it in all seriousness—would make an almost total change in the way we live, the way we think about our lives, and about each other and ourselves.

Perhaps a curriculum is like a hand in that every piece and component of what they would call a curriculum is really related ideally to the other components as fingers are related to each other and to the whole hand . . . we Anglo-Saxons do not learn to live in a language because we believe that it is made of separate parts . . . We have lost by the time we are twelve the idea of language as a living organized pattern.

. . . And now, perhaps because you are Anglo-Saxons, and I am an Anglo-Saxon, you will want to ask me, “But how are we to achieve . . . a holistic education?” . . . The question springs from an already dissected universe, and therefore asks for an answer which cannot be the answer. It asks for an answer in terms of a dissected universe, and that answer I will not give you. It would not be an answer.

We face a paradox in that I cannot tell you how to educate the young, or yourselves, in terms of the epistemology which I have offered you except you first embrace that epistemology. The answers must already be in your head and in your rules of perception. You must know the answer to your question before I can give it to you. I wish that every teacher, schoolmaster, parent, and older sibling could hear the thunderous voice out of the whirlwind: “Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without understanding? . . . Dost thou know when the hinds bring forth? . . . Where wast thou when I set up the pillars of the earth”? I mean the thirty-eighth, thirty-ninth, and fortieth chapters of the Book of Job. The pietistic silly old man thought he was pretty good and thought God was just like him, but finally he was enlightened by an enormous lesson, a thunderous lesson in natural history and in the beauty of the natural world.

Of course natural history can be taught as a dead subject. I know that, but I believe also that perhaps the monstrous atomistic pathology at the individual level, at the family level, at the national level and the international level—the pathology of wrong thinking in which we all live—can only in the end be corrected by an enormous discovery of those relations in nature which make up the beauty of nature. (Steps: 310)

This puts a great deal of our epistemology—and the incredible challenges of attempting to arrive at it—on the table, up front, even if we will eventually have to unpack quite a lot over the course of our inquiry. We will clarify a few of the issues slightly in a moment, but first I want to make a suggestion: If we follow Bateson carefully above, we will understand why he also says this:

If I ask you how many fingers you have, you will probably answer, “Five.” That I believe to be an incorrect answer. The correct answer, I believe, is, “Gregory you are asking a question wrongly.” In the process of human growth, there is surely no word which means finger, and no word which means five. There might be a word
I want to suggest that things are stranger than Bateson indicates. He himself falls back into “counting”. He properly challenges us to question whether “possession” applies to relationships, but that in part has to do with their status as non-things, and as non-local. We can’t possess what we can’t count, so to speak. The two go together in some deeper sense, in a certain style of consciousness or way of thinking and knowing. Relationships should not be reified, and mind should not be localized.

But let us link this passage to the one from Dewey we considered above. We might say that, “ninety readers out of a hundred wouldn’t stop to think twice, coming across the expression ‘a dead organism,’” and we might say that ninety readers out of a hundred wouldn’t stop to think twice, coming across the expression, “I have five fingers,” or even, “I know how many fingers I have on my right hand.” We will eventually want to carry this same basic epistemic conversion into something like this: “Though ninety readers out of a hundred wouldn’t stop to think twice about the phrase, ‘We know how to put a human being on the moon,’ I want to suggest that the answer to the question, ‘Do we know how to put a human being on the moon?’ is something like, ‘You are asking wrongly—and terribly so,’ or we may go so far as to say the answer is better put as ‘No!’ than even a qualified ‘yes.’” This will take time to appreciate, but let the seed begin to germinate. An admittedly strange suggestion, it indicates the strangeness of our inquiry.

I said I would clarify a few more things now regarding what Bateson lays out for us. A relational way of knowing is actually more properly called ecological (not merely “biological,” and I think
Bateson would agree), one that somehow roots itself and us in a kind of intimacy with Nature, as if it returns us to Nature or puts us into a more participatory mode in relation to the natural world. We could call it a style of thinking or a style of consciousness, a general attitude and worldview, a *way of life*, experienced holistically. There is a sense of wonder in it, the wonder that marks the beginning of philosophy, as well as the path and the goal of philosophy. The relations we are talking about actually *constitute* us, thus knowing in a relational manner means the realization of *ourselves*, not simply a knowing of the world, as if the world were an object or consisted of objects. Subject and object no longer remain in a dualistic separation. Relations are not a tangle, but a kind of creative ordering, which we might sense with a feeling of awe, wonder, even sacredness.

Bateson, a lifelong atheist, emphasized the sacred and might call what we inquire into here an epistemology of the sacred, or a sacred epistemology—both terms I hope to make acceptable to the reader in time, along with another, the epistemology of the soul. Bateson tries to approach sacredness in many ways, including the following:

> We are beginning to play with ideas of ecology, and although we immediately trivialize these ideas into commerce or politics, there is at least an impulse still in the human breast to unify and thereby sanctify the total natural world, of which we are.

> Observe, however, that there have been, and still are, in the world many different and even contrasting epistemologies which have been alike in stressing an ultimate unity, and, although this is less sure, which have also stressed the notion that ultimate unity is aesthetic. The uniformity of these views gives hope that perhaps the great authority of quantitative science may be insufficient to deny an ultimate unifying beauty.

> I hold to the presupposition that our loss of the sense of aesthetic unity was, quite simply, an epistemological mistake. I believe that that mistake may be more serious that all the minor insanities that characterize those older epistemologies which agreed upon the fundamental unity. (MN:18)
The goal of our inquiry includes helping to make accessible the notion that we can all—in our own ways, in our own religious, spiritual, and philosophical traditions—we can all agree that we share the possibility, the potential of touching a sacredness in Nature and in ourselves. We will speak more about how Bateson and other non-religious thinkers can help us all, theist and atheist alike, to productively work with a sense of sacredness, shifting our understanding of how what we might call religion or spirituality might play a vital role in a better way of knowing.

The earlier, longer passage from Bateson puts something else on the table: The epistemology of practice-realization is also experimental and experiential, which means we have two other critical terms to manage. We will have to say at least a few key things about them, drawing from Nietzsche and Dewey. They will help us understand why we are so trapped in a way of knowing that might be very problematic, and they will help us to see how we can make philosophy more rigorous, realistic, skillful, and graceful. But obviously a term like “experience” is vast, and eventually merits its own dissertation. We will say only enough about any of these terms to make the epistemology comprehensible in a basic way. The epistemology itself indicates their understanding comes only in the practice of the epistemology itself (something Bateson mentions above as well). We do not understand this way of knowing until we know by means of it. Thus Bateson has touched on much of value to us in our inquiry, and he has perhaps presented the great challenge of the inquiry: How can we get suspicious enough about our current way of knowing that we could actually let go of it, let go even of ourselves (what we think we are, what we cling to) sufficiently to change our way of knowing? Can we raise enough sincere questions about our current way of thinking that we might, even in the process of this questioning, begin to
let go a little, and perhaps glimpse (if not fully see) things from a significantly shifted perspective?

It’s worth giving this a little more emphasis, as part of understanding the difficulties of our epistemic situation. Let us turn again to Dewey. In *Human Nature and Conduct*, Dewey offers a delightful inquiry into habit, and we must deal with habits of thought, speech, and action if we want anything to improve about our way of knowing—a problem that applies even within the dominant epistemology, and all the more so if we want to enter into a better way of knowing. The passage we will look at is so astonishing in its simplicity that we will consider a lengthy excerpt, after a few framing remarks. Part of what we may accomplish by looking at it now has to do with planting the seed for another term we will employ to describe the new epistemology: Use.

We all know how challenging it can be to learn to use a new device. We had to learn how to use smart phones, laptops, ATM’s, and even had to relearn how to use cars as they have changed. For instance, one doesn’t use the brakes on a car with anti-lock brakes as one does the old type of car.

Imagine if a group of scientists from various fields announced a press conference. A team of archaeologists, astrophysicists, quantum physicists, psychologists, ecologists, and many others had gotten together because of a remarkable finding, a discovery so surprising that all of these experts joined forces to verify an astonishing hypothesis. They found a device, an artefact, and after a series of surprising discoveries about it, they began to probe it with ever greater care and
nuance. It seemed to give off a mysterious energy, and after a tremendous amount of work, everyone had agreed that, whatever this thing might be exactly, it gave clear evidence of having the capacity to destroy the planet. However, it also gave exceedingly optimistic evidence that it could actually “save” the planet—meaning that this device seemed to have the capacity (and the scientists could barely stand the strangeness of saying so) to do the following: Stop the mass extinction of species, stop the general collapse of the conditions of life, end war, end poverty, end consumerism, end racism and all forms of discrimination, and in general lead to a period of relative peace, compassion, wisdom, and well-being, as well as a flowering of creativity and intelligence, perhaps even a revolution in science and the arts. The scientists felt practically embarrassed by these claims, and this in part explained why so many experts had been brought into the project, each to verify these claims as far as possible. After saying all of this, and getting everyone in the room worked into a frenzy, the scientists presented an unfortunate caveat: They could not for the life of them figure out how to use this artefact. They tried yelling at it. They tried shocking it with various kinds of energy. They tried pushing on it in various places. They analyzed its composition in countless ways, put it into every scanner they had. They could get it to do various things, but they had become convinced that, if they only knew how to use it properly, it would mark a turning point. On the other hand, continuing to do the things they had so far been doing, they admitted, might trigger the destructive side. Of course, doing nothing, we all still face the crises the device seems to have the capacity to help us avoid or at least mitigate.

Obviously, the artefact is the human being. And the story creates problems in the sense that it deals with an object, and not an ecology or a living system of relations, interwoven with Nature. However, it serves to frame our epistemology in that a better way of knowing would see our
current way of knowing the way we might see someone hitting their touchscreen with a hammer: They don’t know how to use the thing. It’s bad use to pump anti-lock brakes, or to fail to change the oil in a standard engine, or to drive at high speed in very wet conditions, to clean a laptop by taking it in the shower, and so on. Though we may think we know how to use our car, our phone, and our laptop, the history of philosophy and science together with the present state of the ecologies on our planet suggest that we don’t know how to use whatever it is that uses the car, the phone, and the laptop. And, perhaps despairingly, the problem presents a lot of subtle challenges—including ethical and aesthetic ones. Dewey tries to get at some of those in the following passage:

Recently a friend remarked to me that there was one superstition current among even cultivated persons. They suppose that if one is told what to do, if the right end is pointed to them, all that is required in order to bring about the right act is will or wish on the part of the one who is to act. He used as an illustration the matter of physical posture; the assumption is that if a man is told to stand up straight, all that is further needed is wish and effort on his part, and the deed is done. He pointed out that this belief is on a par with primitive magic in its neglect of attention to the means which are involved in reaching an end. And he went on to say that the prevalence of this belief, starting with false notions about the control of the body and extending to control of mind and character, is the greatest bar to intelligent social progress. It bars the way because it makes us neglect intelligent inquiry to discover the means which will produce a desired result, and intelligent invention to procure the means. In short, it leaves out the importance of intelligently controlled habit.

We may cite his illustration of the real nature of a physical aim or order and its execution in its contrast with the current false notion. A man who has a bad habitual posture tells himself, or is told, to stand up straight. If he is interested and responds, he braces himself, goes through certain movements, and it is assumed that the desired result is substantially attained; and that the position is retained at least as long as the man keeps the idea or order in his mind. Consider the assumptions which are here made. It is implied that the means or effective conditions of the realization of a purpose exist independently of established habit and even that they may be set in motion in opposition to habit. It is assumed that means are there, so that the failure to stand erect is wholly a matter of failure of purpose and desire. It needs paralysis or a broken leg or some other equally gross phenomenon to make us appreciate the importance of objective conditions.

Now in fact a man who can stand properly does so, and only a man who can, does. In the former case, fiats of will are unnecessary, and in the latter
useless. A man who does not stand properly forms a habit of standing improperly, a positive, forceful habit. The common implication that his mistake is merely negative, that he is simply failing to do the right thing, and that the failure can be made good by an order of will is absurd. One might as well suppose that the man who is a slave of whiskey-drinking is merely one who fails to drink water.

Conditions have been formed for producing a bad result, and the bad result will occur as long as those conditions exist. They can no more be dismissed by a direct effort of will than the conditions which create drought can be dispelled by whistling for wind. It is as reasonable to expect a fire to go out when it is ordered to stop burning as to suppose that a man can stand straight in consequence of a direct action of thought and desire. The fire can be put out only by changing objective conditions; it is the same with rectification of bad posture.

Of course something happens when a man acts upon his idea of standing straight. For a little while, he stands differently, but only a different kind of badly. He then takes the unaccustomed feeling which accompanies his unusual stand as evidence that he is now standing right. But there are many ways of standing badly, and he has simply shifted his usual way to a compensatory bad way at some opposite extreme. When we realize this fact, we are likely to suppose that it exists because control of the body is physical and hence is external to mind and will. Transfer the command inside character and mind, and it is fancied that an idea of an end and the desire to realize it will take immediate effect. After we get to the point of recognizing that habits must intervene between wish and execution in the case of bodily acts, we still cherish the illusion, that they can be dispensed with in the case of mental and moral acts. Thus the net result is to make us sharpen the distinction between nonmoral and moral activities, and to lead us to confine the latter strictly within a private, immaterial realm. But in fact, formation of ideas as well as their execution depends upon habit. If we could form a correct idea without a correct habit, then possibly we could carry it out irrespective of habit. But a wish gets definite form only in connection with an idea, and an idea gets shape and consistency only when it has a habit back of it. Only when a man can already perform an act of standing straight does he know what it is like to have a right posture and only then can he summon the idea required for proper execution. The act must come before the thought, and a habit before an ability to evoke the thought at will. Ordinary psychology reverses the actual state of affairs. (MW14: 23-5)

There is more nuance than some readers might at first notice, partly because we don’t turn our attention to activity with enough clarity and patience, busy as we are with other philosophical practices. This example should be held as something sacred, for it gets at the essence of our inquiry. We somehow need to see the profundity of asking, “With what mind will I stand up
straight?” We will hold this example as a touchstone, and along the way try to illuminate its meaning.

For the time-being, let’s consider a few details. We can notice, for instance, how Dewey seems to prefigure here what he will say a few years later in his Terry Lectures, which come to us as the book, *A Common Faith*. There Dewey tells us, “The emphasis that has [in these lectures] been put upon intelligence as a method should not mislead anyone. Intelligence, as distinct from the older conception of reason, is inherently involved in action” (LW 9: 53). As we alluded to previously, a contrast between “reason” and “intelligence” will prove fruitful. There is something in our current set of habits, the habits of thought, speech, and action, the habits of knowing that we employ even in the academy, that we need to somehow see as bad “use” of ourselves and our world. But—it currently *feels right*. When we engage in a habit, even if the habit constitutes bad use of ourselves, it often still appears phenomenologically with an inherent rightness to it—an *experience of rightness*—and doing something different can often at first feel *wrong*. Of course, as Dewey makes clear, once we get the sense that we have practiced a bad habit (a bad way of knowing, a bad way of living), doing anything can amount to just another “doing,” another way of getting things wrong. We can’t think our way out of bad thinking or knowing any better than we can do our way out of any other bad doing. And our attempts to try amount to magical thinking in the pejorative sense. Instead, we will have to get in touch with something that bears the same relation to knowing that knowing itself bear to all our activities.

As the example Dewey gives shows us, we cannot really formulate the idea of knowing better until we can know better. However, consider that one who stands properly does not do so by
means of an idea, but by means of proper standing. Thus, while only such a person could formulate a full and rich idea of standing that might somehow prove useful, that very person has little use for the idea, because, if we might put it poetically, they take refuge in standing itself, in activity, in the wholeness of activity, and not in a stepping out of activity to “think” about it. This is what we shall try to get at as the contrast between intelligence and reason. Reason in the old sense involves a distance that in fact doesn’t function in a living world. Meanwhile, intelligence is a kind of living thinking that does not operate on the basis of “ideas,” which are a matter of mind in a narrow sense. Instead, this thinking functions on the basis of the ecology of mind, meaning loops or circuits or networks of mind (forgive the mechanical analogies) that of necessity transcend our habitual consciousness. This will become clearer as our inquiry progresses, and, again, we just plant a few seeds now.

If we cannot productively tell someone to, “Stand up straight,” how much less productive must it be to say, “Know better,” or, “Fix the problems of the world,” or, “Be a better person”? We return here, in general, to a very old question of philosophy and religion: Why do people do unethical things? Aristotle had a notion of “weakness of will.” Dewey clarifies even further why this is a bit silly: Willing our way into “the good” (whatever good we want to aim at) amounts to just another kind of doing—and, put in religious terms, doing simply expresses our original sin (we will clarify this later by means of a story from Bateson, our resident atheist). We cannot correct our original sin by means of original sin. Of course, the original sin itself can be nothing other than our actual nature, whatever that may be, but this is a matter of spiritual tautology, not anything functional or ethical.
Some of that may be hard to understand until later in the inquiry. Let’s put it this way: Aristotle did us no small disfavor in speaking about weakness of will, because correct or realistic effort is an altogether sort of thing (a come-and-see thing—as in, “come and find out for yourself, because I cannot tell you about it,” as with “the Good” in Plato), and when we think we have got weakness of will or anything less than a holistic problem, an ecological problem that includes context, we end up doing more of the same—at least on a fundamental level. A person who drinks too much when they go out to a bar does not have a problem of akrasia, or weakness of will. Rather, they have a problem with the way they organize their life (we could say, more poetically yet more precisely, a problem with the way they attune their soul), and transformation will come when they stop putting themselves in bars, where they will face the repeated defeat of their alleged conscious purposes. Such a person needs new friends and new interests, not more “will power”. Whatever Dewey may say about the place of concepts like “self” and “personality” in ancient Greece (and they most certainly differ from our own), we can nevertheless sense how Aristotle may here be putting us on the road to disaster as he tempts us to locate certain problems “inside” of us, without clarifying the way that “inside” goes altogether with “outside”. In any case, we do not transform by “willing” transformation, because we cannot “do” what we are. This is perhaps what Dewey is trying to get at when he writes above, “Conditions have been formed for producing a bad result, and the bad result will occur as long as those conditions exist.” Such reflections lead us almost into that “conditions of possibility” talk of the continental philosopher. Perhaps we do work in that spirit. What are the conditions of possibility for
collapsing the conditions of life? Well, what if they turn out to be the conditions of academic philosophy, and more generally the conditions of western culture?  

No matter what we think of *that* question, the issue surely still relates to the central question of *LoveWisdom*: Who am I, and How should I Live? We can no more tell someone *Who they are* than we can tell them to stand up straight or to fix the problems of the world. “Stand up straight, be who you are, heal the world.” However we spell out what we think any of that means, it will never touch the come-and-see thing that we actually are and that the world is. It will never itself be realization.

To recap, we now have a very general sense of where we are headed. First we have further contemplation of the sorts of issues just sketched, so that we can appreciate with some sensitivity the problems we face in an inquiry like this, and so we can begin to understand the problems with our way of knowing and the sorts of things a relational epistemology of practice-realization invites us to consider. Our inquiry brings up all sorts of problems with the way we do philosophy in the west, and those problems are the problems of our way of knowing, systemic problems that we will not easily undo. Any healthy rejuvenation of the dominant culture and its philosophies will take generations. Likewise, any of the problems we will consider could become a dissertation. We need a broader vision though. That, indeed is part of our problem right now:

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9 In other words, a critique of the form of discourse of the academy is (by a kind of ecological necessity) the critique of a whole form of life—not merely the “life of the mind” cultivated in the university, but the whole ecology of mind cultivated by western civilization, embodied in and encouraged by its languages. Our inquiry involves evoking a sense that the form of life may have deep, systemic issues.
Everyone is a mile deep in their drill-hole of scholarship, with no idea how to talk to someone even one or two drill-holes away (perhaps with no awareness that someone else is so close by) and meanwhile the conditions of life are collapsing. I sometimes think of Gil Scott-Heron’s poem:

A rat done bit my sister Nell.
(with Whitey on the moon)
Her face and arms began to swell.
(and Whitey’s on the moon)

I can’t pay no doctor bill.
(but Whitey’s on the moon)
Ten years from now I’ll be payin’ still.
(while Whitey’s on the moon)

The man jus’ upped my rent las’ night.
(‘cause Whitey’s on the moon)
No hot water, no toilets, no lights.
(but Whitey’s on the moon)

I wonder why he’s uppi’ me?
(‘cause Whitey’s on the moon?)
I was already payin’ ‘im fifty a week.
(with Whitey on the moon)

Taxes takin’ my whole damn check,
Junkies makin’ me a nervous wreck,
The price of food is goin’ up,
An’ as if all that shit wasn’t enough
A rat done bit my sister Nell.
(with Whitey on the moon)
Her face an’ arm began to swell.
(but Whitey’s on the moon)

Was all that money I made las’ year
(for Whitey on the moon?)
How come there ain’t no money here?
(Hm! Whitey’s on the moon)

Y’know I jus’ ’bout had my fill
(of Whitey on the moon)
I think I’ll sen’ these doctor bills,
Airmail special
(to Whitey on the moon)

I once started sketching a version for our situation in the academy:

The multi-generational migration of the monarchs is collapsing
and whitey on the brain
Our addictions spreading and relapsing
and whitey on the brain

Things are falling apart—and we keep reading Kant. All the old dead white men languish on the brain. The syllabi surely change in many of our courses. And we in philosophy rely (perhaps too much) on the fact that we have colleagues in feminist studies and various other programs who may introduce students to thinkers other than Aristotle, Descartes, Kant, and the other usual suspects of the western philosophy department. But do we need to do more than we now do? Should we get whitey off the brain, or at least engage with some kind of more genuinely transformative way of realizing the highest ideals of our own traditions?

While I have no question regarding value of philosophy, that also comes from a somewhat different approach to it than the one dominating the academy. And perhaps that very confidence in philosophy itself makes it painful for me to write a book like this and to discuss it with a such a respected group of readers, for it feels terrible to discuss this dissertation with intelligent and caring people when we all could instead sit and discuss how to properly deal with the collapse of the conditions of life and the other problems our society faces. Since the epistemology we inquire into here offers a diagnosis of our many crises as well as ways to work with them such that we might mitigate some of the suffering and even begin to heal, maybe we can feel good about at least considering it. Something of our conversation may in some way help us to navigate

10 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=goh2x_G0ct4
the suffering we have already made inevitable, given how far we have let climate collapse, economic inequality, and other symptoms of ignorance proceed.

To say it again, I have no question regarding the value of philosophy—indeed, no question regarding its inescapability for us. But this comes from a particular view of what philosophy is. If a change in how we do philosophy might help us to know better and ultimately live better, we should reflect a bit on its meaning and purpose. Since the meta-analysis involves some potentially strange elements of form (such as using quite a few long quotations and, as the reader can sense by now, moving more in the manner of Montaigne than Quine, though certainly not with the skill of either), let me say again that all of these considerations carry tremendous salience for me as a philosopher. They in fact weigh heavily on me at times, especially with respect to what I might most like to convey about the possibility for better ways of knowing. I would go so far as to say that all of this feels like a life-and-death matter. None of what we will discuss here feels to me like mere speculation or conjecture or some sort of intellectual indulgence, and I invite the reader to join me in some sense of urgency, because of the state of the world, and for the sake of people we love and people we don’t even know who suffer now and will suffer tomorrow—suffer more intensely if we cannot know better and live better. I know that all of you suffer too, in your own ways and also just as I do. You are perhaps too busy, too overstimulated, caught up in various agendas that seem inescapable; you all have experienced the insanities of the dominant culture, including its university system; you all love philosophy in your own way, and want to understand things. I have no idea how we will actually help with the larger crises we face together. But we must now philosophize in conditions that should have remained unimaginable—and these conditions may get worse, even in the next few months, to
say nothing of the next 5, 10, or 20 years. For us, that time will go surprisingly quickly. For the moment, let us think through things with as much patience as we can muster. How can philosophy help? And in what ways has philosophy contributed to the crises we face?

All professional philosophers know that “philosophy” comes from the Greek, philo-sophia (φιλο-σοφία). “Philo” indicates Love, and “Sophia” indicates Wisdom. But it often seems that what professional philosophers mean by the activity of philosophy has little if anything to do with what most people might have in mind or in heart when they think of “Love” or “Wisdom”. This remains puzzling, especially given that professional philosophers do love, and they in fact, at least sometimes, love what they do for a living. It is not clear how many professional philosophers seek “wisdom,” or seek to become genuinely “wise,” or what that would even mean to them. Again, the activity of professional philosophy just doesn’t seem to align with what
many ordinary people might think of if asked to imagine a “quest for wisdom” or a “love of wisdom”.

This disconnect, between “philosophy” on the one hand, and love and wisdom on the other, perhaps relates to the larger disconnect between academic philosophy and the general public, which we might find tragic, especially to the extent that we think we deal with beautiful things in the academy, beautiful theories, insights, inspirations. Yet most people I meet think of philosophy as something either high-brow, useless, or both. The words “philosophy,” “philosophize,” and “philosophical” often carry varying degrees of derogatory connotation, depending on the context (phrases like, “I don’t have time to philosophize about this,” or, “That sounds a bit philosophical; we need to be practical here,” and many others . . . the range of dismissals at times surprises me). This derogatory connotation makes little sense from the standpoint of the meaning of philosophy as we will work with it here, but it will take a little time to develop that enough so that we can apply it more directly at the aim of our inquiry, which has to do with knowing better and living better. Again, our reflections on the nature of philosophy and the challenges of “doing” philosophy are themselves already reflections on the essence and heart of our inquiry.

How do we do philosophy? Pierre Hadot, one of the great French philosophers of the 20th century, examined and in many ways endorsed Thoreau’s suggestion in Walden that, “There are nowadays professors of philosophy, but not philosophers” (Hadot 2005). Hadot showed how Thoreau’s charge aligned quite closely with some of the specifics of Epicurean and Stoic philosophy, and how it aligned in general with the spirit of much of Ancient philosophy in the
west. We might suspect that the difference between the practice of philosophy on the one hand, and the practice of professing philosophy on the other, mark off some sort of potentially important issue in relation to knowing. Maybe these are two ways not merely of “doing” philosophy, but, given what philosophy might be, different ways of knowing what we are and what the world is. Indeed, they might mark off different ways of knowing altogether—knowing anything, including knowing what this or that philosopher was trying to say, knowing what science is or should be, knowing what a human being is or could be, knowing what the world is or could be.

A few years ago, Robert Zaretsky, a historian and rather philosophical fellow, wrote on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of one of Hadot’s books, What Is Ancient Philosophy? It seems telling that a non-professional philosopher (a mere historian, we might say with tongue in cheek) wrote a piece like this, which appeared in the Chronical of Higher Education. Quite a few professional philosophers might endorse some or all of the content of Zaretsky’s piece, but embracing Hadot with any zeal means going against the grain of academic philosophy in general. Perhaps it should grate the ear to have to say, “academic philosophy,” and grate the heart that this differs from what philosophy seems to have meant for people like Socrates, Epicurus, Nietzsche, Simone Weil, and many others in the west, as well as differing (in similar ways) from what analogous terms meant for people like Siddhartha (Buddha), Kongzi (Confucius), Dogen (perhaps the greatest giant of Japanese philosophy), Machig Labdron (a revered Tibetan philosopher), Rumi, the Peacemaker of the Haudenosaunee, and many others around the world.

Zaretsky tells the following story:
Several years ago, I chaired a search committee for a humanities postdoctoral position at my university. Inevitably, this involved chauffeuring the candidates to and from the airport, blathering about the advantages of life at our university and in our city, all the while carefully skirting anything at all about the candidate’s own life.

With all but one applicant, that is. When I met Michael at the gate, he reached out to shake my hand. Both of us realized, with a laugh, that he was still holding a book with his. Expecting to see a monograph on the Carolingian Church — his field — I instead glimpsed the name of an author and work I’d never seen before. It was a well-worn, dog-eared copy of Pierre Hadot’s *Qu’est-ce que la philosophie antique?* (*What Is Ancient Philosophy?*)

While Michael’s curriculum vitae had already suggested a number of professional bruises, I later learned that those paled in comparison with the bang-ups he had known in his private life. This, it happened, was why he was reading Hadot. Not only had the French scholar changed Michael’s understanding of the ancient schools of philosophy, but Hadot had also changed, well, his life. Through Hadot’s discussion of the Epicureans and Stoics, Platonists and Aristotelians, Michael had found a framework to better understand his past and shape his future.

As we mark the 20th anniversary of the book’s publication, I can’t help recalling that moment. “This book changed my life”: This is not only the sort of remark one doesn’t make at a job interview, but it is the sort of remark one doesn’t make about scholarly works in general . . . .

. . . many of us who work outside philosophy departments — or, for that matter, outside universities — still carry the confused yet persistent idea that philosophy is a discipline apart. That philosophy is nothing if not a close articulation between one’s work and one’s life.

In part, Hadot’s work was revolutionary because he gave lay readers solid textual and historical reasons to insist upon that deep expectation for the discipline. His audience was hungry for that — the book’s commercial success, in fact, led Hadot’s publisher, Gallimard, to launch a series of “what is?” books devoted to other fields in philosophy. ¹¹

Hadot’s work emphasizes the strangeness of philosophy, but not the strangeness people typically sense about philosophy, the strangeness that sent my entire extended family into paroxysms when I first announced, at the age of 18, an intention to become a philosopher—something I had

¹¹ https://www.chronicle.com/article/Lived-Philosophy/234426
never heard of before I went to college. To my family, as to many people I have met, and also according to many accounts and references I have come across, a philosopher has little or nothing to contribute to society, in part because they epitomize the absent-minded professor and the mere intellectual, one who has endless questions and critiques but no answers or practical insights into daily life and ultimate questions. Philosophers are strange to most of society because they speak in jargon, seem highly clever and critical (in a pejorative sense), and concern themselves with minutiae that few in the university truly comprehend, let alone anyone in the general population.

I cannot think of a scholarly work other than Hadot’s that I would hand to anyone at all with the intention of helping them as a human being. Academic philosophy remains too strange for that. It seems useless, in a rather pejorative sense. Many a student has remarked on this uselessness, even those who majored in philosophy—lured in by one of the introductory courses that sometimes deal with the “cosmic questions” of philosophy—and later came to regret their decision, as they learned the bitter truth about what academic philosophy actually involves, its strangeness to life, to love, to wisdom and meaning in a more “cosmic” sense (the meaning of terms and propositions is, of course, debated to exhaustion—which makes it an ironic engagement with meaning from the more lived sense of “meaning” . . . an inquiry into meaning that ends up feeling meaningless in some way). I am not sure if enough professional philosophers realize how their students feel, or how the general public really feel about these matters. They have perhaps become so strange in their own way that they either misunderstand or, to some

12 But I would probably not recommend Hadot right off the bat anyway, in most situations. It would be far better to go with non-academic philosophers if the aim is to truly help someone as a human being.
degree, no longer concern themselves (surely for very good reasons). I think with sadness about all the students excluded from the riches of philosophy because of the way it is taught, and this exclusion is reflected in declining enrolments and declarations of major in departments already tiny relative to majors like business and the STEM majors—not to mention the failure to get a highly diverse population of students to enroll and declare. Socrates would probably reel in shock and horror at how philosophy’s strangeness keeps so many people from studying it.

But Zaretsky touches another kind of strangeness, one that goes back to philosophy’s ancient roots—and, ironically, returns it to what many university students hunger for, what would get them to enroll in more courses, what gets some of them hooked when they declare their intention to study philosophy. In some cultures, these roots have remained vibrant and have produced full ecologies of living philosophy (again, the word differs in other cultures). Zaretsky gets at the strangeness of the philosopher as a figure representing a vitalizing rupture.

In *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, one of Hadot’s other books (perhaps a much a better place to begin for most readers), Hadot gives a brief history of some of western philosophy, after which he writes the following:

> But as a history of ancient *philosophia*, our history of Hellenistic and Roman thought is less focused on studying the doctrinal diversities and particularities of these different schools than it is on attempting to describe the very essence of the phenomenon of *philosophia* and finding the traits shared by the “philosopher” or by “philosophizing” in antiquity. We must try to recognize in some way the strangeness of this phenomenon, in order then to try to understand better the strangeness of its permanence throughout the whole history of Western thought. Why, you may ask, speak of strangeness when *philosophia* is a very general and common thing? Doesn’t a philosophical quality color all of Hellenistic and Roman thought? Weren’t the generalization and popularization of philosophy characteristics of the time? Philosophy is found everywhere - in speeches, novels, poetry, science, art. However, we must not be deceived. These general ideas,
these commonplaces that may adorn a literary work, and true “philosophizing” are separated by an abyss. Indeed, to be a philosopher implies a rupture with what the Skeptics called bios, that is, daily life, when they criticized other philosophers for not observing the common conduct of life, the usual manner of seeing and acting, which for the Skeptics consisted in respecting customs and laws, practicing a craft or plying a trade, satisfying bodily needs, and having the faith in appearances indispensable to action. It is true that even while the Skeptics chose to conform to the common conduct of life, they remained philosophers, since they practiced an exercise demanding something rather strange, the suspension of judgment, and aiming at a goal, uninterrupted tranquility and serenity of the soul, that the common conduct of life hardly knew.

This very rupture between the philosopher and the conduct of everyday life is strongly felt by non-philosophers. In the works of comic and satiric authors, philosophers were portrayed as bizarre, if not dangerous characters. It is true, moreover, that throughout all of antiquity the number of charlatans who passed themselves off as philosophers must have been considerable, and Lucian, for example, freely exercised his wit at their expense. Jurists too considered philosophers a race apart. According to Ulpian, in the litigation between professors and their debtors the authorities did not need to concern themselves with philosophers, for these people professed to despise money. A regulation made by the emperor Antoninus Pius on salaries and compensations notes that if a philosopher haggles over his possessions, he shows he is no philosopher. Thus philosophers are strange, a race apart. Strange indeed are those Epicureans, who lead a frugal life, practicing a total equality between the men and women inside their philosophical circle - and even between married women and courtesans; strange, too, those Roman Stoics who disinterestedly administer the provinces of the empire entrusted to them and are the only ones to take seriously the laws promulgated against excess; strange as well this Roman Platonist, the Senator Rogatianus, a disciple of Plotinus, who on the very day he is to assume his functions as praetor gives up his responsibilities, abandons all his possessions, frees his slaves, and eats only every other day. Strange indeed all those philosophers whose behavior, without being inspired by religion, nonetheless completely breaks with the customs and habits of most mortals.

By the time of the Platonic dialogues Socrates was called atopos, that is, “unclassifiable.” What makes him atopos is precisely the fact that he is a “philosopher” in the etymological sense of the word; that is, he is in love with wisdom. For wisdom, says Diotima in Plato’s Symposium, is not a human state, it is a state of perfection of being and knowledge that can only be divine. It is the love of this wisdom, which is foreign to the world, that makes the philosopher a stranger in it.

We find a thread of strangeness woven through our conversation. It is strange to offer such a long quote (we shall enjoy many more), and the quote itself has to do with the strangeness of philosophers. I am strange in many ways, though all-too-human in my modest love of wisdom.
(strangeness gives us no guarantee of good philosophical practice). Recall the strangeness that Zaretsky noted, the strangeness of saying a book by a scholar, a modern book of philosophy, had changed one’s life. And reflect on the possible strangeness of that life, the life of the man Zaretsky met: Michael had experienced professional bruises far exceeded by the bruises he experienced in his personal life; he was not a professional philosopher, but he found he could turn to the tradition of philosophy for actual help in his life, actual relief from suffering. This seems exceedingly strange, given the context of academic philosophy.

The themes of *strangeness, rupture, and atopia* run through the inquiry we will make together here. But because of the state of philosophy in the academy, we must control them—thus running the risk of defying and even insulting Sophia herself, who may *demand* the rupture into strangeness, the disorientation into an *atopia*, a placelessness that leaves us feeling confused and perhaps even afraid. We could put this another way: Because of the state of the academy, a certain kind of philosopher or philosophy must appear not only strange (maybe even outlandish), but actually dangerous to the academy and to certain structures of power in the larger culture. And even if certain philosophers endorse in spirit some, much, or practically all of what Hadot suggests, they may still feel a rational inclination to control strangeness, if for no other reason than the one Hadot himself gestures toward: a simple fear of charlatans . . . and perhaps no means of determining the charlatan from the atopos philosopher or sage, or (setting aside the issue of judging philosophers) at least a philosophy that comes from and invites us into *atopia*.

I happen to feel like neither a charlatan nor a sage. I engage in our inquiry here with sincerity, and with a sense that something important is at stake, something we could come to discover and
create together, so I hopefully avoid charlatanism. On the other hand, the bar is set so high for
the *atopes* philosopher that one can only turn red with embarrassment at any comparison there,
any suggestion that one’s work might threaten the academy or the society for the best or most
proper reasons. Eliot wrote, “I am no prophet — and here’s no great matter,” which I might twist
to say, “I am no Socrates—and yet here is some great matter.” The matter we face at this
historical moment seems so great as to induce despair—and philosophy itself always seems a
great matter indeed, perhaps only presencing itself most fully at moments of despair, when the
go finally has to let go of what it thinks it knows, and entrance into placelessness—at least a
glimpse of it—might happen mysteriously, as an act of grace from Sophia herself.

Hadot’s work is much more scholarly than my own, and I would like to address that issue in
brief. First of all, let us acknowledge that his scholarly care and clarity have not spared him from
marginalization. As Zaretsky points out:

> Despite, or perhaps because of, Hadot’s iconoclastic interpretation and limpid
language, influence has been greater on those working outside his field than on
those within. This odd state of affairs was brought home to me when I began to
ask those who specialize in ancient philosophy about Hadot. Gradually I started to
feel like a private eye in a noir detective tale pursuing a case where there are no
witnesses, and no body, either.

An Aristotelian scholar, who told me she had never read Hadot, referred me to a
second specialist whose “broad interests” might include Hadot. It turned out that
this individual had, in fact, read Hadot — but only his early philological study of
Marius Victorinus, a fourth-century neo-Platonist. This specialist was kind
enough, however, to suggest that I contact another colleague, one who had
recently written a book on the ancient schools of philosophy, but that scholar
never replied to my query.

It seemed Hadot was as *atopes* in the profession as Socrates was in the agora.
I do not mean this as a cop-out, but as a genuine expression of disconcertion: I could try to put what I want to say in a more “scholarly” manner, but, given what I have to say, that seems unlikely to convince many of the people I might like to convince—worse yet (and this is the more important point), what I have to say in some sense demands a certain amount of defiance, rebellion, revolt against scholarly forms, to at least some degree, because they both arise from and perpetuate some fundamental problems in our way of living, speaking, thinking, and knowing, and these problems are part of our inquiry together. This latter issue, the main issue, actually has two interwoven dimensions: That the present way of knowing arises from and perpetuates a pattern of insanity goes altogether with how strange a new way of knowing must look, feel, and sound from within the current way of doing things. Not only are the forms of discourse in the academy at stake in any genuinely open-minded inquiry into our way of knowing, but essential features of language and identity could become suspect. To use Quine’s metaphor, we may find ourselves sincerely questioning relationships, objects, or concepts very much at the core of our functional “web of belief”—doing so not for the sake of an intellectual exercise or abstract skepticism, but maybe with the sincerity Descartes asks us to believe he had in his skepticism (and that maybe he did in fact have, given his life circumstances, though his inquiry seems like a rather blundering attempt at philosophy as we shall mean it here). We may face the challenge of Quine’s indeterminacy of translation even in cases when someone communicates with us in our native or otherwise-understood tongue, and this problem perhaps becomes ironically worsened if they speak in a way which we at first think we understand, because we will miss the fact that every time we think we understand, we have likely misunderstood, having applied our habitual ways of understanding (as if each sentence says to us, “Think differently” in the same way we might say to someone, “Stand up straight,” with all
the attendant problems Dewey pointed out). The more what I write here looks like what the reader knows, the further it gets from helping the reader to understand what it invites us into, let alone to help the reader themselves to know in a new way. So, I must apologize for every slip into apparent clarity.

Let us consider the matter of philosophical form a bit more in a moment. First, let us sit with the questions that the above passage from Zaretsky might raise, given its description of the apparent marginalization of such a talented scholar with seemingly important and rather radical things to tell us. Surely we could find other examples of such marginalization, perhaps even better ones. But, as far as philosophy goes, Hadot might serve as a decent example to start with: He wrote books that could feel genuinely helpful, and they seemed helpful precisely because of his work to show how philosophy as a way of life differs from philosophy in the academy, thus challenging academic philosophy in a significant way. What does any of that say about academia? About philosophy as it is and as it was—and as it might be?

Zaretsky wanted to answer questions like these, so he called up Arnold Davidson, a professional philosopher at the University of Chicago who has perhaps done more than anyone else to introduce Hadot to a U.S. audience, having translated Hadot, interviewed him, and engaged in other activities to bring attention to his work. Davidson told Zaretsky that contemporary philosophers should recognize both Hadot’s “philological rigor” and also his “philosophical vision,” one that, in Zaretsky’s words, “has struck a deep and lasting chord among those outside the profession. (As far outside as jazz: Davidson mentioned that one of Hadot’s admirers, the
composer, trombonist, and scholar George Lewis, recorded a piece titled *Les exercices spirituels.*” Vision. That, too, will come to play a role in our inquiry into knowing and living.

Zaretsky also relates that Davidson interviewed Hadot in 2007—their last interview (Hadot died in 2010). Davidson asked about “spiritual exercises,” perhaps the single most important idea Hadot sought to convey regarding ancient philosophy and philosophy as a way of life in general. Arguably, there is no full rupture brought about by philosophy, no genuine or authentic strangeness in the philosopher, no realization of the *atops* philosopher who abides in wisdom and happiness, serenity and wonder, without these exercises that make such a realization possible—exercises like the various forms of meditation one finds in the Buddhist philosophical traditions (the ancient west seems to have discovered nothing quite as sophisticated, and this may help explain why philosophy as a way of life dwindled and almost died out in the mainstream of what we continued to refer to as “philosophy”—it of course held on in many Christian traditions, especially those characterized as “mystical”). Davidson wanted to know whether Hadot thought such exercises, and thus philosophy as a way of life in a more robust sense, might have a place in the academy. Hadot gave a qualified no. He felt that the traditional exercises are, let us say, too strange. But that perhaps students and professors could find ways to turn *reading texts* into a spiritual exercise. Some readers may feel excited by this prospect, while others may find it farfetched, and they may agree with Zaretsky’s general characterization that, “The university has long been the place where we live for examinations, not where we examine our lives.” Similarly the great psychologist C.G. Jung said of himself,

> I am a physician and deal with ordinary people, and therefore I know that the universities have ceased to act as disseminators of light. People have become weary of scientific specialization and rationalistic intellectualism. They want to hear truths which broaden rather than restrict them, which do not obscure but
enlighten, which do not run off them like water, but penetrate them to the marrow. This search threatens to lead a large, if anonymous, public into wrong paths. (CW 15, para. 86)

We can more fully receive these words when we realize that Jung shared the same feeling for ancient philosophy that Hadot and many others do (“many,” but a relative minority—a small and largely marginal one, but seemingly on the rise, and ready for co-opting at every turn). Jung thought of himself not as a “psychologist” in a technical or scientific sense, but as a philosopher; not a “physician” in the manner of a doctor of the body, but a doctor of the soul, which captures the old meaning of philosophy as a therapy for the soul:

I can hardly draw a veil over the fact that we psychotherapists ought really to be philosophers or philosophic doctors—or rather that we already are so, though we are unwilling to admit it because of the glaring contrast between our work and what passes for philosophy in the universities. We could also call it religion in statu nascendi, for in the vast confusion that reigns at the roots of life there is no line of division between philosophy and religion. (CW 16, para. 181)

In an interview, Jung said,

Man’s soul is a complicated thing, and it takes sometimes half a lifetime to get somewhere in one’s psychological development. You know, it is by no means always a matter of psychotherapy or treatment of neuroses. Psychology has also the aspect of a pedagogical method in the widest sense of the word. It is an education. It is something like antique philosophy, and not what we understand by a ‘technique.’ It is something that fixes upon the whole of man, and which challenges also the whole of man in the patient . . . as well as in the doctor. (1977: 255)

In the academy, it would be strange indeed to speak about the “soul”. It would be even stranger to speak about philosophy as a pedagogical method that fixes upon one’s whole being and aims at the development of the soul, and to speak of majoring in philosophy as critically examining and engaging with such a pedagogical method—without which engagement, the philosophy remains misunderstood. That latter point should really give us pause, because it suggests limitations on our ability to understand philosophy (and thus ourselves and our world),
limitations arising from our very way of framing and doing philosophy, our way of life, our way of talking to each other and even of moving around. The way we do things in the academy (and, we must emphasize this, this means the whole of it: not only the way we read and teach and talk, but the way we organize our schedules, go to conferences, move about the campus, the way we relate to loved ones, the way we work on problems alone or together . . . the whole thing) might cut us off from certain important kinds of knowledge (though, we can hardly think of them as important or evaluate them at all if we don’t know what they are). There are things we cannot know, and misunderstandings or failed understandings that must persist, simply because of the way we organize doing philosophy and living our lives.

What can we make of such divergent views, that of the philosopher and that of the professor of philosophy? Let us speak inclusively (a prime virtue of philosophy as a way of life) and say that philosophy consists of pluralism and variety—a variety of contexts, a variety of forms or modes, a variety of content and experiences, and a variety of ways of relating one or more of those things to the rest of life.

We can think of the forms or modes of philosophizing as the variety of outputs. These outputs range across a surprisingly broad spectrum: long dialogues, such as we find in Plato; little vignettes, such as we find in Zhuangzi; discourses such as we find with Socrates, Epictetus, and Siddhartha (Buddha); exchanges such as we find in the Confucian Analects; fiction, such as we find with Albert Camus, Iris Murdoch, Kurt Vonnegut, and countless other highly philosophical writers; poetry such as we find with Rumi, Milarepa, Basho, Walt Wittman, and others; visual art such as we find with William Blake, Hildegard of Bingen (who should get counted in music and
poetry too), Kandinsky, Andy Goldsworthy, and the Japanese Zen philosophers like Hakuin, Sengai, and others. One could go on and on.

Let the record show that any form outside of the standard book or essay gets some measure of criticism in the dominant discourse of the academy. In my experience, Plato’s dialogues are read almost exclusively for their arguments, thus missing—as Hadot clearly shows—the most important points of those dialogues (some of which might remain occluded without refined practices or spiritual exercises, something like running the experiments of science as a method of verification, but a verification upon which full and proper understanding hinges decisively). Meanwhile, I have heard philosophers say things like this: “Why would I teach Camus? Indeed, how could I teach Camus? Where are the arguments?” All the worse then for the painters, poets, and dancers—despite that fact that, for instance, dancers like Isadora Duncan felt deeply inspired by philosophers (in the sense that dance seems to have been a philosophical activity, the practice of philosophy for at least some dancers), and despite the fact that even a contemporary philosopher, Alva Noe, found that dancers had taken up one of his technical philosophical texts (Action in Perception) as a framework for creating and exploring dance. For the record, in many courses I have taught, students have told me that some of the major points I kept trying to make only made sense after they were exposed to the arts, for instance after watching Rivers and Tides (a documentary about the work of Andy Goldsworthy), learning Japanese Tea Ceremony or calligraphy, practicing Tango, or making photographs or other works of art (as philosophical practice, and thus done in a particular way).
We can find here a difference not merely in form but also in content. In this regard we should first acknowledge Martha Nussbaum’s cogent argument that we perhaps cannot fully separate form from content. We needn’t rehearse it here. The reader seeking detailed analysis can peruse works like *Love’s Knowledge*. Suffice it to suggest that we might not be able to express everything important about life if we restrict our expressions to rational analysis. For instance, how better to explore the philosophical significance of tragedy than to put on a tragic play? We can talk about it all day, but the magic of theater can bring it to life, and even allow us to “work” on the problem of tragedy (assuming the presence of appropriate “spiritual exercises” and a *functional* philosophical framework for them).\(^{13}\) As another example, a painter might easily tell us, “If I thought I could express it in words, I would have done so.” And, we all know the difference between, “I love you” and a warm embrace. They may seem to come to the same basic point, but some of us clearly incline to the embrace, at least sometimes. Infants who don’t get enough touch can experience developmental interruptions, even death, and it won’t help to merely sit and tell them, “I love you.” What do we make harder to express when we restrict philosophizing to the dominant discourse of the academy?

But, we may also ask what we *marginalize as content*, what we make harder to experience and to philosophize about in the first place, when we restrict the discourse as we do, and restrict the practices of philosophy almost exclusively to the analysis and production of text. Naturally, we

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\(^{13}\) So-called playback theater provides a sort of limited example of the therapeutic dimension of theater, which relates to coming-to-know something that allows for transformation. In this form of theater, the actors improvise scenes based on events from the lives of the audience. A person might have their own personal tragedy or other experience played out, thus allowing for a shift in knowing those experiences. Playback theater could be seen as a kind of “spiritual exercise” in Hadot’s sense of the term.
will tend to work on problems amenable to the theories (the general vision) and the tools or practices at hand, and thus something that doesn’t yield to our tools or practices may never even come up for consideration, lying as it might outside of the imagination, the vision, the sense of the world that created and/or employs the tools.\textsuperscript{14}

The very idea of philosophical tools can seem odd. Wiley-Blackwell published a book called \textit{The Philosopher’s Toolkit} (Baggini and Fosl 2010). In our inquiry here, we will have an interest in this question: What do philosophers build with their tools? What do philosophers make? Do they build soil? Do they build clean air or clean water? Do they build forests or oceans? Do they build any living ecologies in vitalizing ways? It seems most non-human beings do just that kind of work with their toolkits of mind and body. But the embodied philosopher, whose “mental” “experience” depends on the living world, employs tools in relative isolation from the living world, while extracting from it constantly (however “indirect” the extraction may seem) in order to produce and consume books, buy laptops and phones, drive cars, fly to conferences and interviews, store their ever-expanding, digitized verbiage on servers, and so on. What kind of world do we philosophers make with our activity? Does the world itself, the world and all its sentient beings, place any conditions on our philosophizing that we should feel an ethical demand to fulfill? From the perspective a more ecologically rooted culture (a more realistic culture), what is the point of philosophy, and what must philosophy include, what must

\textsuperscript{14} Recall here Aldrich’s suggestion that Dewey engaged in a kind of visionary mode of philosophizing, and recall too Bateson’s suggestion that we made a major epistemological error when we lost the sense of aesthetic unity, as well as Husserl’s a Dewey’s concerns about a vitalizing sense of the world we have not yet given birth to, in light of several centuries of “scientific” inquiry.
philosophizing look like? These will perhaps come to strike us as not only valid questions, but as important ones, perhaps threatening the center of our web of beliefs.

But back to this funny little text about the tools of philosophy. It has two references to meditation, which we might see as a major form of “spiritual exercise” in Hadot’s sense, and a tremendously important method for taking up experience itself or mind itself as the content of philosophy. One mention of meditation comes in the entry on the “transcendental argument”. The authors write, “Despite its name, this sort of argument has nothing to do with Eastern religion or meditation. It is, rather, a cool, calm analytic procedure most notably used by Immanuel Kant (1724–1804)” (281). The other comes in the entry on art as a way to “do” philosophy: “Roger Scruton, following Plato [the authors, and perhaps Scruton too, notably fail to mention Confucius or other non-western traditions], has even argued that music is important for our ethical development. Through music, we can ‘enter into a state of frenzy’ or ‘enter a state of meditation’, and these, he argues, ‘are character-forming experiences’” (256). Neither of these actually deal with meditation as a tool of philosophy, as a way to “do” philosophy. Meditation is used as a contrast in one case, and a comparison in another. But the tools are argument and music.

Of course, we should give thanks that music and the arts do get mention as tools. But it’s a largely academic discussion. The authors do admit that,

It may also be, however, that the arts can take our thinking forward in ways formal arguments cannot. Philosopher Stanley Cavell, for example, has written influential essays on the way Shakespeare explores the issue of scepticism, not by putting philosophical dialogues into the mouths of his characters, but by literally dramatizing problems of scepticism and their solutions. Similarly, films, plays and novels may show us things about ethics more truthfully and powerfully than
they can be *told*. Robert Bolt’s *A Man for All Seasons* (1954), for example, shows us things about living life according to an ethic of duty rather than consequences which, arguably, formal treatises cannot. (255)

Fair enough, on the surface. But this “tool” is located in a section of the book titled, “Tools at the Limit,” which in practice means mostly *beyond* the limit of what is acceptable in the academy. It’s all well and good for a philosopher of Cavell’s status to say nice things about Shakespeare, but quite another for any philosopher (let alone one less established) to turn in a play or dialogue as work that should help them earn tenure—with prospects looking worse for students of philosophy who wish to turn in anything too “creative” or “artistic” for a course or a degree.

The closest we get to meditation as a tool comes in the entry on “Mystical experience and revelation,” another tool “at the limit”—which in this case in particular pretty much means, “has no place in the academy as a way of ‘doing’ philosophy.” The entry feels largely dismissive. At the end, the authors muse that, “perhaps, paraphrasing Shakespeare (Hamlet, Act 1, Scene 5), there’s more in Heaven and Earth than ever dreamed about by philosophy. Then again, perhaps not” (258). Yes: Perhaps not. But is that “perhaps not” because philosophy in the academy has so much imagination, or so little?

One might interject here an interesting artifact from the philosopher John McTaggart Ellis McTaggart, in the conclusion of his *Studies in the Hegelian Dialectic*:

> Thus it is not reality which is abstract, but only our knowledge of it. And this is not surprising, since all imperfect knowledge must be abstract, and it is a matter of common notoriety that our knowledge is as yet imperfect.

> Nor need we regret such a limitation of the province of philosophy. For if our present knowledge were completely adequate to reality, reality would be most inadequate to our ideals. It is surely at least as satisfactory a belief, if we hold that the highest object of philosophy is to indicate to us the general nature of an ultimate harmony, the full content of which it has not yet entered into our hearts.
to conceive. All true philosophy must be mystical, not indeed in its methods, but in its final conclusions. (1859: 258-9)

We can appreciate the humor of this artifact, which practically implies the essential presence of mysticism, in an unexpected way. All philosophers are thus mystics, but McTaggart has clearly understood mysticism in as fragmented a way as the authors of the Toolkit. We should not find this surprising. So many people who use words like “mysticism,” “mystical,” and even “esoteric” in a derisive and dismissive manner have only intellectual assumption and speculation to support their dismissal.

The same seems to hold with the authors of the Toolkit. We should note that meditation receives no entry as a tool, even a tool “at the limit,” and that mantra is likewise not listed, even though mantra has the literal meaning of “instrument (-tra) of mind (man).” The closest we come to these tools is the entry on “mystical experience,” but with this entry the authors have perhaps not really given us a tool, per se, have they? Can we just start “having” “mystical” “experience”? How would we apply or work with such a tool? Are they serious about it as a tool or not? Can we try and work with it, or can’t we?

We might in a preliminary way call meditation a tool or technique of experience, and we might want to hold off on calling experience itself a tool, unless we clarify what we mean—which presents challenges. At first, we might better say that philosophy always has to do with the cultivation of experience—which, if we follow Dewey’s (1905) somewhat radical claim of
“immediate empiricism,” suggests that philosophy has to do with the cultivation of what is—ultimately, the cultivation of the world (a corollary of the epistemology of practice-realization).\(^\text{15}\)

The ancient philosophers of the west (along with both ancient and modern philosophers from all over the world, in living traditions running up to the present day) thought philosophy should cultivate experiences like wisdom, love, beauty, meaningfulness, well-being, true joy, peace or equanimity, and so on. This amounts to saying we can live in a meaningful, healthy, peaceful, wise, and loving world—if we will do the necessary work to make it so. Philosophy, on this understanding, has to do with the practice-and-realization of a kind of experience of life, and a kind of reality we can share together.

Let us allow “mystical experience” to mean the realization of the loftiest aims of philosophy as a way of life. From one perspective such experience does not itself make for a tool with which we then do philosophy. Rather, the doing of philosophy brings us to the mystical experience, a knowing not captured in our understanding prior to the experience. However, experience might still be thought of as a method in a broad sense (something akin to Dewey’s sense of experience as method, which we needn’t worry about here), and (pace Dewey) it might also be thought of as the content or subject matter of philosophy. Meditation would become an Art of Experience, or an Art of Awareness, something like a refinement for the general method of empiricism, experiment, or experience (let us see these as roughly synonymous for our purposes). Even arguments can get reframed as attempts to invite us to experience something in a certain way, a

\(^\text{15}\) “Immediate empiricism postulates that things—anything, everything, in the ordinary or non-technical use of the term ‘thing’—are what they are experienced as” (393).
way to walk us up to the gateway of experience rather than an attempt to “convince” or to “change our beliefs” or something like that. We can never leave experience, and this marks the beginning and end of philosophy.

We will return in a moment to this consideration of experience and tools. But let us add just a few additional reflections on the form and content of philosophy. Among other things, our reflections may bring up the duality between scholarly and unscholarly, academic and non-academic, philosophy and non-philosophy. Walter Kaufmann writes in his own way about these issues in his book, *Faith of a Heretic*. He begins by sharing portions of a somewhat famous letter written by Wittgenstein, who offered these thoughts to his friend Norman Malcolm:

I then thought: what is the use of studying philosophy if all that it does for you is to enable you to talk with some plausibility about some abstruse questions of logic, etc., and if it does not improve your thinking about the important questions of everyday life, if it does not make you more conscientious than any ... journalist in the use of the dangerous phrases such people use for their own ends. You see, I know that it’s difficult to think well about ‘certainty,’ ‘probability,’ ‘perception,’ etc. But it is, if possible, still more difficult to think, or try to think, really honestly about your life and other people’s lives. And the trouble is that thinking about these things is not thrilling, but often downright nasty. And when it’s nasty then it’s most important. (from Kaufmann 2015: 36).

Kaufmann finds this a marvelous general statement about the study of philosophy. He only suggests that thinking about your life and other people’s lives is very thrilling indeed (though, perhaps Wittgenstein had in mind the discomfort these reflections can provoke in us, and Kaufmann would surely agree about that)—and that this orientation to philosophy seems to have lost its place in the academic version of philosophy, which, on a certain reading, concerns itself far more with ever-narrowing, abstract, jargon-filled inquiry into things like “certainty,” “probability,” and so on.
Kaufmann was not alone in feeling some concern about this trend. Writing in the *London Review of Books*, the iconoclastic philosopher Richard Rorty related the following story:

‘I had hoped my department would hire somebody in the history of philosophy,’ my friend lamented, ‘but my colleagues decided that we needed somebody who was contributing to the literature on vagueness.’

‘The literature on what?’ I asked.
‘Dick,’ he replied, exasperated, ‘you’re really out of it. You don’t realise: vagueness is huge.’

Commenting on this as an aspect of the general rise of analytic philosophy (the essay is a kind of review of a two-volume, 900+ page history of analytic philosophy, the second volume of which bearing the title, “The Age of Meaning,” which, given our reflections so far, may feel ironic), Rorty offers the following:

My friend’s judgment is confirmed by Scott Soames’s 900-page history of analytic philosophy. In an epilogue titled ‘The Era of Specialisation’, Soames cites ‘the investigation of vague predicates’ as an area of philosophical inquiry that has ‘exploded in the last thirty years’. The intensity with which such specialised inquiries are being pursued is, he says, indicative of the fact that ‘the discipline itself – philosophy as a whole – has become an aggregate of related but semi-independent investigations, very much like other academic disciplines.’

Soames welcomes this change. He ends his book by saying that ‘what seems to be the fragmentation in philosophy found at the end of the 20th century may be due to more than the institutional imperatives of specialisation and professionalisation. It may be inherent in the subject itself.’ Philosophers used to think that the point of their discipline was to attain a synoptic vision – to see how everything hangs together. But, Soames seems to suggest, they may finally be disabusing themselves of this millennia-long misunderstanding of their own enterprise.

To see what philosophy may look like in the future, consider the problem that gave rise to the huge literature on vagueness: the paradox of the heap. Soames formulates it as follows: ‘If one has something that is not a heap of sand, and one adds a single grain of sand to it, the result is still not a heap of sand . . . if n grains of sand are not sufficient to make a heap then n+1 grains aren’t either.’ So it seems that ‘no matter how many grains of sand may be gathered together, they are not sufficient to make a heap of sand.’

. . . . An educational administrator (a dean in the US, a pro-vice-chancellor in Britain), asked to ratify the appointment of someone who has produced a brilliant
new theory of heaps, might be tempted to ask whether this sort of thing is really philosophy. Most analytic philosophers would think this a dumb question – as silly as whether inquiry into the neural processes of squids is really biology.\footnote{16} Notice here the contrast between Dewey as a more “visionary” philosopher, and what we have today; Bateson’s sense of the fundamental epistemological error of losing touch with the aesthetic unity of things, and what we have today. Compare also Hadot, who claims that, “No one has described the relationship between the ancient sage and the world around him better than Bernard Groethuysen” (a French philosopher). He then gives us Groethuysen’s description:

The sage’s consciousness of the world is something peculiar to him alone. Only the sage never ceases to have the whole constantly present to his mind. He never forgets the world, but thinks and acts with a view to the cosmos. . . . The sage is a part of the world; he is cosmic. He does not let himself be distracted from the world, or detached from the cosmic totality. . . . The figure of the sage forms, as it were, and indissoluble unity with man’s representation of the world.\footnote{17}

Hadot comments on this by saying, “This is particularly true of the Stoic sage, whose fundamental attitude consisted in a joyful “Yes!” accorded at each instant to the movement of the world, directed as it is by universal reason” (251). Such a joyful “Yes!” does not seem to echo through the halls of academic philosophy, nor does one find it easy to sense how analysis of heaps would give rise to it.

Thus, the Students too interested in finding their own joyful Yes, the meaning of life (as opposed to the meaning of “heaps”), students too interested in synoptic vision or anything too visionary, students too interested in how everything “hangs together,” students too interested in doing philosophy in alternative modes (painting, poetry, dance), students seeking work with alternative

\footnote{16}{https://www.lrb.co.uk/v27/n02/richard-rorty/how-many-grains-make-a-heap}

\footnote{17}{Let us note the resonance here with contemporary cognitive science: “World and perceiver specify each other.” Varela, Thompson, and Rosch (2015: 172)}
methods (anything non-textual, including meditation and “mystical” or other sorts of experience), students too interested in Indigenous cultures and epistemologies, students too interested in female philosophers . . . all of these and more will either never consider becoming philosophers, or, having tried to enter the field, will eventually get disabused of their naïve notions of what philosophy is about and how it might be done (nor would they find it easy to obtain mentorship even if they could pursue these non-academic passions).

This is not to say we have any sort of overt tyranny or dogma. It functions in part as a zeitgeist, and one can sometimes feel like the powers that be have taken the fun out of philosophizing (I sense this in students all the time, even hear them express it directly). It also functions the way what Chomsky and Herman have described as the “manufacture of consent” functions (1988). Chomsky and Herman directly implicate academics as responsible for maintaining structures of domination and oppression. On a certain political reading, it is the job of philosophy to avoid anything at all like what Socrates did. Philosophy must not “corrupt the youth,” and thus, in any society with structures of power and domination in place, in any society that involves itself in conquest and extraction, inequality and exception, the education in that society must protect the youth from the kind of philosophy Socrates did (the kind Hadot says he and many others did) because that sort of philosophy has indeed proven to “corrupt the youth,” and thus Socrates served as an esteemed model for revolutionaries like Gandhi and Martin Luther King.

How does this controlling of philosophy work? In a free society like ours, structures of power tend not to rely on a bludgeon except in extreme cases or with marginalized populations (and even then, it doesn’t compare to a brutal dictatorship). One must employ other threats and other
means. In the most sophisticated case, one never has to do much of anything to control philosophizing, because philosophy itself simply never takes a threatening form. For instance, in the case of journalism—the major focus of Manufacturing Consent (the book by Chomsky and Herman; there is also a documentary by the same name that focuses more on Chomsky as a figure, but effectively conveys the model developed in the book)\(^{18}\)—one may find occasional application of the more clumsy strategy of shelving a story. This happened recently in the famous case of Jane Mayer, who uncovered information threatening to Trump’s presidential run. The overlords at Fox News told her to shelve it. Fox News has perhaps approached the crudity of state television, at least at times (which might mean our society has degraded more than some of us suspect). But maybe that makes it all the more helpful in employing the other, more sophisticated strategies. For one thing, if the New York Times is the epitome of crazy liberal thinking, then we are never going to have a serious conversation about anarchy—or even single-payer healthcare and a return to a top tax rate of over 90% (the recently proposed 70% already got framed as a socialist nightmare that would destroy “America”). But the most sophisticated issue comes to this: Anyone who is going to try and do real journalism that holds power accountable and attempts to genuinely inform the public is not going to get a job at the New York Times to begin with. People who get into journalism and stay in it, especially with careers in institutions like the New York Times, already have an implicit agreement on what sorts of views are realistic, and what sorts of questions and investigations one should launch. If you are going to

\(^{18}\) I would like to recommend the documentary for one sequence in particular, in which an editor at the New York Times claims that he, with apparent due diligence and sincerity, looked into some of the charges made by Chomsky and, after investigating, cleared the Times of these charges—meanwhile the film dramatizes the apparent blindness of this investigation. We can hear a critique, appear to take it seriously, and end up proving the critique by finding it baseless or misguided, or in some other way essentially doing nothing differently.
ask the President of the U.S. really tough questions, you just won’t make it into the White House press corps. So goes the model proposed by Chomsky and Herman. They make a convincing case.

We can at least wonder if something like this holds in philosophy, where people have all agreed not to, as Kaufmann puts it, “stick their neck out” in any way that would resonate with the kind of philosophizing done by some of the great philosophers in western history—or, indeed, might seriously challenge them in any radical way. Kaufmann includes in his mention of great philosophers many I find too intellectual, and I think things are all the worse in the mode of philosophy as a way of life. I am trying to gesture toward implicit biases that may first of all be quite invisible to us (we might not have a place in the academy at all unless they remained invisible or largely repressible), and which, even if we can begin to talk about them, may lead us to rationalize. Certain kinds of philosophers and philosophies just don’t fit the academic worldview, the academic way of life or the western way of life. And, beyond that basic acknowledgement, we must take a deep breath and ask to what degree the practices of academia end up “manufacturing consent” in the sense Chomsky and Herman meant, thus perpetuating domination and degradation. To the extent that philosophy remains “useless” from a practical point of view, it remains powerless to transform the culture of consumption; to the extent that philosophy is useful, in this culture, its permitted use must pose no threat to any of the core evils of the structures of power. Again, the university must protect the youth and the culture more broadly from philosophy itself (at least some versions of philosophy). McCarthyism showed that, even in a relatively free society, radical views in the university can get rooted out, and the economic realities of the society and the university in particular put daily pressure on thinkers to
conform. The “cost of living” and the cost of paying for one’s education cannot be easily ignored. Nor can we easily ignore the investments we have made in a career and in a certain line of research, which may feel “doable” in the same way our typical way of standing up or sitting down may feel very doable.

Kaufmann seems to have felt some dismay at the proliferation of the sort of philosophizing Soames apparently valorizes—a rise he witnessed during his too-brief career. One might see the work on heaps as eminently friendly to structures of power. Working on heaps, we offer no mobilizing critiques of power, and the jargon of those working on issues closer to a critique of power may mean they will have no audience in the general public, perhaps in large part because those academics explicitly interested in power and domination of necessity spend much if not most of their time publishing in academic journals and interacting with other academics.

In his book, Kaufmann goes on to endorse a pluralism regarding how one might think well about our life and other people’s lives, and that letter from Wittgenstein forms a nice context for his considerations, but it will also come back again when we return to more specific reflections on content. As for form, let us be strange and enjoy yet another long passage, since Kaufmann does such a fine job of reflecting on many aspects of form, and it seems worthwhile to emphasize that careful thinkers have reflected on form and endorsed pluralism regarding both form and content:

Let some philosophers favor the monograph, and others more artistic forms. Clearly, the scholarly monograph is the best way of making some kinds of contributions; but it would be a pity if the monographic mind monopolized the field. Let us remember that most of the finest philosophic classics were not monographs . . . .

Each form has its dangers. They are too numerous to catalogue. One obvious danger of the monograph is pedantry . . . But pedantry will always be with us . . . .
Some philosophers want to get across their experience of philosophy, too—that way of life in which the particular problems they treat are merely episodes. They recall, and take seriously, Plato’s disdain, in his Seventh Letter, for “those who are not genuine philosophers but painted over with opinions” and his insistence that there neither was nor ever would be any written work of his containing his own philosophy: “for this cannot be formulated like other doctrines; but through continued application to the subject itself and living with it, a spark is suddenly struck in the soul as by leaping fire, and then grows by itself” (340 f.).

A philosopher may try to communicate what, as he knows, cannot be communicated to everybody. He may exert himself to strike a spark here and there in a mind that is ready. He may hope that, though some readers will merely browse, whether to take offense or pleasure, others may, as it were, live with his book until the spark leaps over.

Nor is there only one way of sticking with a point—the monographic way. One may want to show how one point is related to others, how a judgment derives part of its meaning from its relation to other judgments, how a view that is seemingly clear appears in a different light when seen in a wider context. Microscopic work can be of the greatest importance; but it has no monopoly on importance, and not everything macroscopic is necessarily popular in the bad sense—or popular at all. The gadfly’s function is hardly a paradigm of popularity.

One can take up a single point and worry it as a dog worries a bone, though occasionally with more fruitful results. One can also ask oneself about the significance of a whole trend in philosophy . . . . To be sure, the effort is more hazardous than a painstaking and detailed analysis of a single problem, and it is more likely to fail. But as Whitehead remarked in *Modes of Thought*, “Panic of error is the death of progress” (22). As long as one is aware of the dangers and warns one’s readers, instead of wearing the mantle of omniscience, the risk is hardly excessive: if the prose is clear, errors can be corrected. (62-3).

Perhaps the most important thing he says in these reflections: “No form is a panacea,” and we should perhaps take that to also mean much more latitude than even Kaufmann himself seems to allow in these reflections. He seems strangely conservative.

In any case, I cannot offer a form of discourse or a form of life that will appeal to everyone. But academia has gotten rather entrenched in particular forms of discourse, and I have come to see this as more significant a problem than we might at first think, or more significant than I myself thought not so long ago. We have good reasons for valuing the forms of discourse we currently
prize, and I do not say we should throw them out altogether. At the same time, if we look at our situation and say, “Something has to give,” we might wonder if the forms of discourse in the academy need to give much more than a little—and that with them might come many aspects of our forms of life.

In this regard, we might wonder if the most important thing in the passage above comes not from Kaufmann, but from Plato, who clearly and succinctly expresses the sorts of things Hadot tried to get us all to recognize about philosophy as a way of life. Plato might say that there are nowadays many who “are not genuine philosophers but painted over with opinions,” and it should perhaps gives us pause to think, as I do about this book, that for some philosophers, no written work can contain their philosophy, and that the meaning they intended could not come from textual analysis alone, and in fact could not even be “formulated,” but rather the meaning of some philosophies, the knowledge or knowing they invite, might only arise by means of a kind of “continued application to the subject itself and living with it,” by means of spiritual exercises, such that “a spark is suddenly struck in the soul as by leaping fire, and then grows by itself.”

This book has its interest in such sparks first and foremost, and I must confess doubts about being able to strike them, at least in a text like this one. But, as a consolation, we may perhaps get ourselves to wonder if such sparks might have a special value, and we might seek them—outside of a book like this, which maintains so many limitations of the dominant culture.

Let us conclude these general meditations on form and content with a little reflection from Kaufmann about content itself, so to speak (again, form and content may go more closely together than we might like to admit). Kaufmann quotes a little book by Geoffrey Warnock, a
philosopher who lauded the so-called “analytic” “revolution” in philosophy:

Warnock says: “It is at any rate certain that questions of belief -questions of religious, moral, political, or generally ‘cosmic’ variety—are seldom if at all directly dealt with in contemporary philosophy. Why is this so? The first part of an answer to this question can easily be given: There is a very large number of questions, not of that variety, which philosophers find themselves more interested in discussing.”

One might doubt whether a mere shift of interest deserves to be called a revolution, until one realizes what most of these philosophers are prepared to relinquish: they no longer “try to think really honestly about your life & other people’s lives.” And they do not only abdicate one of the noblest functions of philosophy as a matter of individual choice but they hail this surrender as a major advance and discourage others from carrying the quest for honesty into less academic questions. Since so many highly intelligent and deeply humane people take this view, it will be well to consider their reasons, if only briefly.

“Religious, moral, political, or generally ‘cosmic’ questions are not considered the business of philosophers because philosophers do not seem to possess any special qualifications for dealing with them; and if one holds a post in a university, along with natural and social scientists, one ought to have some specialized professional competence, else one is an impostor. (43)

This book invites philosophers to cultivate the specialized competence to deal with the “cosmic” questions, the global questions, the questions of heaven-and-earth that we must face to navigate the catastrophe we have already created, and to perhaps mitigate the extremes to which that catastrophe may flare. This competence comes altogether with the epistemology of practice-realization. It demands experimentation that leads to a capacity to speak with authority about the only thing that matters, the only thing we can ever “get at” with any way of knowing: The possibilities for experience—especially experiences of wisdom, love, and beauty, as well as peace, healing, and joy.

Returning to Kaufmann again, he notes that we have an abundance of journals and other publications in philosophy. If he could see the general publishing glut we have today, in all areas (to the extent that we have a “replication crisis” in some of the sciences, and publishing across
the board, including academic and non-academic works, amounts to a staggering volume of words and data), he might feel astonished. He might see us as so strange. Kaufmann draws our attention to the influence this can begin to have on the form and content of philosophy:

The main reason for our many philosophic journals is, of course, that suddenly there are thousands of men [and women . . . but the discipline still seems to suffer from white privilege and male privilege—n.k.] professionally engaged in the subject—thousands who have to publish now and then to gain some recognition, to win raises and promotions, and to show themselves and fellow members of their “association” that they are both physically and mentally alive. Quotation from a letter of recommendation in 1960: “During the last year he has published three times.”

What used to be a rare vocation for uncommon individuals who took a bold stand has become an industry involving legions. Naturally, the whole tone and level of discussion had to change. When there are over a thousand colleges in one country, and most of them have departments of philosophy, many of them with a dozen or more members, it would be ridiculous if every professional tried to emulate Spinoza’s Ethics; or if they urged millions of students in their courses to write something like Hume’s Treatise of Human Nature, being an Attempt to Introduce the Experimental Method of Reasoning into Moral Subjects. But the reason why it would be absurd is not that these books were written by amateurs, perhaps in armchairs; nor even that the Treatise, like some other philosophic classics, was the work of a young man in his twenties. It would be bizarre only because these books are so great and so bold. (47)

We have to do what we can to get a degree, to get tenure, and so on. If any psychological shadow material affects our choices of how we work, they will likely remain unconscious—a too-neglected point: that what is unconscious is literally unconscious. It seems we might want to really sit with that. The ways we constrain ourselves and our students likely have an unconscious dimension, and the work of Freud, Jung, and so many brilliant therapists, theorists, and indeed serious “scientific” researchers19 shows us that unconscious bias does appear as an all-too-real phenomenon. We will—in academia we must—have all sorts of rationalizations for doing things

19 Howard Shevrin’s work has been especially valuable here, but all the work on the variations of “dual process” accounts of the mind or brain support the suggestion that we need to face up to the unconscious dimension of the psyche.
the way we do them. We must have reasons. We must use reason. But, setting all our reasons aside, are we doing philosophy in the way the current context demands? I really wish we would wrestle with this, wrangle with it, let it become a barrier to further movement, and then become so at-one with this barrier that a new way of philosophizing, a new way of knowing might dawn upon us. I say all of this because it bears directly on our inquiry. I am trying to say that this inquiry could be framed as a struggle “against” our current way of knowing. But then what do we expect a new way of knowing to look like? And if it looks like what we expect, haven’t we gotten nowhere?

And I think it would help more than we can imagine if would more openly discuss and more directly confront the potential psychological provocations of challenging our way of knowing, especially if we start to inquire into whether some of the more fundamental things we take for granted might have unethical consequences attached to them, as well as thorny entrapments that arise from our attachment to them and/or our inability to see how or why we should actually change them.

For instance, consider the case of Semmelweis. Importantly, Semmelweis does not seem to be remembered as a great genius, but someone who nevertheless discovered something quite valuable—in fact life-saving. Semmelweis found that child mortality rates skyrocketed in conjunction with the advent of dissection, and the rates were much higher than that of midwives operating in the same geographical area. Doctors would go from dissecting cadavers to delivering babies—without washing. This unfolded in the mid 1800’s, before the work of Lister and Pasteur, so they had no germ theory of disease to tell them to do otherwise. Somehow,
Semmelweis got the idea that washing would help, and he documented this empirically, publishing results showing that it functioned. In part because he had no theory with which to interpret the data, his findings received a strong negative reaction—so much so that he ended up having a breakdown, and on one interpretation of the events he died rather young because he had found out something that could save lives, but the establishment refused to listen. Again, he is not remembered as some great “genius;” he simply noticed something about a set of practices that happened to be sensitive to those engaged in them. Although we may see this as a case of not having a good theory, it may also have a lot to do with unconscious dynamics. No one wants to think they are “dirty,” and no one wants to think they are killing mothers and newborns. These were all “scientifically” trained people, and yet they refused to accept what seems like uncontroversial data.

Our inquiry here seems to involve a good measure of not very controversial data and suggestions (though, they may not seem so from the point of view of this or that established web of belief), and only given the seemingly extreme circumstances we find ourselves in regarding ecology and politics does it seem important, and yet it still could carry a certain psychic charge. For instance, some of our inquiry could be harshly interpreted this way: When we move from dissecting concepts to functioning as midwives of the soul (which as educators we do so function, whether we like it or not), we might end up making those souls unwell somehow. If we read the text that way (or even in a much gentler, more charitable, and more open-minded way), we may face certain unconscious dynamics, because none of us (I include myself) want to hear that we might, in the course of our dissection of concepts, theories, matter, and so on, contaminate the psyches of our students and the general public.
Admittedly, in some way I do want to suggest that philosophy corrupts, and not in the way Socrates was accused of, but in the way Socrates accused his culture’s philosophy of corrupting. The culture itself seems corrupt and corrupting, and philosophy in some ways perpetuates this and even helps constitute it. As we attempt to give birth to our own souls, so to speak (in the manner of midwifery, as Socrates invited us to see the process), do we experience a high rate of infant mortality, a high rate of ontogenic interruption, a high rate of soul degradation, soul sickness, soul loss, and relative soul death? Has the collective soul (or collective psyche, if we prefer that term) also gotten contaminated, infected by abstractions, dualities, and all manner of unskillful views and practices that come not only from academia but from the general social, political, and economic environment? In other words, a culture is not “pure” or “antiseptic,” (indeed, the “pure” and the “antiseptic” appear in one form or another in the dominant culture, including in its universities), but it must nurture life, and must contain those sorts of elements that bolster the spiritual or philosophical immune system, just as a mother passes this on to her child. Moreover, it must contain some vision of health—the vision of a healthy mind, and healthy ecologies too.

Even the contrast between “philosophy as a way of life” on the one hand, and “philosophy as it tends to appear in the academy” could provoke a certain level of defensiveness, as if I were suggesting that no one is doing philosophy except those engaging in philosophy as therapeia. But the view here is inclusive, and only seeks to point out the need for making a concerted effort to create space for philosophy as a way of life, while also pointing out the dangers of failing to do so, and the challenges of doing so in the midst of our particular historical situation. We have
lots of uncomfortable things to consider—no surprise given the state of the world, but no more
pleasant (and perhaps less so) just on account of the possible urgency.

In light of these reflections, let us consider one last excerpt from Kaufmann’s book—broken into
two pieces. It may seem strange to consider yet another long passage, but there are reasons for
using these long passages. This one in particular brings us back to strangeness again, quoting as
it does a wonderful passage from Nietzsche. These reflections bear directly on the endeavor at
hand, because I have to write this book in the modern academy, a place that may be less
conducive to it than any of us can fully grok—and in part I mean that it may limit me more than
it even limits my readers, thus making it challenging indeed for me to help them understand
anything. There are subtle and unconscious dimensions at work, some of which may become
more conscious as our inquiry progresses. But some of these reflections can leave a
contemporary philosopher rather stymied.

The new, professional philosopher does not vie with the great
philosophers of former ages but with other men in his own age group in the other
departments of his college. He may well be older than Berkeley and Hume were
when they wrote their masterpieces, but he would be likely to make a fool of
himself if he stuck out his neck as they did. It is far safer and much more prudent
to insist on being a professional. One publishes papers in learned journals, often
employs symbols even when they are dispensable, and uses a jargon that stumps
everybody but fellow professionals. Perhaps the average paper now is better than
the average paper fifty years ago: that would hardly be a great compliment . . .

In a fine passage in Beyond Good and Evil (§212), Nietzsche says that,
traditionally, the great philosopher has always stood “in opposition to his today.”
 Philosophers have been “the bad conscience of their time.” They knew “of a new
greatness of man, of a new untrodden way to his enhancement. . . . Confronted
with a world of ‘modern ideas,’ which would banish everybody into a corner and
a ‘specialty,’ a philosopher—if there could be any philosophers today—would
be forced to define the greatness of man, the concept of ‘greatness,’ in terms
precisely of man’s comprehensiveness and multiplicity, his wholeness in
manifoldness.” After some illustrations from the sixteenth century and some
remarks about Socrates, Nietzsche continues: “Today, conversely, when only the herd animal is honored and dispenses honors in Europe, and when ‘equality of rights’ could all too easily be converted into an equality in violating rights—by that I mean, into a common war on all that is rare, strange, or privileged, on the higher man, the higher soul, the higher duty, the higher responsibility, and on the wealth of creative power and mastery—today the concept of ‘greatness’ entails being noble, wanting to be by oneself, being capable of being different, standing alone, and having to live independently. . . .” Thus, in 1886. Wittgenstein would have fully understood.

In some ways the so-called revolution in philosophy is counterrevolutionary: its influence leads men away from trying to stand alone; it would banish philosophers “into a corner and a specialty.” It teaches young philosophers not to become heretics or revolutionaries because they lack any special qualifications for that. Yet it might be part of a philosopher’s task to acquire the necessary qualifications. Of course, not everybody can do that; but to say that what not all can do, none should even try to do, is a recipe for mediocrity, “a common war, on all that is rare, strange, and privileged.” (48-9)

It seems best for someone in my position to let a mature and highly intelligent philosopher make these sorts of charges. Thankfully, I actually feel a great deal of encouragement and support for the inquiry we are engaging in. I feel my own collegial advisers and committee members have gone out of their way to not banish me into a corner, and rather to encourage me to come out of the corner and speak. The problem comes when the speaking appears even stranger than Nietzsche’s Zarathustra—not because of some desire to sound like Nietzsche, Zhuangzi, Dogen, or other philosophers whose work can at times seem so challenging to enter, but because of the demands of what one wishes to express, which seems to have been the reason those philosophers wrote the way they did.

Staying with Zarathustra for a moment, let us consider something Jung wrote in the introduction to a book of essays on Zen Buddhist philosophy by the famous D.T. Suzuki. Recall that Jung saw himself as a philosopher, and thus saw psychotherapy as a way of doing philosophy. I myself wrestled for a long time with the possibility that my commitment to philosophy might be better
served by getting a Ph.D. in clinical psychology rather than philosophy. Anyone who has any sense of the kinds of things that might have gone on in Jung’s consulting room (and—quite crucially for us—the kinds of practices Jung had his patients engage in, and which he himself engaged in to develop the foundation upon which all his major work depends) will appreciate how strange this way of doing philosophy would seem in the academy (and thus my hesitancy in trying instead to recover this meaning of philosophy within the current academic context, and its meaning of “philosophy”).

We will see that, because of his own orientation to philosophy and psychology, Jung properly frames Buddhist philosophy as *therapeia*, therapy for the soul—the kind of framing Hadot gives to ancient western philosophy (with whom Jung would surely have agreed). Philosophy on this view has to do with healing, wholeness, even holiness (something Socrates seemed intent on emphasizing, and which we can most assuredly interpret and work with in a secular way, not least because “healing,” “wholeness,” and “holiness” share the same etymological root, and thus may orient us toward a particular kind of experience of the world—the aesthetic unity Bateson gestured toward, as part of realizing the sacredness of life).

Since encountering the work of Hadot, I have been fond of keeping in mind Epicurus’s Philosophical Imperative, the Prime Directive of Philosophy as it were: Vain is the word of the philosopher that heals no suffering. This imperative guides our inquiry here, and we are trying to get at how difficult it makes things, especially if the medicine seems most bitter, or if the
medicine promises to affect one more like ayahuasca than aspirin. We might further that directive: Vain is the word of the philosopher that does not heal suffering, and does not thereby reveal the sacredness of life. Jung’s reflections here may seem strange, but they may also come to seem significant, especially in relation to such a vision of philosophy on the one hand, and the crises of our culture on the other:

the psychotherapist who is seriously concerned with the question of the aim of his therapy cannot remain unmoved when he sees the end towards which this Eastern method of psychic “healing”—i.e., “making whole”—is striving. As we know, this question has occupied the most adventurous minds of the East for more than two thousand years, and in this respect methods and philosophical doctrines have been developed which simply put all Western attempts along these lines into the shade. Our attempts have, with few exceptions, all stopped short at either magic (mystery cults, amongst which we must include Christianity) or intellectualism (philosophy from Pythagoras to Schopenhauer). It is only the tragedies of Goethe’s Faust and Nietzsche’s Zarathustra which mark the first glimmerings of a break-through of total experience in our Western hemisphere. And we do not know even today what these most promising of all products of the Western mind may at length signify, so overlaid are they with the materiality and concreteness of our thinking, as moulded by the Greeks. Despite the fact that our intellect has developed almost to perfection the capacity of the bird of prey to espy the tiniest mouse from the greatest height, yet the pull of the earth drags it down, and the samskaras [mental formations] entangle it in a world of confusing images the moment it no longer seeks for booty but turns one eye inwards to find him who seeks. Then the individual falls into the throes of a daemonic rebirth, beset with unknown terrors and dangers and menaced by deluding mirages in a labyrinth of error. The worst of all fates threatens the venturer: mute, abysmal loneliness in the age he calls his own. What do we know of the hidden motives for Goethe’s “main business,” as lie called his Faust, or of the shudders of the “Dionysus experience”? . . . And this, in shadowy hints or in greater or lesser fragments, is what the psychotherapist is faced with when he has freed himself from over-hasty and short-sighted doctrinal opinions. If he is a slave to his quasi-biological credo he will always try to reduce what he has glimpsed to the banal and the known, to a rationalistic denominator which satisfies only those who are content with illusions. But the foremost of all illusions is that anything can ever satisfy anybody. That illusion stands behind all that is unendurable in life and in front of all progress, and it Is one of the most difficult things to overcome. If the psychotherapist can take time off from his helpful activities for a little reflection,

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20 Aspirin relieves pain, while ayahuasca involves a journey that can feel intensely confusing and uncomfortable before a breakthrough into insight and concomitant feelings of peace, clarity, and well-being finally happens.
or if by any chance he is forced into seeing through his own illusions, it may
dawn on him how hollow and flat, how inimical to life, are all rationalistic
reductions when they come upon something that is alive, that wants to grow.
Should he follow this up he will soon get an idea of what it means to “open wide
that gate / Past which man’s steps have ever flinching trod.” (CW11, para. 905)

Perhaps we can open ourselves to the possibility that this “something that is alive, that wants to
grow” is like the spark Plato mentions in his letter, when he says that his philosophy “cannot be
formulated like other doctrines; but through continued application to the subject itself and living
with it, a spark is suddenly struck in the soul as by leaping fire, and then grows by itself” (340 f.). If Plato could, in good conscience, have given us “rationalistic reductions,” he probably
would have.

The remembrance of Plato is intentional. In the same essay, Jung describes psychotherapy this
way:

Psychotherapy is at bottom a dialectical relationship between doctor and patient. It is an encounter, a discussion between two psychic wholes, in which knowledge
is used only as a tool. The goal is transformation—not one that is predetermined,
but rather an indeterminable change, the only criterion of which is the
disappearance of egohood. No efforts on the part of the doctor can compel this
experience. The most he can do is to smooth the path for the patient and help him
to attain an attitude which offers the least resistance to the decisive experience.
(CW11, para. 904)

This can bring to mind the dialectical method mentioned in Plato’s Republic. Recall that the
whole of that dialogue takes place “in the cave,” “in the Matrix” we might say. The whole
discussion comes from Socrates’s or Plato’s pharmacy of the soul. It is a medicine meant to help
us on our way, a medicine offered not as “knowledge,” but from a certain kind of knowing. And
Socrates explicitly tells us that he cannot possibly explain the most important thing—what we
might call the most important knowledge or truth. He wants us, perhaps needs us to experience
“the Good,” the highest realization of philosophy. Any normal person might say, “The highest
realization of philosophy? Well, tell me about it!” Socrates says, “I can’t. No one can.” What he
does say makes no sense, especially in the context of Ancient Greek philosophy, for he says the
Good is beyond being and non-being, beyond truth and knowledge (see 508e-509b, which come
before the allegory of the cave—though the allegory itself makes the point, perhaps more
effectively). What on earth does that mean? While we may offer all sorts of arguments and
interpretations about the matter, it defies the text itself, which seems pretty much like mystical
talk—in the original sense of the term, the “mystic” being one who has been initiated, one who
has experienced, one who knows the taste of wine because they have tasted it, and knows one
cannot explain that taste or offer it as knowledge. Thus, however confoundingly, Plato seems to
insist here that he cannot tell us what we most need to know. I think this is why an
Aristotelean/Kantian mood dominates the academy—or, we may say, why Hadot might claim we
have mostly become professors of philosophy and not philosophers.21

21 On a certain reading, we could blame this on how we interpret and work with the philosophies
of Aristotle and Kant, for we could certainly find ways to follow an Aristotelean or Kantian
philosophy as a way of life. The point comes to this: These authors don’t seem to have
reservations about trying to tell us how things really are, and thus a certain kind of intellectual
orientation appears in their work, one that allows us to dispense with any practices outside of
reading texts (a slight exception occurs for both authors in the case of ethical development, but
this is also a matter more for the education of youth in some sense, and in any case, at least with
Kant, reason seems to remain the only practice we really need, if we can reason well enough, and
for Aristotle, a certain kind of reasoning is the highest kind of happiness, trumping everything
else—Kantian scholars may find other exceptions, for instance in his aesthetics, and perhaps
Aristotelean scholars know of exceptions in his work . . . I am an expert on neither). Again, all of
this may come to a certain kind of interpretation we make of them, but arguably the trend of
“professor of philosophy,” a more “intellectualist” trend, starts as early as Aristotle and seems
clearly in place by the time Kant gets a job at the University of Konigsberg. It may be that
Plato’s Academy differed in spirit from Aristotle’s Lyceum as much as a sincere vision quest
differs in spirit from the pursuit of a B.A. in philosophy. Even if that contrast seems too much for
the philosophers in question, we will understand Hadot’s overall distinction of philosophy as a
way of life to carry that sort of energy.
This might not seem as important as I want to suggest it is. In the movie *The Matrix*, when the protagonist Neo meets the somewhat sagely Morpheus, they are all still in the Matrix. When Morpheus offers the red pill, they are still in the Matrix. When Neo takes the red pill, he is still in the Matrix. When things begin to get strange, he is still in the Matrix. When we are in the Matrix, everything we look at *is* the Matrix. We don’t simply step out of the Matrix just because someone tells us we are in it. No intellectual maneuver will work.

If Plato is right, if the philosophy as a way of life approach has any rightness to it (not as “ultimate truth,” but as a source of truths or knowing that we would treasure if we attained them, and which we might badly need most especially at our historical moment), then we need some sort of *rupture*, and I don’t think Hadot emphasized properly what this means. Yes, there is a kind of rupture in, let us call it, home-leaving, wherein we decide to take the leap out of our conventional life. But this is just deciding to meet Morpheus, and maybe deciding to take the red pill. It is not yet the real rupture, which is something that must remake us and the world, something that must bring us to the realization of the way of life we have decided to practice. In the movie it would be not only the process of leaving the Matrix and seeing the real world, for that is merely a disorienting and even frightening step. The bigger rupture comes in seeing the nature of the Matrix, when Neo experiences a kind of transcendence and becomes “the one,” and here of course the movie breaks down if we want it to “explain” anything to us about what this rupture really is and reveals. In any case, the rupture is needed because, somehow (on this view), there is something systematically misleading or ignorant about our whole pattern of thought, perception, communication, and action. There is some kind of active misknowing of life, wherein we take shadows for reality. Our whole inquiry is interpreted through this active
misknowing. We are in the Matrix, talking about the Matrix, and everything we look at is the Matrix. Every sentence I write appears in the old way of knowing, not the new one we may find we need. What a funny situation.

So, to say it again, we remember Plato here to help make sense of the whole project of our inquiry, and to make sense of Jung’s statements which bear on this inquiry. Jung sounds as mystical as Plato. The disappearance of egohood? What does that mean? And what is this “decisive experience,” this “breakthrough of total experience”? Maybe it’s analogous to escaping the cave and seeing the Sun. However, one remains a bit confused . . . was Socrates talking about a “rational” procedure when he spoke of “dialectic” in the Republic? If so, why could he not simply give us a rational account of “the Good”?

Dewey might have something to offer us here:

It is frequently remarked that the Greeks had no word that corresponds to our “personality.” Neither did they have a single word for what we call “consciousness,” and much less did they connect reason with the idea of selfhood, the ego, or with consciousness . . . . If we turn from these general considerations to philosophy proper, we find we have the key to its constant problem. Modern thought is so preoccupied with the question of the relation of subject and object, in knowing and in action, that it is at once a relief and a perplexity to find that question conspicuous by its absence in Greek thought. Its problem was the relation of the abiding principle to the concrete scene of actual transformations. (UPMP: 23)

This actually brings ancient western philosophy much more in line with eastern philosophies that predate Socrates and have living lines of practice right up to the present day. In light of Jung’s mention of the disappearance of egohood, I want to emphasize in particular this appearance of the ego and its association with mind, and later with science. Here’s Dewey again:
There was another factor that combined with that just stated to create the problem of knowing as it has been dealt with by modern philosophy. This was the rise of individualism in politics, industry, and Protestantism. The private character of the mental states (which were the only means of knowing the physical world was set over against them) might be viewed as a factor in the epistemological problem as that has just been stated. But it may be doubted whether the sense of their intrinsically private character would have been so especially acute had it not been for the rise of individualism. It is noteworthy that both Descartes and Berkeley speak of the mind or self. It is the more noteworthy because they make the identification in an incidental way as if it were something that could be taken for granted and that needed no justification. Yet it is safe to say that such an idea would not even have been understood, much less accepted, in either Greek or medieval philosophy. Independently of the rise of individualism in other quarters, the conditions under which the new science arose promoted its rise in the intellectual class. For the old beliefs were institutionalized to such an extent that new conceptions were in effect a revolt against established intellectual and moral authority. At the present time, the individual investigator is backed up by an extensive body of ascertained facts and principles and the methods he employs have the sanction of successful use as well as of the practical utilities that have arisen from application of what has been found out. Pioneers in the new science were in the opposite condition. From the standpoint of scientific orthodoxy they were heretics. Nothing is more natural than that they should appeal to the powers of the individual mind freed from the benumbing influence of tradition, custom and institutions that claimed authority over belief. (UPMP: 74)

It will help us to hold in mind a possible connection between the rise of science and the entrenchment of individualism and ego. Dewey does not grapple with the possibility that the ancient Greek way of therapeia might have had to heal by means of some version of ego transcendence, like the Buddhist tradition Jung commented on above. Healing might involve a transcendence of ego, and of our habitual notions of mind, self, and nature. In Dismantling Discontent, Charles Fisher analyzes Buddhist philosophy and practice in light of what we know about biological evolution and the history of human culture. He makes the interesting argument that the rise of civilization brought with it the rise of discontent, the rise of neurosis that called for philosophical therapy to put us back into attunement with ourselves and with Nature. Even though Dewey might correctly describe certain aspects of ancient Greek culture, this does not
mean that they had no ego-centric suffering. He may be quite right that the development of philosophy got us precisely off on the wrong track, entrenching the ego, conflating mind with self, and furthering along other dualities. But he may miss the possibility that what we needed was somehow to stay in touch with a more therapeutic approach, and not merely a scientific one, which Dewey at times seems to understand a bit too conventionally (maybe his own form of discourse did not allow him to get at the more radical dimensions of his own work). In any case, it matters a lot that we keep in mind the way the western style of consciousness developed along lines that emphasize dualities and their social realities: we conceive subjects not only in contrast to objects, but in contrast to objects the subjects can possess, and thus the public-private dichotomy involves private property as well as private mental states. And any suggestion of the need to transcend the ego provokes centuries of obdurate habit, habit that links up the ego with one’s sense of identity, possessions, comfort, mind, accomplishment, and so on. To threaten the ego means threatening a great deal, and to threaten a way of thinking itself already threatens the ego. We face the possibility that we use rationality as a principal tool to maintain these dualities, rather than to discover the nature of things. And thus, rationality as we know it becomes suspect, and it becomes suspect precisely in relation to the prospects of healing ourselves and our world, according to philosophy as a way of life. Realizing “the Good” means transcending things we might cling to in deep and unconscious ways. Any rigorous epistemology will have to face this prospect.

Speaking from experience, and from his own inquiry into “antique philosophy,” Jung expresses this same frustrating notion: That somehow this Good, or whatever we want to call the “decisive experience” or the “breakthrough of total experience” goes beyond rationality. That leaves us in
the uncomfortable situation of potentially having to think ourselves toward something that currently seems irrational—even if, after the “decisive experience,” we might not call it irrational anymore. Jung makes that pretty clear in the paragraph above, but he dramatizes it here:

. . . therefore, after many years of the hardest practice and the most strenuous demolition of rational understanding, the Zen devotee receives an answer—the only true answer—from Nature herself . . . As one can see for oneself, it is the naturalness of the answer that strikes one most . . . (CW11, para. 901)

This seems quite important, since rationality, argument, and rational linguistic practices dominate our discourse. I want us to note and gently hold in our hearts this “true answer—from Nature herself,” this apparent “return to Nature,” we might call it, a return to “naturalness” in some sense—but one which, I invite us to eventually see, does not rest on a “myth of the given.”

This return to Nature is something that Dewey would probably endorse in some sense, and I always think of him as committed to common sense. Thus, the “demolition of rational understanding” perhaps requires some caveat.

So, let us linger a moment on this notion, this provocative suggestion that we may need a “demolition of rational understanding.” We can both make too much and not enough of it. On the one hand, the Dalai Lama, someone who knows far more about Buddhist philosophy than Jung ever found out, wrote a book with the subtitle, Faith Grounded in Reason. I can think of no greater champion of reason than the Dalai Lama. At the same time, he often acknowledges the limits of language and reason, and the founder of his order, the revered philosopher Tsongkhapa discovered, most wondrously, that his years of careful reasoning had given him precisely the wrong understanding of central notions of Buddhist philosophy. Robert Thurman (1984)
describes the realization of Tsongkhapa, his “decisive experience,” his “breakthrough of total experience” this way:

At that instant, the perfect realization of the central way arose within him effortlessly—the essential keys of the dialecticist view, the criteria of the logical negatee, and so on—all with profound certitude. All his “sign-habit-orientations” dissolved, and all his perplexities about the import of ultimate Thatness disappeared. He said later that his view of the world changed radically, that it had been exactly upside down before, and that the authentic view was precisely the opposite from what he had expected. (85)

All his habits of language use, his habits of thought, speech, and action somehow fell away and became transformed (or else, how did he continue to function?). And the decisive experience of transformation, the decisive entrance led him to a sense of things precisely the opposite of what he thought. This should perhaps not come as a surprise in a philosophical tradition that tells its students that some of the teachings it offers have so freaked people out that they had heart attacks and even vomited blood.22 I am talking about the concepts, not any crazy ascetic exercise that brings one to physical extremes. Thus some of the Buddhist philosophical traditions themselves emphasize the problems we are getting at here. And so, the philosopher Dogen, perhaps the greatest philosopher in the history of Japan, wrote the following:

When you realize [the teaching of the Buddha], you do not think, ‘This is realization just as I expected it.’ Even if you think so, realization inevitably differs from your expectation. Realization is not like your conception of it. Accordingly, realization cannot take place as previously conceived . . . Reflect on this: What you think one way or another before realization is not a help for realization. (Tanahashi, 876, with slight modification)

And the philosopher-poet Rumi danced out this poem:

When you eventually see through all the veils to how things really are, you will keep saying again and again,

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22 See Karl Brunnholzl’s The Heart Attack Sutra for some discussion of this.
“This is certainly not like we thought it was!”

In the same poem, Rumi says:

It’s foolish of me
to try and say this. If I did say it,
it would uproot our human intelligences.
It would shatter all writing pens.23

I want to suggest that we need to enter just this kind of territory. No true lover of wisdom, no true lover of life should be able to say that their highest realization was exactly what they thought it would be, and yet we cannot get our heads around this, and cannot seem to allow the heart cross the abyss.

It is worth noting that Rumi did literally dance at least some of his poems. After his own “decisive experience,” his own “breakthrough of total experience,” he would dance and sing, and his students would write down what he sang. So many of Rumi’s poems return us to silence, ending on a note that asks us to just quiet the mind, so that we might have our own decisive experience. Thus Rumi “did” philosophy by means of dancing and by means of silence—not the silence of ordinary “thinking,” but the silence somehow prior to thinking, the origin of thinking in some sense, which is the space of knowing our epistemology will help us to enter for ourselves.

Perhaps all of us have had some taste of this sort of shift in our lives, some experience of saying, “This is not at all like what I thought it would be.” It might have been as simple as the taste of

wine, the first sexual experience, a trip to Europe, or countless other experiences profound or mundane. As far as philosophy goes, as far as any significant leaps in knowing go, the work of philosophers from Plato, to Kierkegaard, to Nietzsche and right through to Thomas Kuhn and others today, reminds us again and again that it must be this way, that genuinely transformative and growth-producing insight must land us in a space of experience we would not have thought possible. As a general rule, we must keep the experiences of the great philosophers and mystics near to our heart, and affirm them along with Jung, who writes: “It is always possible that what lies in the darkness beyond our consciousness is totally different from anything the most daring speculation could imagine” (CW 8, para. 617).

The question is: Do philosophers today really acknowledge this possibility? (The words of the authors of the Toolkit suggest at least some do not—and we must keep in mind that such a text is intended not for advanced professionals, but for the purpose of indoctrinating those new to philosophy, and thus perhaps—consciously or not—to foreclose not only on the imagination, but to foreclose on what might exceed even imagination’s reach.) How do we work with such a suggestion in the academy? What if the well-being of people close to us depends on our working with it, working with the darkness that lies beyond our consciousness—what not only lies there, but what does not yet lie there, and will not lie there until we approach, until we enter the darkness and only then find something vitalizing has come to life to meet and transform us? What if the well-being of many, many sentient beings, human and non-human, depends on our finding a way to really leap into something different? How would we do it? Most pressingly, how would we do it while maintaining a discourse and a form of life like the one that now dominates? What will it take for us all to revolt? A good argument that the conditions of life are
on the verge of collapse? Or will that tempt us only to apply the same basic kind of thinking that put them on the verge of collapse?

Let’s go back to the Dalai Lama as part of wrapping up these considerations related to Jung. Again, I see the Dalai Lama as a paragon of the rational philosopher, and most of our university scholars would likely salivate over the scholarly traditions of Tibet if they could come to know them. The Dalai Lama made some remarks that may help to illuminate what Jung invites us to see, including this notion of the dissolution of the ego. These remarks also relate to a point of our inquiry related to how we philosophize in the academy. In his book, The Universe in a Single Atom, the Dalai Lama says the following:

After having talked to numerous scientist friends over the years, I have the conviction that the great discoveries in physics going back as far as Copernicus give rise to the insight that reality is not as it appears to us. When one puts the world under a serious lens of investigation—be it the scientific method and experiment or the Buddhist logic of emptiness or the contemplative method of meditative analysis—one finds things are more subtle than, and in some cases even contradict, the assumptions of our ordinary common-sense view of the world.

One may ask, apart from misrepresenting reality, what is wrong with believing in the independent, intrinsic existence of things? For Nagarjuna [a revered Buddhist philosopher], this belief has serious negative consequences. Nagarjuna argues that it is the belief in intrinsic existence that sustains the basis for a self-perpetuating dysfunction in our engagement with the world and with our fellow human beings. By according intrinsic properties of attractiveness, we react to certain objects and events with deluded attachment, while towards others, to which we accord intrinsic properties of unattractiveness, we react with deluded aversion.

In other words, Nagarjuna argues that grasping at the independent existence of things leads to affliction, which in turn gives rise to a chain of destructive actions, reactions and suffering. In the final analysis, for Nagarjuna, the theory of emptiness [a core theory of Buddhist philosophy, perhaps the core theory, which the spiritual exercises of Buddhist traditions invite us to verify by means of experiment or experience] is not a question of the mere conceptual understanding of reality. It has profound psychological and ethical implications.
I once asked my physicist friend David Bohm this question: from the perspective of modern science, apart from the question of misrepresentation, what is wrong with the belief in the independent existence of things? His response was telling. He said that if we examine the various ideologies that tend to divide humanity, such as racism, extreme nationalism and the Marxist class struggle, one of the key factors of their origin is the tendency to perceive things as inherently divided and disconnected. From this misconception springs the belief that each of these divisions is essentially independent and self-existent. Bohm’s response, grounded in his work in quantum physics, echoes the ethical concern about harbouring such beliefs that had worried Nagarjuna, who wrote nearly 2000 years before.

Granted, strictly speaking, science does not deal with questions of ethics and value judgements, but the fact remains that science, being a human endeavour, is still connected to the basic question of the well-being of humanity. So in a sense, there is nothing surprising about Bohm’s response. I wish there were more scientists with his understanding of the interconnectedness of science, its conceptual frameworks and humanity. (2004: 50-1)

Bohm began life as a physicist, and ended up experiencing the marginalization that can happen even in the sciences if one tries to challenge the dominant paradigm. He ended up spending much of the latter part of his life as a philosopher, and his work has to me often felt incredibly resonant with the kind of work we are doing here. Among other things, Bohm tried to develop a better way of knowing, a particular dialogical process he dedicated himself to for many years. Bohm saw very clearly the grave problems with our current ways of thinking and knowing, and this activity of dividing plays no small part. It runs right through our very language, and thus every attempt at speaking comes as a temptation to further think in dividing ways. That bears heavily on us in the academy, where we spend so much time making distinctions, analyzing, separating, and so on. The question arises: Though philosophers, unlike scientists, seem to deal with questions of ethics and value judgements, does a fundamental misunderstanding of the interconnectedness of things—especially the interconnectedness of our conceptual frameworks

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24 This BBC interview with Bohm gives some sense of his work and the challenges he faced: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qi66ZglzcO0
and the problems we face as a global species—does that misunderstanding block us from really seeing potential problems with the way we do philosophy, and further obstruct our ability to arrive at some “decisive experience,” some “breakthrough of total experience” that might transform philosophy, philosophizing, and the dominant culture in general, in a way that would benefit us all?

Let us keep in touch with the fact that we are inquiring into what we, together, can accomplish in a more radical critique of knowing, and an opening to possibilities for knowing better. What can we productively accomplish? What can it even look like? Have we already shut something off, made certain that we cannot touch what is most important to touch? What might keep us from taking very seriously the possibility that we need a different way of knowing, or that we need arts of awareness or some kind of spiritual exercises in order to do a better job at philosophizing and living our lives? Can we arrive at some kind of “decisive experience” that might seriously shift things for us? Jung thinks we lack the context for it. In the following passage, let “Zen” be a stand-in for the “healing” process Jung described above, a stand-in for philosophy as a way of life as Hadot describes it:

The mental education necessary for Zen is lacking in the West . . . respect for the greater human personality is found only in the East. Could any of us boast that he believes in the possibility of a boundlessly paradoxical transformation experience, to the extent, moreover, of sacrificing many years of his life to the wearisome pursuit of such a goal? . . . . let a “Master” set us a hard task, which requires more than mere parrot-talk, and the European begins to have doubts, for the steep path of self-development is to him as mournful and gloomy as the path to hell. (CW 11, para. 902)

Perhaps even more mundane considerations enter here. For instance, we don’t have time to meditate or to engage in some of the other practices we will examine. Some of them demand a context we may lack, for instance a community of fellow inquirers, who all agree already to the
framework of inquiry. And we have our own projects, that look sufficient to get us the next advancement in our career, or get us the result we want intellectually. We only have time, or barely have time, to do the kinds of things we already want to do, in the ways we already want to do them, or think we are capable of, and imagine to suffice quite well indeed, thank you very much. But there seems to be a serious set of issues here. They remind me a bit of Peggy McIntosh’s reflections on white privilege and male privilege. Before quoting her remarks, let me clarify a little of my sense of identity politics. This is one of those bends in the labyrinth that could make us wonder if we have begun to move away from the center, but we can keep in mind that each step does in fact get us closer to insight.

A lot of the discussions around identity, race, gender, origin, religious belief, and more serve at least in part (often in large part) to maintain structures of power. To take a simple example, both rounds of graduate student contract negotiations during my time as a doctoral student were serious failures in various ways. The negotiating teams expended a great deal of effort formulating demands for gender-neutral bathrooms, for instance, and they succeeded in getting them. But, they failed to secure a living wage. It seems to me that, just as structures of power are happy to indulge all manner of inquiry into heaps, those same structures similarly benefit from having a lot of our energy invested in seemingly righteous debate about gender-neutral bathrooms, and then to finally supply them, because it conveniently distracts from the deeper systemic issues that, for instance, queer studies or feminist studies at its best tries to bring attention to, and it makes us feel as though we have achieved a measure of victory. We look into these things as part of our inquiry, as part of how we know political reality, the reality of our
working lives, and so on. We are looking at our style of life and mind, how we use our mind, body, and world.

Similar questions come up with respect to the control of language and pedagogy—including the standards applied to syllabi, learning outcomes (which ones are even allowed, and then how we will measure them), teaching, research, and of course things like writing dissertations. It is as if, having already given up on the prospects of making radical changes to structures of power and domination, we will do everything we can to regulate how others speak to us when they oppress us, and how we will speak to each other in the midst of our mutual oppression. Control of pronouns, for instance, gives us a lot to fuss over, exhaustively so, but it doesn’t do much to affect the larger structures. Having a diversity statement in one’s job application does little to demonstrate how one’s teaching will help students to become more wise and loving.

It may give us a sense of moral authority to claim our students can “feel” “safe” in our classes, but a more profound ethical practice would help our students to be safe, while taking great existential risks, involving moments when their ego did not feel safe at all. This sort of practice includes opening ourselves to the fundamental wildness and precariousness of life, sensing our real vulnerability, and through this discovering a spiritual invulnerability that allows us to meet the ignorance of others with true equanimity and compassion.

Admittedly, it can bring a certain amount of awareness to have someone remind us that, “If you have met one person with autism, then you have met one person with autism.” But, if you have met one white male, you have met one white male—and on we could go. This sort of talk, by
itself, does little to cultivate compassion, which requires more rigorous and precise philosophical or spiritual practices, not merely a change in language or “thinking”. Nor does any labelling or resistance to labelling accomplish significant realization. To define oneself as neuro-atypical does not turn one into the atopos, which indicates the practice-realization of something about us that exceeds all concepts and identity constructs. Such a realization marks the highest meaning of liberation, and we will not liberate ourselves by getting more restrooms and pronouns.

Evasion of deeper challenges—deeper challenges of practice and deeper challenges to structures of power—can all-too-easily go together with these sorts of issues of identity politics. I recall a few years ago having a student in a class who seemed quite distinctively odd. The student seemed interested in compassion in a certain abstract sense, and yet seemed to resist any careful philosophical inquiry and experimentation to verify compassion. They seemed to think their activism and politically-rooted modes of dialogue and community-building totally sufficient. And yet, the student consistently revealed themselves to be caught up in the very forms of anxiety, stress, and suffering that philosophy as therapy for the soul has long promised to heal, and which their fellow students already found healing. I felt myself confronted with something unfamiliar to me in the way this student rooted their criticism of philosophical practice in a particular kind of political language. But by coincidence or perhaps synchronicity, a month into the course I was looking for a video to show the students in class, and I came across a video with “SJW” in the title. I had never heard of “SJW,” but the title of the video clearly meant it in a pejorative sense. I was curious, and clicked the link. I saw someone who sounded very much like my student! I thought, “My goodness, is this a personality type of some sort? A cult? What is this?” Looking into the term, I realized that my student was indeed a “social justice warrior” of
some kind. One’s practice certainly can get one into habitual ways of thinking, speaking, and acting that fall under categories we conventionally call “types”. And it seemed quite odd that this “type” appears to distance people who are just as caught up in structures of power, and who should be on the same side, so to speak. Yet, our ways of speaking, thinking, and acting maintain “sides”.

People have suffered real traumas, such that they have become sensitive and sensitized to things. But giving “trigger warnings” doesn’t change the fact that the students live in a traumatizing culture. Nor does it offer them any practices for healing the trauma and becoming resilient, practices for going to the places that scare us and expanding our soul. Nor does a trigger warning change the fact that most of us have become numbed, otherwise no philosophy course could be taught without trigger warnings, since a philosophy course should indeed empower us to go to the places that scare us. Everyone needs that warning. The notion that a philosophy course might trigger or provoke us should go without saying, but in fact I would bet the vast majority of students only experience philosophy courses that have no need to offer a trigger warning. Even if they did, the larger issue has to do with creating a healthy culture, which we currently lack. That we now have unwell students who might reasonably require trigger warnings only demonstrates that lack.

But again, we must confront the suffering of our culture. There is something tremendously important in the suffering of any being, something we must turn toward and become skillfully responsive to. And there is something important in philosophies that bring our attention to systemic violence. Let me say that I find the present version of the meta-analysis incomplete for
the conspicuous absence of figures like W.E.B. Dubois, Martin Luther King Jr., Ida B. Wells, and other figures I would very much like to include in a larger study, and I would like to include much more from James Cone and Cornel West, who have only a few spiritual artefacts in our inquiry.

We can consider one such artefact now, highly relevant to the contrast the meta-analysis invites us to see between a certain limited and limiting way of knowing on the other, and something more intimate, expansive, and even wild on the other. James Cone wrote, in the preface to his *A Black Theology of Liberation*:

> It is my contention that Christianity is essentially a religion of liberation. The function of theology is that of analyzing the meaning of that liberation for the oppressed community so they can know that their struggle for political, social, and economic justice is consistent with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Any message that is not related to the liberation of the poor is not Christ’s message. Any theology that is indifferent to the theme of liberation is not Christian theology. In a society where persons are oppressed because they are black, Christian theology must become black theology, a theology that is unreservedly identified with the goals of the oppressed community and seeking to interpret the divine character of their struggle for liberation.

Properly understood, I would happily, even enthusiastically suggest that philosophy is essentially a path of liberation, and that the function of philosophy is to practice and realize that liberation in ways that allow for expressions of it that offer genuine help to suffering beings, so that they can sense, in their own way, how their struggle for peace, joy, and vitalizing well-being (which may include political and economic dimensions) is consistent with the teachings of philosophy and spirituality in their own culture as well as in the culture of their kin from other lands.

To get to a proper understanding of something like that, we must keep our discernment as we recognize that this holds for the whole of what we may call the divine creation—taking “divine”
as poetically as we need to, depending on how certain we are in our knowledge that “atheistic” is the right characterization of reality. It cannot be otherwise for two reasons: First, that the well-being of all humans depends on the well-being of the whole of the divine creation, which the divine wove us into, rooted us into; and secondly, that the whole of the divine creation is itself sacred, and it cannot be said to stand apart from the divine in any ultimate sense. Given these two insights, we can say that we need a theology both Black and Wild. We must turn toward and care for not only with non-whites, but also with non-humans, in one and the same gesture. As Chief Oren Lyons said,

> We went to Geneva—the Six Nations, and the great Lakota nation—as representatives of the indigenous people of the Western Hemisphere. We went to Geneva, and we spoke in the forum of the United Nations. For a short time we stood equal among the people and the nations of the world. And what was the message that we gave? There is a hue and cry for human rights—human rights, they said, for all people. And the indigenous people said: What of the rights of the natural world? Where is the seat for the buffalo or the eagle? Who is representing them here in this forum? Who is speaking for the waters of the earth? Who is speaking for the trees and the forests? Who is speaking for the fish—for the whales, for the beavers, for our children? We said: Given this opportunity to speak in this international forum, then it is our duty to say that we must stand for these people, and the natural world and its rights; and also for the generations to come. We would not fulfill our duty if we did not say that. It becomes important because without the water, without the trees, there is no life.25

The majority of oppressed beings in the world are still non-human. The majority of oppressed humans in the world are still non-white. Those whites who are oppressed (and there are many) become non-white in their oppression, and also non-human (often in a double sense). Oppression happens to whites by means of the same process that it happens to others: Distancing and delusion (essentially the same movement). One group begins to see another group as less human

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or, at the extreme, non-human. If the “superior” group (who are either “more human” or the only “real” humans) happen to be “white,” then non-white people become immediately inferior, and all who are seen as inferior are essentially excluded from full whiteness. This is the very process, the very practice of knowing ourselves and others—it is our practice of knowing reality, and all that we know is affected by such delusions.

In human cultures, the “lesser” group may often be associated with wildness, because the lesser group are not as “civilized,” not as “evolved,” not privilege to the “special gifts” of the “superior” group. This association holds in the dominant culture for both people of color as well as for women. Thus, we may say that Sophia Herself is Black and Wild.

We may practice so that we see the Black Sophia of the alchemists as pure and compassionate, or we may practice so that we see ourselves as Black and Wild. Cone says that white people must become black. This means many things, but it seems in no small part to mean that we must all see the truth of suffering, see how our suffering connects us, see how our practice of suffering creates misery for ourselves and others in mutuality, see how the PracticeRealization of liberation creates well-being for ourselves and others (all others) in mutuality, and in interwoven ecologies. “We’re all in this together” means we all suffer, and some of us have contributed to the suffering of others in ways that must change. Everything we “get” from life comes at a cost. In ceremony and celebration, we receive and we give in return, while in what we might call Sorrowville, we take—and others suffer for it. No matter how little we take, our taking is suffering itself.
Nothing here is “ours,” to do whatever we like with it. Everything is given, and our job is to take care of it—hence the crucial importance of the Euthyphro, lost in all discussions of it that get entangled in the “logic” of the “arguments” about whether “x” is righteous because it is “f’d” by the gods, or whether the gods “f” it because it is righteous. We can certainly arrive at a limited and limiting learning outcome if we stick to that—with no fear of triggering anything.

In a wonderful talk, James Cone says this:

> God is present in people struggling for life, and not in the abstract metaphysical world of reason, which is only inhabited by philosophers and theologians and other privileged intellectuals. The Christian God is not the God of the philosophers, not the God of Plato, Kant, and Hegel, but rather the God of the Exodus, the Prophets, and Jesus. If God is in the world where people are abused and exploited, what then is God doing?\(^26\)

Again, I would invite us, with great respect, to say this all again, with Sophia in the place of God, and with Love of Sophia as philosophy’s sacred imperative. This recovers philosophy from the pejorative sense Cone gives to it, the one we have discussed at length and continue to inquire into, continue to place in tension with other visions, as per the intention of our inquiry. The inspiration for quoting Cone here thus seems obvious. He continues:

> Christians are called by God to plunge themselves into the world on behalf of those who are voiceless and hurt. The great Russian writer Dostoevsky said, “There is only one thing I dread: not to be worthy of my suffering.” And as I reflected on that saying in relation to black suffering, I said, “There is only one thing I dread: not to be worthy of the life that the suffering of black people has made possible for me.” I wanted to be a faithful witness to the redemptive meaning of nearly 400 years of black people suffering. I am at Union Seminary, and I am here at Yale talking to you tonight, because black people suffered and died for me and others like me.

We should first say that philosophers are called by Sophia, called by wisdom, love, and beauty to plunge themselves into the world on behalf of all beings, most especially those who remain voiceless and hurt. But we should also see how these contemplations from Cone get us oriented toward the meaning of “karma” that a fuller inquiry should like to help us to realize. There is a sense of responsibility here to one’s ancestors, a sense of responsibility for their rights and wrongs, a sense of the multi-generational nature of trauma that our science has only begun to uncover. And we can welcome a broader vision. Every white person in the U.S. owes as much to the suffering of black people as Cone does. Moreover, all of us owe much to the suffering of white people of the past. And we all owe an incredible debt to the suffering of non-human beings. Human slavery might well be modeled on the enslavement of horses. In any case, horses have been the slaves of human beings for over 4000 years—likely much longer, but evidence of bit-wear dates back at least that long (Anthony 2007). The world we have was built on the backs of horses—as well as dogs, elephants, whales, and countless other beings—and they collectively suffered so much that any turning toward it might sear the unprepared heart. Philosophy must first and foremost prepare us to turn toward that suffering, for without preparation we will not even look. Rather, we will look away, ceaselessly. And if we do look, lacking that preparation, we will soon enough pull away in empathic distress. Thus we prevent ourselves from knowing suffering, our own and the suffering of others. Cone continues:

Cain killed his brother Abel. But Abel’s blood spoke. The Lord said to Cain, ‘Where is your brother Abel?’ He said, ‘I don’t know; am I my brother’s keeper?’ And the Lord said, ‘What have you done? Listen: Your brother’s blood is crying out to me from the ground!’ Now, Cain can be viewed as a metaphor for white people, and Abel for black people. God is asking white Americans, especially Christians, ‘Where are your black brothers and sisters?’ And white people respond, ‘We don’t know; are we their keepers?’ And the Lord says, ‘What have you done to them for four centuries?’ The blood of black people is crying out to God and to whites from the ground in the United States of America.
We can open our heart here, sitting quietly with this sort of suggestion. How can we let all of this sink in? We might reflect a little . . . or maybe we could go so far as to suggest that we can allow the heart and soul to speak to us, and we might then sense an intimate truth in what Cone says. And we might sense that not only Black people in the U.S. have suffered for us, but that Black people in Africa continue to suffer for all of us today, every day. We can see that Indigenous people of the past and present suffered and suffer for us. Our lives are possible because of countless sentient beings who suffered, who screamed, cried, yelped, whimpered, groaned, winced, writhed, withered, died—and who do this every day. Not just millions of human beings, but millions of horses, whales, dogs, wolves, eagles, elephants, dolphins, redwoods, honey bees, butterflies, beetles, bats, and more. Countless sentient and sensitive beings suffered and died, and whole cultures and even species were driven to extinction, and this suffering and extinction continue every day. Who can hold the horror of all of that? All of that horror so that we could live. What will we do with the life they gave us, the life we are given each moment?

What do we do when we really allow ourselves to register the suffering of sentient beings—suffering we may even benefit from? What do we do when the state of the world actually registers with us? The problems we now face seem unmanageable. Indeed, as our inquiry will soon begin to suggest, “managing” things has driven us into this mess. People talk about “forest management.” It’s absurd. Forests got along for millions of years by means of their own management, which we might call the management of wisdom, love, and beauty—for we mean these as “naturalistic” terms. We might begin to suspect we should let sacredness manage the forests and rivers. How can we do this? Philosophy for me means nothing if it does not get us to
engage in activity on behalf of the voiceless and the suffering. When everything we do seems connected to suffering, how do we move forward? What do we do?

In the Gospel of Thomas, Jesus says, “If you bring forth what is within you, what you bring forth will save you. If you do not bring forth what is within you, what you do not bring forth will destroy you” (Pagels 2003: 25). The religious scholar Eileen Pagels, who brilliantly titles her book on this Gospel, Beyond Belief, also notes that, in the Gospel of Thomas, Jesus says that the Kingdom of God is both inside and outside of us. It is a nondualistic kingdom—which the most divine kingdom must of course be. When we come to know ourselves, then we are known, and we see that we are indeed the children of the living divine. But if we do not know ourselves, we dwell in poverty—and we ourselves are that poverty (Pagels, 25). This feeling of lack, of lackingness, of scarcity, of not truly belonging to and receiving abundance is altogether with our delusion, our pattern of insanity. Our original sin is othering, distancing, lacking, fragmenting. We ate the fruit because we got tricked into a feeling of lack, a feeling of otherness, a feeling of being out of attunement with the divine.

In our contemplation of white privilege, we may helpfully relate to “whiteness” as a stand-in for a style of consciousness often typified by the west in many of its instances and in its overall trajectory. As we will see, the anthropologist Richard Sorenson calls it “conquest consciousness,” and he points out that non-western cultures have also practiced and realized it. The west has managed to bring it to a planetary scale, and it remains fundamental to the dominant culture. The acknowledgement of things like “white privilege” has to do with acknowledging the karma associated with this style of consciousness. Those whose heritage
traces back primarily in the west have many things to celebrate, many things to receive with
grateful and to practice and bring to fruition—philosophy exists in the western traditions
(emphasis on the plural), and wisdom, love, and beauty have as central a place in those traditions
as any other. But the west currently lacks a pervasive and deeply held commitment to practice-
and-realize wisdom, love, and beauty. This has nothing to do with something like verifying the
boiling point of water, or verifying the cleverness of investing in the stock market, or verifying
the relative material stability provided by getting a job in tech, or verifying the pattern of, “get a
degree, get a job, get a car, get married, get a mortgage, have kids, send them to get a degree . . .”
Valorizing laboratory experiments over the lived experimentation of verifying wisdom, love, and
beauty marks an anemia of the soul, and the laboratory is comparatively boring and useless once
we begin to touch the wonders of life. This anemia is exacerbated as professors of philosophy
keep philosophy as a way of life out of the academy, and they perpetuate education as career
preparation rather than care of the soul. Socrates would say the same things to us in the academy
today as he said to the most bone-headed Athenians—perhaps with incredulity on both sides.

I have Greek roots—I am a first-generation Turtle Islander on the Greek side of my human
family. I can celebrate the path of LoveWisdom laid down by my own ancestors, and can count
Socrates as an ancestor in a rather intimate sense. But I also carry the wound of logos, because
“philosophy” has been co-opted for the purposes of conquest, for the practice-realization of a
style of consciousness that amplifies suffering.

In relation to these reflections on “white” as a stand-in for something, it is worth noting that the
human species, going back millions of years, shows a tendency to kill others of our species that
one does not find at the same rate in other mammals. Gomez et al. (2016) report that lethal violence accounts for a death rate of 2% in ancestral humans, while it accounts for roughly .3% in all other mammals. But anthropologist Brian Ferguson offers a much-needed critique of the Hobbesian position the study authors seek to support:

the 2% through-line would not in itself indicate an inherited genetic proclivity, rather than a species capacity, for killing. An innate tendency to kill, and an ability to kill, are very different things, the latter more plastic in response to environmental influences. “Phylogenetic Roots” [a shortening of the title of the submission from Gomez et al.] finds that across clades, the two socioecological factors of sociality and territoriality are significantly correlated with rates of killing. Pagel comments on this. “The increases in lethal violence coincide with species having increasing amounts of group living and territoriality. Group living places individuals routinely in close contact, and territoriality means that groups might potentially compete over resources.”

. . . . rates of killing increase dramatically over archaeological time periods, jumping upward in the Old World Iron Age, and the New World Formative periods. This is consistent with previous arguments against war being common throughout the archaeological record, although I put the increase much earlier than the Iron Age (See Ferguson, “Archaeology, Cultural Anthropology, and the Origins and Intensifications of War”).

. . . . rates of killing increase dramatically with developing social complexity and political hierarchy. Prehistoric bands and tribes come in around that 2% marker, but the chiefdom bar looks like 8 or 9%. This finding is consistent with a wide spectrum of anthropological writing, that social complexity leads to more war. Their measured fall-off in killings with historic and contemporary states is not a surprise, since war in pre-state societies involves combat participation for virtually all fighting-age men, whereas states use specialized armies representing a much small fraction of the population. And as Max Weber told us and Gomez et al. reaffirm, state governments claim and enforce “a monopolization of the legitimate use of violence.”

. . . . rates of killing indicate that deadly violence in prehistoric bands and tribes is dwarfed by kill-rates in “contemporary” or “present day” bands and tribes. They suggest that this may be due to higher population density, “or because they have contacted colonial societies where warfare or interpersonal violence is frequent.” This is precisely the point argued by “Tribal Zone” theory (Ferguson and
Whitehead 1992): expanding colonial systems generate high levels of killings such as are not found in earlier archaeological remains.  

We shall see that anthropologist Richard Sorenson makes a similar case: Colonial consciousness or conquest consciousness goes altogether with violence. Moreover, Sorenson makes the case that conquest consciousness goes altogether with a breakdown in ways of knowing, ways of living, that seem to bring people into the epistemic space our inquiry seeks to invite us into. We thus stand in tension with our own heritage and with the condition of “civilization” itself—not the condition of Culture, or humaneness, or ethical vitality, or non-savagery, or non-primitiveness, or anything like that. We are talking about a style of consciousness, a way of knowing the self and the world, a way of living that does not practice and realize “bad” things exclusively, but practices and realizes everything in a certain way—with serious negative side effects for its members and all other beings. We are talking about a problem of ignorance, a way of knowing things, a practice of active misknowing, the evidence of which one finds in the consequences of all the collective activity of knowing. We get more violence and degradation everywhere as this consciousness spreads.

Taking into account liberation theology and the deeper philosophical insights identity politics tries to get at but ends up ironically co-opting into the pattern of insanity, we allow “white” people to see that they too have gotten caught up and oppressed by this style of consciousness. Again, we need to include all sentient beings, both “white” and “non-white,” “human” and “non-human”.

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We also need to clarify there is not a “purveyor” of this style of consciousness. It is a style of life that, historically, we fell into, and it has a well-put-togetherness and a stability that resists insight that might dispel it. We do have to recognize that a small number of very wealthy and powerful people actively seek to manipulate us, that there are rich and powerful people sitting in rooms deciding how to expand and stabilize their power, but it’s not helpful to think of it as a “conspiracy of the illuminati” or something like that. The dominant culture is constituted by converging interests and a way of thinking that together make for easy coordination of efforts. But, more significantly, everyone participates, and even the most powerful people in the society are victims of this style of consciousness rooted in ignorance. It does not appear as ignorance to them. It appears as knowledge, as rightness, as the way to do things. We can no more tell them to just stop doing what they do than we can just tell someone to stand up straight and think it will turn out well. This is just their consciousness, and it is ours too.

It’s pointless to villainize “white” people, because the issue has nothing to do with race, and the whole mindset of blaming seems integral to the consciousness our inquiry places in tension with itself and with potentially vitalizing alternatives. The concept of race got co-opted into a style of consciousness, a way of knowing, a way of living, and we can no more tell someone to stop presencing this consciousness than we can tell them to stand up properly or dance tango. To challenge identity politics itself, we might provocatively suggest that, in the most practical terms, it’s no more a “choice” for a person to be “white,” and to practice the elements of conquest

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consciousness they do, than it is for a person to “choose” heterosexuality—at least not until we make transformation more possible, for while we may never find it possible or even acceptable to make homosexuality a matter of choice, there is something about conquest consciousness that makes it amenable to transformation, just as there is something about a criminal lifestyle that makes it amenable to transformation, once we see it as a problem of organizing life, not a problem of choosing to not commit a crime (all ecological degradation is a problem of organizing life, not a problem of choosing not to commit a crime or do some act or set of acts).

Similarly, it is not much of a choice for a person who is gay to participate or not participate in many of the elements of conquest consciousness, even if their particular suffering and marginalization by conquest consciousness makes them highly sensitive to its ignorance, and quite open to transformation—they may seek it and even think they have accomplished it, when in fact many of its elements continue to live in, through, and as their very lives.

We come back to this again and again: “Just like me!” The vast majority of us know in ways that don’t help, in ways that lead to suffering. The “White” person is “Just like” the “Black” person, the “Mexican,” the “Chinese,” the “lesbian” person, and so on, in this key philosophical respect: They experience suffering, and worse yet they experience suffering as a result of their own activity, despite the fact that their activity was not aimed at making them suffer, and is typically meant to make them happy in some way; furthermore, they often cause suffering to others, also without intending it, but at least sometimes by actually intending it, however subtly, in however “civilized” a form.
The universality of the problem doesn’t change the fact that, as with poetry, we may need to look for specifics as a way to get at skillful resolutions and realizations. *Given our current context,* perhaps the most appropriate way to practice-realize “All Lives Matter” is to practice-realize “Black Lives Matter” and “Honey Bee Lives Matter”. This we should try to find out by means of arts of awareness, not by means of argument. We need emphasis just now on how rational the activities of conquest consciousness are from their own standpoint. All of us, whether captains of finance and industry or professors of philosophy or ecology, do things that seem right and justified. Today’s “capitalist” (what an abused term, as are its dualistic contrasts) operates rationally. They have no problem making arguments to defend that they do. While we might hope to out-reason them, our reasonings still seem to come to, “Stand up straight!”

We need a practice of “stand up straight” that allows for uprightness in our Culture, an ecology of uprightness (in the ethical sense, as Confucius/Kongzi discussed it). We may begin to see such a practice as the practice of Indigenizing, and we may thereby connect it with all of these contemplations of race, politics, identity, and identity politics. Gary Snyder offers us some nice reflections that will help us segue back to more direct considerations of “white privilege,” now with a better understanding of what we are up to. In his *Mountains and Rivers without End,* he writes:

> Ghost bison, ghost bears, ghost bighorns, ghost lynx, ghost pronghorns, ghost panthers, ghost marmots, ghost owls: swirling and gathering, sweeping down,

> Then the white man will be gone.
> butterfly on slopes of grass and aspen —
> thunderheads the deep blue of Krishna rise on rainbows
> and falling shining rain
> each drop —
tiny people gliding slanting down:  
a little buddha seated in each pearl —  
and join the million waiving grass-seed buddhas  
on the ground. (80-1)

As part of our karma, those of us in the mindset called “white” must to turn toward these ghosts, and take up the work of rejuvenation, the work of honoring what we have made extinct, healing the suffering we have created and that our ancestors created, in their ignorance, spreading the grass-seeds of wisdom, love, and beauty. To clarify what this means, Snyder offers the following note on the poem: “‘White man’ here is not a racial designation, but a name for a certain set of mind. When we all become born-again natives of Turtle Island, then the ‘white man’ will be gone” (161). This thought in turn resonates with the thinking of John Mohawk, a philosopher from the Seneca Nation: “I think that when we talk about re-indigenization we need a much larger, bigger umbrella to understand it. It’s not necessarily about the Indigenous people of a specific place; it’s about re-indigenizing the peoples of the planet to the planet” (in Nelson 2008: 259). Daniel Wildcat of the Muscogee Nation of Oklahoma defines indigenizing as, “a set of practices that results in processes in which people seriously reexamine and adopt those particular and unique cultures that emerged from the places they choose to live today” (Wildcat, 2005, 419). A set of practices. A set of practices that results in a process. Practices that give rise to processes of inquiry. It is activity all the way down, interwoven activity rooted in a place, with a history, with an ancestry of good and bad ways of practicing. All of us are originally indigenous—only we have gotten cut off from this. Even if we follow the Old Testament, we see that the divine made a place for us. Even if we follow an atheistic scientism, we can come to some lived sense of sacredness.

With all of this in mind, we can return to McIntosh. She writes:
The denial of men’s overprivileged state takes many forms in discussions of curriculum change work. Some claim that men must be central in the curriculum because they have done most of what is important or distinctive in life or in civilization. Some recognize sexism in the curriculum but deny that it makes male students seem unduly important in life. Others agree that certain individual thinkers are male oriented but deny that there is any systemic tendency in disciplinary frameworks or epistemology to overempower men as a group. Those men who do grant that male privilege takes institutionalized and embedded forms are still likely to deny that male hegemony has opened doors for them personally. Virtually all men deny that male over reward alone can explain men’s centrality in all the inner sanctums of our most powerful institutions. Moreover, those few who will acknowledge that male privilege systems have over empowered them usually end up doubting that we could dismantle these privilege systems. They may say they will work to improve women’s status, in the society or in the university, but they can’t or won’t support the idea of lessening men’s. In curricular terms, this is the point at which they say that they regret they cannot use any of the interesting new scholarship on women because the syllabus is full. When the talk turns to giving men less cultural room, even the most thoughtful and fair-minded of the men I know will tend to reflect, or fall back on, conservative assumptions about the inevitability of present gender relations and distributions of power, calling on precedent or sociobiology and psychobiology to demonstrate that male domination is natural and follows inevitably from evolutionary pressures. Others resort to arguments from “experience” or religion or social responsibility or wishing and dreaming.  

These sorts of considerations should weigh on us. I take them seriously and carry them even further, for I think there is also a human privilege that we in the academy (and beyond) indulge far too unconsciously. It matters that this sort of privilege has a strong unconscious dimension, even if it also has certain conscious dimensions (for instance, the way men in the west long had stories and theories and labels for women that perpetuated their marginalization). We might go so far as to suggest that white privilege actually goes together with human privilege (in part, because the dominant culture has a long history of separation from Nature and a sense of superiority; it is a culture of conquest, both of Indigenous People and of Nature), and that it goes

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further with something we might call intellectual privilege (not least because the abstractions and patterns of thinking of the dominant culture go together with separation from and conquest of Nature and Indigenous cultures; abstractions and logic function efficiently in maintaining control over property and populations, in justifying oppression, extraction, degradation, war). With the term “intellectual privilege” we try to capture some of the problems with contemporary philosophy that we have tried to confront.

Another aspect of these problems relates to the way intellectualizing becomes something like an addiction, a distraction, an escape or evasion, or (in whatever proportion) all three. We have often in western philosophy made a distinction between hedonia and eudaimonia, with the former considered “mere pleasure,” and the latter considered “true happiness” or “true well-being” or “meaningful happiness” or something like that. But starting at least with Aristotle, we have needed to add another term: theōria. Eudaimonia thus becomes a middle way between the extremes of hedonia and theōria. In this way of thinking, theōria should signify “merely intellectual” pleasure (though the intellectual—and we include scientists there, and even engineers in many cases—would take offense to the “merely”). Like its mirror, hedonia, it leaves something out. The “meaning” seems to be there, because the concepts we contemplate have apparent meaning. But that meaning casts a shadow. It actually eclipses a larger meaning, with which we need to participate. I will say more about that in a moment, because it’s crucial to our inquiry.

But first, I want to probe for the possibility of this intellectual privilege, connected with human privilege. McIntosh gives a list of 46 symptoms or indicators of white privilege that she bravely
tried to confront in her own experience. Leaving out any of them comes with risks, but here are a few of them:

5. I can go shopping alone most of the time, fairly well assured that I will not be followed or harassed by store detectives.
6. I can turn on the television or open to the front page of the paper and see people of my race widely and positively represented.
7. When I am told about our national heritage or about “civilization,” I am shown that people of my color made it what it is.
14. I could arrange to protect our young children most of the time from people who might not like them.
15. I did not have to educate our children to be aware of systemic racism for their own daily physical protection.
18. I can swear, or dress in secondhand clothes, or not answer letters, without having people attribute these choices to the bad morals, the poverty, or the illiteracy of my race.
21. I am never asked to speak for all the people of my racial group.
22. I can remain oblivious to the language and customs of persons of color who constitute the world’s majority without feeling in my culture any penalty for such oblivion.
23. I can criticize our government and talk about how much I fear its policies and behavior without being seen as a cultural outsider.
24. I can be reasonably sure that if I ask to talk to “the person in charge,” I will be facing a person of my race.
25. If a traffic cop pulls me over or if the IRS audits my tax return, I can be sure I haven't been singled out because of my race.
34. I can worry about racism without being seen as self-interested or self-seeking.
35. I can take a job with an affirmative action employer without having my co-workers on the job suspect that I got it because of my race.
41. I can be sure that if I need legal or medical help, my race will not work against me.
44. I can easily find academic courses and institutions that give attention only to people of my race.
45. I can expect figurative language and imagery in all of the arts to testify to experiences of my race.

Let us consider some possible indicators of intellectual and human privilege, keeping in mind that, as McIntosh does with indicators or symptoms of white privilege and male privilege, these things actually make us less than what we might otherwise be, that these forms of privilege are not healthy for us, for a variety of reasons, and yet they function as “an invisible package of unearned assets that I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was “meant” to
remain oblivious.” We are meant to not see these, to not see how our intellectual pleasure depends on and perpetuates a wide variety of assumptions and practices, including the degradation of ecologies.

Before looking at the list of indicators, I want to emphasize that we are talking about a relation to knowledge. Intellectual privilege goes along with the way of knowing we are trying to understand as limited. Dewey offers an interesting reflection:

Knowledge and effort to achieve it have never occupied in fact a very distinguished position in the constitution of societies nor has the class of persons professionally engaged in knowing ever been given a place of superior privilege. When the intellectual class has held such a position it has been in the capacity of priests, and the fact that homage went to them in virtue of their being the guardians and distributors of the supernatural is indirect testimony to the revelatory [low] estate in which search for knowledge is held. It may truly be said that the prestige of science and the status of scientific men have greatly advanced during the last century and a half. But this is a recent matter; moreover, it is still doubtful whether such honor as is conferred is a tribute to their pursuit or to the utility of knowledge for the purposes of industry and war. A cynic might say that the separate and supremely high place given knowledge is an expression of the fact that intellectuals constitute the writing class and like others suffering from an inferiority complex have taken advantage of the position given them to over-compensate. (UPMP 345)

Nietzsche’s thoughts about the “priestly class” in Genealogy of Morals, and his various criticisms of philosophers, should be welcomed to mind here. There are serious questions about what the intellectual class seeks to maintain, for themselves and for the elites of a society. Utility of knowledge for industry and war seem like such a principal interest of the society that one can hardly keep from thinking that, taken as a whole, it is the function of universities to further these pursuits above all else—hardly an encouraging definition of education. Intellectuals (again, including scientists and even engineers) may have various vested interests in maintaining their relative comfort and prestige, maintaining, in short, a kind of privilege.
In considering the incomplete list (below) of possible indicators of intellectual and human privilege, it behooves us to keep in mind that many of these items appear on the list precisely because they feature prominently in non-western or more holistic (less purely “intellectual”) epistemologies/ways of life. It also behooves us to keep in mind that this is not an indictment, and that there is nothing inherently wrong with theōria any more than there is something inherently wrong with hedonia. The situation is somewhat nuanced, and in part we could think of ourselves as examining the spiritual materialism of theōria. The main question has to do with whether we can detect any ethical, epistemological, or aesthetic reason for seeing a contrast between theōria and eudaimonia that mirrors the contrast between hedonia and eudaimonia. This is a long list, in part because of the subtlety of the problem. The reader may skim, trusting that attention will land upon at least one or two items worthy of contemplation.

1) I operate my life on the basis of conscious purposes
2) I spend most of my day indoors, and I don’t see this as compromising my epistemic situation (all of these items can also be considered from the standpoint of one’s aesthetic and ethical situation)
3) I am in general surrounded by plastic: For instance, I eat from plastic containers, handle plastic throughout the day, wear plastic clothing (e.g. polyester or nylon), sit on plastic chairs—and these things often seem to make my life easier, they seem to facilitate my work by saving me time and money and making my life more comfortable and convenient
4) When I think, I usually do so indoors, often alone
4a) When I think with others, it is almost exclusively with other human beings (many of whom are, at bottom, quite similar to me—e.g. they are all philosophers, or they are all scientists or academics, or they are all in my area of specialization, or we share much in common in our thinking, we are all “materialists” of some variety, etc.)

5) I do not regularly go on spiritual retreats or retreats in wild or relatively remote nature for 3 days or more—and, (likely) I have no serious concern that a failure to spend such extended periods of time in nature or other forms of retreat might compromise my epistemic situation, nor any real confidence that engaging such retreats would significantly improve my epistemic situation (though, maybe I would admit it could benefit my health in some way, and thus rather indirectly affect my epistemic situation)

6) I do not have a consistent spiritual practice that involves daily spiritual exercises such as meditation

6a) Whether I have these or not, I not think I need them in order to improve my epistemic situation

7) I do not have an active and ongoing relationship with Nature and non-human beings; I have never tried to learn from a non-human being and apply that learning to my activity as a scholar

7a) I do not think of interaction with non-human beings as “doing” philosophy, and I do not see how one could significantly improve their epistemic situation in such interactions

8) I do not have a consistent creative practice

8a) I have never made art as a way of “doing” philosophy (or intellectual or scientific research), and I have never tried to improve my epistemic situation by means of artistic activity

9) I do not regularly contemplate my dreams
9a) I do not conscientiously try to resolve problems in my work or my life by dreaming about them
9b) I do not try to dream lucidly
9c) I do not regularly draw on the activity of dream to improve my epistemic situation
9d) I do not regularly speak with others about dreams as guidance for daily life
9e) I do not regularly dream about wild beings, whether animals like Tiger or Eagle, or plants like Redwood or even Yggdrasil

10) My epistemic practices are confined largely to the analysis and production of rationally organized text
10a) I learn primarily through linguistic means, either through books, journals, lectures, or discussions
10b) I do not regularly practice ways of knowing that go beyond “reasoning” and “argument”

11) I think the world is made up of matter—matter that doesn’t really matter, so to speak (this symptom may also appear as: I live in a “dead” world with life growing on it here and there, as a kind of cosmic accident—other variations could present themselves as well, and they may sound less harsh, more skillfully rationalized)—and I have no concerns that this worldview might compromise my epistemic situation

12) While I may experience coincidences from time to time, I do not experience synchronicities, meaning a coincidence that is no mere coincidence, but rather an event that ruptures the illusion of time and space, revealing a deeper, hidden order (I may even suspect that the experience of synchronicity indicates apophenia, and thus either relative superstition in the best case, and possible mental illness in the worst)

13) I think in terms of dualities
14) I cannot quite see how my practice at *each and every moment* gives rise to my experience of life; living better has to do with reasoning better and keeping oneself in accord with reason, not with some sort of embodied, moment-to-moment practice of life.

15) I don’t know how to grow food (beyond perhaps a few garden vegetables).

15a) I do not grow or hunt the majority of my food, and I am not genuinely clear about how the food I eat was produced.

16) I live my life in a massively degraded natural world.

17) I think there is hope that we can use technology to resolve the problem of climate collapse.

18) I have hope for a Green New Deal.

19) We don’t need to do anything about ecology or climate collapse.

20) Climate collapse, the various ecological crises, and ecology in general are “not in my wheelhouse”—I don’t know much about ecology.

20a) . . . and I probably don’t really need to, or can’t see any professional reason why I need to.

20a) . . . in any case, I am not going to study ecology.

21) I rarely if ever interact with non-western epistemologies.

22) I rarely if ever study the epistemologies of Indigenous Peoples and try to apply them to a critique of my own way of knowing, thinking, speaking, and living.

22) I would rather read a book than be out in Nature without books (especially “wild” places) or interact with non-human beings.

23) I almost never make significant room in my syllabi for non-western sources, including Indigenous sources.

24) I have never used plant medicines like ayahuasca or peyote to improve my epistemic situation.
24a) admittedly, I cannot really understand how they might do so, even if I remain open to the possibility

25) I think travelling is a good way to improve my epistemic situation

26) I think going to academic conferences is a good way to improve my epistemic situation

27) I don’t speak, attempt to study, or even make myself aware of some of the basic functioning of any non-western or Indigenous languages

28) I have no concerns that my world view, in and of itself, will trigger skepticism about the subject matter of a talk I want to give or a book or article I would like to publish

29) I have no concerns that any of my views will be thought of as primitive or superstitious

30) I have no concerns that the sources I want to interact with have not been read, perhaps even heard of, by any of my colleagues

31) I have no concern that my colleagues will think that what I do is NOT philosophy (or science)

32) I have invested a lot of energy into texts: reading them, purchasing them, prizing them, talking about them

32a) I do not try to “live” those texts, in the sense of having them change my moment-to-moment experience

33) I have never seriously considered the Earth my mother

34) I have never stopped what I was doing to try and listen to a non-human (non-pet) being, because I thought they were trying to “tell” me something

35) I have not thought about the distinction between an “adult” and an “Elder,” where the latter indicates someone of significant dignity and wisdom to be particularly valued in the community
35a) . . . nor do I worry that I might be merely an adult in years but somehow quite immature in terms of genuine wisdom or spiritual depth; I have no serious concerns that my ontogeny has been interrupted by civilization

36) In my interactions with non-human animals, a sense of juvenilizing prevails—always, “Good boy!” or “Good girl!” or “You’re so cute!” or something along those lines, and never, “My brother” or “My Elder sister” “My teacher” or something along those lines

37) I have not experienced a sense of direct participation in Nature

38) I have not ever seriously entertained the idea that humans can communicate with plants

39) I have not seriously entertained the idea that forests can think

40) I have never experienced a transforming vision of the fundamental wholeness and unity of the Cosmos and/or of the Earth and all its beings

41) I do not ever feel a concern that my epistemic situation might be compromised to some significant degree by poor synchronization of my mind and body, or of my mind, body, and the world

42) I have no serious concerns that unconscious dynamics compromise my epistemic situation

42a) I have not ever tried to actively work with unconscious or shadow material

43) I feel I can pursue my intellectual interests “for their own sake” or as part of participating in “the great conversation,” with no serious concern for how they might or should affect ordinary people and non-human beings, to whom I bear a great responsibility.

44) I can come and go as I wish, and I am never trapped in a small space for 8 or more hours a day, a space that I cannot leave unless a person who inherently sees themselves as superior to me comes to let me out

45) I do not spend much time working on non-verbal communication
46) I have never thought significantly about how much of my own thinking and even my own life that I “owe” to non-humans, and I do not seriously think of non-human beings as having something significant to teach me

47) On a daily basis, I interact with more objects (toys, tools, furniture) than non-human living beings

47a) I perpetuate this pattern of living by getting my children lots of manufactured toys and other manufactured objects

48) There is nowhere I want to go on any regular basis that I realize I cannot go because another species has dominated that place, even if I really want or need to go there, for instance for food, companionship, or shelter

49) I never have to worry that another species will make a decision that will put members of my species at serious risk, perhaps even at risk of extinction—and sheerly for its comfort and not for its need

50) I have never seriously thought of a non-human being as “my relation”

51) I don’t have to pause before leaving my home in the morning to look out for a dangerous species

51a) I don’t have to be mindful as I journey throughout the day, lest I encounter a species I know to be a threat to my own

51b) basically, I can come and go as I please, because my species dominates the planet

52) I have no serious concerns that the principal language I speak may have basic structural features that compromise my epistemic situation
53) There is no place in Nature that I visit because it is sacred, and because I think being there with the right attitude will improve my epistemic situation (for instance, the place might speak to me in some way and help me to know something significant)

54) Other than obvious fruit trees or shrubs, I cannot identify any edible plants growing wild within a hundred yards of my home (i.e. I wouldn’t know it if there were something edible growing near me, other than something obvious, like the oranges on a tree)

55) I do not know the name Indigenous people had for the place I live

55a) I am not sure how close my current home is to a former Indigenous settlement, and I am not sure what tribe or nation would have lived there, if one did

56) I cannot name ten—or, let us even say 5—great philosophical figures outside the western tradition and summarize a few of the most salient features of their thinking

57) When I am hungry, I can go to a store and obtain food; when I am thirsty or need to bathe, I do not have to go far to get water, and I don’t have to carry that water any great distance to use it

58) I have never participated in a ceremony that attempted to put me in attunement or proper relation with the energies or forces of life (I may not have much of an idea what that would even mean)

59) My consciousness or mind is located inside my skull

59a) Communication or information exchange between my consciousness and that of others is always mediated by mechanical processes—there is no “perceptual channel for information exchange” that could operate between two minds physically separated (with no “means” of communication) or which would give me access to knowledge I would normally have to get by going someplace and looking (or doing some sort of research, etc.) or perhaps knowledge I simply could not get by means of the five conventional senses plus the intellect
60) I have no idea what the current rate of species extinction might be

60a) I would admit that I cannot see how this extinction compromises my epistemic situation, which is to say that I cannot see how the existence or non-existence of trees, turtles, whales, or wolves has any impact on anything I know or care to know

61) I am not aware that, because of soil degradation, there may only be 60 harvests left

61a) I have no idea what we will do about the situation, given that it takes roughly 1000 years to produce an inch of topsoil

62) I thoroughly enjoy “the life of the mind,” and I take tremendous pleasure in reading and/or constructing texts

63) When driving, I don’t seriously think about how the human road has cut through what might be a home and rangeland for other species—I may, for instance, fear that a deer might jump out and damage my car, but I don’t fear that I have damaged the deer’s home, simply for my own convenience

64) I can’t say that I feel I belong to the landscape, and that it is likewise an essential part of me

65) Though I may feel satisfied with my work in many ways, I cannot say that it brings me lasting peace of mind, wisdom, or deep joy

65a) Though I get excited about the ideas I think about, and though they make me feel happy in a certain sense, I cannot say that I still don’t sometimes feel something is missing for me to be truly well, wise, joyful, or at peace

66) I never have to worry that my work will offer no stimulation for my mind

67) I rarely if ever have to walk, dig in the earth, or otherwise engage in manual labor in order to survive

68) I don’t have to push my body on a daily basis to what feels like a limit in order to survive
69) My work is does not feel communal and celebratory; my work lacks a feeling of sacredness to it, and someone observing me could likely make a pretty easy distinction between work and play

70) I participate in my society mainly as a consumer of essential goods, goods needed for life, but not so much as a creator of them (though I may see myself as a contributor of knowledge or education)

71) My day largely ignores natural rhythms that might arise from within my body or between my body and the natural world—in other words, my day takes direction from the clock and the calendar, to which I must pay fairly close attention

72) I don’t know how to make the basic tools and objects I most rely on every day (e.g. my laptop, my car, my coffee mug)

73) My life could probably be best characterized as sedentary

74) I think getting exercise is important, even if I don’t get enough

75) Going to the gym is a reasonable way to get exercise

This list is as much a confession as McIntosh’s. Many of these items appear here because they are or have been true in my own case, and they eventually began to raise ethical and epistemological concerns—and here we face the crucial problem McIntosh mentions in terms of men’s recognition of their privileged status: “They may say they will work to improve women’s status, in the society or in the university, but they can’t or won’t support the idea of lessening men’s.” We have to find a way to actually give back to non-humans some of what we have taken, and in general giving up some of our privilege.
Some of the items may seem strange, and some of their dynamics operate invisibly, in part because, for instance, we may not see is just how addicted we might be to our theōria, how much we are willing to do to perpetuate that addiction, and how much we disconnect it from any obligation to or relationship with non-human beings and non-western cultures. In his 1929 essay, “Surrealism,” Walter Benjamin offers some interesting reflections that relate to this aspect of theōria:

The most passionate investigation of telepathic phenomena, for example, will not teach us half as much about reading (which is an eminently telepathic process), as the profane illumination of reading about telepathic phenomena. And the most passionate investigation of the hashish trance will not teach us half as much about thinking (which is eminently narcotic), as the profane illumination of thinking about the hashish trance. The reader, the thinker, the loiterer, the flâneur, are types of illuminati just as much as the opium eater, the dreamer, the ecstatic. And more profane. Not to mention that most terrible drug—ourselves—which we take in solitude. ‘To win the energies of intoxication for the revolution’—in other words, poetic politics? ‘We have tried that beverage. Anything, rather than that!’ Well, it will interest you all the more how much an excursion into poetry clarifies things. For what is the programme of the bourgeois parties? A bad poem on springtime, filled to bursting with metaphors. (Benjamin 1999: 216)

In other words, we can get “stoned” on our equations, abstractions, arguments, and texts (thus deadening us to . . . to what?), and, like any addict, we will not stop just because others start paying the cost of our addiction. Moreover, as much as we may endeavor (or, as much as we do not even have to endeavor) to keep poetry out of philosophy, perhaps academic philosophy is just a variety of poetry—which to some ears sounds like not the most elegant poetry (though to others it might sound lovely).³⁰

³⁰ As a side note, the “magical experiments” Benjamin discusses, which we tend to refer to as “surrealist games” can, in the right context, function as an art of awareness. The experiments seem “magical” in part because of the surprising kinds of knowing that seem to arise from bypassing ordinary conscious purposes and reasoning processes.
It will benefit us to think a little about thinking as addiction. Nietzsche often comes to mind regarding how our creatureliness might shape our philosophy and our science:

As you see, they are not unbiased witnesses and judges of the value of the ascetic ideal, these philosophers! They think of themselves—what is “the saint” to them! They think of what they can least do without: freedom from compulsion, disturbance, noise, from tasks, duties, worries; clear heads; the dance, leap, and flight of ideas; good air, thin, clear, open, dry, like the air of the heights through which all animal being becomes more spiritual and acquires wings; repose in all cellar regions; all dogs nicely chained up; no barking of hostility and shaggy-haired rancor; no gnawing worm of injured ambition; undemanding and obedient intestines, busy as windmills but distant; the heart remote, beyond, heavy with future, posthumous—all in all, they think of the ascetic ideal as the cheerful asceticism of an animal become fledged and divine, floating above life rather than in repose. (GM III, 8)

We will return to these suggestions. It helps to hold them together with Nietzsche’s insightful suggestions regarding the relationship of scientific truth and “civilization”—that we essentially made “knowledge” central to our way of life as part of the project of “making people responsible.” The Genealogy of Morals is a Genealogy of Science, but also something like a critique of a style of thinking, one to which we may exhibit signs of addiction. This should not surprise us if any of Nietzsche’s suggestions hold, for it comes to no more than the suggestion that we can become addicted to our own comforts, and we don’t want to let them go.

But I would like to look at this notion of addiction from a perspective informed by cognitive science, especially the view offered by enactive cognition.\(^{31}\) And we can keep in mind here the view of addiction that neuroscientist Marc Lewis has developed. In relation to our present

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\(^{31}\) The work of Gregory Bateson, Francisco Varela, Ezequiel Di Paolo, and others stands out. *The Embodied Mind*, by Varela, Rosch, and Thompson, and *Mind and Life* by Thompson serve as good philosophical/scientific introductions to this stream of research. Though Bateson did not consider his theories part of the approach of enactive cognition (the term comes into its own only after his death), his views certainly harmonize with this approach.
inquiry, Lewis has essentially made a convincing case that addiction is not so much a disease as a matter of practice-and-realization. His work supports the notion that we are what we practice, and that our practices can become like addictions in the sense of shifting our orientation to reality, shifting the way we metabolize experience and nutrients, shifting what our bodies and minds think of as nutriment.\textsuperscript{32} As the Buddha makes clear: All things depend on nutriment, and as we feed something, it begins to take on its own logic, its own well-put-togetherness, such that we can get trapped in a cycle of craving even though we see, consciously or unconsciously, that it doesn’t function.

But there is also something we can get here from Dewey, whose theory of inquiry seems to be based on a view of life that presages contemporary enactive theory. Dewey puts it in what I would call an intellectual way, seeming to see “reflection” as a stepping back from things, and he does not, as far as I have seen, demonstrate a truly vitalizing vision of thinking in activity, which our inquiry invites us to verify.

Working with ideas from these streams of research (enactivism, “addiction” research, and Deweyean as well as Buddhist philosophy), we could suggest, in a preliminary way, that life means processes that sustain life. An organism engages with the world (so to speak)—there

\textsuperscript{32} I understand the importance of Lewis’s argument that addiction is not a disease. It arises in part because of the current cultural context. I would prefer that we think of the deeper problem as a lack of vision regarding health and healing. In the proper context, in a healthier ecology, addiction \textit{would} be considered a disease, but that would not medicalize it and thus bring with it all the attendant problems Lewis rightly raises concern about. For an introduction to Lewis’s views, see his \textit{Biology of Desire}, an excerpt of which appears online: https://www.alternet.org/2015/07/our-brains-are-designed-addiction-and-thats-not-necessarily-bad-thing/
should be a nondualistic view here) to sustain the conditions of its own existence (thus the organism shapes the environment and itself, and the environment shapes the organism and itself, all in mutuality). Where there is life, there is mind, and thus some sort of experience, no matter how primitive. In a Deweyan sense, we could say that every experience arises in a continuum of life-sustaining activity. We should adjust this to say that, in practice, every experience arises as activity carrying life forward, or transforming/cultivating life forward, without necessarily thinking of the transformation as a linear sequence. In this activity-experience, every feature of experience is conditioned by, or arises in dependence upon, the sense-making activity of the organism, or what we might call the organism’s life-directing goals (an organism must continually “make sense” of the world, in, through, as sensitiveness, sentience). Experience is made sense of in relation to what sustains the conditions required for the life of the organism. In terms of basic feeling, every experience arises as positive, negative, or neutral. Negative experiences feel unsettling, because in the basic sense-making of the organism, negative experiences ultimately threaten the processes of sustaining life.

Dewey felt that organisms, including humans, would typically tend to take action on the basis of habit. When activity became blocked because habitual reactions failed to function, this would then trigger a process of inquiry. We humans experience this blockage of activity as doubt, uneasiness, ungroundedness, anxiety, imbalance, tension—something negative. These experiences indicate that our habits appear inadequate to respond to some kind of life situation. That may be due to the fact that the life situation is quite novel, or it could arise from the fact that each moment is unique, and thus habit must always already include a dimension of improvisation.
In some sense, in one time scale or another, the continuous unfolding of life, its ongoing co-discovery-creation means that all the sense-making activity of all the organisms alive will become part of an ongoing development. But, (again, in a manner that ironically seems “intellectual”) Dewey focused on a process of reconstruction that occurs especially in human experience, in which we come up against doubt, frustration, and so on, then take a step back, so to speak, and develop new habits of action that reconstruct the old ones so that activity can flow again. This process of activity-blockage-doubt-reconstruction-activity is understood by Dewey as the logic of inquiry. It is inherently experimental, or, we could say, scientific.

Dewey felt that, when our habits function well enough (we might say, habits along with our intelligence-in-action or living thinking—which, in its most vital and vitalizing form, we could call sagehood, and see it as liberated and liberating activity . . . Dewey did not offer such a vision), we remain in a mode or, perhaps better said, a dimension of experience he called primary experience. In this dimension our tacit goals adequately direct our activity, and this gives rise to a more or less fluid field of experience which feels more or less whole or holistic. However, when certain obstacles arise that habit cannot deal with, our activity becomes frustrated or stuck, and we experience uneasiness, doubt, anxiety, and so on. This triggers, often immediately, a shift into a secondary dimension of experience, characterized by reflectiveness, which can feel like a distance or delay in action. It is like taking a step back from a frustrating situation in order to focus and to better activate discernment. We need to bring an intentional awareness to the features of experience in order to better understand the relationships of those features (we usually think of these as “causal” features). As we inquire into those features, we
may arrive at insight, or re-cognition—a renewed thinking, a fresh view of the situation. In a “scientific” way of speaking, we might say that we get a new cognitive map or explicit cognitive understanding of the situation, and this allows us to better plan and control (all of that is a rather horrible way to put the matter, but at times Dewey sounds like this, and mostly our contemporary “science” as well as our politics, economics, and more sound like this). What we now have is an enriched experience, either experience “enriched” (perhaps dubiously so) by cognition and understanding, or, if we are lucky, experience enriched with some measure of wisdom, love, and beauty.

A major spiritual issue Dewey did not seem to acknowledge—one that needs not only acknowledgement but extensive discussion and practice—is that the human ego is especially good at developing its own abstract notions about what we need in order to sustain our existence. Another way of putting the same point is that we as organisms will work hard to maintain the conditions of our existence, even if the conditions of our existence are diseased and deluded. If I think that I need chocolate to go on living, then I experience the loss of chocolate as no small frustration. Not only doubt but fear and anxiety and hope all arise in me, and I begin to do anything I can to get more chocolate. Thinking of heroin in place of chocolate might make the point more starkly, but many, many things that are as non-essential as chocolate drive our reactions in the continuum of experience, and we react to many, many things that are not really a threat to our existence as if they somehow were potentially deadly. We can react to a request from a loved one as if they had asked us to poke a needle in our eye, even though they may only have asked us to make an extra stop on the way home, or to finish washing the dishes, or to make an important phone call. The same holds for considering evidence that goes against our cherished
beliefs. If I am a “liberal,” a “white male,” a “Buddhist,” a QAnon follower, or anything at all that I can reasonably label, I may experience a conscious or unconscious existential threat in the face of, or even at the hint of, evidence that might challenge the beliefs that go with that identity.

Any membership in a team, tribe, family, party, or institution of any kind can produce this effect, which arises from the fact that the basic processes of life are themselves dependent on what we may call “higher-order” processes that themselves arise out of the more basic processes. The basic processes of life simply empower living beings to recreate what they are and carry themselves (and all of life) forward. The processes inside a cell take in nutrients that allow the cell to keep itself intact, which means keeping the cell wall and other structures in good shape and keeping out potential toxins. The good can come into the cell and is kept there; the bad is kept out. There is a barrier between self and not-self, good and bad. The cell’s activities all go to making itself, sustaining itself.

Many of us are familiar with the fact that almost our entire material body gets replaced every 7 years. Some cells actually take longer to wear out, but those cells also do work to maintain and repair themselves. Some cells are replaced very quickly, on the order of days. For instance, the tongue and digestive tract regenerate quite quickly. Red blood cells are also produced at a fairly quick pace. Our body makes itself, and it makes sense of the world, in some sense constructs the world, on the basis of what allows it to keep constructing itself effectively—a co-discovery-creation of self and world.
But, it does this not on some mindless, mechanical basis. Body is already mind. Thus what we call body (speaking dualistically) responds to our learning, because, when learning functions well, it allows us to do the work of life more skillfully. Learning can become rather “conceptual,” and, when our concepts function as delusion, they co-opt the processes of life for unhealthy purposes. Our total intelligence gets co-opted into getting the job, the tenure, the car, the shoes, the jewelry, the stock deal, the book deal, the drilling permit, the partner, the reputation, the money that some small part of us has learned to think of as important for sustaining our life. And this total process involves a mutuality, an interwovenness of what we divide up as “organism” and “environment,” as well as what we divide up as “top-down” and “bottom-up”. These distinctions do have their place. It helps to have a sense that my foolish addiction to chocolate or to reading Descartes will in various ways co-opt, so to speak, unconscious processes in the system—not only in “my” “body,” but more broadly, in “my” “department,” and in widening circles, to Africa where the beans for the chocolate grow and where the environmental degradation that keeps books in print and data in servers may be more keenly felt than in my comfy office on campus.

Moreover, these contemplations show us the dangers in arts of awareness that lack proper vision. Again and again, contemporary teachers of mindfulness and meditation like to remind us that we are no longer at risk of being eaten by wild animals. They treat this as a rational explanation for our suffering. They tell us that we are “wired” to be on the look-out for man-eating tigers, and not finding any, those processes that scan for problems turn themselves on us. We start thinking something is wrong, and it must be “me”! But I have yet to hear a single meditation teacher
acknowledge the possibility that something *is* wrong, and that it *is* me.\(^{33}\) In other words, the bottom-up processes do detect something off in the environment, and the meditation teacher shows me how to *override* this rather than inquiring into it. What do those processes detect? Maybe that the air is not clear, the water is not clean, the weather is too bizarre, my job takes up too much energy and feels meaningless . . . that life feels meaningless, that species are going extinct, that we don’t see enough birds or spend enough unstructured time in wild places, that we are not rooted in the landscape, that we spend too much time reading books, that we are too tired, that we cannot see the night sky as our ancestors did. Indeed, we could say that the modern scientific story about our neuroses gets things wrong in an ironic way: Those ancient processes send warnings not because they (stupidly) think a tiger might be lurking behind a parking meter, but *precisely because there are no tigers at all.* The tiger is not merely a threat, but a friend, a highly esteemed member of the family, and we rightly feel uneasy, longing to see our loved and esteemed Elder. As Carl Safina (2015) points out, even today we see that human beings can make agreements with lions and tigers: You don’t eat us, we won’t eat you or bother your share of the food. We have had intimate relationships with other beings, who are now suffering and vanishing because of our way of being in the World. What kind of meditation practice would teach us to deny our experience of suffering for what we have done to the World? And yet, this seems de rigueur.

In any case, this too illustrates one of the points we have made here: We can always transform our experience—of self and world—with, on balance, positive or negative consequences. In this

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\(^{33}\) I mean something different here than the general philosophical teaching that we ourselves are the source of our suffering. Most every meditation teacher is in fact trying to make that point in some way—not always with sufficient ecological sensitivity.
sense, philosophy has to do with rebirth, renewal, rejuvenation. We birth ourselves anew, seeing the world and seeing ourselves with fresh eyes—the eye of wisdom-love-beauty. This does not mean accepting the now-degraded world as the way things should be. It means a rebirth into the work of rejuvenation, in which, as James Cone put it, we “plunge [ourselves] into the world on behalf of those who are voiceless and hurt.” Indeed, we plunge ourselves into the world for the sake of all beings.

When we do this, everything changes, and the basic processes of life become increasingly attuned to wisdom-love-beauty. It becomes our vitalizing addiction, which just means a well-put-togetherness-in-liberation—no longer “addiction” in the normal sense, but true well-being. This shift happens the very moment we enter the path of wisdom-love-beauty (or, we could say, the path of philosophy as a way of life . . . we are getting at the centrality of wisdom, love, and beauty in every major tradition). Dogen encourages us to make no distinction between intention, path, and fruition (or worldview, arts of awareness, and activity in, through, as the world)—even if we do at times need to accept that our practice at any given moment remains shaky and tender. Nevertheless, each moment we presence the heart of love, the heart of wisdom, the heart of beauty, the heart-mind-body-world-cosmos of wisdom-love-beauty (again, because self and world are mutually specified in, through, as our basic activity), we make our very life processes about wisdom-love-beauty, and these things we seek to carry forward, to renew, rebirth, revitalize, just as we now might seek to maintain, hold onto, perpetuate, or further our addictions, fears, cravings, hopes, and so on.
What we might call the shift into love that our inquiry will recommend involves transformational insights of wisdom, love, and beauty that sometimes prove painfully elusive, and we can think of it as trying to shift our whole metabolism. It relates to the basic processes of life, and how those processes get co-opted by delusions of all kinds—our beliefs, concepts, distances, fears, neuroses, ways of trying to be happy that fundamentally don’t function. The resilience of these delusions relates to the way the processes of life manifest a powerful energy of resistance to disturbance—a seeming necessity of life as we know it. We can call it “self-correcting,” “self-preserving,” “self-reproducing,” or something else. The basic idea is that a living system has a kind of integrity. It has to keep itself going, and it needs some differentiation from what we call “the environment”. In order for the play of life to unfold as it does with living beings, beings must differentiate themselves. In order for the dance of life to become endless spirals of dance, there must be dancers.

After all, a primary thing to wonder at is how strange it is that there are “individual beings,” given the wholeness of life—or, given the way Dewey and other more non-dualistic philosophers tried to undermine our conceptual dualities (in other words, we could take their arguments seriously, and then naturally ask them, “Okay, but then why does it seem like there are all these ‘organisms’ moving around?”). We usually come from the other direction: We think that interwovenness is something strange, some peculiar philosophical concept, and meanwhile we think we understand individuality quite well—when in fact we cannot understand individuality without insight that radically disrupts our assumptions about it.
And we certainly come to a tremendously liberating insight when we see that things are not-two, that reality is not a collection of atomized individuals. This naturally changes our understanding about “individuality”. Nevertheless, we have at that point yet to achieve insight into why/how things are not-one, and why/how they are not-two-not-one. We don’t really understand (we should say wonderstand) so-called individuality without this fuller insight.

But the main point here has to do with the utter resilience of foolish notions, ways of living that do not truly function—whether we feel that disfunction quite directly (for instance, the suffering of hangovers and broken relationships) or must try and sense it with a broader vision (for instance, seeing how our everyday activity arises altogether with human and non-human suffering, perhaps far away from us, but also quite locally and intimately—or, more to our general point just now, seeing how our thinking is not thinking in a robust sense but rather an intellectualism, that this intellectualism might put us at a distance from life, that it might function more or less like an addiction, like a disease, while failing to function in a way that will cultivate life forward in a vitalizing and mutually nourishing manner). The most “obvious” things in the world can be invisible to someone if that obvious thing seems to threaten the integrity that the “self-correcting” processes of life our systems naturally seek to perpetuate. Or, we can say that skillful and realistic views can appear very obviously wrong if they threaten the integrity our system seeks to preserve. Changing one’s mind becomes a matter of shifting one’s entire metabolism, one’s entire pattern of sense-making.

We can put this another way: We fail to think holistically and skillfully if we imagine that “reason” and “evidence” are enough to “change people’s minds” in ways that matter deeply,
especially if we might be in rather deep trouble. We think atomistically if we think we can just
“reason” with someone to get them to let go of a view that seems to cause them suffering or
seems to lead to more suffering in the world. The processes of life seek to minimize the effects
of perturbations or disturbances of the system. We all experience this psychologically too,
whether we are the sort of person who chronically resists changes of any kind, or if we have just
had times when we wanted to do nothing at all, just to relax in non-disturbance. We may put up a
Do Not Disturb sign on our hotel door when we manage to sneak off for a holiday, and we may
wish we could put a Do Not Disturb sign that would actually function at home or at the office.
We often want nothing more than to be left undisturbed, to feel in complete control of our time
and our perception.

Our systems do have a certain inertia which in ideal cases involves a conservation of energy, but
in practice this can mean that we look for ways to keep things as they are—another case of the
bottom-up processes being co-opted by top-down processes that rationalize in order to seem
reasonable. No matter how promising and beneficial a change may seem, if it appears that the
change will take a lot of energy, or feels like too much of a disturbance in any way, we will resist
the change—with good reasons. It may be that, over time, we will waste tremendous energy and
experience a lot of suffering by keeping things as they are (a pattern which might itself include a
lot of chasing after things, for instance extensive travel or pursuit of adrenaline rushes), but the
initial barrier of energy output for a radical change in the system (whether real or imagined—it
almost always has an imaginary component) can keep us stuck.
What tends to happen is that we will not even notice things that threaten our delusions. Quite the contrary: Things that feed our delusion become salient to us. Salience and intelligence seem to arise together, as salience goes immediately with sense-making (a bacteria is intelligent, and its intelligence makes sense of a sugar gradient—i.e. sugar is salient to the bacteria, while the sounds of tango music might not be). We just do not see that which might be threatening to the system of delusions that runs our life (they do not ever become salient), or we see it as something that threatens the integrity of that system, and thus we react to it, to keep it at a distance, lest it destabilize our patterns. We see the “liberal” as a “lib-tard” or some other derogatory notion, or we see the “conservative” as a “redneck,” or we see someone’s work as non-academic or unscientific, and so on.

Suffering always carries the threat of disruption, whether our own suffering or that of others. When we see another human being, we may not vulnerably and openly see a being who suffers like we do and who just wants to be happy—and in many respects may do no worse a job at that fundamental project than we do (an issue of particular threat as we contemplate the tension between philosopher and professor of philosophy, one that implicates the whole of the academic enterprise). In a spiritual sense, everyone on this side of enlightenment, apotheosis, sagehood, or the status of atopos does a foundationally bad job of trying to be happy—though our spiritual sense also helps us to see the importance of doing better at it, which involves making less suffering for ourselves and others, while cultivating the well-being of all.

We have considered habit here, and Lewis summarizes the distinction between habit and what we call addiction this way:
What makes [addiction] different from what we might call more benign habits? Three things. First, it’s a habit of thinking and feeling—a mental habit—not just a behavioural habit. It’s easier to stop singing in the shower than it is to stop seeing the world as violent or unfair. Second, the feeling part of addiction always includes the feeling of desire, which is of course the theme of this book. And third, it’s a habit that becomes compulsive. Perhaps all habits, once formed, are compulsive to some degree. The brain is certainly built to make any action, repeated enough times, into a compulsion. But the emotional heart of addiction—in a word, desire—makes compulsion inevitable, because unslaked desire is the springboard to repetition, and repetition is the key to compulsion.

Like all habits, addiction quite simply grows and stabilizes, in brain tissue that is designed (by evolution) to change and stabilize. Yet addiction belongs to a subset of habits: those that are most difficult to extinguish. . . .

In fact, it can be rather challenging to stop singing in the shower if we have made singing in the shower something that carries emotional charge. But another issue here has to do with the energy that comes up in us. Think of the energy that emerges when we read a text. We can start to get the heebie-jeebies when something happens in a text that annoys us, or seems like the wrong way to think, to write, or whatever. If it comes from or expresses a worldview we find strange or unacceptable in any way, an emotional tone of negativity, dismissal, even disgust and hatred can arise. In Buddhist philosophy, the so-called near-enemy of love is not hate. Rather, the near-enemy of love is attachment. Hatred is actually the near-enemy of knowledge—an insightful suggestion. The activity of knowing can enact a hatred, and our addiction to intellectual knowledge can (as Nietzsche tried to get us to see) enact a kind of hatred of life, and also of other beings who will not submit to our way of knowing (in the double sense). The unknown presents a kind of threat to us.

What, in general, is threatening to us? We are all familiar with the ways in which political views become threatening. Of course, the pattern of insanity operates in such a way that we do not always perceive contrary views, arguments, and evidence as “threatening”. Reason prevents this. We suppress our emotional reaction. Instead, we perceive what we don’t like as plain wrong—though with reason’s objective nuances: wrong-headed, confused, ill-informed, poorly reasoned, not well-argued, unscientific, and so on. None of this means I think the activity of reasoning is useless, or that our only alternative is “the irrational” or “the mystical” (certainly not as the latter term is typically understood). But it helps us to see how the processes of life protect us from even having to consider some things with any sincerity and depth—while allowing us to claim that we have an open and critical mind, that we consider evidence, that we are being rational, and so on.

This holds rather pervasively. All our relationships arise in a matrix of the self-preservation of our delusions. So, with a romantic partner, for instance, we may have keen insights into the ways they delude themselves, into their self-limiting habits, into their foibles of thought, speech, and action, while seeing much less clearly into ourselves. Our intelligence shows up not only in some occasionally keen perceptions of others, but it also shows up in the endless cleverness and imagination needed to keep our own delusions going along as we do. Of course, some or even most of what we think we see about our beloved ones may in fact be laced with biases, and sometimes the very thing we think we see so clearly in them has more to do with us. We see their stinginess as we ourselves are the most stingy one in the relationship, and they may in fact be quite giving, or giving at the limit of what they are capable of, contextualized in our mutual practice together.
The aspect of this issue that relates to our personal, political, social, economic, and ecological woes matters a great deal, but we must keep our eye on the fact that this is essentially a spiritual problem, and not one of “politics” narrowly or typically construed. The better we get at seeing how political disfunction arises from spiritual disfunction, the better we may get at turning toward the spiritual for resolution, reconciliation, and rejuvenation. It is a matter of remembering ourselves and spiritualizing our lives—touching the sacredness in all our engagements with life.

We may think, in this regard, that the ultimate threat in all of this is threat of meaning—and we are not far off the mark. If we have the wrong ideas about life, and we have identified with those ideas, then our life and our identity face a crisis. What are we if we are wrong about our “liberal” or “conservative” political views? Who would we be without our membership in this or that group? Who would we be without our drinking or our social media habits? Who would we be without our books, our articles, our causes, our agendas? Who would we be without our fMRI machines—and how would we ever do science without these and other accoutrements that add up to such a massive intervention into the natural world? When our fears run wild, we may even think that all of life is meaningless. This we can call the threat of nihilism. It certainly makes almost every single energy barrier seem daunting: Why should we practice our lives at all if nothing matters, if our little life doesn’t make a difference, and if, anyway, spiritual practice doesn’t really make a difference for us or for anyone else? There is nothing to be known from spiritual practice, right?
While nihilism does seem to have a real hold on us—and we will look into it further—it may be that in some ways what threatens us most deeply is not the meaninglessness of life, for then we could still do whatever we want—including clinging to the patterns of insanity that we have grown so accustomed to. The real threat of spiritual practice is that everything matters, and that in some very profound sense, our lives are not ours, that our lives don’t “belong” to us, but that we belong to something inconceivable, something that transcends us. The ego fears that this means death or the loss of “individuality” or “specialness”. In fact, we only realize ourselves—our unique purpose—in, through, and as this immanent transcendence. But it is not something we can capture with concepts or even formulate or hold on the basis of ordinary consciousness.

The threat that everything matters feels like a big disturbance, because it means we cannot ever hang up the Do Not Disturb sign on the door of our life. We cannot expect Sophia to pay any heed to such a sign. We cannot expect the mystery, the sacred, the divine to go away. We cannot expect the Dance to stop while we read our books or get our act together. And, ironically, we may say that we would do anything to heal, that we would do anything to gain true insight, to realize wisdom, love, and beauty, to help the world, to make things better. And yet, how many times does it happen that, when Anything comes knocking at our door, we desperately want to shout: “Go away!”35 Our inquiry will suggest that opening—no matter what has come knocking—marks a proper spiritual/philosophical orientation. It is the practice and realization of our interwovenness.

35 Thanks to Laura Ferry for drawing out this metaphor with me in dialogue.
We are interwoven with each other, but we allow our delusions, we allow our suffering to isolate us. Oppressed people know that suffering actually connects us. Their oppressors try to suppress this fact, as all of us do when we try to use isolation to cure isolation, fragmentation to cure fragmentation. We suffer, and thus feel cut off. We suffer because of a mirage of distance, a mirage manufactured from distraction and delusion. To medicate our suffering, we apply more distance, distraction, delusion. To medicate our suffering, we may villainize a group of people. We may hate them, attack them, take their land, hang them from trees. We may also drown ourselves in text, the way others drown themselves in drink.

Somehow, things might shift if all we did is sense that our suffering connects us. We are interwoven both in our suffering and in our basic goodness, our basic nature. These things are our interwovenness with all beings. White people are already interwoven with Black, Red, Yellow, Brown people. The white person who does not see institutionalized racism, who actively tries to deny it, applies spiritual materialism to this fact. Such a person realizes that they, too, suffer. They realize that we all suffer. But this does not excuse us from seeing structures of power and domination that focus suffering on particular groups—always at the expense of all, including the oppressors, whose souls are degraded in the process. We humans degrade our own souls as we degrade the world, and we degrade the world in particular ways when we live the life of a typical academic, including the typical scientist and the typical professor of philosophy.

We are responsive beings, sensitive beings. All of the suffering of the world threatens us, especially any suffering in which we sense our own contribution. What threatens us most right now, perhaps more so than at any time in human history, is that the meaningfulness of our
connection to all beings might force us to stop what we are doing, stop key aspects of the life we think we need. Socrates simply asked people to STOP. Buddha asked people to STOP. Can we STOP the academic machine? Can we STOP the political-economic machine of the dominant culture? Why not? And what happens if we don’t?

And, What if we want a new kind of sobriety? All this talk of addiction . . . what do we make of sobriety? Could we—and how would we—give up the addiction to theory and to ourselves as we know ourselves? What if we want that “decisive experience” Jung and so many other philosophers have invited us to verify by means of our own experimentation, the experience that would herald a genuinely new and vitalizing way of knowing—so different from what we are used to that we almost cannot help keeping it at bay, in a thousand ways so clever and protean that we do not see them in operation? Returning to Jung’s reflections on the decisive experience or the “breakthrough of total experience,” we can note that he feels a little skeptical about our prospects, though not completely hopeless:

There is nothing in our civilization to foster these strivings, not even the Church, the custodian of religious values. Indeed, it is the function of the Church to oppose all original experience, because this can only be unorthodox [could the same be said for academia?—n.k.]. The only movement inside our civilization which has, or should have, some understanding of these endeavours is psychotherapy. (CW11, para. 903)

That may sound cocky, but he seems to mean it as a gesture of modesty regarding western culture. He clarifies that aspect of it here:

it frequently happens with us also that a conscious ego and a cultivated understanding must first be produced through analysis before one can even think about abolishing egohood or rationalism. What is more, psychotherapy does not deal with men who, like Zen monks, are ready to make any sacrifice for the sake of truth, but very often with the most stubborn of all Europeans. (904)
In other words, we westerners aren’t really up to the task of anything too radical. We’re a bit too juvenile and neurotic, a bit too stubborn and skeptical or cynical (in a pejorative sense). While we may say we will make any sacrifice for wisdom, love, and beauty, in practice we have our limits—including the limits of time, patience, and a thousand constraints placed on us by the culture and its institutions.

The issue of ontogeny feels troubling. Paul Shepard (e.g., 1982, 1995) and Chellis Glendinning (1994) have invited us to sense the possibility that we humans became interrupted in our developmental process, perhaps with the invention of large-scale agriculture (humanity’s biggest mistake, according to Jared Diamond), but at least with the development of “civilization” as we know it, which eventually included capitalism, the industrial revolution, and neo-liberalism as high points. This interruption comes from a breakdown of an intimate awareness of our interwovenness with each other and the natural world—perhaps we could call it an awareness of symbiosis with the natural world and with each other. But even such turns of phrase can lead us into thinking we could functionally suggest a separation, a duality between organism and environment, which itself stands as a prejudice, perhaps of intellectual privilege. If Shepard and others have a point, and if something about civilization does in fact interrupt our development, then at least some of us do not fully mature. In some sense, we remain juvenile, even as we continue to age. Shepard called this “ontogenetic crippling,” indicating that we may have damaged ourselves in some important way, and he tries to help us see how this might hold true. Glendinning went further with the concept of the original trauma, claiming this separation from nature has resulted in collective trauma that underlies (in some cases perhaps gives rise to) much of the other trauma we experience. If Glendinning has a valid point, one that goes together with
Shepard’s, then perhaps a great deal of our philosophizing arises as the attempts of a confused and traumatized mind to make sense of its situation, from the standpoint of a limited development. What kind of commentary does that make on our philosophizing? Does any of it feel like an attempt to reconnect with Nature or a sense of the sacred? But if that’s what actually drives it—if at a deep level we seek and even need reconnection, atonement, attunement—then, maybe much of it amounts to an astonishing web of rationalized distraction.36

These might feel like strange speculations, but we move with them further into Dewey’s idea of context, which he frames as the philosophical fallacy. Before moving more into that territory, let us think of another way he framed that fallacy: as intellectualism.

We have suggested that philosophy has to do with cultivating certain kinds of experience—the experience of wisdom, love, beauty, peace, joy, and general well-being for oneself and others (overall we might suggest a function of healing and good health, a health and healing inclusive of “individuals,” but ecologically understood)—and we can say it fundamentally shares this characteristic with myth, art, religion, and all of “spirituality”. We cultivate experience so as to make it skillful, realistic, creative, and so on, such that life carries forward in rich and delightful ways, in mutual nourishment and mutual illumination. This kind of experience has generally

36 It may be worthwhile here to recall the Dalai Lama’s words, from A Call for Revolution:

I have been inspired by the ideas of the French Revolution that were adopted as the motto of the French Republic: Liberté, égalité, fraternité. I adopted the same motto. As a Buddhist, the aim of my spiritual quest is to free myself of the fundamental ignorance that has led to the notion that there is a division between people and the natural world, which is at the root of all our suffering. (2017: 36-8)
been taken variously as an experience of how things really are, or the experience of reality, or even the experience of mystery or sacredness.

In criticizing philosophers for making a most fundamental fallacy of ignoring “context,” Dewey seems to want to say that philosophers fail first and foremost by “intellectualizing” everything, or interpreting everything as some facet of epistemology. One sees this all the time in introductory courses of philosophy, most clearly when students are taught Plato.

We eventually need to ask, What is the proper “context” of “knowledge”? Dewey doesn’t quite get to this in the way we may need to. We might say we need to “contextualize” the process of knowing, but we might then say there is no “context” for this. In other words, we might try to “situate” something called “knowledge” in the living world and/or in our lived experience. However, according to the definition of mind and life we find in certain strains of rigorous cognitive science, the living world is not alive if it isn’t a process of knowing. Experience is blind if it is not already, let us say, luminous-and-knowing (to borrow a term from Buddhist philosophy). So, we cannot “contextualize” anything (most especially any thing) called “knowledge,” but we must instead transcend all our unskillful and unrealistic ways of knowing and return to life—as Jung implies in the quote above about getting our ultimate answers “from Nature herself,” and which Dewey, too, suggests very clearly, though in his own way, in works like *A Common Faith* and *Experience and Nature*. The former of Dewey’s works allows us to say that this return to life, this return to Nature is a gesture of sacredness, the realization of any proper meaning of “religion”. More poetically we could call this return to sacredness, this return
to experience and Nature, a return to the richness and goodness of being alive and alove, inspired and insightful, a state of serenity and wonder.

The epistemology we seek is thus a proper “Philosophy of Experience,” or “The Practice-Realization of Experience.” In such an epistemology, the “meaning of life” is not about knowledge. It is not an item of knowledge, and thus cannot be told, and cannot ultimately be evaluated or understood by procedures for evaluating the truth or falsity of “propositions”. The sage, the realized philosopher in all of us, dedicates themselves to the richness of experience, the beautiful possibilities of meaningfulness that can emerge from the mystery of life, which we might technically call, following David Bohm, an “implicate order,” a sort of living potential that arises or happens explicitly in, through, and as our experience (which means our experience constitutes the explicate order), according to our manner of practice, which includes the tools and forms of philosophy we employ. But we also need to make clear that this epistemology applies to what we should want to call science, and thus becomes a critique of what we now call science, because what we now call science does not include sufficient responsiveness to the meaning of life (which includes what we might call the *conditions* of life—more poetically, the alive and alove quality of Nature, its mindfulness, its mindedness, and the demands that Nature places on us) and the proper cultivation of experience. That will still take time to clarify, but, to plant a seed now, we may come to a place, a vision, a sensibility from which we would judge our current science as something of an epistemological failure.

Dewey may have wanted to develop what we could call a “cultural naturalism,” in which “culture” serves as a substitute for whatever he meant by “experience” (he wrote in the second
introduction to *Experience and Nature* that he might have rather called the work *Nature and Culture*—again, the endless struggle with terms, most especially when one wants to do radical philosophy, transformation at the base, so to speak). We might understand Dewey’s sense of “experience” as our shared, embodied, “symbolic life,” perhaps taking poetic and also philosophic license to resonate there with Jung’s notion of the symbolic life:

You see, man is in need of a symbolic life—badly in need. We only live banal, ordinary, rational, or irrational things—which are naturally also within the scope of rationalism, otherwise you could not call them irrational. But we have no symbolic life. Where do we live symbolically? Nowhere, except where we participate in the ritual of life. But who, among the many, are really participating in the ritual of life? Very few. And when you look at the ritual life of the Protestant Church, it is almost nil. Even the Holy Communion has been rationalized . . .

Have you got a corner somewhere in your house where you perform the rites, as you can see in India? Even the very simple houses there have at least a curtained corner where the members of the household can lead the symbolic life, where they can make their new vows or meditation. We don’t have it; we have no such corner. We have our own room, of course—but there is a telephone which can ring us up at any time, and we always must be ready. We have no time, no place. Where have we got these dogmatic or these mysterious images? Nowhere! We have art galleries, yes—where we kill the gods by thousands. We have robbed the churches of their mysterious images, of their magical images, and we put them into art galleries. That is worse than the killing of the three hundred children in Bethlehem; it is a blasphemy.

You see, we are in need of a symbolic life—badly in need. Only the symbolic life can express the need of the soul—the daily need of the soul, mind you! And because people have no such thing, they can never step out of this mill—this awful, grinding, banal life in which they are “nothing but.” In the ritual they are near the Godhead; they are even divine. Think of the priest in the Catholic Church, who is in the Godhead: he carries himself as the sacrifice on the altar; he offers himself as the sacrifice. Do we do it? Where do we know that we do it? Nowhere! Everything is banal, everything is “nothing but”; and that is the reason why people are neurotic. They are simply sick of the whole thing, sick of that banal life, and therefore they want sensation. They even want a war; they all want a war. They are all glad when there is a war: they say, “Thank heaven, now something is going to happen—something bigger than ourselves!”

These things go pretty deep, and no wonder people get neurotic. Life is too rational, there is no symbolic existence in which I am something else, in which I am fulfilling my role, my role as one of the actors in the divine drama of life.
I once had a talk with the master of ceremonies of a tribe of Pueblo Indians, and he told me something very interesting. He said, “Yes, we are a small tribe, and these Americans, they want to interfere with our religion. They should not do it,” he said, “because we are the sons of the Father, the Sun. He who goes there,” (pointing to the sun)—“that is our Father. We must help him daily to rise over the horizon and to walk over Heaven. And we don’t do it for ourselves only: we do it for America, we do it for the whole world. And if these Americans interfere with our religion through their missions, they will see something. In ten years Father Sun won’t rise anymore, because we can’t help him any more.”

Now, you may say, that is just a sort of mild madness. Not at all! These people have no problems. They have their daily life, their symbolic life. They get up in the morning with a feeling of their great and divine responsibility: they are the sons of the Sun, the Father, and their daily duty is to help the Father over the horizon—not for themselves alone, but for the whole world. You should see these fellows: they have a natural fulfilled dignity. And I quite understood when he said to me, “Now look at these Americans: they are always seeking something. They are always full of unrest, always looking for something. What are they looking for? There is nothing to be looked for!” That is perfectly true. You can see them, these travelling tourists, always looking for something, always in the vain hope of finding something. On my many travels I have found people who were on their third trip round the world-uninterruptedly. Just travelling, travelling; seeking, seeking. I met a woman in Central Africa who had come up alone in a car from Cape Town and wanted to go to Cairo. “What for?” I asked. “What are you trying to do that for?” And I was amazed when I looked into her eyes—the eyes of a hunted, a cornered animal-seeking, seeking, always in the hope of something. I said, “What in the world are you seeking? What are you waiting for, what are you hunting after?” She is nearly possessed; she is possessed by so many devils that chase her around. And why is she possessed? Because she does not live the life that makes sense. Hers is a life utterly, grotesquely banal, utterly poor, meaningless, with no point in it at all. If she is killed today, nothing has happened, nothing has vanished—because she was nothing! But if she could say, “I am the daughter of the Moon. Every night I must help the Moon, my Mother, over the horizon”—ah, that is something else! Then she lives, then her life makes sense, and makes sense in all continuity, and for the whole of humanity. That gives peace, when people feel that they are living the symbolic life, that they are actors in the divine drama. That gives the only meaning to human life; everything else is banal and you can dismiss it. A career, producing of children, are all maya compared with that one thing, that your life is meaningful.

That is the secret of the Catholic Church: that they still, to a certain extent, can live the meaningful life. For instance, if you can watch daily the sacrifice of the Lord, if you can partake of his substance, then you are filled with the Deity, and you daily repeat the eternal sacrifice of Christ. Of course, what I say is just so many words, but to the man who really lives it, it means the whole world. It means more than the whole world, because it makes sense to him. It expresses the desire of the soul; it expresses the actual facts of our unconscious life. When the
wise man said, “Nature demands death,” he meant just that. (CW 18, para. 625-31)

We will see that Jung, like Dewey, demands experiment, a setting out to discover and create for oneself in a vitalizing process of verification. This experience which nothing can take away from us is more important even than Galileo’s supposed “And yet it moves,” for we speak here of something that affects our whole way of being in the world, and not merely our “picture” of it. This notion of “symbolic” does not deal in abstractions and written jargon. Here, the phrase “symbolic logic” takes on new meaning, indicating not the dry logic that students suffer through every school year in universities across the country, needlessly forcing themselves to master forms that will do nothing for their growth as human beings, all the while neglecting the living symbols of the psyche, and repressing any empathic response to the collapse of the conditions of life that goes on while they learn what are for them meaningless translations into predicate logic. Logic becomes another way we drain the meaning from education. The symbolic logic of myth, dream, art, archetype—the sense of “cosmic meaning” that philosophy in the academy no longer deals with—all of this could help us and our students, could get us all on a Quest that might lead us to get in touch with the meaningfulness of life, and also lead to real solutions for the real problems of the world (not the pseudoproblems of how to run a business or how to get a job at a tech firm, but the problems related to spiritual development and the conditions of life—the latter of which, granted, may be somehow helped by a tech firm, but this would not change the diagnosis of our current situation). All of this could be part of philosophy, and we shall want to think of dreaming, for instance (or dance, ritual, ceremony, and so on), as a viable philosophical practice which most philosophers not only leave largely untouched, but do not even conceive in its fuller potentials.
We should note here that, as rituals like the ones Jung mentions disappear, so do the conditions of life. One simple-minded interpretation of “the symbolic” might be: The symbol is totally different from the symbolized. Another might be: The symbol is exactly the same as what is symbolized. The truth might be a middle way: These rituals matter, and we must face the fact that, as they degrade, we approach a time at which the sun no longer comes up on the world as we have known it. We somehow need a symbolic life for life to function, because a symbolic life in the proper sense is life.

We shall return to these ideas again and again, but the basic sense of them comes to something like this: A skillful life is constituted by the inherently meaningful ways we are informed and transformed (in-formed and trans-formed) by what Hume might have called the secret powers and hidden causes of our lives (we might better call them sacred powers and inconceivable causes); as D.H. Lawrence put it, we are “lived by powers we pretend to understand,” and we should take that further to get at the mutuality of our life in this world, the way we “inhabit the world” while it simultaneously “inhabits us”. These may seem rather strange assertions, but even someone as reserved as Dewey wrote that, “the closer man is brought to the physical world,

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37 From another perspective, we must recall here, as we shall need to do elsewhere, Nietzsche’s comments, which remind us that we do not simply “do philosophy,” but we are philosophized, by powers we pretend to understand—most especially when we call them by the name “reason”:

I do not believe that a “drive to knowledge” is the father of philosophy; but rather that another drive has, here as elsewhere, employed understanding (and misunderstanding) as a mere instrument. But anyone who considers the basic drives of man to see to what extent they may have been at play just here as inspiring spirits (or demons and kobolds) will find that all of them have done philosophy at some time—and that every single one of them would like only too well to represent just itself as the ultimate purpose of existence and the legitimate master of all the other drives. For every drive wants to be master—and it attempts to philosophize in that spirit. (BGE 6)
the clearer it becomes that his impulsions and ideas are enacted by nature within him” (LW10: 341). Even this, when we reflect on it, seems stranger than Dewey indicates, for he takes it as a rather plain fact, whereas Jung has offered this to us as a sort of mystical revelation of “the only true answer—from Nature herself.” Such seemingly strange notions will get clearer as we rethink the nature of thinking, drawing as we will on some very concrete analogies and on the empirical foundations of cognitive science. For now, we want to at least emphasize again the suggestion that experience transcends all our concepts, including the biological and psychological concepts that might reduce “experience” to a matter of “sensations,” “nerve stimulations,” “stimulus-response” events, or “brain” events. And this experience reaches the sacred, even for Dewey (as far as he might allow the use of the term), as it reaches Nature, which we should think of as manifesting most robustly, most as itself so to speak, in events or happenings such as dancing, playing jazz, making a work of art, falling in love, practicing compassion, bringing wisdom to realization, and so on. It doesn’t manifest robustly in particle accelerators. Something like physics perhaps cannot alter experience as significantly as Dewey may have thought we want and need, and it may be too intellectual to reveal Nature in her fullness, and thus to serve as a revelation of ourselves (as part of Nature). Not that Dewey would ever suggest we stop doing physics. But, I want to suggest that the way we do it certainly qualifies for the grand fallacy of context.

We need to go into that more clearly. The error of context is not simply a philosophical error or fallacy. It is a blindness. And the error is not best put as a failure to “recognize” something we could call “context”. Rather, it is a failure to recognize—to rethink even, to think totally freshly—on the basis of rootedness in Nature and rootedness in wisdom, love, and beauty. We do
not need merely to “contextualize” ourselves, which is quite an abstract notion, especially as utilized in the contemporary academy. Rather, we need to Indigenize ourselves, to become rooted in the world. Here we should cite Pierotti’s discussion of Traditional Ecological Knowing: It is so rooted in “place” (in real ecologies that give us a sense of “place” and a sense of belonging, in mutuality) that it does not “transfer,” does not become part of a system of global control. As Pierotti puts it:

One definition of Traditional Ecological Knowledge38 is “the sum of the data and ideas acquired by a human group on its environment resulting from the group’s use and occupation of a specific region over many generations” (Mailhot 1994). It is only possible to know a limited area in the kind of detail required for true Indigenous knowledge. Thus by definition many of the specific results obtained can only have local application (Brody 1982).

In contrast, the Western “scientific” tradition seeks “global” solutions—that is, results that can be generalized across all localities, or “so that it could be used by groups of people who did not necessarily live in the same region” (Alessa 2009). This can create problems in that solutions and results that are assumed to be global in scope turn out instead to be local. For example, when I was an undergraduate in the early 1970s I listened to an endless, sometimes acrimonious debate between two graduate students, one of whom studied Steller sea lions, *Eumetopias jubatus*, in Alaska, whereas the other studied the same species in California. The investigator who worked in Alaska insisted that parental care lasted for more than a year in this species, whereas the California investigator insisted with equal assurance that offspring were weaned at the age of three to four months. Both insisted that their view of parent-offspring relationships in these sea lions was correct and that the other must be wrong. When I suggested that they both might be right and that ecological conditions in different locations might require different responses, both investigators dismissed me as a naïve undergraduate who “did not understand how science worked.”

In the long run it turned out that both views were correct. Harsher conditions in Alaska favored extended parental care, whereas milder conditions in California allowed sea lions to wean their young at younger ages. To me as a larval-stage scientist, this debate revealed the limitations of the Western typological, single “global solution” approach to science. The irony, of course, was that given the proclivity of Indigenous peoples to accept unusual observations and incorporate them in their understanding of the world, if an Aleut from Alaska had met with a Yurok from California and presented these different results, both

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38 TEK for short. “Traditional Ecological Knowledge” is one of the technical terms used to refer to what has become a growing academic discipline, one that perhaps seeks to defy academic disciplinarity.
would have completely accepted the statements made by the other as factual, and both would have presented solid explanations based upon their knowledge of local environmental conditions for why this should be the case.

The important point to take from this example is that an individual’s worldview—the way that this individual sees the world—has a major impact on the way that he or she interprets it. (Pierotti, 2011: 9-10)

In *Quest for Certainty*, Dewey writes,

> Abstraction from use in special and direct situations was coincident with the formation of a science of ideas, of meanings, whose relations to one another rather than to things was the goal of thought. It is a process, however, which is subject to interpretation by a fallacy. Independence from any specified application is readily taken to be equivalent to independence from application as such; it is as if specialists, engaged in perfecting tools and having no concern with their use and so interested in the operation of perfecting that they carry results beyond any existing possibilities of use, were to argue that therefore they are dealing with an independent realm having no connection with tools or utilities. This fallacy is especially easy to fall into on the part of intellectual specialists. (148)

Perhaps the “it is as if specialist . . . were to argue . . .” needs special emphasis. To the extent that we get caught up in the spiritual materialism of theōria, we don’t necessarily *argue* that our work has no connection with the lived and living world—we simply don’t concern ourselves about it. We don’t “need” to argue for any absence of obligation to apply the tools of philosophy to reducing suffering, cultivating souls, cultivating soils, making clean air and water, liberating people, cultivating compassion, and so on. We might make such arguments if pressed (perhaps we at times have been, and so we have the arguments at hand if needed, even for our own comfort), but we often don’t even think about them in the first place, as if the perfection of the abstractions speak for themselves or as if the obvious importance of “the great conversation” should go without saying, and this marks a significant problem. In some cases, if we do acknowledge that we have no idea how any of what we do would translate into ordinary living, we shrug it off, perhaps making something like a “knowledge for knowledge’s sake” sort of argument, almost a trickle-down knowledge theory, even sillier than trickle-down economics.
(and, it does not even bother to present itself as trickle-down wisdom, but really some kind of knowledge). Even if we reject the “trickle-down” analogy (because maybe knowledge is an inherent good) this sort of knowledge already has an intellectualist orientation, which means it does not seem to have a realistic understanding of experience—or of life (ecologically illiterate as it seems to be). In other words, we can’t justify “knowledge for knowledge’s sake” if our whole epistemology gives evidence of bias and of negative side-effects. What is the knowledge we are talking about? Maybe some knowledge cannot be justified simply on the basis of being knowledge—certainly not without considering the context of its acquisition, and the costs and consequences. But we don’t tend to do that, and so, even when philosophers step in to, for instance, collaborate with scientists (we are often more willing to help other academics, especially those in the sciences, than we are the broader public), this leaves unquestioned the basic epistemology we already share with them, which itself seems bound up with the degradation of the conditions of life. We then find ourselves even more isolated in theōria, because, while we theroeticians understand the problems of the world and how to rationally deal with them, the irrational mob have elected another demagogue, and they continue behaving in ways that keep us on the road to disaster. There is nothing more for us to do but keep our faith in science and technology, and return to our abstractions. The growing number of philosophers interested in a kind of public outreach for philosophy also face the charge of perpetuating the current epistemology—and even seducing students into theōria—because they often focus on teaching people a fairly limited sense of what philosophy is, at times leaving philosophy as a way of life out of the conversation, and at other times talking about, say, Stoicism as a way of life, but not challenging the fundamental way of knowing of the dominant culture, which itself already conditions how we will try to live Stoicism as a way of life. Many people will then
become “Stoics” while keeping their job at Google or Exxon (the difference between these two
in their general level of evil-doing seems non-existent at this point, as we shall later try to show).
Any of us teaching anything in the academy face these problems, because so much of what we
teach has gotten fully entangled with “learning outcomes” that cannot themselves get
disentangled from the ills of the larger culture. One might find it tempting to add, “All the more
so when university education has become reduced to mere career preparation,” but that misses
how all of these things go together. Bad philosophy drives the whole mess, and intellectualism is
just a sin of bad philosophy—as it is lived, not merely reasoned about. It makes spiritual
materialism of even our best philosophical texts and traditions. Again and again we must remind
ourselves that this is a problem of knowing. We are talking about an epistemological problem,
and we verge into seemingly ethical, educational, aesthetic and other concerns not because
epistemology pervades those other areas, but because of the altogetherness or interwovenness of
these things. There is no epistemology outside of these other dimensions, and vice versa.

Dewey certainly tried to shift our epistemology. Part of the point of our inquiry is to show why
he may have failed. The challenges he faced, the challenges we face, are dense and deeply
psychological. If a giant like Dewey could not get philosophy reconstructed in a more vitalizing
way, we will have little chance to succeed unless we more directly confront some of the
problems I think Dewey faced, including issues he might not have understood. In any case, it
remains helpful to draw from him. For instance, in the passage above, Dewey almost seems to
want to walk an admirable middle path between a simple-minded “global solution” approach
criticized by TEK on the one hand, and any simple-minded thought that TEK would never accept
any form of “common denominators” of experience, which he describes, and then qualifies, here:
In arriving at statements which hold for all possible experiencers and observers under all possible varying individual circumstances we arrive at that which is most remote from any one concrete experience. In this sense, the abstractions of mathematics and physics represent the common denominators in all things experienceable. Taken by themselves they seem to present a *caput mortuum*. Erected into complete statements of reality as such, they become hallucinatory obsessions. But in practice, there is always an accompanying reverse movement. These generalized findings are employed to enrich the meanings of individualized experiences, and to afford, within limits of probability, an increased control of them.

It is in this sense that all reflective knowledge as such is instrumental. The beginning and the end is the things of gross everyday experience. But apart from knowledge the things of our ordinary experience are fragmentary, casual, unregulated by purpose, full of frustrations and barriers. In the language previously used, they are problematic, obstructive, and challenges to thought. By ignoring for a time their concrete and qualitative fullness, by making abstractions and generalizations, we ascertain certain basic relations upon which occurrence of the things experienced depends. We treat them as mere events, that is, as changes brought about in a system of relationships, ignoring their individualizing qualities. But the qualities are still there, are still experienced, although as such they are not the objects of knowledge. But we return from abstractive thought to experience of them with added meaning and with increased power to regulate our relations to them.

Reflective knowledge is the only means of regulation. Its value as instrumental is unique. Consequently philosophers, themselves occupied in a fascinating branch of reflective knowledge, have isolated knowledge and its results. They have ignored its context of origin and function and made it coextensive with all valid experience. The doctrine was thus formed that all experience of worth is inherently cognitive; that other modes of experienced objects are to be tested, not here and there as occasion demands but universally by reduction to the terms of known objects. This assumption of the proper ubiquity of knowledge is the great intellectualistic fallacy. It is the source of all disparagement of everyday qualitative experience, practical, esthetic, moral. It is the ultimate source of the doctrine that calls subjective and phenomenal all objects of experience that cannot be reduced to properties of objects of knowledge. (LW4: 174-5)

We can see Dewey teetering at moments. Does he offer us the insight that our typical way of relating with life essentially amounts to suffering? Or does he mean to imply that life, in and of itself, arises as frustration and obstruction? Why does he say, “Reflective knowledge is the only means of regulation”? Beavers, wolves, and starfish regulate entire ecosystems, at times with incredibly far-ranging effects, and they do so without “reflective knowledge” as human beings...
narrowly understand it. At times, Dewey speaks about reflection in a way that almost takes it into
the territory of trying to stop the sun in the sky—the general territory of typical human purposes.

We humans can become quite attached to reflective knowledge and its apparent power, and our
scientists and philosophers, as well as our politicians, economists, and “captains of industry,” get
seduced comprehensively by “the great intellectualist fallacy.” Taking this seriously demands a
paradigm shift in the philosophy of the dominant culture, which means a paradigm shift in
science, economics, politics, and all the rest.

Dewey also seems to miss the possibility that myth, poetry, and art in general attain whatever
broad embrace of our souls they do by means of their concrete specificity. It is not in comparing
one’s beloved to “something pretty” that one writes poetry. Rather, the beloved is a flower, and
not only a flower but a blue mountain flower in the early light of spring. In fairness, we could
say that Dewey addresses some of this in Art as Experience, but even there I think he and I
differ, because he seems almost beholden to science, and at times almost seems to presage the
infamous views espoused by the Churchlands (that we will one day so embody our scientific
theories that we will no longer speak of “feeling sad,” but speak of “a relative decrease of
serotonin in my system”). Maybe Dewey would find the view endorsed by the Churchlands
rather misguided (it’s called “eliminative materialism” for how it will eliminate folk psychology,
and perhaps in some way a few fundamental aspects of experience). Nevertheless, we can make
it clearer that mythology represents (to use Dewey’s words to challenge him) “the common
denominators in all things experienceable” far better (that is, more skillfully and realistically—
more wisely and compassionately, when we look with care and acknowledge all negative side-
effects arising from our practices)—than “the abstractions of mathematics and physics.” This is why someone studying TEK might argue that myths and stories can encode the scientific knowledge of the people. Jung also helps here:

What we are to our inward vision, and what man appears to be sub specie aeternitatis, can only be expressed by way of myth. Myth is more individual and expresses life more precisely than does science. Science works with concepts and averages which are far too general to do justice to the subjective variety of an individual life. (MDR 17)

A properly functioning mythological orientation bridges the duality between the “individual” and the “collective,” the “general” and the “particular”. Today’s intellectual, today’s purveyor of the intellectualist fallacy or the fallacy of ignoring context, thus naturally feels suspicion regarding the mythological and the mystical, because these challenge us to avoid such fallacies or else to fail to bring our own concrete potentials to their most precise realization.

Thus, when Dewey says, “These generalized findings are employed to enrich the meanings of individualized experiences, and to afford, within limits of probability, an increased control of them. It is in this sense that all reflective knowledge as such is instrumental,” it seems to me he betrays a western consciousness (though, again, what he imagined but did not even bother to hint in his work, I cannot be sure). He will go on to suggest even stranger things, but these lines already show an orientation toward life which I think we will comes to diagnose as fundamentally unwell. The obsession with control does us no more good than an obsession with certainty, which Dewey himself critiqued in the very text from which we quote.

However, he also gestures toward some very nice things there: The generalized findings of any proper science, any proper spiritual or philosophical tradition, serve to enrich the meaningfulness
of each of our lives and all of our lives. These findings (perhaps we should call them discovery-creations) are not things told, but things we practice-realize, things we bring to fruition and verification ourselves, thus enriching those very findings, carrying them forward as part of cultivating life forward. Everything in life is like this.

How do we know how to live? We turn to images, visions, metaphors, and various thinkings-through (by which I mean living-through, active experimentation, the dance of ecologies of mind), and we find these in our spiritual, philosophical, and religious traditions. These give us a basic material, a set of generalized findings. They are not “facts” or “findings” in the sense of absolutes. Rather, they are something like a fire we use to transmute the raw materials of our lives, in a manner described by alchemy (I mean, actually described there—in western and also Daoist alchemy—but we could just as well say “described in the tantric traditions of India and Tibet”). This is like a scientific theory that serves to transmute the various kinds of data and questions we have into the magic of theories and technologies we have all around us.

Even the way to make bread and the meaning of “bread” has to do with practice-realization (I should rather write PracticeRealization). In our own lives, we may taste something and say, “Now this is good bread,” or, “This is such a good beer.” We may kiss someone and sense, “That was a really wonderful kiss!” A beloved one may do something for us, and we may sense, “That’s what it means to be thoughtful.” None of this differs fundamentally from what happens in “science,” but we get confused. In our inquiry, we may focus often on seemingly “philosophical” matters, but we critique current western science with every step.
Staying with our experience of ignorance, uncertainty, and the unknown is like staying with an experience of impatience: It opens up the world of the mind. We stay in the rawness, and we begin to open to the soul. I mention this now because we also take further steps into the unknown as we proceed—we have taken steps that can provoke confusion and impatience—and the reader may find it a strange experience. And yet I must ask that we continue, with only the suggestion that things will get clearer in time.

In his essay, “Reality as Experience,” Dewey seeks to grant reality to experience even if experience seems to us a late-comer to the dance. What Dewey seems to want us to see (i.e., what he gets right even if we are militant atheists) is something I would call the never-not-nownesss, the never-not-hereness of life (in contrast to a “givenness,” a solidity or fixedness). That may seem complicated, but it becomes essential to touch this if we are to truly understand an epistemology of practice-realization, which means a thoroughly experimental epistemology. Reality in an important sense is not “pre-given,” but itself must be alive, in transformation, in evolution. Dewey gets at the ceaseless cultivating forward of life, an “always more”. This all becomes quite real in and through practice.

All of this amounts to some general considerations of the fallacy of context. We will need to turn toward a more specific sense of context—perhaps sense of context more robust and honest, given our historical moment. But maybe it’s worthwhile to consider a few final, general things about what Dewey says regarding context, because of the connections he intends between this fallacy of ignoring context on the one hand, and his whole orientation toward lived experience on the other. We will consider this, and then push it to asking what our lived experience is like, given
our current context. What fallacies of thought arise if the context of thought itself has become degraded? This question should give today’s philosophers an inspiration to pause, to really STOP. But first, some final reflections with Dewey.

In *Experience and Nature*, Dewey offers us experience as the fundamental method of philosophy—a radical suggestion. This has to do with both avoiding the fallacy of context, by explicitly orienting ourselves to the evaluation of so-called knowledge on the basis of experience, and also with the need to face the fact that we can never step outside of experience, and that we should thus find ways to actually work with our experience. It’s something of a phenomenological turn, but I think a bit richer—more the phenomenology of Meleau-Ponty than Husserl (or maybe, the later Husserl rather than the earlier). It is interesting of course to consider the fact that Husserl sought common denominators of experience too, and sought to ground the sciences on their foundation—seeing, as he did, the sciences in a crisis (relative to the culture, of course). In any case, Dewey writes,

> a first-rate test of the value of any philosophy which is offered us: Does it end in conclusions which, when they are referred back to ordinary life-experiences and their predicaments, render them more significant, more luminous to us, and make our dealings with them more fruitful? Or does it terminate in rendering the things of ordinary experience more opaque than they were before, and in depriving them of having in “reality” even the significance they had previously seemed to have? Does it yield the enrichment and increase of power of ordinary things which the results of physical science afford when applied in every-day affairs? Or does it become a mystery that these ordinary things should be what they are; and are philosophic concepts left to dwell in separation in some technical realm of their own? It is the fact, I repeat, that so many philosophies terminate in conclusions that make it necessary to disparage and condemn primary experience, leading those who hold them to measure the sublimity of their “realities” as philosophically defined by remoteness from the concerns of daily life, which leads cultivated common-sense to look askance at philosophy. (LW1: 18)
We can ask, Does philosophy today render our lives more *luminous and fruitful*? And how about science? Microwaves make things easier—relative to our current context. But do they make the world itself more *luminous*, the world as we *experience* it? We have to ask this without making a duality between “theory” and “practice”. Dewey worked hard to undermine such dualities. Has science given us knowledge, if knowledge has something to do with increasing the luminosity of experience, or, as Dewey puts it in the preface to the book, if knowledge is defined as “intelligently directed experience” (v)? How intelligent is it to direct experience to the collapse of the conditions of life? Have we done this altogether with an intellectualist fallacy?

In contrast to the method of experience, Dewey describes this “intellectualism” for which we must each search our own souls:

In the assertion (implied here) that the great vice of philosophy is an arbitrary “intellectualism,” there is no slight cast upon intelligence and reason. By “intellectualism” as an indictment is meant the theory that all experiencing is a mode of knowing, and that all subject-matter, all nature, is, in principle, to be reduced and transformed till it is defined in terms identical with the characteristics presented by refined objects of science as such. The assumption of “intellectualism” goes contrary to the facts of what is primarily experienced. For things are objects to be treated, used, acted upon and with, enjoyed and endured, even more than things to be known. They are things had before they are things cognized.

The isolation of traits characteristic of objects known, and then defined as the sole ultimate realities, accounts for the denial to nature of the characters which make things lovable and contemptible, beautiful and ugly, adorable and awful. It accounts for the belief that nature is an indifferent, dead mechanism; it explains why characteristics that are the valuable and valued traits of objects in actual experience are thought to create a fundamentally troublesome philosophical problem. Recognition of their genuine and primary reality does not signify that no thought and knowledge enter in when things are loved, desired and striven for; it signifies that the former are subordinate, so that the genuine problem is how and why, to what effect, things thus experienced are transformed into objects in which cognized traits are supreme and affectional and volitional traits incidental and subsidiary.

“Intellectualism” as a sovereign method of philosophy is so foreign to the facts of primary experience that it not only compels recourse to non-empirical
method, but it ends in making knowledge, conceived as ubiquitous, itself inexplicable. If we start from primary experience, occurring as it does chiefly in modes of action and undergoing, it is easy to see what knowledge contributes namely, the possibility of intelligent administration of the elements of doing and suffering. We are about something, and it is well to know what we are about, as the common phrase has it. To be intelligent in action and in suffering (enjoyment too) yields satisfaction even when conditions cannot be controlled. But when there is possibility of control, knowledge is the sole agency of its realization. Given this element of knowledge in primary experience, it is not difficult to understand how it may develop from a subdued and subsidiary factor into a dominant character. Doing and suffering, experimenting and putting ourselves in the way of having our sense and nervous system acted upon in ways that yield material for reflection, may reverse the original situation in which knowing and thinking were subservient to action-undergoing. And when we trace the genesis of knowing along this line, we also see that knowledge has a function and office in bettering and enriching the subject-matters of crude experience. We are prepared to understand what we are about on a grander scale, and to understand what happens even when we seem to be the hapless puppets of uncontrollable fate. But knowledge that is ubiquitous, all-inclusive and all-monopolizing, ceases to have meaning in losing all context; that it does not appear to do so when made supreme and self-sufficient is because it is literally impossible to exclude that context of non-cognitive but experienced subject-matter which gives what is known its import. (LW1: 28-9)

Let us first acknowledge this “non-cognitive” dimension Dewey wants us to admit. Dewey wants to say that what we call “knowledge” simply doesn’t apply to the greater part of life, and yet we keep trying to “know” everything. Again, Dewey seems more optimistic about current science than I am—but I want to suggest that he has failed to apply his own insights broadly enough. Either way, this suggestion regarding intellectualism seems to imply a rather serious indictment of contemporary philosophy and science, and perhaps western culture in a pervasive way.

Dewey stumbles here by referring to “things” and to “things had”. One needn’t experience the world that way (recall Bateson’s question: Is “possession” even applicable to relations?), and this kind of thingification of the world may go altogether with the crisis of western culture. But in his own way, Dewey seems to be getting at how intellectualism contributes to the creation of a
“nothing but” universe. Recall that Dewey’s empiricism insists that things are what we experience them as, and in the context of an epistemology of practice-realization, this means we make the world—either a dead, mechanical universe made up of “nothing but” matter that doesn’t matter, or a living Cosmos brimming with meaningfulness and infused with sacredness (the etymological relationship between “matter” and “mother” comes into play here).

Again, it was James who originally characterized this state of affairs as “nothing but,” and it is worth noting the relationship between Dewey’s intellectualist fallacy and James’s “psychologist’s fallacy,” which he describes in his *Principles of Psychology*:

The great snare of the psychologist is the confusion of his own standpoint with that of the mental fact about which he is making his report. I shall hereafter call this the ‘psychologist’s fallacy’ *par excellence*. For some of the mischief, here too, language is to blame. The psychologist, as we remarked above (p. 183), stands outside of the mental state he speaks of. Both itself and its object are objects for him. Now when it is a cognitive state (percept, thought, concept, etc.), he ordinarily has no other way of naming it than as the thought, percept, etc., of that object. He himself, meanwhile, knowing the self-same object in his way, gets easily led to suppose that the thought, which is of it, knows it in the same way in which he knows it, although this is often very far from being the case. The most fictitious puzzles have been introduced into our science by this means. The so-called question of presentative or representative perception, of whether an object is present to the thought that thinks it by a counterfeit image of itself, or directly and without any intervening image at all; the question of nominalism and conceptualism, of the shape in which things are present when only a general notion of them is before the mind; are comparatively easy questions when once the psychologist’s fallacy is eliminated from their treatment,—as we shall ere long see (in Chapter XII).

Another variety of the psychologist’s fallacy is the assumption that the mental state studied must be conscious of itself as the psychologist is conscious of it. The mental state is aware of itself only from within; it grasps what we call its own content, and nothing more. The psychologist, on the contrary, is aware of it from without, and knows its relations with all sorts of other things. What the thought sees is only its own object; what the psychologist sees is the thought's object, plus the thought itself, plus possibly all the rest of the world. We must be very careful therefore, in discussing a state of mind from the psychologist’s point of view, to avoid foisting into its own ken matters that are only there for ours. We must avoid
substituting what we know the consciousness is, for what it is a consciousness of, and counting its outward, and so to speak physical, relations with other facts of the world, in among the objects of which we set it down as aware. Crude as such a confusion of standpoints seems to be when abstractly stated, it is nevertheless a snare into which no psychologist has kept himself at all times from falling, and which forms almost the entire stock-in-trade of certain schools. We cannot be too watchful against its subtly corrupting influence.39

In our ways of thinking, writing, speaking, and living: To what degree do we abandon experience? To what degree do we abandon the world? Do our ways of thinking, speaking, and living cover over Nature and our need for rootedness in living ecologies? Do concepts and words become rubble covering over a precious natural artefact? Jung offers us a few reflections that might help just now. The italicized words are questions or comments from an interviewer:

_The French writer Colette once said to her husband about some bit of animal behavior, “Maurice, there’s just one animal, just one animal!”_

I wasn’t familiar with that but it’s exactly the same idea, the same sense of totality, expressed in the language of someone very close to the animal world. There are so many possible forms of the truth. We must find simple words for the great truths; we must try to approach the living truth behind things, it’s mankind’s oldest effort.

In our time, it’s the intellect that is making darkness, because we’ve let it take too big a place. Consciousness discriminates, judges, analyzes, and emphasizes the contradictions. It’s necessary work up to a point. But analysis kills and synthesis brings to life. We must find out how to get everything back into connection with everything else. We must resist the vice of intellectualism, and get it understood that we cannot only understand. . . .

I remember a marvellous sight I beheld one evening in India at the Darjeeling observatory. Sikkim was already in shadow, the mountains blue to about four thousand meters, violet to about seven thousand. And there in the middle of that ring of mountains was Kanchenjunga in all its glory, resplendent as a ruby. It was the lotus with the jewel without price in its center. And all the savants and scientists, lost in wonder at this spectacle, said “OM” without realizing it. That’s the primal word, the sound that passes from mother to child, and what some primitives say when they approach a stranger. And after the learned men had regained consciousness, they felt the need of a word and they asked me to recite part of Faust.

_Faust_—you know how Goethe spoke of that work, of the research into the essential that it meant? As “das Hauptgeschäft,” the main thing, the essential.

39 https://psychclassics.yorku.ca/James/Principles/prin7.htm
Man has need of the word, but number is a much more important thing. In essence, number is sacred. Lots of important things might be said about it. The quaternity, above all, is an essential archetype. The square, the cross. Thesquaring of the circle by the alchemists. The cross in the circle, or, for Christians, Christ in “glory.” It is not I who have made up all that. It exists, and it’s important.

What can men do, and especially we Swiss, to prepare ourselves and help everyone prepare himself to face a future already disturbing in its immediacy?

There is no entirely simple, thoroughly rational recipe. Most of us are too academic-minded to come face to face with living reality in its wholeness, its totality. We prefer to deny it because that’s easier, and because we can find such a lot of good, honest, reasonable arguments for doing so. What would you have me do? I say what I know, what I believe, how I see things. But I know very well that truth is ineffable and all our approaches to it, gross. (JS, 419-21)

Here again the irony of the “intellect,” and reason functioning as a barrier requiring a “breakthrough” in order to realize “total experience”. We speak of the age of enlightenment as a turn to reason, but Jung invites us to sense how reason may have created an age of endarkenment and fragmentation, shutting us out from total experience. We shall touch on this again. While we earlier saw Jung suggesting that Faust and in Zarathustra “mark the first glimmerings of a break-through of total experience in our Western hemisphere,” (and, again, he saw Zen as a practice that could help us realize total experience), here he relates something strange: A group of scientists swept up in Natural beauty, spontaneously intoning the sacred syllable Om, and asking for a reading from Faust. Jung might caution us that we need to do more than merely try and “understand” something like this. Somehow, we ourselves must attend to “the main thing, the essential,” “living reality in its wholeness” which many of us, maybe especially the “academic-minded,” would rather evade.

It will help to turn now to more specific reflections on our context, and how this relates to the alleged intellectualism, the alleged evasions that created and perpetuate it. To do that, let us
return to a class of items on the “intellectual and human privilege inventory” we considered above. The inventory included these items:

2) I spend most of my day indoors, and I don’t see this as compromising my epistemic situation
3) I am in general surrounded by plastic: I eat from plastic containers, handle plastic throughout the day, wear plastic clothing (polyester and nylon), sit on plastic chairs—and these things often seem to make my life easier, they seem to facilitate my work by saving me time and money and making my life more comfortable and convenient
4) When I think, I usually do so indoors, often alone; when I think with others, it is almost exclusively with other human beings (many of whom are, at bottom, quite similar to me—e.g. they are all philosophers, they are all academics, they are all in my area of specialization, we share much in common in our thinking, we are all “materialists” of some variety, etc.)
5) I do not regularly go on spiritual retreats or retreats in wild or relatively remote nature for 3 days or more—and, (likely) I have no serious concern that a failure to spend such extended periods of time in nature or other forms of retreat might compromise my epistemic situation, nor any real confidence that engaging such retreats would significantly improve my epistemic situation (though, maybe I would admit it could benefit my health in some way, and thus rather indirectly affect my epistemic situation)

Why these might raise concern involves subtleties and also experience. It seems a relative minority of people have experienced the shift in mind that only begins to happen after 3 or 4 days of retreat in Nature or 3 or 4 days of intensive spiritual practice—a shift that can seem frankly astonishing when we experience it profoundly enough. Even fewer people experience the
shift that arises as part of what we may call a “transformational insight,” a realization, a “breakthrough of total experience”. Such shifts dawn on us as if we suddenly realized we had been walking around in a kind of daze. We may feel we have suddenly woken up, or at least come more alive, even though we were not technically sleeping or dead. We should recall Socrates here again, who said the strangest thing: That people wanted to kill him because they were asleep, and he came around trying to wake them up, and they resented him for it, preferring to remain asleep—even if it meant the collapse of their culture.

To put this awakening experience a bit too poetically, we may feel in some sense that the song of the heart, the song of our being, the song of HeartMindBodyWorldCosmos had been coming out of us off key—or that our song had been somehow repressed, hindered, or even silenced. We realize at such a moment that, although this shift in mind seems subtle in one sense, it also feels profound, radical, like a night and day change, something revolutionary and important. We can feel intimately that everything might be very different if only we could keep practicing-and-realizing this mind, this synchronized ecology of heart, mind, body, world, cosmos. And we may also sense that we have not plumbed the depths of this mind, this heart, and that it may have a great deal of creative potential that we should get in touch with.

We needn’t remain in a too-poetic mood, for our scientists have begun to research some aspects of this, based on the experience of many who have spent time in retreat. To capture this phenomenon, cognitive neuroscientist David Strayer coined the term “three-day effect,” signifying that it takes some time to, shall we say, begin to come home to ourselves and to begin to leave the habitual context behind. Meditators have noticed this too: That the first 1-5 days of a
formal meditation retreat do nothing more than settle the mind into a place from which the real practice can begin—as if one arrived at the retreat unable to properly think in the most concrete and practical sense (even though one may have just come from a job one imagined to involve thinking, such as working as an engineer, a lawyer, a politician, or a philosopher), and needed first to settle into something at least approaching sanity (the meditator would take realization and the healing processes noted by Jung as a deeper sanity, which one must bring to fruition, in, through, and as practice). Such a contemplation should naturally bring a philosopher to wonder. We might imagine the shift here to seem, in certain respects, subtle, for clearly engineers, lawyers, and philosophers can think well enough to do the jobs they now do. But philosophers especially should find subtle discernments of momentous value in at least some cases, and in some of those cases the subtlety turns out to be profound, so that one would say, “Yes, I was thinking before, but I was quite out of my mind . . . it was the thinking of someone asleep in their lives, and so misdirected that I should prefer to call it the antithesis of thinking, or if it were thinking, I should prefer to call it thinking of such an unhealthy kind that I would rather have not been thinking at all.”

As for time in Nature bringing us more into thinking, more into a more healthy mind, Strayer realized that some of his best ideas came after backpacking trips into Nature of 3 days or more. In an interview he said,

> Having hiked around the desert for years, I noticed in myself, and from talking to others, that people think differently after being out in the desert. Their thoughts are clearer, they’re certainly more relaxed, they report being more creative. If you can disconnect and experience being in the moment for two or three days, it seems to produce a difference in qualitative thinking.  

40 https://www.rei.com/blog/camp/the-nature-fix-the-three-day-effect
If we recall Hadot’s mention of the rupture with the bios, meaning the habits of daily life, the limited and limiting way of life for which philosophy offered therapeia, then we confront here the possibility that rupture with the bios can become accomplished as reunion with Nature. In other words, we face the possibility that civilized life as we know it stands in a tension with Nature, and that this civilized life goes altogether with a measurably degraded thinking—and perhaps also a thinking degraded in ways we currently cannot measure. Of course, one needs to validate these sorts of anecdotal findings and suggestions—the best way being through practice-realization in, through, and as experience. But current science has its own ways of working with experience, and they are not all bad. Strayer his co-investigators set up an experiment, the results of which they published under the delightful title, “Creativity in the Wild: Improving Creative Reasoning through Immersion in Natural Settings.” They might better have subtitled it, “Improving Creative Intelligence through Immersion in Natural Settings,” or maybe “Improving Intelligence . . .” or even, “Returning Intelligence to its Place . . .” Anyway, the researchers found something relatively astonishing:

four days of immersion in nature, and the corresponding disconnection from multi-media and technology, increases performance on a creativity, problem-solving task by a full 50% in a group of naive hikers. Our results demonstrate that there is a cognitive advantage to be realized if we spend time immersed in a natural setting. We anticipate that this advantage comes from an increase in exposure to natural stimuli . . . (Atchley, Strayer, and Atchley 2012: 1)41

Interestingly, Leong et al. (2014) found that, “Students who were more connected with nature preferred innovative and holistic cognitive styles, while controlling for their general emotional status and well-being” (57). They note that their findings, “are the first to establish the link between connectedness with nature and cognitive styles” (57). It is interesting that connectedness

41 https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article/file?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0051474&type=printable
to nature may somehow relate to our being more innovative and holistic thinkers. That and the fact that these researchers refer to this as a style of consciousness seems significant for our inquiry. The same holds for the finding of Zelenski et al. (2015) that connecting with nature facilitates cooperative, prosocial, and environmentally sustainable behaviors—and this is precisely in contrast to behavior influenced by the built environment. In a meta-analysis including over 2400 individuals, Shutte and Malouf (2018) found a significant relationship between mindfulness and connectedness with nature. In other words, the built environment seems to go with a style of consciousness that makes us less cooperative, less mindful, less ecologically sustainable. The style of consciousness arising from rootedness in nature seems more innovative, more holistic, more cooperative, more sustainable, more present and aware.

Other researchers have looked into things like “forest therapy,” “nature therapy,” and other interventions that support or replicate the findings of Atchley, Strayer, and Atchley. All of these lines of research can fall into the trap of keeping the findings and suggestions tame or even co-opting them into our pattern of insanity. For instance, so-called “forest therapy” may encourage us to take up “forest bathing,” which some authors suggest we can accomplish even in city parks or short walks in relatively tame wooded areas. In an absolute sense, this is true. But the spirit of this sort of therapeutic intervention is not the same as the therapeia of philosophy, which would demand that we see a deeper problem than the need to occasionally “get away from it all,” and would encourage the more significant rupture that “forest bathing” might actually forestall. Therapy treats symptoms, while therapeia calls for rebirth, rejuvenation, a reorientation, a reorganization of experience. If extended exposure to Nature gives such startling gains in intelligence, along with other benefits, we have to pause and reflect on the whole organization of
society, not try to take better advantage of its current forms of organization by seeking out nearby parks. What ongoing clarity and coherence, what ongoing intelligence does our current context cut us off from?

If this were a new finding, we might hesitate. But, if nothing else, we can recall that retreat into closer communion with Nature sparked Thoreau’s accusation that, “There are nowadays professors of philosophy, but no philosophers.” Such a finding runs through many philosophical and spiritual traditions, even in the west. In a similarly Nature-inspired vein, Emerson wrote, in “Nature,”:

> In the woods we return to reason and faith. There I feel that nothing can befall me in life—no disgrace, no calamity (leaving me my eyes), which nature cannot repair. Standing on the bare ground—my head bathed in the blithe air and lifted into infinite space—all mean egotism vanishes.42

Here Emerson properly associates Nature with whatever good thing we would want from what we call “reason” and what we call “faith”. These are problematic terms, and “reason” has almost become a disease. But we do want the positive benefits from the delusion we called “reason”. We find these in our own rootedness, rootedness in the sacred, which we well practice and realize (which we discover-create) in forests, mountains, oceans, deserts, and all sentient beings—all of sentient being. And both Emerson and the article get at the essence of what we seek: Transcendence of the ego. This is what we wanted from “reason,” but the west got lost, perhaps in the fallacy of intellectualism, and the dualities of path-goal, organism-environment, and so on.43

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42 [http://transcendentalism-legacy.tamu.edu/authors/emerson/nature.html](http://transcendentalism-legacy.tamu.edu/authors/emerson/nature.html)

43 In a letter to his brother, Emerson struggles in an attempt to revalue the term “reason,” seemingly striving to get close to what Dewey may have meant by “intelligence,” and maybe coming close as well to what I would like us to understand by terms like “intelligence,” “original
Why would Emerson speak of a return to reason and faith? Because of the way a proper attunement with Nature accomplishes a single gesture of rupture and reunion. We can think about this in evolutionary terms. As the Australian philosopher Glenn Albrecht notes:

We used to get positive psychoterratic feedback between the Earth and ourselves as a natural part of being alive and human. But now if you go to the beach or try to breathe in the clean air in Oregon, you’re going to have plastic, rubbish, and smoke from wildfires all around you. It alienates us from our natural connections in a world that is polluted.44

We cannot know, from inside out current epistemology, how we could know in a nurturing psychoterratic feedback loop, a loop that unifies Mind and Nature in a manner that activate our intelligence and other capacities in ways we currently access in degraded fashion or not at all. It seems that people hunger for this feedback loop, and for the kind of Mind that emerges in a context more rooted in Nature. For instance, speaking in 1870 about the ways of his ancestors, Homli of the Wallawalla Nation said, “When they hunted for happiness, they searched the ground first” (from Philip 1997: 32). Is this our instinct? We can consider the more recent thinking, and “non-thinking.” Particularly telling is the bind our “understanding” places on us: Total skepticism or accusations of falsehood on the one hand, or the weak-hearted and conscience-abandoning accusation of impracticalness on the other:

Reason is the highest faculty of the soul—what we mean often by the soul itself; it never reasons, never proves, it simply perceives; it is vision. The Understanding toils all the time, compares, contrives, adds, argues, nearsighted but strong-sighted, dwelling in the present the expedient the customary . . . The thoughts of youth, & ‘first thoughts,’ are the revelations of Reason[,] the love of the beautiful & of Goodness as the highest beauty the belief in the absolute & universal superiority of the Right & the True[,] But Understanding[,] that wrinkled calculator[,] the steward of our house to whom is committed the support of our animal life contradicts evermore these affirmations of Reason & points at Custom & Interest & persuades one man that the declarations of Reason are false & another that they are at least impracticable. (from Richardson, 1995: 166).


44
example of Miriam Lancewood, a woman living in the wild in New Zealand—by which I mean a woman who lives with her partner in a light, moveable shelter, who hunts and gathers, who must make a campfire for heat, no cellphones or internet, and so on. She does occasionally hike to the nearest road and then hitchhike into town where she plays guitar on the street, using the money to get a few fruits and vegetables when such things are hard to come by, but other than this, she and her partner live off the land. Miriam originally lived in Holland, and she was a school teacher by profession. She met a man who shared her passion for leaving civilization and living in the wild, and off they went.

As part of a recent interview, she read from a letter to her sister: “Dearest Sophie, Can you image a way of life so quiet, so timeless, so abundant and full that watching a single leaf fluttering from a tree, lifted into the air by a little breeze, turning silver in the sunshine, is meaningful?” When the interviewer asked, “What do you think of the way we live our lives?” She replied,

I don’t really know how you can stand it. How can you deal with sleep deprivation . . . you have all these things, and so much pressure, and how do you deal with that without becoming so dull? How can you keep clarity? How can you keep vital? How do you deal with a monotone existence . . . running around the clock, how do you deal with it? 45

Again, the issue of clarity of mind should stand out for anyone interested in how we know. A simple google search will turn up the literature on state-dependent learning, and that has some bearing on our inquiry. But we are talking about something bigger, a way of life, a style of consciousness. It is interesting to hear such words from a seemingly ordinary person who was

45 It is worth noting how well this resonates with the fuller passage from Walden in which Thoreau not only charges that there are nowadays professors of philosophy and no philosophers, but specifically ties this to vitality and the vital heat of the body.
born and raised in an urban environment. I don’t think most of us in the dominant culture can really understand this, since we haven’t spent much time in truly wild places.

Jung suggested that we might get in touch with this psychoterratic feedback loop by making some beginning, some kind of working our way back to Nature, even as modest as gardening. His comments evoke a larger context as well. We should bracket his comments with the awareness that “tilling the earth” is arguably part of conquest consciousness, that the notion of “owning” land is almost certainly so (let’s read this as an imperative to be truly connected with the land, and that Jung only uses this phrase given the western context), and that in general these suggestions might be overly optimistic, since we may need more of a change in our relationship to the land and each other than the dominant culture can handle without becoming something quite different from what it is:

Every man should have his own plot of land so that the instincts can come to life again. To own land is important psychologically, and there is no substitute for it. We keep forgetting that we are primates and that we have to make allowances for these primitive layers in our psyche. The farmer is still closer to these layers. In tilling the earth he moves around within a very narrow radius, but he moves on his own land. The industrial worker is a pathetic, rootless being, and his remuneration in money is not tangible but abstract. In earlier times, when the crafts flourished, he derived satisfaction from seeing the fruit of his labor. He found adequate self-expression in such work.

But this is no longer the case. First of all, he is responsible for only a small part of the finished product. Secondly, the product is sold, it disappears, and he has no further stake in it. Because the psychological reward is inadequate, the worker rebels against his employer and against “capitalism” as a whole. We all need nourishment for our psyche. It is impossible to find such nourishment in urban tenements without a patch of green or a blossoming tree. We need a relationship with nature. I am just a culture-coolie myself, but I derive a great deal of pleasure from growing my own potatoes. People tend to look for the Kingdom of God in the outer world rather than in their own souls. This is particularly true of socialism. Individuation is not only an upward but also a downward process. Without any body, there is no mind and therefore no individuation. Our civilizing potential has led us down the wrong path. All too often an American worker who owns only one
car considers himself a poor devil, because his boss has two or three cars. This is symptomatic of pointless striving for material possessions.

Yet, we need to project ourselves into the things around us. My self is not confined to my body. It extends into all the things I have made and all the things around me. Without these things, I would not be myself; I would not be a human being, I would merely be a human ape, a primate. Everything surrounding me is part of me, and that is precisely why a rented apartment is disastrous. It offers so few possibilities for self-expression. In a standardized apartment, in a standardized milieu, it is easy to lose the sense of one’s own personality, of one’s individuality.

A community is based on personal relationships. No community can evolve where people can easily move households from one place to another. The one-family house, the house owned by its inhabitants, is much better because it necessarily engenders a sense of permanence.

If man has a hand in shaping his environment, it will reflect his personality. A Soviet collective farm lacks soul, and the people who live on it are a dull, unhappy lot because they have been deprived of any opportunity for personal expression.

When capitalism takes everything out of the hands of the worker, he feels he has been robbed. Therefore our economic system must put something else within his grasp. In particular, the worker must be enabled to have a personal leisure-time occupation, and this again is best suited to the private dwelling, the family, the garden. The economic drawbacks of fixed permanent residence are less important.

Life in a small city is better than life in a large one, politically, socially, and in terms of community relations. Big cities are responsible for our uprootedness. The Swiss are mentally more balanced and not so neurotic as many peoples. We are fortunate to live in a great number of small cities. If I do not have what my psyche needs, I become dangerous.

Because in our country the government is reluctant to aid community projects, the projects that do materialize are all the more genuine and valuable.

A captive animal cannot return to freedom. But our workers can return. We see them doing it in the allotment gardens in and around our cities; these gardens are an expression of love for nature and for one’s own plot of land. As our working hours become shorter, the question of leisure time becomes increasingly essential to us, time in which we are free of commands and restraints and in which we can achieve self-realization. I am fully committed to the idea that human existence should be rooted in the earth. (JS: 202-4)

Perhaps the most important suggestion occurs at the end: Our existence is rooted in the Earth.

Although Jung offers us many other helpful suggestions here, it’s good to see how many things might be potentially wrong with these reflections as might be helpful. Why should we think we must till the Earth? Why should that not seem foolish? Because we got used to it? The no-till revolution in agriculture may do much good. The Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island seem to
have found the white man’s predilection for tilling the soil an aberration. One of the more extreme responses comes from Smohalla, of the Wanapam Nation:

    You ask me to plow the ground! Shall I take a knife and tear my mother’s bosom? Then when I die she will not take me to her bosom to rest. You ask me to dig for stone! Shall I dig under her skin for her bones? Then when I die I cannot enter her body to be born again. (from Philip 1997: 28)

Indigenous peoples are not against farming per se, but they do invite us to see how invasive agriculture goes altogether with a certain mindset.

It may help us to consider the words of an actual farmer. Wendell Berry invites us to consider the necessary relationship between mind, body, soul, and soil—his emphasis on health aligns his with Jung’s reflections on health and healing above, though he first begins with the sense of a quest into wilderness before coming back to growing food, a movement linked by the notion of health. This is one of our largest conceptual data points because it brings out the fractal-like quality of our meta-analysis. The passage brings out many themes, including wildness, ecology, health, and more. The reader is encouraged to read the whole chapter, because as liberal as this quotation is, there is more to savor. He really begins with a feel for something like *vision*, close to the sense implied in the Revisioning of Philosophy:

    The question of human limits, of the proper definition and place of human beings within the order of Creation, finally rests upon our attitude toward our biological existence, the life of the body in this world. What value and respect do we give to our bodies? What uses do we have for them? What relation do we see, if any, between body and mind, or body and soul? What connections or responsibilities do we maintain between our bodies and the earth? These are religious questions, obviously, for our bodies are part of the Creation, and they involve us in all the issues of mystery. But the questions are also agricultural, for no matter how urban our life, our bodies live by farming; we come from the earth and return to it, and so we live in agriculture as we live in flesh. While we live our bodies are moving particles of the earth, joined inextricably both to the soil and to the bodies of other living creatures. It is hardly surprising, then, that there should be some profound
ressemblances between our treatment of our bodies and our treatment of the earth. . .

Until modern times, we focused a great deal of the best of our thought upon such rituals of return to the human condition. Seeking enlightenment or the Promised Land or the way home, a man would go or be forced to go into the wilderness, measure himself against the Creation, recognize finally his true place within it, and thus be saved both from pride and from despair. Seeing himself as a tiny member of a world he cannot comprehend or master or in any final sense possess, he cannot possibly think of himself as a god. And by the same token, since he shares in, depends upon, and is graced by all of which he is a part, neither can be become a fiend; he cannot descend into the final despair of destructiveness. Returning from the wilderness, he becomes a restorer of order, a preserver. He sees the truth, recognizes his true heir, honors his forebears and his heritage, and gives his blessing to his successors. He embodies the passing of human time, living and dying within the human limits of grief and joy. . . .

[Speaking of a letter he received] My correspondent went on to say: “Healing, it seems to me, is a necessary and useful word when we talk about agriculture.” And a few paragraphs later he wrote: “The theme of suicide belongs in a book about agriculture . . .” I agree. But I am also aware that many people will find it exceedingly strange that these themes should enter so forcibly into this book. It will be thought that I am off the subject. And so I want to take pains to show that I am on the subject—and on it, moreover, in the only way most people have of getting on it: by way of the issue of their own health. Indeed, it is when one approaches agriculture from any other issue than that of health that one may be said to be off the subject. The difficulty probably lies in our narrowed understanding of the word health. That there is some connection between how we feel and what we eat, between our bodies and the earth, is acknowledged when we say that we must “eat right to keep fit” or that we should eat “a balanced diet.” But by health we mean little more than how we feel. We are healthy, we think, if we do not feel any pain or too much pain, and if we are strong enough to do our work. If we become unhealthy, then we go to a doctor who we hope will “cure” us and restore us to health. By health, in other words, we mean merely the absence of disease. Our health professionals are interested almost exclusively in preventing disease (mainly by destroying germs) and in curing disease (mainly by surgery and by destroying germs).

But the concept of health is rooted in the concept of wholeness. To be healthy is to be whole. The word health belongs to a family of words, a listing of which will suggest how far the consideration of health must carry us: heal, whole, wholesome, hale, hallow, holy. And so it is possible to give a definition to health that is positive and far more elaborate than that given to it by most medical doctors and the officers of public health.

If the body is healthy, then it is whole. But how can it be whole and yet be dependent, as it obviously is, upon other bodies and upon the earth, upon all the
It immediately becomes clear that the health or wholeness of the body is a vast subject, and that to preserve it calls for a vast enterprise. Blake said that “Man has no Body distinct from his Soul...” and thus acknowledged the convergence of health and holiness. In that, all the convergences and dependences of Creation are surely implied. Our bodies are also not distinct from the bodies of other people, on which they depend in a complexity of ways from biological to spiritual. They are not distinct from the bodies of plants and animals, with which we are involved in the cycles of feeding and in the intricate companionships of ecological systems and of the spirit. They are not distinct from the earth, the sun and moon, and the other heavenly bodies.

It is therefore absurd to approach the subject of health piecemeal with a departmentalized band of specialists. A medical doctor uninterested in nutrition, in agriculture, in the wholesomeness of mind and spirit is as absurd as a farmer who is uninterested in health. Our fragmentation of this subject cannot be our cure, because it is our disease. The body cannot be whole alone. Persons cannot be whole alone. It is wrong to think that bodily health is compatible with spiritual confusion or cultural disorder, or with polluted air and water or impoverished soil. Intellectually, we know that these patterns of interdependence exist; we understand them better now perhaps than we ever have before; yet modern social and cultural patterns contradict them and make it difficult or impossible to honor them in practice.

To try to heal the body alone is to collaborate in the destruction of the body. Healing is impossible in loneliness; it is the opposite of loneliness. Conviviality is healing. To be healed we must come with all the other creatures to the feast of Creation. Together, the above two descriptions of suicides suggest this very powerfully. The setting of both is urban, amid the gigantic works of modern humanity. The fatal sickness is despair, a wound that cannot be healed because it is encapsulated in loneliness, surrounded by speechlessness. Past the scale of the human, our works do not liberate us—they confine us. They cut off access to the wilderness of Creation where we must go to be reborn—to receive the awareness, at once humbling and exhilarating, grievous and joyful, that we are a part of Creation, one with all that we live from and all that, in turn, lives from us. They destroy the communal rites of passage that turn us toward the wilderness and bring us home again.

Perhaps the fundamental damage of the specialist system—the damage from which all other damages issue—has been the isolation of the body. At some point we began to assume that the life of the body would be the business of

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46 A most crucial philosophical question—disturbingly germane to an inquiry into knowing.
47 And both are as absurd as a philosopher uninterested in ecology (including our relationship with food), psychology (a branch of ecology), and medicine (another branch of ecology).
48 The old, “Convivio, ergo sum.”
49 Academic specialization receives indictment here as well . . . Why do we think it plausible to run a university in which students do not engage in growing food, receiving education in how to survive in wilderness, receiving support to go into wilderness?
grocers and medical doctors, who need take no interest in the spirit, whereas the life of the spirit would be the business of churches, which would have at best only a negative interest in the body. In the same way we began to see nothing wrong with putting the body—most often somebody else’s body, but frequently our own—to a task that insulted the mind and demeaned the spirit. And we began to find it easier than ever to prefer our own bodies to the bodies of other creatures and to abuse, exploit, and otherwise hold in contempt those other bodies for the greater good or comfort of our own.

The isolation of the body sets it into direct conflict with everything else in Creation. It gives it a value that is destructive of every other value. That this has happened is paradoxical, for the body was set apart from the soul in order that the soul should triumph over the body. . . .

The soul is thus set against the body, to thrive at the body’s expense. And so a spiritual economy is devised within which the only law is competition. If the soul is to live in this world only by denying the body, then its relation to worldly life becomes extremely simple and superficial. Too simple and superficial, in fact, to cope in any meaningful or useful way with the world. Spiritual value ceases to have any worldly purpose or force. To fail to employ the body in this world at once for its own good and the good of the soul is to issue an invitation to disorder of the most serious kind. . . .

You cannot devalue the body and value the soul—or value anything else. The prototypical act issuing from this division was to make a person a slave and then instruct him in religions “charity” more damaging to the master than to the slave. Contempt for the body is invariably manifested in contempt for other bodies—the bodies of slaves, laborers, women, animals, plants, the earth itself. Relationships with all other creatures become competitive and exploitive rather than collaborative and convivial. The world is seen and dealt with, not as an ecological community, but as a stock exchange, the ethics of which are based on the tragically misnamed “law of the jungle.” This “jungle” law is a basic fallacy of modern culture. . . .

By dividing body and soul, we divide both from all else. We thus condemn ourselves to a loneliness for which the only compensation is violence—against other creatures, against the earth, against ourselves. For no matter the distinctions we draw between body and soul, body and earth, ourselves and

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50 Another basic fallacy. It resonates with Dewey’s reflections, not only on the intellectualist fallacy, but also something we shall see later. Berry’s basic fallacy of modern culture seems to resonate with the one the Dalai Lama invites us to see: “As a Buddhist, the aim of my spiritual quest is to free myself of the fundamental ignorance that has led to the notion that there is a division between people and the natural world, which is at the root of all our suffering.” Berry’s comments in the next paragraph elaborate this fallacy, the one Berry and the Dalai Lama seem to see as so central to our suffering. I am not sure if Berry understands this as I invite us to try and understand it.
others—the connections, the dependences, the identities remain. And so we fail to contain or control our violence. It gets loose. Though there are categories of violence, or so we think, there are no categories of victims. Violence against one is ultimately violence against all. The willingness to abuse other bodies is the willingness to abuse one’s own. To damage the earth is to damage your children. To despise the ground is to despise its fruit; to despise the fruit is to despise its eaters. The wholeness of health is broken by despite.

If competition is the correct relation of creatures to one another and to the earth, then we must ask why exploitation is not more successful than it is. Why, having lived so long at the expense of other creatures and the earth, are we not healthier and happier than we are? Why does modern society exist under constant threat of the same suffering, deprivation, spite, contempt, and obliteration that it has imposed on other people and other creatures? Why do the health of the body and the health of the earth decline together? And why, in consideration of this decline of our worldly flesh and household, our “sinful earth,” are we not healthier in spirit? . . .

. . . it is clear to anyone who looks carefully at any crowd that we are wasting our bodies exactly as we are wasting our land. Our bodies are fat, weak, joyless, sickly, ugly, the virtual prey of the manufacturers of medicine and cosmetics. Our bodies have become marginal; they are growing useless like our “marginal” land because we have less and less use for them. After the games and idle flourishes of modern youth, we use them only as shipping cartons to transport our brains and our few employable muscles back and forth to work.

As for our spirits, they seem more and more to comfort themselves by buying things. No longer in need of the exalted drama of grief and joy, they feed now on little shocks of greed, scandal, and violence. For many of the churchly, the life of the spirit is reduced to a dull preoccupation with getting to Heaven. At best, the world is no more than an embarrassment and a trial to the spirit, which is otherwise radically separated from it. The true lover of God must not be burdened with any care or respect for His works. While the body goes about its business of destroying the earth, the soul is supposed to lie back and wait for Sunday, keeping itself free of earthly contaminants. While the body exploits other bodies, the soul stands aloof, free from sin, crying to the gawking bystanders: “I am not enjoying it!” As far as this sort of “religion” is concerned, the body is no more than the lusterless container of the soul, a mere “package,” that will nevertheless light up in eternity, forever cool and shiny as a neon cross. This separation of the soul

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51 Recall Jung’s suggestions about the symbolic life: Without it, everything is banal, and we desperately seek after and cling to the silliest things so that we can feel as if something is actually happening. In fact, the dominant culture is characterized by the stark absence of happenings, amidst an endless stream of fake events. The post-truth era simply emerges as a symptom of this illness. Before the advent of “fake news,” we already had the ceaseless stream of fake news that we ourselves fed into and fed off of: My team won, I got my degree, I landed my first career job, my boss gave me a raise, I’m going on vacation . . . All of these events, and nothing happening.
from the body and from the world is no disease of the fringe, no aberration, but a fracture that runs through the mentality of institutional religion like a geologic fault. And this rift in the mentality of religion continues to characterize the modern mind, no matter how secular or worldly it becomes.

But I have not stated my point exactly enough. This rift is not like a geologic fault; it is a geologic fault. It is a flaw in the mind that runs inevitably into the earth.

I do not want to speak of unity misleadingly or too simply. Obvious distinctions can be made between body and soul, one body and other bodies, body and world, etc. But these things that appear to be distinct are nevertheless caught in a network of mutual dependence and influence that is the substantiation of their unity. Body, soul (or mind or spirit), community, and world are all susceptible to each other’s influence, and they are all conductors of each other’s influence. The body is damaged by the bewilderment of the spirit, and it conducts the influence of that bewilderment into the earth, the earth conducts it into the community, and so on. If a farmer fails to understand what health is, his farm becomes unhealthy; it produces unhealthy food, which damages the health of the community. But this is a network, a spherical network, by which each part is connected to every other part. The farmer is a part of the community, and so it is as impossible to say exactly where the trouble began as to say where it will end. The influences go backward and forward, up and down, round and round, compounding and branching as they go.

All that is certain is that an error introduced anywhere in the network ramifies beyond the scope of prediction; consequences occur all over the place, and each consequence breeds further consequences. But it seems unlikely that an error can ramify endlessly. It spreads by way of the connections in the network, but sooner or later it must also begin to break them. We are talking, obviously, about a circulatory system, and a disease of a circulatory system tends first to impair circulation and then to stop it altogether. Healing, on the other hand, complicates the system by opening and restoring connections.

52 Seeing the interwovenness of things, we shift out of Hume’s skepticism regarding the “secret powers and hidden causes,” and we begin to intimately touch what we can poetically refer to as the sacred powers and inconceivable causes that rupture the boundary between mind and matter, body and soul, self and world, self and other, organism and environment, philosophy and ecology, Nature and Culture, and so on. Here again we could bring the Dalai Lama’s fundamental fallacy to mind.

53 In this and the previous sentence, Berry gets at the concept of a feedback loop, a concept that forms part of the key scientific insights that Gregory Bateson called, “the biggest bite out of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge that mankind has taken in the last 2000 years” (Steps, 461). As Berry points out—and Bateson would agree—Error cannot ramify endlessly (scientists link this to “the great filter” of life in the cosmos). This is precisely what our inquiry invites us to see, and it further invites us to see how the level of error currently evident in our way of knowing indicates that way of knowing must be transcended by a better way of knowing. That Berry implicates an altogetherness of inadequate visions of health, inadequate visions of the Earth, the spread of specialization, and more resonates strongly with the meta-analysis as a whole.
among the various parts—in this way restoring the ultimate simplicity of their union. When all the parts of the body are working together, are under each other’s influence, we say that it is whole; it is healthy. The same is true of the world, of which our bodies are parts. The parts are healthy insofar as they are joined harmoniously to the whole. What the specialization of our age suggests, in one example after another, is not only that fragmentation is a disease, but that the diseases of the disconnected parts are similar or analogous to one another. Thus they memorialize their lost unity, their relation persisting in their disconnection. Any severance produces two wounds that are, among other things, the record of how the severed parts once fitted together.

What I have been trying to do is to define a pattern of disintegration that is at once cultural and agricultural. I have been groping for connections—that I think are indissoluble, though obscured by modern ambitions—between the spirit and the body, the body and other bodies, the body and the earth. If these connections do necessarily exist, as I believe they do, then it is impossible for material order to exist side by side with spiritual disorder, or vice versa, and impossible for one to thrive long at the expense of the other; it is impossible, ultimately, to preserve ourselves apart from our willingness to preserve other creatures, or to respect and care for ourselves except as we respect and care for other creatures; and, most to the point of this book, it is impossible to care for each other more or differently than we care for the earth. (2002: 93-118)

In our inquiry we seek connections that are indissoluble though obscured, by our way of knowing, which goes together with conscious human purposes (“modern ambitions”).

The wholeness Berry speaks of . . . It invites us into expansiveness inconceivable to our habitual mind. If we cannot heal except in wholeness, if we cannot know better without knowing more holistically, then what is the wholeness of our being, what is the wholeness of our thinking, what is the wholeness of our activity that we must surely, in our present state, fail to touch, practice, realize?

54 Health—wholeness—here becomes some sort of attunement and at-one-ment. There is no wholeness apart from the whole.
Paul Shepard, among others, invites us to see that wild beings are indispensable to our wholeness, and thus to our thinking, to our meaning. In his book, *The Others: How Animals Made Us Human*, Shepard invites us to see how “the human species emerged enacting, dreaming, and thinking animals and cannot be fully itself without them” (4). Wild beings facilitated self-knowing and provided metaphors for transformation—in other words they helped ground our spiritual/philosophical life, either out of their divine imperative or simply as part of the wonder, the mystery of the sacredness we all are (or both). Wild beings of all kinds embodied our cosmologies—not in the sense that we merely projected onto them, but in the sense that we learned those cosmologies from the activity, the living thinking, of those beings . . . we touched cosmology directly in our relationships with them. Thus they enriched our language, not only with these teachings, but with their own sounds, their styles of communication and communion, and in the ways we tried to speak with and listen to them, to live with them and allow them to live through us. They constituted our being as they helped us practice and realize our *place*, our *purpose* in living ecologies. Domestication, as Shepard sees it, involved the disrupted of this mature relationship with mature beings, mature *presences* and ways of life, ways of thinking and knowing. Again, domesticated animals seem to Shepard as immature examples, constrained examples, and they began to displace the wild beings in our souls as well as in the landscape. This, in turn, resulted in an ontogenetic crippling of the human, thus degrading social bonds in the human community, which became increasingly isolated from wildness. Shepard ends his book with a letter from The Others, delivered by Bear:

Dear Primate P. Shepard and Interested Parties:

We nurtured the humans from a time before they were in the present form. When we first drew around them they were, like all animals, secure in a modest niche. Their evident peculiarities were clearly higher primate in their obsession, social status, and personal identity. In that respect they had grown smart, subtle,
and devious, committed to a syndrome of tumultuous, a seasonal, erotic, hierarchic power.

Like their nearest kin, they had elevated a certain kind of attention to a remarkable acuity which made them caring, protective, mean, and nasty in the peculiar combination of squinched facial feature and general pettiness of monkeys.

In ancient savannas we slowly teased them out of their chauvinism. In our plumage we gave them aesthetics. In our courtships we tutored them in dance. In the gestures of antlered heads we showed them ceremony and the power of the mask. In our running hooves we revealed the secret of grain. As meat we courted them from within.

As foragers, their glance shifted a little from corms and rootlets, from the incessant bickering and scuffling of their inherited social introversion. They began looking at the horizon, where some of us were both danger and greater substance.

At first it was just a nudge—food stolen from the residue of lion kills, contended for with jackals and vultures, the search for hidden newborn gazelles, slow turtles, and eggs. We gradually became for them objects of thought, of remembering, telling, planning, and puzzling us out as the mystery of energy itself.

We tutored them from the outside. Dancing us, they began to see in us performances of their ideas and feelings. We became the concreteness of their own secret selves. We ate them and were eaten by them and so taught them the first metaphor of their frantic sociality: the outerness of themselves, and ourselves as their inwardness.

As a bequest of protein we broke the incessant round of herbivorous munching, giving them leisure. This made possible the lithe repose of apprentice predation and a new meaning for rumination, freeing them from the drudgery of browsing and the grip of relentless interpersonal strife. Bringing them into omnivorousness, we transformed them forever and they entered the game as a different player.

Not that they abandoned their appetite for greens and fruits, but enlarged it to seeds and meat, and to the risky landscapes of the mind. The savanna or tundra was essential to this tutorial, as a spaciousness open to infinite strategies of pursuit and escape, stretching the senses to their most distant reference. Their thought was invited to a new kind of executorship, incorporating remembrance and planning, to parallels between themselves and the Others and to words—our names—that enabled them to share images and ideas.

Having been committed in this way, first as food and then as the imagery of a great variety of events and processes, from signs in dreams to symbols in metaphysics, we have accompanied humans ever since. Having made them human, we continue to do so individually, and now serve more and more in therapeutic ways, holding their hands, so to speak, as they kill our wildness.

As slaves we stay close. As something to “pet” and to speak to, someone to be there and need them, to be their first lesson in otherness, we have shared their homes for ten thousand years. They have made that tie a bond. From the
private home we have gone out to the wounded and lonely, to those yearning for unqualified devotion—to hospitals, hospices, homes for the aged, wards of the sick, the enclaves of the handicapped and retarded. We now elicit speech from the autistic and trust from those in prison.

All that is well enough, but it involves only our minimal, domesticated selves, not our wild and perfect forms. It smells of dependency.

They still do not realize that they need us, thinking that we are simply one more comfort or curiosity. We have not regained the central place in their thought or meaning at the heart of their ecology and philosophy. Too often we are merely physical reality, mindless passion and brutality, or abstract tropes and symbols.

Sometimes we have to be underhanded. We slip into their dreams, we hide in the language, disguised in allusion, we mask our philosophical role in “nature aesthetics,” we cavort to entertain. We wait in children’s books, in pretty pictures, as burlesques in cartoons, as toys, designs in the very wallpaper, as rudimentary companion or pets.

We are marginalized, trivialized. We have sunk to being objects, commodities, possessions. We remain meat and hides, but only as a due and not as sacred gifts. They have forgotten how to learn the future from us, to follow our example, to heal themselves with our tissues and organs, forgotten that just watching our wild selves can be healing. Once we were the bridges, exemplars of change, mediators with the future and the unseen.

Their own numbers leave little room for us, and in this is their great misunderstanding. They are wrong about our departure, thinking it to be a part of their progress instead of their emptying. When we have gone they will not know who they are.

Supposing themselves to be the purpose of it all, purpose will elude them. Their world will fade into an endless dusk with no whippoorwill to call the owl in the evening and no thrush to make a dawn.

–The Others

Something in this letter from The Others resonates with various speeches and writings of Indigenous peoples, at least here on Turtle Island. For instance, in response to a missionary who sought to convert Indigenous peoples to Christianity, the great orator Red Jacket of the Seneca Nation said the following:

. . . . your forefathers crossed the great waters, and landed on this island. Their numbers were small; they found friends, and not enemies; they told us they had fled from their own country for fear of wicked men, and come here to enjoy their religion. They asked for a small seat; we took pity on them, granted their request, and they sat down amongst us; we gave them corn and meat; they gave us poison in return. The white people had now found our country; tidings were carried back, and more came amongst us; yet we did not fear them, we took them to be friends; they called us brothers; we believed them, and gave them a larger seat. At length,
their numbers had greatly increased; they wanted more land; they wanted our country. Our eyes were opened, and our minds became uneasy. Wars took place; Indians were hired to fight against Indians, and many of our people were destroyed. They also brought strong liquor among us; it was strong and powerful, and has slain thousands.

Brother, our seats were once large, and yours were very small; you have now become a great people, and we have scarcely a place left to spread our blankets; you have got our country, but are not satisfied; you want to force your religion upon us. . . .

Brother, we are told that you have been preaching to the white people in this place. These people are our neighbors; we are acquainted with them; we will wait, a little while and see what effect your preaching has upon them. If we find it does them good, makes them honest and less disposed to cheat Indians, we will then consider again what you have said.55

Another artefact comes to mind here. Not long after becoming President of the U.S., Andrew Jackson wrote the following letter to the Muscogee Nation—actually, he seems to have stopped looking at the various tribes as Nations and lumped them all together, as others—and the rhetoric is in its own way frightening, all the more so given what followed when the Indigenous peoples naturally refused to obey:

Friends and Brothers — By permission of the Great Spirit above, and the voice of the people, I have been made President of the United States, and now speak to you as your Father and friend, and request you to listen. Your warriors have known me long You know I love my white and red children, and always speak with a straight, and not with a forked tongue; that I have always told you the truth. I now speak to you, as my children, in the language of truth—Listen.

Where you now are, you and my white children are too near to each other to live in harmony and peace. Your game is destroyed, and many of your people will not work and till the earth.

Beyond the great River Mississippi, where apart of your nation has gone, your Father has provided a country large enough for all of you, and he advises you to remove to it.

There your white brothers will not trouble you; they will have no claim to the land, and you can live upon it you and all your children, as long as the grass

55 http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5790/
grows or the water runs, in peace and plenty. It will be yours forever. For the improvements in the country where you now live, and for all the stock which you cannot take with you, your Father will pay you a fair price.

Where you now live, your white brothers have always claimed the land. The land beyond the Mississippi belongs to the President and to no one else; and he will give it to you for ever....

Chief Speckled Snake gave this reply to the Muscogee Indians:

Brothers! When the white man first came to these shores, the Muscogees gave him land, and kindled him afire to make him comfortable. And when the pale faces of the south [the Spanish] made war on him, their young men drew the tomahawk and protected his head from the scalping knife.

But when the white man had warmed himself before the Indian’s fire, and filled himself with the Indian’s hominy, he became very large. He stopped not for the mountain tops, and his feet covered the plains and the valleys. His hands grasped the eastern and western sea.

Then he became our great father. He loved his red children; but said, ‘You must move a little farther, lest I should by accident tread on you. With one foot he pushed the red man over the Oconee, and with the other he trampled down the graves of his fathers.

But our great father still loved his red children, and he soon made them another talk. He said much; but it all meant nothing, but ‘move a little farther; you are too near me.

I have heard a great many talks from our great father, and they all began and ended the same.

Brothers! When he made us a talk on a former occasion, he said, ‘Get a little farther. Go beyond the Oconee and the Ocmulgee. There is a pleasant country.’ He also said, ‘It will be yours forever.’

Now he says, ‘The land you live on is not yours. Go beyond the Mississippi. There is game. There you may remain while the grass grows or the water runs.

Brothers! Will not our great father come there also? He loves his red children, and his tongue is not forked.\(^{56}\)

\(^{56}\)https://www.nps.gov/ocmu/learn/historyculture/*/SB38-Creek-Indian-War-of-1836.doc
When Jackson didn’t get what he wanted from his letter, he opened debate on the Indian Removal Act, and thus followed the incredible suffering of the Trail of Tears.

In his book, *Coming Home to the Pleistocene*, Shepard writes:

> When we grasp fully that the best expressions of our humanity were not invented by civilization but by cultures that preceded it, that the natural world is not only a set of constraints but of contexts within which we can more fully realize our dreams, we will be on the way to a long overdue reconciliation between opposites which are of our own making. (5)

This reconciliation of opposites means a healing of the wound in the Earth, the geological fault Berry invites us to see. It will come up again below, courtesy of Jung. One sees it everywhere: Where we make dualities, we make a wound. It is not that one needs to give up discernment, it is that true discernment, true wisdom liberates us from practicing and realizing dualities as if they were solid. Not only does the degradation of nature follow from this kind of duality, the fundamental fallacy the Dalai Lama mentions, but we in the university are lived by it, and we perpetuate it.

For instance, we in the university perpetuate the specialization that Berry rightfully associates with isolation and disintegration. Consider the incredible incoherence of our specializations from the most practical point of view: There is an almost total lack of coherence in how these disciplines relate back to, or relate us back to Nature—and yet we depend on the Natural world, and our wholeness, our healing has an intimate relationship with the living world and its beings. We might more coherently establish colleges or departments such as the Department of Mountains and Rivers, the Department of Oceans, the Department of Deserts, the Department of Forests, the Department of Vitalizing Agriculture, the Department of Human-non-Human...
Relations, the Department of Indigeneity, and so on. A Department of Mountains and Rivers might, for instance, employ philosophers intimate with the PracticeRealization of works by Emerson, Thoreau, Kohak, Muir, Aldo Leopold, Rachel Carson, Dogen, Milarepa, Shabkar, Gary Snyder, Mary E. Power, Val Plumwood, Freya Mathews, Andy Goldsworthy, Betsy Damon, Cathy Fitzgerald, Escif, Mary Oliver, Ansel Adams, and others. However, we don’t organize departments and “majors” this way. We not only drive students into incoherently specialized majors, but we insist on isolating the students from the natural world. We also isolate the variables of learning, so that we can properly measure learning outcomes. We localize these outcomes “in” the students rather than cultivating larger ecologies. We don’t put the students in much of a vitalizing relationship with each other or the natural world. We work mainly in classrooms, and almost never in the woods, on hikes, on vision quests, and so on—even in terms of assignments we give (for instance, we don’t tend to give students, as part of a philosophy course, an assignment to spend time in Nature, perhaps involving the creation of art works as an offering to the natural world and as part of experiences in Nature that are achievements or consummations in some sense, and not something “passive”). We don’t have students work together, as if collaboration and cooperation were a matter of course, since that would make it hard to measure the localized learning (we are fearful of cheating, plagiarism, and so on, even though these seem to occur as a symptom of fragmentation itself and of problems not properly localized in the students who fall into them). But when we back away and look at the state of the world, we see what we teach them, we see what human beings have learned to do. As David Orr writes in his book, *Earth in Mind*:

The conventional wisdom is that education is good, and the more of it one has, the better . . . The truth is that without significant precautions, education can equip people merely to be more effective vandals of the earth. If one listens carefully, it may even be possible to hear the Creation groan every year in May when another
batch of smart, degree-holding, but ecologically illiterate, Homo sapiens who are eager to succeed are launched into the bio-sphere . . . [We need to address] the problem of education rather than problems in education. (2004: 5)

What if it is impossible to presence wisdom, love, and beauty differently for each other than we do for the Earth? What does that say about how academia functions, how education in general functions? Once we really sense what wisdom, love, and beauty mean for us, this becomes not only inclusive of but a more important question than, What does that say about our current ways of knowing—in science, politics, economics, religion, and so on?

Berry invites us to see the importance of changing our whole way of life, our whole way of knowing ourselves, each other, and the world. Experiences with gardening, farming, hiking, meditating, and so on can easily become co-opted into the dominant culture. They do grant us access to other ways of knowing. We may access them intermittently in robust forms—in experiences of profound insight—but these do not abide, and the abiding may make all the difference. Here we may quote Milarepa:

   In the beginning, nothing comes;
   In the middle, nothing stays;
   At the end, nothing goes.

The passage contains a double meaning, but the meaning from the perspective of gradualism goes something like this: At first when we practice, nothing happens, and our spiritual activities may even seem to go nowhere; after some time, refreshing insights arise, peace arises, true joy arises, but nothing stays, and we quickly revert back into typical kinds of neurosis, even though these states of confusion have themselves become altered by practice; finally, we arrive at an abiding fresh state of mind. We are getting at two things here: That “trying” these other ways of knowing may produce almost nothing significant at first (that varies . . . some people will have a
fairly early sense that something important is happening, and they may even experience some
degree of conversion), but even when something does seem to happen, it remains a far cry from a
totally reorganized way of life. Thus, this “In the beginning” to which Milarepa refers happens
not only in the beginning of our spiritual life, but every time we sit down to meditate (for
instance), and then every time we go on retreat: In the beginning, we seem to be meditating (or
not meditating), but we aren’t (and . . . we are), and the true mind of meditation will not fully
appear until we accomplish the rupture. Nature can help us, the Earth can help us, countless
beings and experiences may help us, but it may take more to get at the depths Nature-and-
Experience, Mind-and-Nature has to offer than mainstream western culture has understood.

Granted, western culture has its share of Nature-based spiritual traditions and Nature-inspired
philosophers, but even eastern cultures may rival the generalized west, not to mention the many
Indigenous cultures that clearly do. We briefly noted Charles Fisher’s Dismantling Discontent.
Fisher wrote a follow-up called, Meditation in the Wild, which documents the role of wild nature
in a variety of Buddhist philosophical traditions. Though he expresses admiration for Thoreau,
Fisher would, I think, evaluate Thoreau as at least a little on the namby-pamby side, getting his
solitude without having to be very far from town, without the kind of wildness and vulnerability
that many Buddhists have practiced. Fisher invites us to imagine a more radical entrance into
Nature and, let us say, the “wild mind,” this mind of greater sensitivity, acuity, stability,
creativity, insight, and general intelligence than the one we have come to think of as “normal”
and to employ in all our thought, speech, and action. I say Fisher invites us to imagine, but not
because he invites a mere flight of fancy. Rather, he documents the long history of this mind. In
the oldest layers of Buddhist philosophy, retreat into the wilderness was seen as the gold
standard of practice. Recall that Fisher sees the therapeia of Buddhist philosophy as in large part made necessary by civilization itself.\(^{57}\) We have two ways, then, to interpret the Buddhist tradition: It makes it possible for us to find a way to live a healthy version of “civilization,” or it makes it possible for us to see that no healthy version of “civilization” is possible, but that we do not have to retreat into “savagery” or a “state of nature” or any other sort of crudity. Rather, we would need to invent, to discover-and-create a form of society, a form of life, a form of Nature-Culture, Nature-Experience, Mind-Nature that functions to bring to fruition healthy minds and healthy ecologies—healthy ecologies of mind. Either way, the Buddhist traditions of practice-in-the-wild give us a lot to think about as far as the current context of western thinking, and thus western thinking itself. Again, what do we cut ourselves off from, what is not possible for us to think as philosophers in the contemporary academy and as citizens in the midst of western culture? Reading texts like the 100,000 Songs of Milarepa (one of the greatest realized philosophers of Tibet), or even texts like Fisher’s, might make us wonder deeply.

We should also consider the three-day effect as it relates to spiritual retreats that do not take place in the wild. While many retreat centers exist at a remove from ordinary life, and while

\(^{57}\) We can sense a difference here between Miriam Lancewood’s experience and what the spiritual traditions refer to. Lancewood suggests a basic clarity of mind and body can emerge in the wild, a coordination of heart, mind, body, and world not possible in “civilized” life. But, if that were enough to practice and realize whatever it was that, for instance, Siddhartha the Buddha realized, then all such wilderness folk would be sages, and Buddha would only have prescribed living in the wild, not an altogether spiritual life. The same goes for any practice. The arts, for instance, cultivate the dimension of beauty so deeply that, given its altogetherness with wisdom and love, they readily reveal the intimacy of art and philosophy/spirituality. But, if art, all by itself, were enough, Socrates would have recommended we all just become artists in the narrow sense, not artists of life, and he would not have found the artists he spoke with so lacking in wisdom. Plato brings our attention to the spiritual materialism of art, and that is not the same thing as a rejection of art. Indeed, it acknowledges the power of and importance of art.
entrance into such a retreat can mark the rupture to which Hadot referred, one can go on retreat with many of the comforts of civilization, including running water, soft cushions and beds, food that one doesn’t have to store or even procure for oneself, and so on, and still accomplish this rupture. In theory, one might accomplish it in the midst of everyday life, depending on the manner in which, and the intentions with which, one engages in everyday life. In any case, a meditation retreat can certainly bring about a relative rupture, and retreats lasting 3 days or more may have special effects that a daily practice of meditation may not typically bring about. Some of the findings on the effects of meditation that bear on thinking would be worthwhile in a longer version of our inquiry. But here, we can at least mention some of the effects observed in relation to this shifted context of thinking.

One study, known as the Shamatha Project, recruited experienced meditators, randomly assigning them to either a wait-list control condition or to a 3-month intensive meditation retreat. Everyone eventually went on the retreat, but the control group helped to keep the data clean. All the participants were measured before, during, and after the retreat, as well as in follow-ups at 6 months, 18 months, and 7 years later. In the course of the project, the experimenters inquired into a wide variety of operational variables, including things like levels of telomerase (they found that meditation seems to produce increased telomerase, a measure of healthy aging, where lower levels indicate increasing breakdown). It’s one of the finest, most comprehensive long-term studies on meditation available in western science. Among other things, the study showed that, during and following the retreat, there were significant improvements in things like perceptual discrimination, response inhibition, vigilance, and response time variance as measured in a response inhibition task. What seems particularly compelling is that these improvements were
maintained for as much as 7 years after the completion of the retreat. Older participants did experience age-related declines in accuracy, however those declines did not occur in participants who reported significant *continued meditation practice* after they completed the initial retreat. Might our thinking improve if we could improve our basic capacities of perceptual discrimination and vigilance?58

We might ask more broadly how an ongoing spiritual practice might alter our general experience, including even the basic experience of our body and mind. For instance, Wielgosz et al. (2016) found that long-term mindfulness training correlates with reliable differences in resting respiration. Spending time in meditation may make us breathe differently, move differently, think differently. Baird et al. (2019) found that lucid dreaming occurs more frequently in long-term meditators than in those with no meditation practice. They also found that, in those who don’t have a mediation practice, the occurrence of lucid dreaming correlated with a tendency to verbalize experience. This did not hold for the meditators, for whom lucid dream frequency correlated with aspects of what is called trait mindfulness, which is meant to capture abiding features or qualities of relating as opposed to transient states. One can think of being in a state of mindfulness or a state of concentration on the one hand, and having a basic tendency to be mindful or to be focused on the other. Consistent practice of states can give rise to resilient *traits*. The researchers here found a kind of coherence of mind between waking and sleeping which links meditation practice with a special mode of awareness that allows one to notice the dream state as a dream state, and to open one’s dream life up for further and deeper

spiritual practices. As we shall see, dream work has an important place in the new epistemology, as does a sense of coherence and continuity in experience that correlates with a quality of wonder.

Another study on the effects of a 3-month intensive meditation retreat on cognitive ability showed findings of “large and lasting” effects. The researchers confirmed the finding that meditation can prevent age-related declines. Among other measures, they relied on an inventory called MINDSENS, which has consistently separated meditators from non-meditators with 82% accuracy. Higher MINDSENS scores correlate with meditative experience. The researchers report that:

Compared to controls, retreatants showed increases in non-attachment, observing, MINDSENS, positive-affect, balance-affect, and cooperativeness; and decreases in describing, negative-others, reward-dependence and self-directedness. Non-attachment had a mediating role in decentring, acting aware, non-reactivity, negative-affect, balance-affect and self-directedness; and a moderating role in describing and positive others, with both mediating and moderating effects on satisfaction with life.

A 1-month Vipassana meditation retreat seems to yield improvements in mindfulness, well-being, and personality, even in experienced meditators. Non-attachment might facilitate psychological improvements of meditation, making it possible to overcome possible ceiling effects ascribed to non-intensive practices. (Montero-Marín et al. 2016: 1)

Though the path of “reason” taken by the west has emphasized a “detached” perspective, this meditative path may help us to practice-and-realize a non-attached style of relating, one that can feel fully, richly, responsively, without getting “hooked”. The biases that reason is susceptible to, and which the approach of detachment may not be capable of addressing (particularly without the cost of becoming like a robot or being at war with oneself in some way), may be better overcome by means of the practice-realization of non-attachment. We will have to save a fuller
discussion of non-attachment for another time. The question here remains whether this kind of heightened awareness, non-reactiveness, cooperativeness, balance, and overall well-being would help us philosophize, and if their pervasive presence would have helped us avert climate collapse. What kind of ecology gives rise to such a fruit as global climate collapse, and what kinds of ecologies would make such fruit unlikely or almost impossible? Our inquiry invites us to see how the sorts of states and traits that constitute healthy ecologies come altogether with a better way of knowing, and it invites us to wonder if the fact that we philosophize without practices that conscientiously cultivate them indicates compromises or systemic limitations in our way of thinking and knowing.

When we taste, even in a limited way, a mind that transcends our usual mind, we can begin to see the unhealthy nature of our typical thinking, and we can begin to see the delusion of our typical orientation to life. For instance, we can see the delusion of trying to function on the basis of conscious human purposes, and we sense more intimately what we might call the soul’s purpose and its interwovenness with the purpose and purposes of the world, the meaning and purpose of life.

Synchronicities and spiritual insights tend to rupture time, space, and the many beliefs, the many prejudices and conceptual dualities that keep us in a limited and limiting frame of mind, keep us restricted to our typical mind rather than entering and presencing a more original mind. But even our contemporary science and philosophy have ways of explaining some of the things on our inventory of human and intellectual privilege, explaining them so that we can begin to understand why they might be symptoms of a disorder of the soul, and problems of context.
Thus we come more directly to one of the items on our inventory that might seem particularly strange, namely the first one: I operate my life (or, we could say, organize my life) on the basis of conscious purposes. Because of the western context, this amounts to a localization of mind and knowledge, a reification of knower and doer. It is a style of mind and a style of life that we can call doing. I’ll bet ninety readers out of a hundred wouldn’t stop to think twice, coming across the expression “conscious human purpose,” or “I achieved my purpose,” or something along those lines. But does such a notion hold up? Is it an intellectualist fantasy that ignores a larger context?

For instance, in the most basic common sense of western science, we can point out that consciousness can only ever present a sampling of our total intelligence, our total mind. Bateson saw this as a matter of simple logic: “Of course, the whole of the mind could not be reported in a part of the mind. This follows logically from the relationship between part and whole” (Steps, 439). From this follows a troubling issue: What gets reported comes with an agenda that itself does not arise as fully “conscious”. So, whatever we say about our intentions and purposes cannot tell the whole story of our intentions and purposes.

The considerations here seem to come close to those offered by Peirce in his famous Harvard Lectures on Pragmatism:

But the sum of it all is that our logically controlled thoughts compose a small part of the mind, the mere blossom of a vast complexus which we may call the instinctive mind, in which this man will not say that he has faith because that
implies the conceivability of distrust, but upon which he builds as the very fact to which it is the whole business of his logic to be true.\(^{59}\)

The notion of control seems to appear naturally when we think about thinking. What else do we do with our thinking but attempt to control? Can we do more, or do otherwise? We certainly cannot control synchronicities. And perhaps this “vast complexus” goes beyond our own cranium. Perhaps we should most assuredly not restrict it to the notion of “instinct” as we typically conceive it. We should also note here something rather incredible: Peirce essentially describes logic as in service to something non-concious, and we have to ask, If logic serves something not conscious, can I really tell the difference between its serving a non-conscious wisdom versus a non-conscious ignorance? After all, the logic itself, as a movement, may still look logical in either case. If we cannot have it otherwise, if the nature of our own minds makes things somehow like what Peirce may gesture toward, then what do we make of thinking?

We can also consider this inherent limitation of ordinary consciousness and conscious control in the manner of information theory or scientific sampling: If we go to the beach with a teacup, fill it with ocean water and then go back to the lab, we will report that there are no whales in the teacup, and we may then assert that there are no whales in the ocean. We can fill thousands of teacups, and even wheelbarrows full of ocean water, but these will only ever be samples, and we will never find a whale in those samples, and, not knowing what to look for, we also won’t find any evidence of whales that our instruments can reliably detect. We may now and then find ambergris or some other evidence of a whale, but that is not a whale, and we can possibly guess

\(^{59}\) From Lecture 7, available online: http://mesosyn.com/peirce-Harvard.html
at or infer a whale, but we won’t have a whale. The whale will never be in the teacup, nor will a great many other things.

The image below gives an impression of our epistemic situation:

Our typical consciousness is like a little box, within which we constrain ourselves. We can only see what seem like straight lines of thought, but proper thinking, a better way of knowing, would put us in touch with larger loops of mind. This seems to be the challenge we face: How to get attuned with loops of mind large enough, and of the right kind, that our activity becomes more wise, loving, and beautiful. By any reasonable standard, for instance in terms of the scientific criteria we just considered, it seems to require an overcoming of the ego, which by definition can
only manage snippets or fragments of mind, and not living loops and larger ecologies of mind. Arts of awareness function by putting us in touch with these larger networks of mind—by \textit{liberating} us into these larger ecologies, allowing these larger ecologies to liberate us (it is a gesture of mutual liberation, mutual illumination, co-discovery-creation). We forget the box and become \textit{intimate} with nonlocal mind, thus yielding a nonlocal knowing. All of this happens, can only happen, as part of a better \textit{Way} of knowing, or else we have merely found another way to foist our agenda onto life.

We will return to these considerations, but we may now at least wonder, and we can at least begin to doubt the viability of conscious human purposes. Are we really being skillful and realistic when we try to operate our lives—and the life of the world—on such a basis? Bateson, a careful scientific thinker, found this an unacceptable basis, something we should not really rely on. And, perhaps shockingly, this would hold even for seemingly nice ends and purposes. Dewey draws close to this Insight when he remarks,

\textit{Joshua’s reputed success in getting the sun to stand still to serve his desire is recognized to have involved a miracle. But moral theorists constantly assume that the continuous course of events can be arrested at the point of a particular object; that men can plunge with their own desires into the unceasing flow of changes, and seize upon some object as their end irrespective of everything else.} (HNC; MW14: 157)

At times, Dewey too, seems to want to stop the sun in the sky. We will inquire further into the matter elsewhere.

For now, let us contemplate further the symptoms on our inventory. We find a general and pervasive problem in them. One way or another, we seem to need to see that thinking well means allowing mind to manifest ecologically (while Bateson wrote about “Steps to an Ecology of
we also need to make Steps to a Mind of Ecology). This follows rather directly from several contemporary scientific theories or sets of theories, such as enactive cognition, quantum physics, evolution, and ecology. Thinking properly, we would think like a forest, because mind is more like a forest, and human beings are more like forests, than they are like machines. Oddly, we invented machines, and then decided that our own invention was a better metaphor for mind and body than anything in Nature, even though machines as we conceive them don’t exist in Nature, and even though mind and body are natural phenomena, living phenomena. Paul Shepard offers us some reflections that may help just now:

In one aspect the self is an arrangement of organs, feelings, and thoughts—a “me”—surrounded by a hard body boundary: skin, clothes, and insular habits. This idea needs no defense. It is conferred on us by the whole history of our civilization. Its virtue is verified by our affluence. The alternative is a self as a center of organization, constantly drawing on and influencing the surroundings, whose skin and behavior are soft zones contacting the world instead of excluding it. [Better to say co-discover-create over and above “contacting,” but if we allow contact to mean intimacy, especially embodied intimacy, then the term might function.] Both views are real and their reciprocity significant. [But the logic of “both” doesn’t function here.] We need them both to have a healthy social and human maturity. [Again: Not both—also not neither, nor one, nor the other.]

The second view—that of relatedness of the self—has been given short shrift. Attitudes toward ourselves do not change easily. The conventional image of a man, like that of the heraldic lion, is iconographic; its outlines are stylized to fit the fixed curves of our vision. We are hidden from ourselves by habits of perception. Because we learn to talk at the same time we learn to think, our language, for example, encourages us to see ourselves—or a plant or animal—as an isolated sack, a thing, a contained self. Ecological thinking, on the other hand, requires a kind of vision across boundaries. The epidermis of the skin is ecologically like a pond surface or a forest soil, not a shell so much as a delicate interpenetration. [Dogen’s Entwining Vines resonates here, as does the work of anthropologist Tim Ingold, on walking in the Earth.] It reveals the self enabled and extended rather than threatened as part of the landscape and the ecosystem, because the beauty and complexity of nature are continuous with ourselves. (from Sessions 1995: 132)

60 In another essay, originally intended as part of the present inquiry, the following passage from Ingold appears:
These are Steps toward an Ecology of Mind and a Mind of Ecology. Before cultivating them forward in our inquiry, it would help to note how Shepard relates these steps to the ones Wendall Berry invited us to take. These words follow right after the ones above:

And so ecology as applied to man faces the task of renewing a balanced view where now there is man-centeredness, even pathology of isolation and fear. It implies that we must find room in “our” world for all plants and animals, even for their otherness and their opposition. It further implies exploration and openness across an inner boundary—an ego boundary—an appreciative understanding of the animal in ourselves which our heritage of Platonism, Christian morbidity, duality, and mechanism have long held repellent and degrading. The older countercurrents—relics of pagan myth, the universal application of Christian compassion, philosophical naturalism, nature romanticism and pantheism—have been swept away, leaving only odd bits of wreckage. Now we find ourselves in a deteriorating environment which breeds aggressiveness and hostility toward ourselves and our world.

How simple our relationship to nature would be if we only had to choose between protecting our natural home and destroying it. Most of our efforts to provide for the natural in our philosophy have failed—run aground on their own determination to work out a peace at arm’s length. Our harsh reaction against the peaceable kingdom of sentimental romanticism was evoked partly by the tone of its dulcet facade, but also by the disillusion to which it led.

To be honest, though, I do not believe we need draw any analogy between mind and ground. For in truth they are one and the same. Far from being confined within the skull—the bulbous concavity of which is so readily likened to the global convexity of the planetary surface—the mind extends along the pathways or lines of growth of human becoming, just as do earthy roots and aerial foliage. Thus the ground of knowing—or, if we must use the term, of cognition—is not an internal neural substrate that resembles the ground outside but is itself the very ground we walk, where earth and sky are tempered in the ongoing production of life. Walking along, then, is not so much the behavioural output of a mind encased within a pedestrian body as a way of thinking and knowing—an activity, according to Rendell, ‘that takes place through the heart and mind as much as through the feet’. Like the dancer, the walker is thinking in movement. ‘What is distinctive about thinking in movement’, writes dance philosopher Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, ‘is not that the flow of thought is kinetic, but that the thought itself is. It is motional through and through.’ The motional thought, however, runs along the ground . . . the ground is an instrument, not only in the blunt sense that we need it to stand on, but also in the sense that without it we would lose much of our capacity to know. If its variations were erased and covered over by a hard surface, we would still be able to stand and walk but could no longer know as we go along. (2015: 48-9)
Natural dependence and contingency suggest togetherness and emotional surrender to mass behavior and other lowest common denominators. The environmentalists matching culture and geography provoke outrage for their oversimplified theories of cause and effect, against the sciences which sponsor them and even against a natural world in which the theories may or may not be true. Our historical disappointment in the nature of nature has created a cold climate for ecologists who assert once again that we are limited and obligated. Somehow they must manage in spite of the chill to reach the centers of humanism and technology, to convey there a sense of our place in a universal vascular system without depriving us of our self-esteem and confidence.

Their message is not, after all, all bad news. Our natural affiliations define and illumine freedom instead of denying it. They demonstrate it better than any dialectic. (133)

Again we see that shifting our way of knowing involves overcoming tremendous inertia—culturally, ecologically, psychologically, experientially. Our ego can feel threatened, for reasons we only begin to understand by means of spiritual practice that turns us toward our grasping, clinging, aversion, and so on, while liberating our capacity for perception and discernment, liberating our capacity to actually see and accept reality. But we have all this apparent affluence to comfort us, to serve in place of more rigorous verification. Although Shepard, like Berry, speaks of the isolation and suffering that come with our dualities, it does not seem so easy to make a shift out of our loneliness, our fear, our clinging, our self-doubt—in part because our confusion manifests in just these sorts of states, and they do not make for a mind conducive to wisdom. Moreover, as we discussed previously, our way of life has an inertia, a habit energy holding it together. Furthermore, shifting our thinking, our way of knowing, comes with an enobling of ourselves that also entails some degree of humiliation. We have to admit the humiliating defeat implied in saying, “Okay . . . in a fundamental sense, we really don’t know what we’re doing. We really don’t know. I don’t know. I’m lost. We seem to be lost on a large scale. We may seem to know a lot, and in some sense we must know something, but some kind
of root ignorance still has its way with us. It is destroying the conditions of life. We are destroying the conditions of life by knowing ourselves and our world this way. What *is* this?”

In resonance with Jung who suggested that we can only find our true answer “from Nature herself” (who, we may say, speaks as the voice of the divine), and in resonance with all the spiritual traditions that sent practitioners into wilderness to resolve “the great matter,” Shepard suggests that Nature herself embodies and expresses (embodies, presences, manifests) the more noble way of thinking we seek better than any dialectic—and thus we ourselves are that thinking, if only we can return to it, in a single gesture of rupture and reunion, in an altogether practice of co-discovery-creation. We return home to ourselves, in remembrance and recognition.

In speaking of re-membering and re-cognition, we can have in mind Nietzsche’s great question, which is the great question of our inquiry: “To what extent can truth endure incorporation? That is the question; that is the experiment” (GS 110). If we have so far incorporated error as we incorporated the unskillful thinking of dualities like human-nature, self-other, body-soul, body-mind, and all the rest (we can think of how Berry described such incorporation: “weak, joyless . . . the virtual prey of the manufacturers of medicine and cosmetics”), how can we incorporate something that, according to some of our best science and philosophy, seems truer—something we cannot truly know anyway until we incorporate it? We have to re-member ourselves, re-embody, arrive at a new thinking, re-cognition of ourselves in, through, as the world—thus transforming forward the *thinking of the world*.

Similarly, we return here to Dogen, who must always stay with us on our journey of re-cognition:
To carry the self forward to verify [or, practice-realize] myriad things is delusion. That myriad things come forth and verify the self is enlightenment.

. . . To study [to practice] philosophy is to study the self. To study the self is to forget the self. To forget the self is to be verified by all things. When verified by myriad beings, your body and mind and the body and mind of myriad beings fall away. A traceless trace of verification [realization] remains—ungraspable. The traceless trace of verification expresses itself without end. (translation adapted from Waddell and Abe)

When Shepard (like Jung, and like so many others in our inquiry) relates our challenge to the presence of an ego, we can, if we contemplate carefully, begin to sense how profound a challenge we face here. How do we get over ourselves? We have incorporated on the basis of a sense of self that directs itself in relation to its conscious purposes. How do we forget that self, which is all we “know,” because it is what we have incorporated? How do we allow for knowing to happen by means of the World—by means of Sophia, by means of sacredness and mystery?

We do this in part by sensing how it always does anyway. But this takes experimentation, an end to holding the World at arm’s length, as Shepard suggests we do, as Dewey suggests we do, as Berry and so many others suggest we do. A fundamental duality lives itself through us, with all sorts of negative consequences. Dewey gets at this duality here:

The material and spiritual, the physical and the mental or psychological; body and mind; experience and reason; sense and intellect, appetitive desire and will; subjective and objective, individual and social; inner and outer; this last division underlying in a way all the others. (LW 16: 408)

We can perhaps read this as a way of expressing both the intellectualist fallacy that Dewey thought philosophers so badly need to address, and also the fundamental fallacy the Dalai Lama invites us to overcome. I think Dewey’s collaborator Arthur Bentley puts this general problem in terms quite resonant with our inquiry:

Human skin is the one authentic criterion of the universe which philosophers recognize when they appraise knowledge under their professional rubric,
epistemology. By and large—except for a few of the great Critics and Sceptics—they view knowledge as a capacity, attribute, possession, or other mysterious inner quality of a “knower”; they view this knower as residing in or at a “body”; they view the body as cut off from the rest of the universe by a “skin”; all of which holds for philosophizing physicists and physiologists even as for the professionals of the arcanum itself. If this assertion seems crude, one may recall that there are times when a bit of crudity is a fair physic for an inflamed subtlety. In the case before us the factual crudity lies in the use of “skin” for a criterion, not in our calling attention to the fact. (Bentley 1941)\(^6\)

Bentley invites us to sense the crudity of our epistemology—a great irony given that our intellectualism endows us with a sense of sophistication. But many so-called “primitive” Cultures had well-established practices for realizing the wispiness of skin, for realizing that our skin is not even like the soil of a forest, but that skin can cover over the sense that we are more like a forest than an acorn. Various rites, rituals, ceremonies, celebrations, prayers, vision quests, and other arts of awareness (including a wide range of spiritual and shamanic practices) help individuals and cultures to orient themselves in a way that doesn’t get hooked on or ensnared by the “one authentic criterion of the universe.”

We may not think of this criterion as a criterion. We may protest that we do not hold this as “the one authentic criterion,” but such a protest betrays the subtlety of the disease, while evidence of its inflamed nature we find everywhere we look—for what else do we agree upon so universally in our actual practice of life but that we can hide inside our skin, that a knower and a doer dwell here, in this organic capsule? Again, we are saying in part that, because “philosophy” really amounts to “how we do things,” we suffer from a case of bad philosophy, emerging out of the

\(^6\) The title and the subtitle Bentley gave to the article bears significance in our inquiry: The Human Skin: Philosophy’s Last Line of Defense. Today’s professors may be hiding from a nonlocal epistemology, and from the decentering of ego that such an epistemology demands. But, given that even our science has carried us into this territory, there may be no line of defense left for any conscientious person.
incorporation of duality, the incorporation of distance from Sophia, difference from Nature, disengagement from the World. In the dominant culture, we might suggest, along with Alan Watts, that transcending the skin becomes a matter of taboo—thus showing the “primitiveness” of so-called “civilized” society. As Watts puts it in the preface to The Book on the Taboo Against Knowing Who You Are:

This book explores an unrecognized but mighty taboo—our tacit conspiracy to ignore who, or what, we really are. Briefly, the thesis is that the prevalent sensation of oneself as a separate ego enclosed in a bag of skin is a hallucination which accords neither with Western science nor with the experimental philosophy-religions of the East—in particular the central and germinal Vedanta philosophy of Hinduism.

This hallucination underlies the misuse of technology for the violent subjugation of man’s natural environment and, consequently, its eventual destruction. We are therefore in urgent need of a sense of our own existence which is in accord with the physical facts and which overcomes our feeling of alienation from the universe.

Watts does well to characterize his sources of inspiration as “experimental,” and even “philosophy-religions” in the sense that they rely on experiment and experience, they offer themselves for verification, and they demand a philosophical/spiritual attunement. The findings of these experimental traditions so nullify the theories upon which the dominant culture is founded that they must remain taboo. Such findings exist in marginalized traditions of the dominant culture as well, and they also appear in the science of the dominant culture. They remain unmetabolized, kept at a distance by means of “the one authentic criterion” that allows us to rationalize or evade a great deal of insanity.

The capsule epistemology that arises from this “authentic criterion” of our lives seems to come with negative side-effects. We might be tempted to think that this root criterion is perfectly acceptable, and that what we “do” with it creates trouble. But therein lies our confession: This
epistemology is the epistemology of a doer, of a doing orientation to life, which is what our inquiry seeks to understand—through the tensions it creates in us, through the degradation it seems to give rise to in ourselves and the world—and which it seeks to help us transcend. That this doing epistemology pervades our activity matters first and foremost, because we can then understand that it naturally pervades our science. It does this in countless ways, including the inclination of theory and practice toward atomization. For instance, consider how “ninety readers out of a hundred wouldn’t stop to think twice, coming across the expression ‘we put each participant in an fMRI scanner,’” while in another culture we might find ourselves coming across that expression and saying, “How odd . . . instead of studying an ecology, these experimenters isolated ‘organisms’ and put them in a scanner all alone . . . valid findings in a certain sense, but not very ecologically valid, not very true to a rich, lived experience . . .” Experiments have been done with pairs of “individuals,” but, as far as I know, only Joy Hirsch and her team have pioneered inquiry into relational beings engaged in relational activity (relational dynamism). Similarly, Theise (2009) offers a critique of “the cell doctrine,” the assumption that the body is made up of “cells”. It is not that the cell doctrine gives us nothing or renders a senseless interpretation of “biological” “phenomena,” but that it reflects and perpetuates knowing ourselves in atomized pieces, and by means of the intellectualist and psychologist fallacies, we begin to overwrite our experience, unable to get in touch with ourselves as a flow of energy, wind, or something like what certain Asian cultures refer to as chi, ki, lung, or prana. Something like acupuncture then gets relegated to the fringe, and the more holistic approaches to medicine practiced in the Indian, Tibetan, and Chinese traditions become a matter of “alternative” approaches. We obviously want “science-based” medicine, but those who most militantly argue for it rarely seem to question the current paradigms dominant in western science. While on the
one hand we should see these as mere details (in other words, we don’t need to think we must all “convert” to Tibetan medical practices), on the other hand we do seem to have here a crisis of worldview.

We needn’t panic over this “crisis”. It does seem we have to acknowledge some level of crisis in the dominant culture. But for now, we could maybe just try to imagine a possibility for an epistemology not founded on a bag of skin, to feel what it may evoke in us. We could use Shepard’s imagery in an expanded form, and we could say that thinking, especially creative thinking, is like a forest, a living ecology exploring potential connections (in the manner of an ecology of roots, seeds, pollens, insects, and so on, all exploring in, through, as relational dynamism). The connections may be nearby in physical space, or just in conceptual space. They may even be “separated” in such a way that insight involves a rupture of apparent separation (for instance, the synergy that gives rise to cells with mitochondria, or the synchronicity between a dream and a “later” event in a waking state). Even so, an insight is in some sense a living constellation of connections or relations. Similarly, a psychological “complex” is a persistent constellation of connections, a habitual way of practicing and realizing something that might be unskillful, limited, and limiting in harmful ways. Such a complex is not merely “in” us, but must manifest outside us in various ways, either in the stuckness of our lives, or, as Jung put it, “The psychological rule says that when an inner situation is not made conscious, it happens outside, as fate.” This applies in all sorts of life situations, and we may find that what appears like an “accident” over which we had no control . . . if we could reflect deeply enough, perhaps with the help of a guide, and often only by means of certain arts of awareness that would allow us to see it, we might find a troubling synchronicity, an unsettling sense that the “accident” was no mere
accident. In the most general sense, the state of the world reflects the state of our souls.

However, while Jung would certainly agree with this general feeling for his point, he also intended a more focused kind of meaning that in turn applies broadly to western culture. Thus, a fuller quotation may prove helpful, especially if we reflect on it in relation to the geological fault Wendell Berry spoke of, and the dualities suggested by Shepard, Dewey, Bentley, and Dogen—each in turn representative of wider networks or ecologies of conceptual data points:

The irreconcilable nature of the opposites in Christian psychology is due to their moral accentuation. This accentuation seems natural to us, although, looked at historically, it is a legacy from the Old Testament with its emphasis on righteousness in the eyes of the law. Such an influence is notably lacking in the East, in the philosophical religions of India and China. Without stopping to discuss the question of whether this exacerbation of the opposites, much as it increases suffering, may not after all correspond to a higher degree of truth, I should like merely to express the hope that the present world situation may be looked upon in the light of the psychological rule alluded to above. Today humanity, as never before, is split into two apparently irreconcilable halves. The psychological rule says that when an inner situation is not made conscious, it happens outside, as fate. That is to say, when the individual remains undivided and does not become conscious of his inner opposite, the world must perforce act out the conflict and be torn into opposing halves. (CW9ii, para. 126)

Nietzsche comes at this same split not only from a certain cultural perspective, but from a kind of biological suggestion that we do not necessarily evolve over lifetimes or develop in the course of one lifetime in order to grasp “the way things are,” but rather we will incorporate what functions to keep us going. We will return to this. But let us contemplate a little further some broader sense of thinking, elaborating a bit Shepard’s image of the self as a forest—a relational openness.

We can consider, as a way to ease into this notion, the image of plants growing in the rain forest. Some plants will begin to explore white, sandy soil, and find out what is possible in connection with this soil, thinking through possibilities. Eduardo Kohn, an anthropologist who spent four years living with the Indigenous Runa of the Amazon, tried to get in touch with forest thinking
during his time there, and then tried to theorize about his experience in terms of Peirce’s
semiotics. The discussion of representation seems a bit distracting, but just as Dewey tried to
mean something we aren’t quite used to with terms like “experience,” Kohn recognizes the
significant baggage hanging onto “representation,” yet still tries to rescue the concept. It may
prove better to talk about *thinking*, and not worry about the “semiotics” for now. Kohn tries to
explain how the thinking of a tropical forest of necessity involves a great deal of discernment:

For example, a number of tropical tree species have evolved as specialists that
grow only on white-sand soils. Tropical white-sand soils, as contrasted to tropical
clay soils, are nutrient-poor, do not hold water well, and have characteristics such
as high acidity that can slow plant growth. However, it is not the soil conditions in
themselves that account for the fact that there are specialists that live on white-
sand soils. Rather, the fact that there are such specialists is the result of their
relation to another set of life-forms: plant-eating organisms, or herbivores
(Marquis 2004: 619).

Because of the extremely poor conditions of these white-sand soils, plants
have difficulty repairing themselves fast enough to sustain the levels of nutrient
loss incurred by herbivory. Thus there is great selective pressure for plants living
on such nutrient-poor soils to develop highly specialized toxic compounds and
other defenses against herbivory (Marquis 2004: 620). (2013: 81-2)

While we could call this “selective pressure” “on the plants” which gets them “to develop”
something, it seems a more narrow characterization. Bateson puts it much better: Evolution is a
*mental* process (see his *Mind and Nature*). What we refer to as evolution has to do with the
living thinking of Nature. I don’t mean this in any “mystical” sense that should carry a pejorative
connotation. I mean that we don’t always recognize mind or thinking when we see it, since we
trap ourselves outside of the “vast complexus” of mind that the limited ego knows nothing about
and cannot control. We see then, not a “selective pressure” and so on, but a process of thinking, a
relational epistemology in action—which we should remain open to seeing if we remain
committed to philosophy, committed to wisdom, love, and beauty. Our epistemology should
attune us to life, and does not seem properly characterized as a matter of “knowledge,”
something “internal” to “humans,” something about “beliefs,” or any of a number of other more limited and limiting notions. As Nature’s beings, whether because we “evolved” with, through, as Nature, and/or because the divine made us altogether with Nature, perfectly fitted to live here in attunement with the sacredness of the divine creation, it seems reasonable the we should try and attune our way of knowing to the way of knowing expressed in, through, as Nature— because, again, that is what we are. This is not a simple-minded notion. It’s an experiential achievement or consummation, a matter of PracticeRealization. We are trying to glimpse something by means of such suggestions, trying to approach a fresh state of being, a space of knowing.

In a paper titled, “Herbivores Promote Habitat Specialization by Trees in Amazonian Forests,” Fine, Mesones, and Coley (2004) describe an experiment in which they took plants from white-sand soil and transplanted them to clay soils, and they took plants from clay soils and transplanted them to white-sand soils. They first protected all the plants from herbivores. In that situation, the plants from the clay soil grew better, even when they were transplanted to the white-sand soil. But, when the researchers let the herbivores back in, the plants who had evolved to grow in the white-sand soil thrived in that soil type, and the clay soil plants thrived in their soil type. Again, this is not a matter of herbivores exerting some kind of pressure, but a thinking through of relational possibilities, possibilities of mutual illumination and mutual nourishment. Growing in the white-sand soil is possible, but it takes collaborative thinking, a process of co-discovery-creation to cultivate it to realization. The plants, soil, fungi, bacteria, herbivores, and other beings all think together, in loops of mind or ecologies of mind that always transcend anything we localize in a bag of skin, a bag of bark, or the designation “organism”.

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We should remember that we are looking here at context, mindful (sati, awareness, remembering) of how our forgetting of context (in place of forgetting the self) becomes the fundamental philosophical fallacy—the fundamental human fallacy. The thinking of the plants, the herbivores, the soil (loaded as it is with fungi, bacteria, and other thinking constituents), and other beings gives us the validity of the way the plants in the white-sand soil organize their lives. It is relational. It is a relational way of knowing and being, an intimate presencing of non-local mind. We could point out, for instance, that such differences in soil types wouldn’t make a difference to the plants if it weren’t for the other beings who live with them, think with them, co-discover-create the world with them, making the forest, cultivating and transforming it forward.

Kohn wants to interpret this using the term “representation,” but we only need to see mind and thinking here—not “mind” as a substance, but mindfulness, mindedness, the unity of mind and life, Mind and Nature, a membering and remembering together, a mutual incorporation. So, we could also say that plants in the tropics have to become more discerning, have to be able to think with more nuance, than perhaps some other plants do, where there are fewer species, even in relatively varying terrain. Given that there are more species in a few acres of Amazonian rainforest than in the whole of “North America,” if someone from Turtle Island moved to the Amazon, they would have to develop a lot of discernment about what to eat, what not to eat, where to walk, when to walk, how to walk, and so on. But living in wild conditions anywhere likely provokes more thought and discernment from us than does our monotonous life in “civilization”—in spite of the hectic pace. Some people have remarked on the vast difference that seems to separate the wild boar and the domesticated pig (Paul Shepard for instance).
Domestication seems to involve a making-stupid, as part of a making-docile, making-juvenile, and making-controllable. In the self-domestication of humans, we may have accomplished a kind of numbing of our own capacities for discernment and vitality, and this is part of what Shepard seems to want to get at with the notion of “ontogenetic crippling.” As we put ourselves in office spaces, cars, and classrooms, we take ourselves out of what Kohn calls “a relatively denser web of living thoughts” (82).

It will help us to back out of the rainforest for awhile, and consider how unlike a forest our current context of thought appears. Kohn himself offers a segue from these reflections on forest thinking back to the habitual thinking we seek to question:

Selves, in short, are thoughts, and the modes by which such selves relate to one another stem from their constitutively semiotic nature and the particular associational logics this entails. Considering the logic by which these selves relate in this ecology of selves challenges us to rethink relationality—arguably our field’s fundamental concern and central analytic (Strathern 1995).

If selves are thoughts and the logic through which they interact is semiotic, then relation is representation. That is, the logic that structures relations among selves is the same as that which structures relations among signs. This, in itself, is not a new idea. Whether or not we are explicit about it we already tend to think of relationality in terms of representation in the ways we theorize society and culture. But we do so based on our assumptions about how human symbolic representation works (see chapter 1). Like the words that exist in the conventional relational configurations that make up a language, the relata—be these ideas, roles, or institutions—that make up a culture or a society, do not precede the mutually constitutive relationships these relata have with one another in a system that necessarily comes to exhibit a certain closure by virtue of this fact.

Even posthuman relational concepts, such as Bruno Latour’s “actant,” the networks of actor-network theory, and Haraway’s “constitutive intra-action” (Haraway 2008: 32, 33), rely on assumptions about relationality that stem from the special kinds of relational properties we find in human language. In fact, in some versions of actor-network theory the relational networks that connect humans and nonhuman entities are explicitly described as language-like (see Law and Mol 2008: 58).

But representation, as I have been arguing, is something both broader than
and different from what we expect given how our thinking about it has been linguistically colonized.62 (83)

To summarize a few of the branches of thinking about thinking we have wandered along, including these suggestions from Kohn, we can say ecology matters in our thinking in many ways, including the so-called “environment” “in which” “I” “think”. Our very language may cover this over (again, presenting all sorts of challenges for our inquiry), and thus an entire culture may orient itself to occlude rather than bring to realization the true nature of our thinking, or the nature of skillful, realistic, wise, loving, and beautiful thinking—and it may do this occluding in the form of a scientific mysticism, which means a seemingly rational and cogent way of knowing that amounts to mysticism in the pejorative sense, because it is a relatively narrow and even dogmatic activity of obscuring something profound and essential rather than helping people to realize and presence it. If thinking is already ecological, then speaking of an “environment” “in which” “I” “think” gives us a bad idea with negative consequences. Even “we think” would not quite get at it. Rather, ecologies think (which includes the “inner” and “outer” realms—e.g. the microbiome of a human being as well as how integrated Nature and non-human beings are in the human’s living and thinking).

This means we need to cultivate creative ecologies, which, in risky, limited terms, means “rooting ourselves” “in” “environments” that “mimic” a creative or vitalizing “network signature”. In other words, we need to think in (with, through, as) places—places alive and

62 A rather significant choice of words. The dominant culture has not only perpetuated conquest of other peoples and lands; it has perpetuated the conquest of its own peoples and lands, and of its own mind. The dominant culture has not only self-domesticated, but self-conquered—an activity coming to a moment of global crisis as the conditions of life collapse.
above, places that are themselves vitalizing ecologies, that are *relational openness*, not “things”.

This wisdom makes so much sense that we can find limited and limiting attempts to approach it in the dominant culture, attempts that of course get co-opted to the ends of the culture, and thus, ultimately, do not liberate us from the pattern of insanity. Simple examples of this include places like Google, Apple, 3M, Gor-tex, MIT, the Manhattan Project, Bell Labs, and similar relatively vitalizing, artificial ecologies that mainly thrive as ecologies of insanity, ecologies that perpetuate the pattern of insanity that lives itself through us (the “genius” of the insights that arise in these places is relative to the larger culture, and these ecologies produce fruits the larger culture wants to consume, but which may prove toxic to life). We often give pride of place to *individuals*—like Einstein, Edison, Martin Luther King Jr.—and we thereby miss the role of the broader ecologies, such as the conversations Einstein had with Michel Besso (whom he openly credited) or the general climate of the Menlo Park lab, where Edison worked and got others to work for him. We could say that all ecologies are ecologies of thinking, ecologies of mind. In any case, the ecology of thinking (even if we find ourselves tempted to limit the notion to human ecologies) depends on biodiversity, which means the nature and variety of minds, skills, sensibilities, sensitivities that come together in co-discovery-creation.

Ultimately, the most enriched and enriching context seems to be *Nature*, or (in the healthy case) Nature-Culture. Thinking like a forest happens best in, with, through, as a forest (hence Buddha’s realization under a tree, near a river, after years of forest wandering, in a pattern of living inquiry that formed the gold standard of many strands of eastern philosophy for millennia

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63 I can imagine a reader saying, “What do you mean by ‘relational openness’?” to which a most sane reply seems to be, “Yes, exactly.” There are surely many such exchanges, in relation to many phrases and suggestions in our inquiry.
after his realization of sagehood, the locally rooted *atopos*. As the magnificent Tibetan philosopher-sage Longchenpa wrote:

I see the truth that this life won’t last and is swiftly heading toward ruin,
That even this body which I’ve so lavishly cared for will be lost,
And I’ll have to head off alone to parts unknown.
So now, I’m off to the wildwoods.

When I get distracted, I lose sight of the path to freedom —
Which is solely responsible for prolonging my saṃsāric suffering.
Now that I’ve seen the plague of conceptual thinking,
I’m off to live in the unborn peace of the wildwoods.

The busy cities are bonfires of desire.
I see now that if I catch the terrible plague of existence,
I’ll just keep wandering in the canyons of saṃsāra.
So, I’m off right now to the wildwoods.

Every being in existence is threatened by affliction
And totally bound by terrifying chains of duality.
Because each one has at some point or another been my mother or father,
To free them, I must go to the wildwoods. . . .

. . . . Those who live an ethically impeccable life with
Abundant study,
Good meditation,
Life in the wildwoods,
And training in what is virtuous
Shall fearlessly discover great joy in the face of death.

The cause of their joy is exactly life in the wilds.
Thus, I am leaving to meditate there.
Nobody could know for certain
If the time when I shall be no more will come tomorrow or not.
On the morning of my death,
Nothing will protect me other than the Dharma.
For the Dharma is my protector, my home, and my friend.
It points me to the fine manor of the higher realms.

Thus, mind, remember that death is coming!
I must go to live in the wildwoods for the love of Dharma.

My mind sent this letter to itself.
Mind, if you’re listening, you are fortunate in the Dharma.
This message, spoken for your benefit, came straight from the heart.
Mind, take it, and head to the wildwoods.

This song of the enchanting wildwoods
Was penned by the man from Samyé
Whose mind was turned to liberation by renunciation,
On the highest mountain peak of Being at Ease in the Nature of Mind,
So he would wholeheartedly head to the wildwoods.

Through any virtue arisen from this,
May all beings extract their minds from the city of samsāra
And find freedom all together
In the enchanting wildwoods of omniscient liberation.64

Most of us today do not send such letters to ourselves. What kind of exercise would it be to write a caring letter from our own soul to our little ego? What would it be like to send a caring letter to our own soul? What would it be like to write a Love Letter to the Earth?65 We do not seek out the “enchanting wildwoods of omniscient liberation” (what an incredible phrase!), for we think we know so much from within our closed rooms with artificial lighting, plastic surfaces, right angles, glaring screens, fMRI scanners, microscopes, and so on. We think and know through abstract concepts, and we think and know through journals and books so as to produce more abstract concepts, more journals more books—and more aircraft carriers, nuclear missiles, fashion campaigns, automobiles (what a word!), and all the fuel for the bonfires of desire that currently engulf the conditions of life. We think in the midst of busyness and business that we perpetuate at every turn. We produce more words, more tech, and more busyness—abstract mind reproducing itself the way living mind does, precisely because living mind got co-opted by

64 Longchenpa lived from 1308-1364, about a century after Dogen, his Japanese counterpart, who lived from 1200-1253. If Longchenpa found the cities of his time busy “bonfires of desire,” one could barely guess what he might think if he saw New York. The full poem is available here: https://www.lotsawahouse.org/tibetan-masters/longchen-rabjam/enchanting-wildwoods
65 Thich Nhat Hanh’s Love Letter to the Earth has been a consistent favorite among my students, whatever their major or religious orientation. I highly recommend it, along with many of his other books, rooted as they are in practice, in a way of life.
abstractions, by “higher” order processes that drive the “lower” processes onward, against whatever wisdom the “lower” processes may want to express. Meanwhile, the conditions of life need us to produce more healthy soil, air, water. But our thinking and knowing happens in degraded conditions and produces more degradation, however “indirectly”. The logician who may think his hands clean of this degradation, because he merely teaches logic and writes books on epistemology, lives in a state of denial, a refusal to see. Same with the scientist doing “pure” research.

Our social ecology also exists in a degraded form. For one thing, “social ecology” will, for most thinkers, bring to mind human relations almost exclusively. Humans do their thinking without any attempt to think with other kinds of beings, even though other beings are our Elders when it comes to the history of thinking in this World we share and make together. But, as Paul Shepard has cogently suggested, non-human beings, especially wild beings, constitute human meaning, human thinking, human being, human activity—which in its wholeness is only designated “human” in relative terms. We are the thinking of the World, the thinking of Sacredness itself, the thinking of Wisdom, Love, and Beauty (which constitute the meaning of all our thinking). But we must allow—in the manner of an achievement, a consummation—we must allow those to be the powers that live themselves through us, as us. Even if we indulge this wrong-headed human exclusivity, we find that most social ecologies have all sorts of negative pressures on them. People work too hard, have too many commitments, have too much of a burden to “produce” whatever it is they produce (almost always, in one way or another, a commodity, something belonging to a brand—a fact that holds, in its own way, even in academia, as anyone seeking funding for a project, or tenure, or even a job knows all too well).
Somehow it seems we might be drawing near to this kind of sensibility, by means of our inquiry: The context of Others is the context of Wonder, the context even of Magic, the context of the Inconceivable. Why is it inconceivable? In part because it is whole already, and we are divided and dividing. There is something genuinely difficult to get at here, because it stands so far outside our experience, and we follow the method of experience. We can keep trying to at least realize an experience of the incoherence of, or even the deeper limits to our way of knowing, and draw near to a strangeness we may not yet be able to seriously and sensitively consider.

We can admit to some degree that creativity and insight cannot be controlled, and they require that we throw out our clocks and our agendas—a truly horrifying thought from the perspective of the dominant culture, which only indicates how important it is, and how challenging it will prove if we want to sincerely inquire into it—to begin to more deeply practice it, for there is no other way to know it. Not only do we face the unseen indoctrinations of the culture that are meant to domesticate out of us any wild thinking, but the conservativity of so many social institutions (many of which functioning in vital support of the general agendas of the dominant culture—despite any protests those in the institutions voice to the contrary) makes it extraordinarily challenging to invite, to allow genuine transformations to happen. They can only happen. We don’t manufacture them. Yet they arise in dependence on our practice.

Admittedly, every culture must face the challenge of balancing conservative and revolutionary tendencies. Conservation of patterns is natural, because if we focus on pattern transcendence in a narrow way, we end up with mere chaos. Genuine pattern transcendence is the ceaseless
unfolding of the cosmos, but our “search” for “transcendence” tends to cut us off from this unfolding.

Nevertheless, pattern maintenance, or the conservative forces of any culture, often operate out of fear, clinging, and attitudes of control. Therefore, creativity and insight have a history of arising in an interplay of liminality, which means creativity and insight happen at the edge, at a threshold, even in a deliberate leaving home, a seclusion from some aspects of the culture, a journey inward that often includes some concrete dimension, like hiding away in one’s home, or going into forest or desert, or finding solitude in a cottage closer to Nature (perhaps in the countryside or in mountains), or even entering into retreat at a monastery or other spiritual center. As far as the symptoms above—the symptoms that we listed in our inventory on human privilege and intellectual privilege, symptoms of a degradation of the context of philosophy, the context of thinking and knowing—we must emphasize that in the midst of the dominant culture, in the midst of its indoctrinations and its noise, we can at this point suggest that maybe, just maybe, we cannot really think, and in general we do not manifest a good mind, a good spirit (genuine eudaimonia). We will continue to bring this out in our inquiry, but by now we can at least feel more open to the suggestion that perhaps the soul itself, the psyche, might have become unwell in at least one or more subtle ways that remain inescapable as long as we stay in the dominant culture and its noise. When we consider examples like the saints and sages of old (and to some extent more modern examples, people like Thoreau or Miriam Lancewood), if we consider those who went into Nature and into retreat in order to heal the soul, to hear the soul, to see visions, to taste wisdom and love, to touch life and experience beauty, if we bring to mind especially the saints and sages, we may reflect on how much worse off we might be as we sit
around and try to “think” in our present context—as it continues to degrade. We are, most of us, trapped in contexts that have no solid track record for cultivating healing and holistic insight. Who thinks of the modern university as a place to get a job or take up a major that will heal one’s soul and produce a clarity of mind so wondrous that it goes altogether with peace, joy, and compassion? Who thinks of the modern university as the heart and soul of making healthy ecologies? Who thinks of universities as ecologies of bliss? Who thinks of universities as ecologies of serenity and wonder? We could call our inventory of human privilege a means of diagnosing a disorder of the soul, something like soul scurvy, or an anemia of the soul, or simply a degradation of the soul that goes altogether with the degradation of Nature we ourselves perpetuate in our activities at the university, and as participants in the dominant culture.

A certain measure of resistance or rebellion thus comes with any sincere desire to heal our own soul and the soul of the world, because we must go against strong currents in the culture. James Hillman has some delightful reflections on this need to Resist and Renounce, as part of a critique of the deluded notions of endless “growth” one finds in the dominant culture—the idea that we will all keep “growing,” which we need to see in relation to the delusions of endless economic “growth”:  

Jung says individuation is becoming more and more oneself . . . And becoming more and more oneself—the actual experience of it is a shrinking, in that very often it’s a dehydration, a loss of inflations, a loss of illusions . . . shedding is a beautiful thing. It’s of course not what consumerism tells you, but shedding feels good. It’s a lightening up [we could say, enlightenment—n.k.] . . . Shedding pseudoskins, crusted stuff that you’ve accumulated. Shedding dead wood. That’s one of the big sheddings. Things that don’t work anymore, things that don’t keep you—keep you alive. Sets of ideas that you’ve had too long. People that you don’t really like to be with, habits of thought, habits of sexuality. That’s a very big one, ’cause if you keep on making love at forty the way you did at eighteen you’re missing something, and if you make love at sixty the way you did at forty you’re missing something. All that changes. The imagination changes. Or put it another
way: Growth is always loss. Anytime you’re gonna grow, you’re gonna lose something. You’re losing what you’re hanging onto to keep safe. You’re losing habits that you’re comfortable with, you’re losing familiarity. That’s a big one, when you begin to move into the unfamiliar. You know, in the organic world when anything begins to grow it’s moving constantly into unfamiliar movements and unfamiliar things. (Hillman and Ventura, 1992: 8)

We continue to move into the unfamiliar—with unfamiliar movements. We somehow have to lose and gain familiarity at the same time, for we must lose familiarity with the dominant culture in the same gesture of gaining familiarity with what we are, even as we realize what we are is not a “thing,” and so cannot be known as we try to know things in the habitual way (so, our old knowing becomes unfamiliar and a new knowing becomes increasingly intimate). And, if we want this movement into the unfamiliar to become vitalizing, our work becomes the cultivation of vitalizing ecologies of practice and realization. The more we do this, the more fruits of true genius we will produce. For this to happen, it seems many more of us—in some sense all of us—need more unstructured time in Nature, more opportunities for seclusion and retreat, as well as the material support to be able to give ourselves in a sustainable way to spiritual practice. Proper thinking means throwing out the clock, the agenda, and all sorts of habits, reactions, and limiting notions, leaving us on “shaky tender” legs, to use Chögyam Trungpa’s characterization. Proper thinking demands unstructured time and a cultivated spaciousness, with proper material support for all citizens (a matter of ecology, not “economics”). And yet the culture finds every way possible to overload and distract us, and to increase economic inequality and perpetuate an unwise and unskillful distribution of resources so that spiritual life (and its concomitant original thinking) gets no priority.66

66 Thus Socrates asked for, but could not get, a free lunch from his culture. The Buddha managed to somehow presence a wisdom, love, and beauty that succeeded where Socrates failed, and a free lunch has long remained part of many Buddhist traditions in many cultures. However, as we all know, in U.S. culture, there is no free lunch, an expression of an inherent animosity to
Consider an example of the insanity of the dominant culture that may seem small at first: So-called daylight savings time. What a bizarre symptom. Nature’s Rhythms be damned! We will put the civilized agenda on top of life, and ignore Life, ignore Nature. We will live unnaturally. We will live apart from Nature. We will send people to the hospital with heart attacks if we must. We have appointments to keep. We have extraction operations to manage. We have ad campaigns to run. Migrations? Cycles? Circles? Bah! Humbug!

One of the problems we face in changing our way of knowing is that better ways of knowing go against the very tendency to have an agenda. In more limited terms: we don’t have time for spiritual practice, just as few had any real time to speak with Socrates. In general, the more we need spiritual practice, the more reasons we have for not practicing: Too tired . . . not today . . . maybe tomorrow . . . maybe a retreat next month . . . maybe if I didn’t have so many errands . . . it’s not my fault that I had to take that extra shift, and then I had to go to the doctor, and . . .

We don’t see the collusion, the way we and the pattern of insanity work together to keep us busy. If we had leisure time, we might see the pattern of insanity for what it is, and we would “have time” to disrupt it. As it stands, we have so many things to do. We need to stop doing. The clock

spirituality. The Regan era defunding of the University of California system, arguably one of the finest university systems in the world prior to his intervention, indicates there is no free lunch for anyone in academia, and thus the corporatization of the university and the funding gamesmanship that pervades, and despoils in various ways, all of the activity in higher education. There should be a free lunch for everyone—or so it should feel, based on proper organization, proper attunement of Nature-Culture.
encourages a doing orientation to life, and thus it limits our ways of knowing. How could we ever think we can *do* life?

Zhuangzi, one of the great sages of non-doing, writes of a massive bird who can fly 90,000 li—roughly 40,000 miles:

The cicada and the little dove laugh at this, saying, “When we make an effort and fly up, we can get as far as the elm or the sapanwood tree, but sometimes we don’t make it and just fall down on the ground. Now how is anyone going to go ninety thousand li to the south!”

If you go off to the green woods nearby, you can take along food for three meals and come back with your stomach as full as ever. If you are going a hundred li, you must grind your grain the night before; and if you are going a thousand li, you must start getting the provisions together three months in advance. What do these two creatures understand? Little understanding cannot come up to great understanding; the short-lived cannot come up to the long-lived.

How do I know this is so? The morning mushroom knows nothing of twilight and dawn; the summer cicada knows nothing of spring and autumn. They are the short-lived. South of Ch’u there is a caterpillar which counts five hundred years as one spring and five hundred years as one autumn. Long, long ago there was a great rose of Sharon that counted eight thousand years as one spring and eight thousand years as one autumn. They are the long-lived. Yet P’eng-tsu alone is famous today for having lived a long time, and everybody tries to ape him. Isn’t it pitiful!

The clock takes away the possibility for experiences that might appear laughable from within the confines of our scheduled lives and their many pressures. The clock takes our orientation and ordering out of the living world, placing it into human agendas that grope in every direction, conscious purposes that justify any means and ignore any unpleasant side-effects, cravings on the march, throughout the day and night, with no interruption, always at war with something, even ourselves. The clock invites invasion, makes space for the colonization of the Soul by the pattern of insanity. The clock is a mandala of madness—not the divine madness inherent in sacred sanity, but madness in the pejorative sense, one in which beliefs assert themselves against reality,
dualistic delusions make an assault against the union of opposites that characterizes what we may poetically refer to as the sacred-creative ordering of life, the sacred-creative necessities and potentials of Nature.

We can at least entertain the possibility that the clock cuts us off from life, from each other, as Plato showed it cutting people off from wisdom.

The clock cuts us off from the moment. Time, as lived, is moment—not a line, not a “moving” “thing”. Time is existence, momentary and open. The clock pushes for closure against the openness. Openness swallows all attempts at closure. That is why the ego fears it, fears the openness we are.

The clock presents an argument, an analysis, a conceptual manner of relating, placing a grid over experience. Life relates only in living ways, beyond minutes and hours yet danced in rhythms, beyond words and ideas yet expressed as an inherent meaningfulness, a play of meanings.

Perhaps we got hoodwinked into thinking there is something scientific about time, or perhaps science got hoodwinked into thinking there is something scientific about time, even though time as we know it in the west seems inextricably bound with commerce and conquest. Sadly, we rarely try to get in touch with rhythms we might sense in ourselves, in relation to Nature. But even if we did, we might not know how to look, since we would have to rebel against intense contemporary pressures as well as centuries of social-psychological-political-economic inertia.
that has become busy-mindless habit. Writing about the anthropology of time, Dinwoodie (2006) gives an overview of the development of the western notion of time:

Curiously, those who search for time in knowledge of nature tend to see nature in the time of clocks and watches, and if we read their work closely they tend to use some version of clock time as their model for “real time.” This is particularly surprising when we consider that Western time concepts as expressed on clocks and watches developed not as results of increasing sensitivity to nature as such, nor in a milieu of “neutral and inevitable technological change,” but as expressions of “the most far reaching [socio-cultural] conflict” (Thompson 1967:93–94). During the Middle Ages the church bell provided the standard indicator of social rhythm. In the heart of medieval European society, work rhythms and in fact all other rhythms of life were subordinated to the cycles of aggregation to worship marked by town bells. On the one hand, the bells indicated the rhythms of activity, and on the other, they served as reminders of the predominance of the Church in the matter of religion and polity, understood as a single undifferentiated sphere of life.

With the rise in significance of markets and industry came the need for new forms of “time” better suited to measuring the value of the work of individuals. In other words, labor, a category of abstract, commodified, social activity that could be bought and sold by analogy to gold, could not be instantiated without a new form of “time.” Clocks with circular dials metaphorically representing “the rhythms of social life” in terms of an infinite sequence of equal spaces, every one of equal value, made it possible for work to be measured as a summation of activity units. And with this a new form of time was born. The “problem of the duration of the working day was especially acute in the textile sector,” writes Jacques LeGoff; “where cloth does not occupy a dominant position, we do not observe the appearance of the Werkglocke” (1980:46). LeGoff continues: “in the cloth manufacturing cities” of the fourteenth century, “the town was burdened with a new time, the time of the cloth makers. This time indicated the dominance of a social category. It was the time of the new masters” (1980:46).

The “time” of these new capitalists spread relatively quickly. Initially clocks were situated in factories, behind closed doors. They were used to demarcate periods of active labor and to place values on the contributions of workers. Only factory owners and their direct representatives had access to the clocks. Workers began to worry that the owners would slow the factory clocks in order to get more labor than they were paying for. Workers had no way of independently evaluating whether they were being treated fairly. What they needed were clocks of their own. Thus a market demand emerged for cheap portable clocks.

Up until that time watches had been expensive and unreliable. They had been curiosities of the rich. With the interests of workers in mind, however, watchmakers began to produce more accurate and affordable timepieces. As workers began to acquire these watches and exert some control over the
conditions of their servitude they also began to acquire “time” in another sense: they began to accept the time of the workplace as the standard for the measure of activities more generally. By the middle of the eighteenth century the clock had penetrated to the realm of personal regime. Thompson cites Laurence Sterne’s novel *Tristam Shandy* (1759–67) as evidence. Tristam’s father—one of the most regular men in everything he did . . . that ever lived—had made it a rule for many years of his life,—on the first Sunday night of every month . . . to wind up a large house clock, which we had standing on the back-stairs head. He had likewise gradually brought some other little family concernments to the same period, and this enabled Tristam to date his conception very exactly. [1967:57]

And so the new time penetrates, if you will pardon the expression, the domestic sphere.

Time management of the capitalistic variety was also extended into schools and even into religion. As Thompson again observes, the “very name of ‘the Methodists’ emphasizes this husbandry of time,” (1967:88). Though the Church resisted, the “time” of capitalists began to challenge the “time” of the Church, and clocks began to replace bells in town squares. Sundays, the period of highest intensity of societal participation, began to be subsumed within “weekends,” periods of ritualized leisure, that is, periods of liminal reversal within the market system.

At this point the “time” of the textile industry had succeeded in supplanting other “times” so well that we have difficulty registering the fact that fairly recently there had been other idioms of temporality. Church bells in fact once represented the standard measure of temporality, though they do not, obviously, represent “time” as we have come to know it.

The matter is further compounded by the widespread use of celestial and other “natural” rhythms to stand above and lend credence to our social rhythms. Obviously, many temporaliites underlie the workings of the natural world, and these all underlie the workings of the social world. In this sense time is certainly inherent in celestial rhythms. Upon reflecting on the situation, however, most would agree that these natural rhythms are necessary but not sufficient conditions for interpreting the “times” used to measure social rhythms within specific social groups. When a natural rhythm happens to be used to mark an important social juncture, it does not do so naturally; it does so because people resolve to use it accordingly. And doing so requires resolving who chooses which rhythm. To understand the social workings of such a rhythm we have to consider who made the decisions and how. In our everyday lives, however, it is normal for us to simplify the matter and to literally accept the metaphors implicit in time representations. We confuse the use of natural rhythms as higher order metapragmatic symbols of social rhythms with natural rhythms as such.

In summary, the basic problematic of the anthropology of time dates back to Durkheim’s *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1916). What we generally
refer to as *time*, the standard time of the West, goes back to the industrial age. It represents a culturally and historically specific temporal system, and it serves poorly as a model for temporalities. Thus in the anthropology of time it is conventional to distinguish between *time* as the dominant form of representation of social rhythms in the West and *temporality* as social rhythms and their representation in general. With this in mind, it would be extraordinary for a non-Western society to have “time” as we know it prior to its contact with Europeans. After all, “time as we know it,” is effectively a variety of European temporality. No one familiar with the anthropology of time would misinterpret such a statement with the claim that the so-and-so have no temporal concepts. (334-6)

The west, in other words, has a remarkably weird notion of time, a notion that seems mechanical and monetary. We might call it industrialized time, or time 2.0, or manufactured time (and, given that it long predates modern science—Galileo wasn’t born until 1564—we might think of our science as industrialized or manufactured and economized from the outset). Granted, there are lots of ways to practice and realize temporality. Indeed, that’s part of the point here: On what basis will we practice and realize the *experience* of time, the experience of *moment*? We can admit that a certain kind of “knowledge” appears when we deal with clocks. But what is that knowledge really worth? What does it do for us? And do we thereby marginalize other sorts of experience? This is not some sort of post-modern critique of science. It is not to say our form of science is “merely” “political” or “economic” or something like that. We can surely begin to sense the interwovenness of science, politics, economics, and more. Science emerges from Nature-Culture. But, we can set as a standard for science its capacity to put us in attunement with Nature, its capacity to make Nature and Experience more luminous. We may find our current science lacking there, and only our imagination limits the possibilities of co-discover-creating something more vitalizing. Thankfully, we can turn to may spiritual traditions for inspiration, including the many traditions of Turtle Island. As Dinwoodie puts it,

In pursuing the experience of temporality, we might ask what contribution Native American studies can make. The backdrop to the ethnography of Native North America, Edward Sapir once suggested, is the “extreme psychological
distance between the aboriginal American cultures and the kind of life they are expected to live today” (Darnell 1990:303). Thus viewed, Native North America offers up the experience of temporal spectra, traditional and modern, in a way that no other ethnographic area does. After all, to generalize grossly, what distinguishes Native North America among all ethnographic areas is the contiguity and sometimes confluence of practices hypermodern, archaic, and everything in between. This approach, the exploration of temporal spectra as epitomized in the experiences of representative Native Americans, would not be entirely new. A start was made in the 1930s and 1940s, particularly in the life-history work supervised by Edward Sapir and John Dollard. It has also been developed implicitly in actor-centered anthropology (Basso 1990, 1996; Fogelson 1974, 1984, 1989; Hallowell 1955) and in Native American literature (Erdrich 1984; Momaday 1968; Silko 1977; Welch 1979).

For reasons that I do not fully understand, however, North America continues to be primarily associated in the general literature not with anything as interesting or palpable as the experience and management of temporalities but with a retrograde version of the question of whether time is relative. Stated simply, this question reads: Do the Hopi have “time” (Black 1959; Gell 1992; Malotki 1983; Munn 1992)? In order to show how an undue emphasis on this approach has impoverished not only Native American studies but also the anthropology of time, I will discuss a recent incarnation of this debate and compare the sort of material on which it is based to the evidence on temporality from one revisited life history. Rather than closing the book on Native American time, so to speak, I hope to show that we have only begun to learn about the Native American experience of temporality and that a genuine understanding of Native American temporality has the potential to reinvigorate Native American studies and the anthropology of time more generally. (327-8)

Other cultures have a sense of temporality. But for us to think they have western “time” seems presumptuous, as does the assumption that they cannot experience timelessness. What their experience might be, of time or timelessness (or their interrelation) . . . that we would have to practice in order to realize. The “management of temporalities” itself sounds like a notion from conquest consciousness, but western cultures are not the only ones to fall prey to conscious purposes and attempts at conscious control. The question in part comes to how leaving the clock

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67 The work of Calvin Luther Martin would be illuminating here, and in a more comprehensive inquiry we would consider some additional artefacts here and elsewhere. This caveat holds in a general way, for the present inquiry is far from comprehensive enough, but, to say it again, the image of the inquiry does have enough support to come through.
might go altogether with leaving conquest consciousness, and how the clock and conscious purpose may reinforce one another.

Leaving the clock, we enter the moment. Renouncing the agenda, we receive our purpose.

Forgetting the deadening hours and workdays, we remember the aliveness and aloveness of a working World, a functioning World in which we fulfill our function.

Must we not rebel against civilized time? Does it not seem we must mutiny against Captain Clock and his constant colonial raiding of the soul and the living world? Captain Clock and his conquest of life must end.

Surely we have places to be! Surely we will still need to go to the doctor at such-and-such an hour. But only by means of placelessness and timelessness (atopos and atempos) can we arrive at our place in life, and only by such means can we arrive at any appointed place or time, to do the work of life.

LoveWisdom means discernment—the realization of the difference between the encumbered and the unencumbered. Captain Clock weighs upon the heart and soul, cracks his whip at mind and body: Stroke! Stroke! Stroke! He whips us to carry his artificial ship onward.

To carry life forward, to realize life, we need to leave the clock and enter the moment. Entering the moment, we can make plans when needed. Living the moment, presencing what we might call the being-moment (existence as a moment, moment as living experience), does not mean
living for “the moment,” which just means another kind of agenda, one of impulse and hedonic medication.

Again and again, Socrates Shows us: Sophia demands we throw out the clock; wisdom-love-beauty will not abide by our agendas, our notions of time, our stuckness in the past and the future. Again and again, Socrates gives himself to the moment, gifts himself to life, gifts himself to, with, through, as intimacy, with no fear of temporal pressures that “civilization” uses to control us, to tame us, to make us more stupid and stuck. Even on his way to his own indictment, on charges that carry the threat of the death penalty, Socrates stops to speak with Euthyphro, who seems nothing more than a bonehead, and yet Socrates seems willing to keep the inquiry going, with a heart wide open to Euthyphro’s capacity for insight. But Euthyphro will not allow his foolish agenda to get interrupted by anything, including insight, and he tells Socrates he has no more time to contemplate righteousness, holiness, sacredness, and service to the divine. He must hurry off to have his own father killed.

Do we think we have no time for Wisdom, Love, and Beauty? Do we think we have no time to stop the pattern of insanity that has us in its grips, that we must hurry off to do the things that make our families sick, that make species extinct, that make a handful of people “wealthy”? Who has time for a book like this? Who has time for the soul, for the sacred, for dispelling the pattern of insanity?

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68 With the term being-moment I have in mind Dogen’s essay Uji, 有時. We could call the essay “ExistenceMoment,” or “BeingMoment,” or “MomentBeing,” perhaps even “HappeningMoment” or “BeingOpportunity,” or even (in light of Dogen’s essay on the Nature of Awakeness), “YesMoment”.

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The clock, so essential to our context, helps constitute the system of closure and clinging, the systemic sickness that has us, that drives us. The clock moves and manipulates us, and by means of the clock we carry the intellectualist and maybe also the psychologist’s fallacy into time. We thereby miss the circulation of life. The heart has an inherent variability, as the literature on heart rate variability shows. For instance, Kirby et al. (2017) note that compassion practice is, “connected to activity of the vagus nerve and corresponding adaptive heart rate variability (HRV). HRV is an important physiological marker for overall health, and the body–mind connection. Therefore, there is significant value of training compassion to increase HRV and training HRV to facilitate compassion” (1). Other studies have found positive changes in HRV as a result of meditation practice, for instance in relation to a 10-day meditation retreat (Krygier et al. 2013).

Natural cycles are life. The clock is the noisiest order, while the heart desires the silent noise of life. The silent noise of life helps us to see the need for non-local ways of knowing.

Researchers have produced evidence suggesting a potentially integral linkage between mind and something called pink noise (also known as $1/f^\beta$ type noise, or $1/f$ scaling). The literature on this is sometimes technical, but we don’t need the technicalities here. We can rely on Dotov et al. to give us what we need to make our way. They cite work by van Orden et al. (2003) and Holden et al. (2009) that supports the hypothesis that:

$$1/f^\beta$$ noise found in an inventory of cognitive tasks is a signature of a softly assembled system exhibiting and sustained by interaction-dominant dynamics, and not component-dominant dynamics. In component-dominant dynamics, behavior is the product of a rigidly delineated architecture of modules, each with
pre-determined functions; in interaction-dominant dynamics, on the other hand, coordinated processes alter one another’s dynamics, with complex interactions extending to the body’s periphery and, sometimes, beyond. (3)

Even this sounds highly technical. We see a contrast: interaction-dominant versus component-dominant. A clock is made of components. The universe is like a clock. Humans can be manipulated like clockwork. If there are components, there are atomized parts and pieces, isolated individuals. Components means something “functional” in a rationalistic sense, as in, “Are we using our resources rationally?” (as opposed to, “Are we using our resources relationally?”)

What is this rationality that burns the candle of the soul at both ends? Why do we feel tired? Why are we so busy? Why can our workaday world reach us at any hour? Why can we stay up all night and binge-watch distracting nonsense, taking in endless streams of entertaining noise? Maybe we have a component-dominant vision of ourselves and the world, which goes altogether with a component-dominant vision of time. Maybe all of this goes together with a vision of lack, of competitiveness, a need to defend a certain territory, a feeling of disconnection, a loss of meaning.

What if time is relation? Not a “thing” “in which” objects move and interact (i.e., “things” “unfold” “in time,” and other conceptions), but being itself—our being-together.

Interaction-dominant dynamics should mean something like relationality. The meaning of “interaction” and “dynamics” transforms the sense. We cannot mean “isolated parts interacting.” We mean relationality-dynamism or relational-dynamism. It is the whole-working. Each moment
is whole-working. Each moment presences the circulation of life, as if we are all integrated as a single body, an interwoven openness, luminous and knowing.

We can, conceptually, distinguish “bare physical interactions” on the one hand, and the relational dance of mind, the interwoven symphony of the soul on the other (we could refer here to “cognitive systems,” or something like that—but we should mean Mind, Life, Ecology, Mutual Illumination, Mutual Arising, a Total Altogetherness . . . capitalized words to help us remember that they need to have new meanings, not the ones we got used to).

Once we recognize or at least entertain the possibility of relational-dynamism, we may see that we can draw no strict boundaries, including any strict boundary of where thinking “takes place,” where mind arises. In such visioning, mind (more properly, heart-mind-body-world-cosmos) has to do with relationality, and we see mind as nonlocal, even if we may discern patterning or functioning asymmetrically organized around this or that “organism”. In such visioning, we may sense how the clock that comes altogether with borders and barriers must make us unwell or even insane. We may sense how “localizing” minds, bodies, and times does not mean finding our place, but becoming unrooted. We cannot enter the moment with gestures of “localization” in the sense implied by the clock. If we let ourselves become cogs in the machinery of civilized insanity, we lose the relations of the soul. We no longer relate to life and to each other. We no longer dance—as the dance. Instead, we “interact”.

With this notion of relational-dynamism we can construct an operational indicator for detecting the presence of mind, or, more technically speaking, a “cognitive system” with certain
“facultative characteristics” which we can measure in clearly defined ways (all of this apparent precision, this kind of “scientific” language, as of now, largely expresses the pattern of insanity). Specifically: If we want to know if a particular system is cognitive, if we want to know if we stand in the presence of mind (so to speak), we can look for pink noise. If we have a genuinely cognitive system, it should exhibit pink noise, and we may find it unlikely that a system would exhibit pink noise if it were not a genuinely cognitive system—assuming we can differentiate these cases.

We should note that the matter is not as neat as we might like it. As van Orden et al. note in another article (2005):

> Criticality, as in self-organized criticality, predicts emergent $1/f$ scaling or pink noise, which should be widely observed in human performance. Pink noise is widely observed in human performance. Does the inverse of this deduction hold true? Does the presence of pink noise strictly imply self-organization? No. As stated in our original article, “Ubiquitous pink noise is not sufficient evidence for self-organized criticality; it is simply a necessary consequence” (Van Orden et al., 2003, p. 343). (121)

These researchers seem to think pink noise appears as a “signature” of cognitive systems, in that it arises as a “necessary consequence” of the functioning of such systems. But they give us a clear caveat that the presence of pink noise alone does not mean we have a cognitive system on our hands (something else could present the same signature). However, if we set up the laboratory conditions properly, the emergence of pink noise may make a compelling case for the self-organization of a cognitive system that includes elements from outside the constitutional boundary of the organism—e.g. beyond the skin—and this would demonstrate the relationality of mind. Dotov et. al sought to do exactly this, to show the beyond-the-skin nature of mind. We have of course contemplated this notion in various ways, but here we do it in the supposedly
precise terms of an operationalized science that isolates variables and measures them with alleged rigor. We can use the gold standard of the old epistemology to raise challenges to our assumptions, and even to record “data” that must be clearly anomalous with respect to that very epistemology, as in the case of Puthoff and Targ’s 1976 documentation of, as they put it, “A Perceptual Charnel for Information Transfer over Kilometer Distances,” by which they meant a signal not sent by any means that fits in our current paradigm. In other words, they ran a scientific experiment to demonstrate so-called extra-sensory perception (ESP), which we only refer to as “supernatural” because of our own assumptions about “nature,” not because of anything we can claim to truly “know” “about” “nature”. Consider the words of the journal’s editor with respect to this publication, comments which probably seemed necessary given the prestige of the journal as a “scientific” publication:

In a series of experiments carried out at Stanford Research Institute, both experienced subjects and inexperienced volunteers were able to describe scenes being viewed at unknown remote locations by other members of the experimental team-sometimes with great accuracy, and always under carefully designed experimental protocol. The possible existence of such an ESP channel is significant to electrical engineers, who have the background and knowledge to exploit statistically described channels through the principles of communication and information theory. The great potential importance of this work, should it be substantiated by replication and further research, weighed heavily in the carefully considered decision to publish this paper in the PROCEEDINGS. We realize that many of our readers will think this an ill-considered decision, as did one of the engineers we consulted who said, “This is the kind of thing that I would not believe in even if it existed.” However, it is our opinion that the majority of electrical engineers believe that the investigation of ESP is a legitimate scientific undertaking, regardless of their belief in its ultimate existence. Furthermore, we believe that the authors have been careful and sincere in the design and reporting of this experiment. Their work deserves scientific consideration and objective criticism. We would encourage others to repeat these experiments and to report their results, whether they be positive or negative. We would also welcome critiques of the experiment itself. In any event, the paper itself may be the most readable ever published in this journal, and few readers will finish without wondering for at least a moment if indeed ESP might be possible after all. What a difference it would make to us all! (191)
Indeed, what a difference it would make—if we used such anomalous data to think ourselves into a paradigm shift in our way of knowing, which not only this but many experiments support. However, given the skin as “the one authentic criterion of the universe,” most of us, consciously or not, would side with the engineer—surely a devoutly scientific person—who said, “This is the kind of thing that I would not believe in even if it existed.” We may as well say, “I would not practice another way of knowing even if one can know things by means of it—perhaps essential, life-changing, life-saving things.” So, in the end, it perhaps does little, for a good number of us, to consider strange phenomena, no matter how well-documented. The skin bag has us trapped.

But, we may find a little bit of wonder in us . . . What if? What might a non-local Cosmos, the one our own sciences (e.g. quantum physics and ecology) tell us we have, what would such a Cosmos be like? After all, we must ask, since we live in the world we practice, and we do not practice a non-local world—except in the sense of the great fallacy of context. Maybe we can begin to hear pink music if we listen quietly.

We should note that, from a certain view, pink noise makes a lot of sense as a signature of cognitive systems, a signature of mind. A gentle noise emerges with mind. Why? Because life involves precariousness. Loosely speaking, mind arises in the midst of precariousness. Mind arises as a moment, a fleeting moment that shines and then shifts, perhaps discontinuously, “into” another moment, almost as if each moment, with its own completeness (a completeness without closure), its own perfection, simply vanishes, and another moment arises, as a now that contains in its perfection anything we could skillfully call past or future.
Life unfolds as ceaseless “flow,” ceaseless practice, ceaseless realization. We call these realizations events or happenings. They presence endless nuances, inversions, insights, shifts, transitions, transformations, perturbations, and surprise. The “flow” is the dynamism of wonder, not a “thing” that “flows” or a “flowing” “thing”.

In this flowing, what we call organisms must actively maintain their identity in the midst of the precariousness, the relational-dynamism of life, and this requires responsive, adaptive activity.69 When we actively engage our lives, which means the PracticeRealization of what we will come to call an EcoSensual Awareness (the term will emerge as a term a bit later), a living relational-dynamism with ecologies of PracticeRealization (what we would call, in a limited way, “interaction” “between” “organism” and “environment”), we must adaptively respond to flowing of happenings we thereby co-discover-create. If we reacted randomly, the signature of our activity would presence white noise. If we reacted in repetitive, rigid, or formulaic ways, the signature of our activity would presence linearity in one way or another—something like clockwork, something Cartesian, controlled, controllable, domesticated, monetized. Pink noise is nonlinear: Neither random nor linear, it suggests an engaged, adaptive responsiveness in the midst of the precariousness, what we might call the fundamental groundlessness of life (there is ultimately nothing to stand on, since its relationality all the way down, and we find no

69 As a virtue, let us see basic responsiveness in the midst of the precariousness of life as a hallmark of mind and of wisdom. Wisdom in the spiritual sense means the PracticeRealization of our responsiveness, which arises in the midst of our functioning, our living interrelatedness, our relations (kin), and our “ontological responsibility” to realize ourselves in, through, as this total dynamism. We must keep discovering and creating better ways of expressing it. We must experience it, live it, first and foremost. And this marks the philosophical or spiritual virtue of responsiveness: The aliveness and aloveness of life, as ourselves presencing the mystery moment-to-moment, for the sake of all beings (whether “near” of “far”). This is a virtue of life, to which human beings attune themselves and thus express their natural virtue.
substances, no selves, no inner, no outer). It’s just the kind of thing we might want to look for in order to identify cognitive systems.

After mentioning the work of Puthoff and Targ, it might seem all the more dry to consider the work of Dotov et al., but let us briefly describe the experiment. They set up a simple computer task. The task involved the manipulation of a computer mouse to play a simple game displayed on the computer screen. The computer game was specifically designed as a kind of transposition of the task of balancing a pole in one’s palm. The mouse was designed to function as a normal computer mouse would, but at a random time the mouse would appear to function improperly. A basic hypothesis tested by the experiment is that an interaction-dominant system will emerge as the tool (in this case the mouse) becomes integrated into the “cognitive system” and functions transparently, the way our fingers function transparently until they get a cramp, and we have to look at them as if they were separate from us. Fully integrated, fingers function from the heart, in the way a pianist might simply play from the heart, not “with their fingers.” We should find this altogether with the emergence of pink noise, which the experimenters measured with a motion sensor near the interface of the human and the computer—and indeed the experimenters found this. As the participants used the mouse in its normal functioning, pink noise emerged, and when the mouse appeared to malfunction, the tool became cut off from the larger system of mind, and the pink noise dropped away. The results of the experiment, we could say, confirm the hypothesis that mind possesses nonlocal and impermanent characteristics, detectable as sense-making nonlinearity.
We can see a separation of the constitutional boundary of the organism from that of the computer system. But the findings support a reading of the experimental happening as the enactment of mind in, through, as the “incorporation” of the computer system. Strictly speaking, mind means relationship, relational-dynamism (not a thing, but dynamic relational openness) constituted by the computer system and the human organism (and, we must go beyond this too, to speak of widening circles, horizons of ecology). It is fleeting but ordered, self-organized and precarious.

As events trigger the breakdown of the transparency of the “tool,” the impermanent mind, the precarious cognitive system dissipates, and mind shifts. This all feels much more boring and dry, and perhaps much less challenging, than trying to study mind as it emerges in, through, as tango dancers embracing each other and co-discover-creating the dance, or as philosophers embracing Sophia in mutuality, embracing Nature in mutuality, embracing sentient beings and sentient being in mutuality and co-discover-creating ecologies of practice-realization, ecologies of wonder and bliss, ecologies of insight and inspiration. *That* is the sort of mind we need to know.

The “scientific” instruments of scanners and other devices that cost us millions upon millions of dollars in aggregate, and which constitute an incredible intervention into the natural world for their construction and use, may not be the best tools for the job just now, even though we rushed to build them and push to use them, in our hurried schedules. We may like them, we may even be addicted to them, but they come from our agendas, not from the demands of Nature, the real demands of our present context. In the race to get “universally” “valid” “knowledge,” we make the fundamental error.

This experiment leads us to ask, What is mind when we incorporate devices like computers? What is mind when we incorporate things like fMRI scanners, particle accelerators, microwave
ovens, grocery stores, stock portfolios, and so on? We can also ask the question that may go
together with those questions: What is mind when we incorporate clocks, the clocks outside of
our skin, and also outside of the soul, so to speak, outside of the rhythms of Nature? What is
mind, what has mind become, what do we turn mind into as we change the time of day, based not
on the living World, not on the sacred sun, not on the Mind of Nature, but on the basis of
conscious human purposes? What are we when we incorporate “time,” rather than incorporating
rhythm, synchronicity (including the nonlocal and atemporal), and the dance of life? What are
we when we cut ourselves off from life, from Nature, from living beings (including wild beings),
from each other, from ourselves, from relational-dynamism?

If you need to take a nap now, will you? If you need to have a breakdown now, will you? If you
need to call your mother now, if you need to call a friend, if you need to walk in the forest, if you
need to sit in silence or rest in the sun, will you? Are we cut off from our own heart-mind-body-
world-cosmos? Does the clock cut into the soul?

Does the divine wear a wristwatch? Does Sophia care about daylight savings time? Does Sophia
care about school calendars and shareholder meetings? Does Sophia care how much the U.S. will
spend on its next presidential election, or how long it will run?

And . . . How easy would it be to suddenly sense the manipulations, to suddenly sense the false
transparency of the clockwork world we have constructed? To sense the confection? To sense
our addiction to its seeming sweetness?
Recall again the Dalai Lama’s comments in his book, *The Universe in a Single Atom*. Here is a condensed version:

After having talked to numerous scientist friends over the years, I have the conviction that the great discoveries in physics going back as far as Copernicus give rise to the insight that reality is not as it appears to us. When one puts the world under a serious lens of investigation—be it the scientific method and experiment or the Buddhist logic of emptiness or the contemplative method of meditative analysis—one finds things are more subtle than, and in some cases even contradict, the assumptions of our ordinary common-sense view of the world.

One may ask, apart from misrepresenting reality, what is wrong with believing in the independent, intrinsic existence of things? For Nagarjuna [a revered Buddhist philosopher], this belief has serious negative consequences. Nagarjuna argues that it is the belief in intrinsic existence that sustains the basis for a self-perpetuating dysfunction in our engagement with the world and with our fellow human beings. By according intrinsic properties of attractiveness, we react to certain objects and events with deluded attachment, while towards others, to which we accord intrinsic properties of unattractiveness, we react with deluded aversion.

In other words, Nagarjuna argues that grasping at the independent existence of things leads to affliction, which in turn gives rise to a chain of destructive actions, reactions and suffering. In the final analysis, for Nagarjuna, the theory of emptiness is not a question of the mere conceptual understanding of reality. It has profound psychological and ethical implications.

Grasping at an independent existence . . . this means grasping in direct contradiction to the Nature of mind, which is inherently relational, interwoven. To grasp in contradiction to our own Nature . . . does that not seem the essence of ignorance? And don’t we grasp in time? Don’t we even grasp after time?

This independent existence of things goes altogether with time and with our delusions. Of all the forms of delusion and self-deception, the subject-object duality seems most difficult to dispel. Nietzsche wondered if the truth could ever be incorporated—Can we really grok the truth of reality and live in attunement with it? Or will we keep trying to satisfy ourselves with attunement
to our agendas? We might deduce some aspects of reality, as Nietzsche did, and as contemporary science does too—and on this the scientists and many saints and sages agree: Inquiring with care, we find no isolated, fixed entities, but rather flux, impermanence, surprise (really, Wonder), discontinuity, nonlocality, interwovenness. Plenty of scientists might think we must ultimately see our individuation as highly relative and, from some perspective, delusory. Not only Einstein in his famous letter, but many other scientists might see things this way. Einstein’s thoughts have become fairly well-known, but worth reviewing here:

February 12, 1950

Dear Mr. Marcus:

A human being is a part of the whole, called by us “Universe”, a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separated from the rest — a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. The striving to free oneself from this delusion is the one issue of true religion. Not to nourish the delusion but to try to overcome it is the way to reach the attainable measure of peace of mind.

With my best wishes,
sincerely yours,

Albert Einstein. 70

Mr. Marcus’s son had died, and he sought counsel from the great scientist. Perhaps ordinary philosophers and spiritual figures had failed him. In any case, we can sense here the living LoveWisdom dimension at work: Seeing through or cutting through our supposed limitedness often gets framed as a Great Liberation, a Great Peace.

At the same time, we need to admit that we fear the profound unknown of such an insight, since it would seem to dissolve us into nothingness, perhaps by dissolving us into everything. We thus

experience self-doubt about what we are—and we may even feel comfort in the defacto taboo against knowing who we are, what we are.

What are we outside of time, outside of schedules, aims, agendas, career goals, political parties, and all the rest? We cling to our self and all the coordinates that define it, and we fear any loosening of our grip or leaving the Cartesian coordinate system and the clocks that keep the “I think” running about. The ego will only be pried from our cold, dead hands, one might guess.

And yet spiritual practice can occasion the “Great Death” that marks the soul’s Birth, the insight by which we let go of this optical delusion of consciousness. We must stress again and again the seeming impossibility or inconceivability of this kind of insight, which happens not by means of any drug or blunt force. We have to see the total relationality of ourselves, and this terrifies us since we think it will turn us into nothingness, and maybe make us let go of our cravings, habits, and so on. Who wants liberation if it means giving up pumpkin spice lattes or Chicken McNuggets—or maybe giving up reading so much academic philosophy? Who wants an unknown Joy when we have the known suffering?

Ironically, if we can confront this terror and get through it, life becomes more beautiful, more Wondrous than all our cravings, all our beliefs about what we need to be happy—at least this is what so many philosophical/spiritual traditions assure us (why would all these people lie?). This terror exceeds the terror of most of the examples we find in the scholarly literature on so-called “motivated reasoning,” one of the terms scholars use for certain kinds of self-deception.
David Bohm, the great physicist mentioned above by the Dalai Lama, offered some wonderful suggestions about time and its relation to our incoherence, self-deception, and the many maladies of “civilized” life, all of which go together with a misunderstanding of time, and the employment of time as a mechanism of manipulation and control. In dialogues collected in the well-titled book, *Thought as a System*, Bohm says the following:

the very notion of time itself is misunderstood. Even in physics it is not adequately being understood as an abstraction, as a representation. In a certain area this will not be too important, because physical processes are regular enough that they can be measured by time. Therefore, even though you have this misunderstanding you are not going to come to a serious practical incoherence. For instance, if we have all timed our watches together and we say that we are going to meet at a certain time, then, if our watches work properly, we will be in the same place. If they don’t work properly we will not. So you can see that, physically, the concept of time implies that there is a great order of nature in the whole universe. From the most distant stars to here, every atom vibrates at a certain rate which is the same as it is here. There are all sorts of regularity that constitute a vast system of order, which the concept of time is tapping into, as it were. If that order were not there time would not be of much use. If the rate of atoms were to become contingent and sort of jump around, then you might as well give up the notion of time. If there were nothing which would follow that order, there wouldn’t be any use to think of it. (232)

Time and agenda mimic or tap into the deeper ordering (cosmos) of Nature— with significant negative side-effects, since we do not actually PracticeRealize that ordering of Nature, the ordering of the sacred, the sacred cosmos. In ancient Greek, the word “cosmos” signified an order, an ordering, and also an adornment, in the sense that Sophia shows Her beauty outwardly, not only in what Bohm would call an *implicate* order.

Ordering already arises. But narrow human thinking attempts to apply its own ordering on top of that Cosmos, that cosmic ordering, that sacred-creative-ordering-and-adorning (a complicated construction in words . . . it is not easy to be precise, especially in English). We think we can snap our fingers and make the clock go back an hour, or build nuclear weapons, or launch
rockets into space, or make a mountain of plastic coffee pods. In the same way time and agendas mimic or tap into the deeper ordering of Nature, science and technology mimic or tap into certain dimensions of wisdom, love, and beauty—with tremendous negative consequences, since we fail to actually presence, fail to PracticeRealize wisdom-love-beauty, but instead practice and realize fragments and fragmentation.

Bohm continues:

. . . every thought assumes time. Whether we discuss thought or anything else, we always take time for granted. And we take for granted the notion that everything exists in time. We don’t take for granted that time is an abstraction and a representation, but we take for granted that time is of the essence—reality—and that everything is existing in time, including thought. There’s some correctness to that, in the sense that its order of succession can be put in terms of time. (233)

Time is the essence. We find that in our practice. We practice-and-realize “time is the essence,” and yet it means we practice and realize a delusion, a misunderstanding. We actively misknow our situation.

We use time as an essence, and this unskillful relationship with the rhythms of life and with the Nature of moment goes altogether with the misuse of ourselves and our world. We use time as part of using our body, our mind, our heart, our soul. We use ourselves and our world unskillfully and unrealistically. We don’t ask if a crop is ripe and ready based on the rhythms of life, for we must get the crop to market. We might never delay a harvest to allow the crop to reach a peak of nutritional value if we would lose money in the process, and if we could get it to market looking decent enough—even if that means we must use chemicals to process it. We may ship it thousands of miles, irrespective of optimal nutrition and irrespective of whether that sort of pattern, that sort of agenda works for life. We pass “Earth Overshoot Day” either without
notice, as part of attending to another day’s worth of appointments, or with fleeting lament that we don’t know how to deal with. Earth Overshoot Day is the day we have already reached the estimated annual carrying capacity of the planet. This is an even more absurd notion than “daylight savings time,” and at the point we need to calculate such an event as “Earth Overshoot Day,” we should declare a crisis in our way of knowing, and we should likely realize that we would best abandon all attempts to “manage” the carrying capacity of the Earth, for it has its own cycles and relative boundaries, the edges of which we should never verge near. According to overshootday.org, we surpassed the planet’s carrying capacity in 2018 on August 1st of that year, and thus we lived at a deficit in a situation in which we cannot rationally think of ourselves as being able to have one. It is a crisis in reason that we continue carrying forward in such a pattern of insanity. As we have all grown tired of hearing, there is only one planet, not the 1.7 we currently live off of, or the 5 we might need if everyone lived as people in the U.S. live (where, of course, massive inequality also means a small group of people use quite an inordinate amount of natural “resources”). There can be no wise, skillful, realistic deficit spending with respect to ecologies (what a strange phenomenon that many of us have heard something like this often enough to grow tired of it).

This notion also applies to ourselves as ecologies. As a consulting philosopher, when people come to me asking about certain physical, psychological, or spiritual pains, and we work together to discover and create a way beyond the symptoms, they will often say in regard to the new way: “That’s too inefficient!” What irony. A person may, for instance, experience pain in their back or elbow because of how they do their job. Observing their relational-dynamism, observing their coordination or synchronization of heart-mind-body-world-cosmos, it may
become plain that they essentially misuse themselves, that they suffer from unskillful synchronization, and this results in something like a repetitive stress injury or some other negative side-effect. Therefore, the way they express their total dynamism involves a lack of grace, dignity, or poise, a lack of realistic and skillful relationship (i.e. open relational activity of life), and ultimately comes altogether with injury, troubles, suffering in themselves and the world.

One might call using oneself into injury an inefficient use. But “efficiency” in ordinary parlance relates to the ego’s agendas, and typically relates to time and impatience. In Nature, things take as much time as they take, so to speak. Wolves wear no watches, birds don’t consult egg timers. No sentient being other than the human tries to apply this sort of concept of time, with its “rational efficiencies”. The efficient way to make an apple is, apparently, a process on the order of billions of years, in terms of conventional notions of time. We humans want to make apples in the laboratory in a matter of months. The efficient way (I mean a Way, a Dao, a Cosmos, a sacred-creative-ordering) to make a tomato involves roundness, but to the human agenda, a cube-shaped tomato is more efficient: One can pack more of them in the rectilinear boxes we use, and one can rationally proportion the tomato to square bread. Similarly, we can get a BA and a PhD in less than a decade, but even a decade of serious spiritual practice seems like a lot, and we

71 We have in fact engineered cube-shaped tomatoes and watermelons. Many modified organisms exist now—by which we tend to mean, “modified to fit human agendas,” something that should strike us, by now, as quite reasonably suspicious from the outset, suspicious as a matter of structure, suspicious as a matter of systemic currents. A genetic engineer who developed a cube-shaped tomato, upon being told it didn’t taste like a real tomato, allegedly replied, “Yes, but very soon, everybody who knows what a real tomato should taste like will be dead, and nobody will know.”
https://www.democracynow.org/2013/12/4/video_extended_interview_with_vandana_shiva
imagine we have nothing to *learn* from such a practice, we imagine no radical shift in our *way* of knowing could really come from it, and we assume, in *practice*, that we can learn anything we really want to learn from concepts and arguments and experiments in laboratories, that we can learn in the abstract, taking in information and using time as we see fit.

The Daoist philosopher Liu I-Ming wrote:

> The human mind is the progenitor of all mundanities; once the human mind is gone, accumulated mundanities evaporate, “light arises in the empty room,”\(^{72}\) and true celestial energy gradually approaches restoration. But before refinement of the self is perfected, the mind is not empty and the light is not true; negativity and mundanity still have not withdrawn completely, and one cannot seek their end in a hurry. If one does not know the firing process and rushes to achieve settlement, this is still the human mentality acting, working with false understanding . . . As long as the human mentality is not gone, [the Mind of the Way] does not become manifest. (translation by Cleary, 1986: 233).

This is like saying that, with our habitual mind and our typical thinking, we produce mundanities, and we do this altogether with time. Time is a mundanity and also a precondition for mundanity. Likewise, mundanities are a precondition of time. It all goes altogether. And we might say that *something else* goes altogether as the realization of sacredness. Bohm invites us to see that we cannot function *coherently* according to this misunderstanding of time that goes altogether with the mundane and its sufferings:

> Bohm: What suggests itself is that psychologically—and perhaps eventually for the deepest level physically—we can’t use time as the essence. Rather, the moment now is the essence, because all the past and the future that we ever will know are in this moment. The past and the future are now—namely, in so far as it has left any impression, whatever has happened is now. And our expectations are now. Thus we could say that now may be the starting point.

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\(^{72}\) Rumi would say, “Music arises from the empty lute.” Sophia does not want to play an instrument with mundanities packed in where spaciousness should be. Sophia plays only the empty lute.
One picture you could make of an electron would be that it sort of flashes into and out of existence so fast that when picked up in the usual equipment it looks continuously existent. It might have a certain regularity, so that it appears to obey an order of necessity. But it might be that it is basically creative; the creative act may create this order of necessity.

Q: Would that mean that any time we escape from the now we are trying to change what is necessary?

Bohm: We are trying to push the order of necessity into the time order. We’re trying to make a change in this order. But we are in an area where that sort of abstraction, or that sort of representation, cannot work. Even in physics we have to admit that this was always a representation, that the actual experience was always now. (237)

Captain Clock commands us to make our insanity a necessity. We try to make the time order the ordering of Nature, the sacred-creative-ordering of Sophia. But, again, Sophia will not tolerate our agendas. She demands that we attune ourselves to Hers.

We thus live in a system of thinking—an ecology of mind, an ecology of thinking, an ecology of heartmindbodyworlduniverse—organized on the basis of cutting itself and us off from life, from the living, loving, sacred-creative-ordering of necessity, the lively patterning of relationality. It is an ecology of insanity, an ecology of delusion, for we do not have the choice to place our agenda on top of the necessities of life—and oh how our culture loathes the thought of not having all the choices in the universe, not having the illusion of choice (for instance, as manifest in 15 different kinds of toothpaste and 30 different SUVs—US News had a piece on “30 SUVs Worth Waiting for in 2019, a rather asinine suggestion, though perhaps quite a few readers out of a hundred would not find the headline silly enough\textsuperscript{73}).

\textsuperscript{73} https://cars.usnews.com/cars-trucks/suvs-worth-waiting-for
The limiting necessities of ignorance—including fear, craving, self-doubt, and all the medications we use to treat them, like war, debt, political circuses, doctor’s bills, family fights, endless agendas, endless “choices” in the marketplace that functions as our ecology, and the rampant degradation of Nature and the soul—none of these necessities can override the necessities of life, and only when we attune with *that* will we fulfill our function, receiving it from Nature herself (Jung’s “only true answer,” coming from the very sacredness of Nature, coming, in religious terms, *intimately* from the *divine*). Instead of synchronizing our clocks with arbitrary time, we need to Synchronize the Soul with being-time, the living moment, the Nature of life. That puts things too poetically, but puts them precisely enough if we turn to verification by means of practice-and-realization. What would we verify? Among other things, a different experience of time, one that itself requires a rebellion against the clock to practice-and-realize.

Dogen’s invitation to enter the moment, the yes-moment, the being-moment, echoes something we can find in the ancient west as well. Hadot was fond of Goethe’s line, “The present alone is our joy.” It comes from Part II of his Faust, in a lovely scene in which Goethe and Helen speak to each other in rhyme, in rhythm and song. Faust says to Helen, “And so the spirit [or mind, or soul] looks neither ahead nor behind. The present alone . . .” And Helen answers, “is our joy.” She later says she is, “trusting myself to the unknown” (from Hadot 1986: 62). Hadot sees in this a reflection of Goethe’s understanding of philosophy as a way of life:

For Goethe, in fact, who says so in a letter to Zelter, this is characteristic of ancient life and art: knowing how to live in the present, knowing what he calls the “the health of the moment”. In Antiquity, he says, the instant was “pregnant”, that is filled with significance, but also experienced in its full reality, in all its fullness and richness, sufficient unto itself. We no longer know how to live in the present, Goethe continues. For us the ideal lies in the future and can only be the object of a nostalgic desire, while the present is considered trivial and banal. We no longer
know how to take advantage of the present, we no longer, as the Greeks did, know “trusting myself to the unknown” (63-4).

Hadot thus reveals a sensibility to time that resonates with the one Dogen invites us to practice and realize—and we must emphasize that this is a realization, an achievement, a consummation, and not merely a “conception”. Hadot offers some further thoughts in this regard, and we can allow “antique” and “antiquity” to resonate with Jung’s reflections. Thus “antique Beauty” is also “antique Wisdom,” “antique philosophy”. It is LoveWisdom.

And in fact, if Faust speaks to Helen as a man of Antiquity, it is because the presence of Helen, that is, the presence of antique Beauty, reveals to him what the present is in itself: what the present of the world is, “the splendid feeling of the present”, *Herrliches Ferfühlder Gegenwartas* the Oriental Divan says. And this is why the dialogue between Faust and Helen can be understood at a third level. It is no longer the dialogue between two lovers, it is no longer the dialogue between two historical figures, but it is the dialogue of man with himself. The encounter with Helen is not just the encounter with antique Beauty which emanates from nature: it is also the encounter with a living wisdom, with a way of living, this “health of the moment” we just mentioned.

We must now define the experience of time in Antiquity as expressed in the verses of Faust we have just discussed. We might think, looking at Goethe’s letter to Zelter mentioned earlier, that it is a general experience common to Antiquity and that it was natural for men of Antiquity to know what Goethe called “the health of the moment”. Moreover, following Goethe many historians and philosophers, from Oswald Spengler to the logician Hintika, have alluded to the fact that the Greeks “lived in the present moment” more than did representatives of other cultures. In his book *Die Zauberflöte*, Siegfried Morenz summarizes this idea when he writes, “This particular feature of Greece has never been better characterized that by Goethe . . . at the occasion of the dialogue between Faust and Helen: ‘And so the spirit looks neither ahead nor behind. The present alone is our joy’”. It must certainly be admitted that the Greeks in general paid special attention to the present moment, attention that could also assume several ethical and artistic meanings. Popular wisdom counselled both being content with the present and knowing how to use it well. On the one hand being content with the present meant in particular being content with earthly life, and this is what Goethe admired in ancient art, especially funerary art. The deceased was not represented with eyes raised toward heaven but accomplishing acts from his normal daily existence. On the other hand, knowing how to use the present well meant

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74 Forgive the play on words, but one wonders again and again about the abstractions of vitality in an ecology of insanity.
knowing how to recognize and make use of the favorable and decisive moment, *kairos*, that is, all the possibilities contained in one or another moment. The strategist knows how to strike at the right moment, and the sculptor fixes in marble the most significant instant of the scene he wished to bring to life. The Greeks, it seemed, paid particular attention to the present moment. But we should not, like Winckelmann, Goethe or Hölderlin, imagine an idealized Greece whose citizens lived in the present moment and as a result were constantly bathed in beauty and serenity. In fact men of Antiquity were distressed and they worried quite like we do. Ancient poetry often reflects their anxiety, which sometimes even becomes despair. Like us they bore the burden of the past, the uncertainty of the future, a fear of death. It is this human anguish which ancient philosophies, particularly Epicureanism and Stoicism, sought to remedy. They were therapies destined to heal anguish or to provide liberty and self-control, a means of freeing one-self from the past and from the future so as to live in the present. The experience of time is totally different from the common and general one we just described. And this experience, as we shall see, corresponds exactly to that expressed in the verses of Faust: “The present alone is our joy”. “Do not reflect on your destiny. To exist is an obligation”. This is a philosophical conversion which implies a voluntary and radical transformation of one’s way of living and of seeing the world. This is the true “health of the moment” leading to serenity. (64-5)

Hadot tries to show that, despite significant differences in doctrine, the Epicurean and Stoic traditions share a commitment to a practice of life that involves a different way of knowing self, world, and time. There is a completeness and a great perfection in the moment, and many philosophical/spiritual traditions invite us to touch it, to enter it as a more skillful and realistic practice and realization of life. It seems to have to do with something more real than our agendas. And simply “thinking” this will not suffice. Though ancient Greek society may have had a place for the general notion of being-moment or yes-moment, the ancient philosophers realized that, in practice, this meant a rebellion against a culture already at odds with the spirit of such wisdom. They realized the need for practice and transformative insight to make an alternative way of knowing real.

With the help of these suggestions, we can return to Dogen:
Firewood becomes ash, and it does not become firewood again. Yet, we should not regard firewood as the before and ash as the after [of “some thing”]. Understand that firewood Dwells in the Reality Place of firewood, which fully includes before and after and is free of before and after. Ash Dwells in the Reality Place of ash, which fully includes before and after. Just as firewood does not become firewood again after it is ash, a human being does not return to birth after death.

This being so, the traditional way in Buddhist LoveWisdom denies that birth turns into death. Accordingly, birth is understood as no-birth. It is an unshakable teaching in the Buddha’s discourse that death does not turn into birth. Accordingly, death is understood as no-death.

Birth is an expression complete this moment. Death is an expression complete this moment. They are like winter and spring: We do not think winter turns into spring or say spring turns into summer. (adapted from the translation by Abe and Waddell)

Dogen’s view of “things not becoming something” can at first seem strange. But in fact it not only seems familiar to many spiritual traditions (and perhaps familiar to someone thinking as Bohm invited us to think about, for instance, the being of electrons), it might seem matter-of-fact in some Indigenous Cultures. For instance, compare Dogen’s contemplations with Dorothy Lee’s discussion of Trobriander Culture:

> . . . there is a series of beings, but no becoming. There is no temporal connection between objects. The taytu [a species of yam] always remains itself; it does not become over-ripe; over-ripeness is an ingredient of another, a different being. At some point, the taytu turns into a yowana, which contains over-ripeness. And the yowana, over-ripe as it is, does not put forth shoots, does not become a sprouting yowana. When sprouts appear, it ceases to be itself; in its place appears a silasata. Neither is there a temporal connection made—or, according to our own premises, perceived—between events; in fact, temporality is meaningless. There are no tenses, no linguistic distinction between past or present. There is no arrangement of activities or events into means and ends, no causal or teleologic relationships. What we consider a causal relationship in a sequence of connected events, is to the Trobriander an ingredient of a patterned whole. (1950: 91)

Just as Dogen invites us to see that firewood does not become ashes, the Trobriander Culture invites us to see that a ripe yam does not become an overripe yam (and perhaps a certain kind of scientist would invite us to sense the discontinuities in radiation or certain other quantum
phenomena—and, of course, we now have some awareness that quantum phenomena may play a surprising role in biology). Lee tries to get around “become” by using “turn into,” but this only shows the limits of both typical western thinking and a typical western language. In the passage from Dogen, we find both a rejection of “become” and a rejection of “turn into.” Lee herself acknowledges some of this:

We who are accustomed to seek lineal continuity, cannot help supplying it as we read . . . but the continuity is not given in the Trobriand text; and all Trobriand speech, according to Malinowski, is “jerky,” given in points, not in connecting lines. The only connective I know of in Trobriand is the pela which I mentioned above; a kind of preposition which also means “to jump.” (Lee, 1950: 92)

The potentially discontinuous Nature of reality must strike us as strange (and, it may prove all the more challenging to resist thinking of this in a simple dualistic opposition to “continuous”). That strangeness comes from our having gotten hooked by certain habits of mind. As Nietzsche put it:

Over immense periods of time the intellect produced nothing but errors. A few of these proved to be useful and helped to preserve the species: those who hit upon or inherited these had better luck in their struggle for themselves and their progeny. Such erroneous articles of faith . . . include the following: that there are things, substances, bodies; that a thing is what it appears to be; that our will is free; that what is good for me is also good in itself. It was only very late that such propositions were denied and doubted; it was only very late that truth emerged-as the weakest form of knowledge. It seemed that one was unable to live with it: our organism was prepared for the opposite; all its higher functions, sense perception, and every kind of sensation worked with those basic errors which had been incorporated since time immemorial. Indeed, even in the realm of knowledge these propositions became the norms according to which “true” and “untrue,” were determined down to the most remote regions of logic. (GS 110, emphasis added)

Returning to the strange question: Firewood doesn’t become ashes? No. Not if there is no firewood (no such “thing” as “firewood”), not if time is not “time” but moment, the being-moment. Everything that is is moment, and moment is everything that is. We ordinarily project onto our experience. But each moment is unique. Things cannot be grasped. We cannot lay a
hand on this Now, cannot lay a hand on any “thing,” yet the sheer intimacy means we cannot not touch it.

Don’t we “see” “things” though? Don’t we “refer” to “things” when we speak? In the *Perfection of Wisdom* literature (*Prajnaparamita*), we see references to “no perception,” “no conception,” “no conventional expression”. Language cannot circumscribe reality. It is interwoven into reality, which is meaningfulness “all the way down,” so to speak.

Nietzsche speaks about language as a narrowing force, if we are not careful with it, and he means by that our tendency toward a mindless use of language that takes away from the lived vitality of experience, in which meaning can never be “fixed,” and thus we turn the rare and beautiful into the coarse and common. We can begin to see how “time” and everything that goes with it drives mindless talking. We don’t have time to speak. So we chit-chat, mindlessly. And quickly, while looking at the clock.

Since life is fresh and new, perfect and complete as each moment, then if I use an expression you understand in any habitual manner, it cannot express what arises *Now*. Expressions can be appropriate or skillful or liberating, but they cannot *capture*—all the more so since experience continues fleetingly, and there is always *More*. We only need liberation into this impermanence,

75 Heidegger’s notion that “language is the house of being” gets sensibly transformed into “Being is the Home of Language,” or perhaps, “language is the house of ego.” In any case, the typical notions of language that rule in the dominant culture seem inadequate, and we need more emphasis on the limitations these impose on the HeartMindBodyWorldCosmos. The function of language is compassion. The essence of meaningfulness is wisdom. But indeed meaning is always constituted by wisdom-love-beauty.

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this open relationality, this ever-more. Experience doesn’t “exist” anywhere as something solid, and therefore nothing can lay hold of it. Thus there is no “deferral” either. There is no need to “defer” anything. The experience has no root, therefore it doesn’t “refer” to any “thing”. It doesn’t refer to “me” or “you”. When some experience arises, if we project subject and object, then we think the language refers to one or refers between.

If we want to find the fragrance of a rose in the Cosmos, we should not look in the rose or in the person smelling the rose. The fragrance of rose, the smelling-of-rose, co-arises as the Cosmos, co-arises as the sacred-creative-ordering, presencing the archetypal, the synchronistic, the interwovenness of all things. It is not even something arising “between” the rose and the person smelling it. Those entities are not solid. It is not an interaction between “things” (we can recall here Dewey’s efforts, and Bentley’s too, to get us to move beyond “interactionism,” a vision of the universe as “things” “interacting,” and to invite us to sense what we might call a “transactional cosmos,” a sacred-creative-ordering that unfolds in mutually dependent transformation, mutually dependent moment-happenings or being-moments). The fragrance of rose is the Cosmos. It is all of time, right Now. It is PracticeRealization. As the being-moment, the YesMoment, the one smelling the rose is the fragrance of the rose, and the rose, and the Sun, sky, mountains, rivers, Earth, the rain that fell, the bugs that aerated the soil, the soil, the soul, the bliss of just this.

The smell of the rose is not a concept, nor an activity that “takes place” “in time”. We may project concepts onto this miracle, this moment of magic, this mandala of the soul, but this always means missing the rose, missing our life—we are missing something all the time, and we
usually do everything we can to repress the grief of it, to medicate the whole mass of suffering that is this missing, to push away the soul’s call to STOP this missing.

Life does not function by means of concepts as we think of concepts. Life has manifested tremendous creativity without concepts and equations. We have written books, and life invented the being who can write books—without arguments or abstractions, and without clocks or agendas. If we think the divine made everything, the same holds true.

We have begun to develop dynamical systems theories and tools, but how can we cultivate the kind of science that can put us in touch with this? Our current science lacks the sophistication to do this. Plenty of mythologies have all the sophistication we would need in order to become wise, compassionate, present, and thus to unleash the healing, hallowing flow of wisdom, love, and beauty into the barren landscapes of the soul and the battered landscapes of the World.

We should of course acknowledge again that there is an aspect of life that allows something like generalization. Life is not mere “chaos”. Life is unique, and yet has regularities. There is nothing but practice-realization, and thus even Cosmic Habits can emerge. This acknowledgement itself involves practice-realization, and it does not allow us to control or manage the world. Instead it challenges us with the spiritual imperative to cultivate wisdom, discernment, attunement, so that we can align ourselves with vitalizing powers of the sacred-creative-ordering of life.

Because of our clocks (better put: altogether with our clocks), we have little time to touch this sacred-creative-ordering. Its jubilance can seem like chaos to us, for it does not always coincide
with human notions of “order,” and it does not cater to human agendas, to fears, desires, and self-doubts. We feel too rushed to just sit, just commune and communicate with forests, rivers, mountains, oceans, places alive and alove. In a relative sense, we have to slow down. We have to stop all our doing, which takes place in time. But, in the midst of our doings, the doings of time, purpose, and agenda, the world can seem chaotic, and its chaos in fact further “justifies” our attempts at management and exploitation (we actually speak of “natural resource management,” as if we clever humans can manage the world, and as if the world amounted to a store of “resources” available for us to manage and distribute as we see fit). As Hans Peter Duerr puts it:

People do not exploit a nature that speaks to them. But a nature that, as two famous nineteenth-century ethnocentrics expressed it, ‘faced humans initially as an entirely foreign, all-powerful and unassailable might, towards which they behaved as animals, and which they allowed to lord it over them as if they were brutes’; such a nature has no language of its own any more, it is merely matter. (1985: 92)

It takes a leap beyond time in order to commune with the World, to hear its voice, to arrive at intimacy with the sacred-creative-patterning—by which we mean those larger loops, circles, and networks as depicted in the image we contemplated in light of Bateson’s reflections on the problems of conscious human purpose.

Let us Consider the way Nietzsche puts our deafness, and his somewhat unskillful attempt to challenge it:

The total character of the world, however, is in all eternity chaos—in the sense not of a lack of necessity but a lack of order, arrangement, form, beauty, wisdom, and whatever names there are for our aesthetic anthropomorphisms . . . Let us beware of attributing to it heartlessness and unreason or their opposites: it is neither perfect nor beautiful, nor noble, nor does it wish to become any of these things; it does not by any means strive to imitate man . . . Let us beware of saying that there are laws in nature. There are only necessities: there is nobody who commands, nobody who obeys, nobody who trespasses. (GS 109)
Here Nietzsche manages cleverness, but not much wisdom. He verges into nihilism and cynicism (in the pejorative sense). The passage holds value for the way in which it expresses the sort of bad thinking Nietzsche seemed to want us to liberate ourselves from. But, because he found ways to tap into what we might call the wondrous creative mind, he mimics the great Chinese sage Laozi:

> When people see some things as beautiful,  
> other things become ugly.  
> When people see some things as good,  
> other things become bad. Being and non-being create each other.  
> Difficult and easy support each other.  
> Long and short define each other.  
> High and low depend on each other.  
> Before and after follow each other.

Therefore the Master  
acts without doing anything  
and teaches without saying anything.  
Things arise and she lets them come;  
things disappear and she lets them go.  
She has but doesn’t possess,  
acts but doesn’t expect.  
When her work is done, she forgets it.  
That is why it lasts forever. (*Dao De Jing*, chapter 2)\(^{76}\)

Laozi shows how the living Cosmos arises as a unity of opposites (a version of which Nietzsche, and later Jung—in part under Nietzsche’s influence—sought to PracticeRealize and express). The Cosmos itself “does not take sides,” (as Laozi puts it in chapter 5 of his work), but that does not mean it lacks wisdom or sacred-creative-ordering. Rather, no human can realize wisdom unless they attune themselves with *that*. What we call “wisdom,” “love,” “beauty,” and all the other good and bad things we wring our hands over have to do with a mind out of attunement with the Way (Dao, dharma, logos, Sophia, LoveWisdom, the sacred), and we can call the Arts

\(^{76}\) [https://terebess.hu/english/tao/mitchell.html#Kap81](https://terebess.hu/english/tao/mitchell.html#Kap81)
of Awareness (or “spiritual exercises”) the PracticeRealization of Attunement. Nietzsche perhaps let himself go into polemics and provocations. He seems to have struggled valiantly to arrive at a functional nondualistic philosophy, but he never quite managed it.

In any case, we can say the world may appear chaotic and amoral to us. Freud, in Future of an Illusion, went so far as to claim that, “the principal task of civilization, its actual raison d’être, is to defend us against nature” (19). To defend against, as if we shall maintain a state of war with the necessities of life, putting ourselves at war with ourselves—because we have no time to listen, to learn, to feel, to sense, to attune?

Confronted with a seemingly mute and meaningless Nature, uninterested in or intimidated by the sacred-creative-patterning, the necessities of Nature, we foist our agenda onto the world, including our sense of time. Nietzsche puts it in the most general terms:

> We have arranged for ourselves a world in which we can live—by positing bodies, lines, planes, causes and effects, motion and rest, form and content; without these articles of faith nobody could now endure life. But that does not prove them. Life is no argument. The conditions of life might include error. (GS 121)

He left out time. And he faltered in his dancing a bit: We arranged a world that we think we need, the world we think we need in order to live comfortably and “happily” (the “happiness we chase as part of our delusion), by a process of cutting ourselves off from life and treating the rootless necessities of our ignorance, the anxious necessities of our hopes, fears, angers, jealousies, greeds, and self-doubts as “natural law” or some other false image of the necessities of life.
Nietzsche also errs here in suggesting that the conditions of life include “error”. Error does not appear in any ordinary sense, and the sense of error we most need to attend to has human foci. For instance, Darryl Gwynne and David Rentz published a paper in 1983 in *Austral Entomology* titled, “Beetles on the Bottle.” The two scientists had come across male jewel beetles trying desperately to mate with beer bottles—so desperately they were allowing themselves to be eaten by ants in the process. It seemed that little bumps (tubercles) on a certain kind of brown glass beer bottle tricked the male beetles into seeing incredibly voluptuous and enticing females. They would cling to the bottles and not let go in their attempt to cultivate life forward, to *Realize* life. We may say the beetles erred: They saw females where we see beer bottles. But beer bottles—especially those strewn about the landscape as garbage, and even more especially ones that look like beetles, perhaps in no small part because there are such beetles whose souls attune with said tubercles and whose souls co-arise with ours (i.e. beetles who do not exist in separation from the human psyche)—such beer bottles do not “belong” in the landscape, as a matter of sacred necessity. I recall sitting in a conference, listening to a talk by a very intelligent cognitive scientist who had the whole room laughing over this poor beetle’s apparent “stupidity,” and no one for a moment paused to ask if the stupidity belonged more to humanity than to beetles. If we find errors of perception in the story, we must ask why, and then where we should inquire to dispel them.

Similarly, the typical horse’s reaction to plastic—especially in the form of plastic bags, plastic tarps, plastic clothing (e.g. a poncho), or umbrellas—seems “irrational” to us clever humans: the typical horse will want to *bolt*. But, while we rational geniuses mock this supposed irrationality of Horse, while we may say that Horse has apparently incorporated error in some way, deeper
inquiry can open us to the insight that Horse’s response makes sense—far, far more sense than it makes to release so much plastic into the landscape, into the living World, into living ecologies where the absence of plastic attunes with sacred necessity and the presence of plastic leads to so many negative side-effects, including an alarming number of wild animal deaths and general intoxication. We are murdering wild animals and making them unwell—not because of any necessity, but simply because of our stupidity.

What has this to do with time, with clocks? It has everything to do with time, first and foremost because humans have incorporated their misunderstanding of time, and the misunderstanding of time affects our use of ourselves and our World. Our incorporated misunderstanding of time perpetuates Sorrowville’s pattern of insanity.

For instance, plastic saves time. How many of us, even those who have thankfully begun to respond to plastic as Horse does, have given in to a plastic this or that, because of apparent necessity—often a necessity that comes to, “I don’t have time for any reasonable alternative”? I have in certain moments behaved almost as if the soul had a violent repulsion to plastic, and yet too often found myself giving in to this or that item, such as an herbal remedy for allergies too insufferable to sleep and work well, or, of course, the plastic in the few bits of technology I own, and obviously the plastic that becomes garbage as a result of a medical procedure, such as having blood work done. In writing this book, I could not use the trackpad on the laptop in a skillful way.

We might add that seeing the stupidity of plastic, once we have become insane enough to make it and let it pervade the World, demands timelessness that goes together with a sense of deep time (we now try to rush toward the latter, as a way of counterbalancing our stuckness in the hedonic present and in limited notions of time, but this new “deep time” is often just a refiguring of clocks, not a rebellion against them).
given the amount of work I needed to do with it in the time available, and my body began to manifest negative side-effects (significant pain in “hand,” “fingers,” “wrist,” “arm”). It made sense to get a plastic mouse. The plastic mouse simply goes together with the laptop, and the work could proceed quite well after that, much more efficiently. That seems to me a mildly horrifying story, since the plastic from the mouse might end up being around for thousands of years, even if I attempt to recycle it when it eventually breaks. If we think of the whole lifecycle of the laptop and mouse, it puts a heavy demand on each writer to say something quite rebellious and meaningful. I am not sure I am up to the task.

All of this nonsense works efficiently, rationally. The efficient and the rational go together in practice, and this too shows the altogetherness of time in our thinking, which allows us to think-with-plastic, to engage in plastic thinking, the artificial, cut-off-from-life thinking that gives us no pause as we exploit and degrade the living World, including our own ecologies. It seems as though we somehow operate as if we are just thinking—admittedly, on the clock, with plastic around. We don’t seem to open up enough to the possibility that the incorporation of thinking-on-the-clock and thinking-with-plastic amounts to a degraded thinking, and that we cannot see this very clearly because of the incorporation. We just call it “thinking”. It’s “invisible” in a way. Dewey invites us to evaluate this thinking on the basis of all of its consequences, which we see evident in the state of the world. It is like stopping the thinking with a computer mouse because the mouse seems to be malfunctioning, but it is much more intimate, because we must somehow see that we are malfunctioning.
Even in realms of wisdom we can find thinking-with-plastic and its concomitant misunderstanding of time. A monastic community whose founder I deeply admire sells a meditation cushion made of “memory foam.” The cushions have been available for over a decade, and perhaps by now they make use of so-called “green” polyurethane, but they don’t advertise it that way, and most memory foam comes from petroleum (and historically that came first), which means it will not biodegrade—a resistance to “time”. A meditation cushion, or anything else, that doesn’t functionally biodegrade makes no real sense. We could clarify this: We should see as unwise anything humans produce that doesn’t nourish the conditions of life. (Where does our production of texts stand from such a perspective? How about our production of equations, theories, data? What do we make—what do we co-discover-create—with our living practice of LoveWisdom?)

Again, these things arise with our misunderstanding of time. Where there is time, there is eventually busyness—too much busyness to pause, to dispel any deep delusions. We have incorporated the delusions, and thus they do not easily dispel, even if they would dispel in a moment, upon our entrance of moment, our realization of moment.

In his book Against His-Story, Against Leviathan, Fredy Perlman offers us some provocative contemplations that bear on these aspects (and others) of our inquiry:

The !Kung people miraculously survived as a community of free human beings into our own exterminating age. R.E. Leakey observed them in their lush African forest homeland. They cultivated nothing except themselves. They made themselves what they wished to be. They were not determined by anything beyond their own being — not by alarm clocks, not by debts, not by orders from superiors. They feasted and celebrated and played, full-time, except when they slept. They shared everything with their communities: food, experiences, visions, songs. Great personal satisfaction, deep inner joy, came from the sharing.
(In today’s world, wolves still experience the joys that come from sharing. Maybe that’s why governments pay bounties to the killers of wolves.)

S. Diamond observed other free human beings who survived into our age, also in Africa. He could see that they did no work, but he couldn’t quite bring himself to say it in English. Instead, he said they made no distinction between work and play. Does Diamond mean that the activity of the free people can be seen as work one moment, as play another, depending on how the anthropologist feels? Does he mean that they didn’t know if their activity was work or play? Does he mean we, you and I, Diamond’s armored contemporaries, cannot distinguish their work from their play?

If the !Kung visited our offices and factories, they might think we’re playing. Why else would we be there?78

Why else? Why would we punch a timecard or otherwise record our presence someplace, in order to engage in physically and mentally repetitive work, typically with no spiritual context and often antithetical to the spiritual values we claim to hold dear, and lacking any practices that would further our spiritual development? Of course, we can keep in mind here Dinwoodie’s account of the development of western time, as an industrial practice.

How hard would we have to work if we attuned Nature and Culture? Anthropologist Jared Diamond offers some thoughts in his infamous essay on “The Worst Mistake in the History of the Human Race”. Though developing and employing—and then proliferating—nuclear weapons or bringing the global climate into collapse might seem like examples of almost incomprehensible ignorance, Diamond suggests that many of such subsequent errors may be seen as consequent errors, depending crucially on the foundation of this rather significant one: That we traded the hunter-gatherer lifestyle (exemplified by the !Kung) for our “civilized” life. It may seem that we have derived all manner of benefits; the case does not seem easy to weigh:

78 https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/fredy-perlman-against-his-story-against-leviathan
While the case for the progressivist view [that agriculture was true progress, and that we have made all manner of progress only because of it—n.k.] seems overwhelming, it’s hard to prove. How do you show that the lives of people 10,000 years ago got better when they abandoned hunting and gathering for farming? Until recently, archaeologists had to resort to indirect tests, whose results (surprisingly) failed to support the progressivist view. Here’s one example of an indirect test: Are twentieth century hunter-gatherers really worse off than farmers? Scattered throughout the world, several dozen groups of so-called primitive people, like the Kalahari bushmen, continue to support themselves that way. It turns out that these people have plenty of leisure time, sleep a good deal, and work less hard than their farming neighbors. For instance, the average time devoted each week to obtaining food is only 12 to 19 hours for one group of Bushmen, 14 hours or less for the Hadza nomads of Tanzania. One Bushman, when asked why he hadn’t emulated neighboring tribes by adopting agriculture, replied, “Why should we, when there are so many mongongo nuts in the world?”

... In one study, the Bushmen’s average daily food intake (during a month when food was plentiful) was 2,140 calories and 93 grams of protein, considerably greater than the recommended daily allowance for people of their size. It’s almost inconceivable that Bushmen, who eat 75 or so wild plants, could die of starvation the way hundreds of thousands of Irish farmers and their families did during the potato famine of the 1840s.

... Skeletons from Greece and Turkey show that the average height of hunter-gatherers toward the end of the ice ages was a generous 5’ 9” for men, 5’ 5” for women. With the adoption of agriculture, height crashed, and by 3000 B. C. had reached a low of only 5’ 3” for men, 5’ for women. By classical times heights were very slowly on the rise again, but modern Greeks and Turks have still not regained the average height of their distant ancestors.

... At Dickson Mounds, located near the confluence of the Spoon and Illinois rivers, archaeologists have excavated some 800 skeletons that paint a picture of the health changes that occurred when a hunter-gatherer culture gave way to intensive maize farming around A. D. 1150... Compared to the hunter-gatherers who preceded them, the farmers had a nearly 50 per cent increase in enamel defects indicative of malnutrition, a fourfold increase in iron-deficiency anemia (evidenced by a bone condition called porotic hyperostosis), a threefold rise in bone lesions reflecting infectious disease in general, and an increase in degenerative conditions of the spine, probably reflecting a lot of hard physical labor.

We may think that we have solved some of these problems. Clearly, we have better longevity and less malnutrition today, right? Diamond’s essay can provoke us to pause and think about “progress”. What does it really mean? And what has come along with it? Furthermore—and
perhaps this question matters most of all—what progress might arise if we cultivated life forward in a totally different way? In other words: Though “civilized culture” claims “progress,” what might have happened if the developmental process had unfolded with the spiritual approach of the best Indigenous Cultures, rather than the culture of the west? And what happens if we keep any of our more important progress (e.g. the expansion of ethical responsibility) and shift with it into a more vitalizing context?

Consider the story of bread as an illustration of the pattern of insanity that grips western culture, infecting its so-called progress. Maggie Beidelman captures an aspect of the pattern of insanity very well in an article that appeared on Alternet: “modern wheat flour is causing us to lose our ability to digest modern wheat flour.” This is a crucial philosophical insight—and we must allow it to carry us much further. It is not wheat itself that makes trouble, but our idea of wheat, our way of knowing what wheat is and how to “use” it “efficiently”—in other words, “wheat” as bound up with our misunderstanding of time. Time, agenda, purpose, efficiency . . . the way of knowing of the Cartesian coordinate system, an ordering of a mechanistic universe.

All thinking is cosmological, but some thinking comes from a mechanistic universe, and some thinking presences as Cosmic Thinking. Any thinking caught up in a pattern of insanity, any way of knowing that is a pattern of insanity, will get pulled into furthering the pattern of insanity. Know-how will amount to knowing how to further that pattern of insanity—efficiently.

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79 https://www.alternet.org/2013/06/gluten-intolerance/
Let’s make that a little clearer by thinking through recent developments in the story of bread. There is a research project called Plant Resources in the Paleolithic. This collective of researchers have published interesting evidence about the diets of our ancestors. For instance, Revedin et al. (2010 and 2015) describe evidence that humans have been grinding up plant matter, in the manner of making flour, for at least 30,000 years. The starches found on ancient mortar-and-pestle artifacts come from plant roots such as cattails, which store nutrients in rhizomes. Our ancestors would have pulled these from the earth, cleaned them up, and ground them. Then they would cook the “flour,” perhaps on hot stones, something like an ancient kind of flatbread. At some point, wheat must have been used, and at some point humans must have discovered what happens when the wheat flour or dough is allowed to ferment.

Maybe we should never have used wheat. Maybe that has more to do with our subsequent problems than any other single factor—if we want to try and isolate factors. But the real issue seems to be the style of consciousness that goes altogether with the development of a certain kind of agriculture and the centrality of bread. Wheat in some way came altogether with what we might call invasive agriculture. Let us indulge the notion that agriculture per se does not seem problematic. But invasive agriculture (perhaps marked by such characteristics as the tilling of the soil, planting monocrops, and certainly the use of vast tracts of land relatively far outside of the main areas of communal living) and the associated consequences themselves illustrate the pattern of insanity. We are in some ways looking at a pattern within a pattern when we look at bread.

For millennia, bread was made with freshly milled grain. Anyone familiar with wheat germ oil knows why: wheat germ goes rancid quite quickly, so time becomes accentuated, and
misunderstandings of time may eventually become amplified. The wheat kernel that gets milled has three major components: the bran, the endosperm, and the wheat germ. All three offer important nutrients to our bodies. Bread made with truly fresh, whole grain flour, especially when produced with sufficient fermentation, seems *relatively* easy to digest, at least for those of us who have adapted to eating bread.

We should keep in mind that bread might, in the end, be a pretty bad idea—already evidence of a pattern of insanity. It might not be anywhere as nourishing as freshly picked or freshly caught food. But let us also keep in mind that traditional breads might have offered far more nutrition than today’s common loaf, and some kind of bread (perhaps even non-wheat bread, or perhaps a whole grain fermented wheat bread) might have made for a decent supplementary component in a varied diet in places where less invasive agriculture could provide such supplements to hunting and gathering. There would be many differences between a more ideal bread and what we have today. Among other things, traditional breads may have been left to rise for far longer than a few hours (we don’t have time for that), and the composition of microbes, and thus the composition of metabolites and micronutrients, would have been quite unique, and possibly nonexistent in industrialized production—not to mention the degraded soils we have today. We certainly took a hit when we went into invasive agriculture, but we did adapt and work out some of the kinks so that we could make relatively healthy and nourishing foods. We might still be far better off with a hunter-gatherer lifestyle, but agriculture remains a workable solution as we try to sensibly balance the human population with the carrying capacity of Earth—something we may perhaps never, ever accomplish without *significantly* reducing global population (by *ethical* means, like intelligent family planning, and widespread ethical awareness that leads many, *many* couples to
have no children, and leads almost all others to have only one child, until the population comes down and other factors get in balance).

But back to bread. As a consequence of the industrial revolution, food would inevitably become industrialized. We should perhaps consider this very notion a symptom of the pattern of insanity, bound up with time. The industrialization of bread unfolded on many levels, including milling. Industrial milling grinds and sifts the bran and the germ out of the wheat, thus robbing it of vital nutrients—but, we may recall, also changing the flour’s temporal dimension, because the germ gets ground out and the resulting flour becomes more resistant to time. Industrial baking probably further robs bread of vital nutrients. And industrial farming has already robbed the wheat of vital nutrients, because of soil depletion. Thus, by the time it gets to us, bread is no longer food in the richest sense (we need a philosophical “rectification of names” here).

We use the same word for the stuff that gets to us, the stuff that often makes life convenient: we still call it “bread”. How quick and easy to pop some bread in the toaster to eat with coffee in the morning—coffee from a plastic machine, perhaps even a single-serving plastic pod. How simple to pack a sandwich for lunch (sealed in a plastic container to keep it fresh and protected), a welcome bit of nosh we can manage without utensils, while sitting at our plastic-finished desk, unable to take a proper lunch break. How medicating to eat good bread with dinner after a long, stressful day, sitting on vinyl or polyester seats that thankfully don’t stain (placemats too, perhaps).
We call that stuff we eat “bread,” but it doesn’t have the same meaning as it would have had for people living a few hundred years ago, and, as with many of our foods today, one wonders if our ancestors might bite into it and say, “You call this bread?” or, “You call this an apple?” or what have you. Here, too, we need to rectify names. Many people do not eat bread but instead eat “bread 2.0” or “Frankenbread” or at least “industrialized bread,” and thus we should rather expect that our systems might begin to get sensitive and send us signals to stop eating this stuff. It’s not really bread, and if we believe in the dictum that Food should be Medicine, then it isn’t Food either. It’s not truly nourishing.

The fact that we had, in some sense, killed bread became evident when malnutrition began to rise after the introduction of industrialized bread. Once human beings realized they had done something insane with bread, we might imagine they would respond something like this: “Well, it looks like we shouldn’t do that. Maybe we need to take a great deal of care when we get the idea to industrialize something. This has taught us an important lesson. Let’s go back to the old way of making bread, and in general do some further contemplation.” But the pattern of insanity held them securely, and instead people decided to add synthetic vitamins to bread. It is essential to see how this works, and how well it works. Producing wheat flour that one can ship all over the world, without worrying that it will go rancid, means one can make a lot of money, and one can pull all the old-fashioned millers into new forms of industrialization. Moreover, this also opens up the possibility for chemical manufacturers to make more money by producing synthetic vitamins. It’s a win all around for the pattern of insanity: the pattern gets strengthened and also furthered along; we double down on its “progress”. One obviously sees this in the case of
breakfast cereals too. When we look at the ingredients we find synthetic vitamins added to an otherwise starkly unnourishing “food”.

That pattern of insanity then continues. As more people develop gluten sensitivity or even full-on celiac disease, it might dawn on us that we need to fundamentally change our relationship with life, with food, with medicine. We might decide to see into the sacredness of the soul, which directs us away from what sickens and weakens us. But, instead, the pattern of insanity holds fast: We have an industrial revolution in gluten free “products,” and they flood the marketplace, not with food or medicine, but with more industrialized products. It is not necessarily better nourishment to eat a cookie or any other product made with potato flour in place of wheat. Soon we will have new ailments that arise from treating the potato as we have treated wheat, and treating ourselves and our world as the pattern of insanity dictates.

The example of bread doesn’t capture everything about the general pattern of insanity that has us in its grips, but once we get the feel for this sort of simplified example we can find it replicated in how we have developed industrialized agriculture in various cases, how we have developed antibiotic use, and so on. We can also find it in academia. It seems important for academic philosophers in particular to sense how this pattern of insanity gets perpetuated in university philosophy departments. The activity of these departments may seem rational. A department may want to model itself on how top departments in the field function.

A department may, for instance, have lower standing in the rankings of philosophy departments—already a strange concept. What is the solution? The department may seek to
model itself on what other departments do, thus perpetuating philosophy as it is being done, without deep reflection on whether this is the best way to do things—because we often think we are trying to do things the best way possible. We say, “I don’t know any other way to do philosophy!” by which we mean we think we have it basically correct. Instead of looking at the state of the world and humiliating ourselves enough to say, “Something may be seriously wrong with the way we do philosophy!” we evade such a humiliating experience, evade any suggestion that what is wrong with the world goes together with how we do philosophy. This only furthers philosophy’s isolation and alienation from the larger culture and the World—it would have to be further isolated to not actively participate in the pattern of insanity, so goes the delusion—and thus, even though it seems insane to suggest that philosophy magically stands outside of the pattern of insanity, we behave as if this were so, and thus perpetuate the insanity.

Alternatively the department might embrace the spirit of education and philosophy, which includes a dimension of pattern transcendence, a willingness to question authority, a willingness to cultivate an ecology that thrives on the basis of diversity. A philosophy department could thus grow by leaps and bounds (far more growth than the top-ranked programs demonstrate, caught as they are in the decline of humanities) if it opened itself up to what students are hungry for, if it opened itself up to the suffering of the World, recognizing that students at all levels in a university experience this suffering and want to heal it. Who wants to suffer? No one. But philosophers offer nothing to heal the suffering. A philosophy department could be a place where people come to inquire into the nature of suffering and how to heal it. It could be a place where people want to come, to work with their lives and to deal with the problems of the World and the problems of their own soul. Such a department would naturally encourage enrollment of students
with rather different approaches to philosophizing—even though this seems scary, and we aren’t sure how to navigate a situation in which people philosophize in ways we don’t feel comfortable with and maybe don’t feel competent to evaluate. But our inquiry invites us to cultivate new competencies—indeed to cultivate the old competencies in a new context, to practice-and-realize the old competencies of philosophy as a way of life, and to find out what a different way of knowing would mean—not to ask for a description of it, not to ask for a summary or explanation, but to engage with it, to experiment, to experience, precisely because we see we have gotten caught up in a pattern of insanity, that we are lived by powers we pretend to understand, and that they arrange our lives and our loves, our cravings, fears, self-doubts, and the degradation of our own souls and the soul of the World.

We could have such a revolution in any philosophy department. It would mean hiring different people, making a stand to say, “We don’t want the same old thing—no matter how new and cutting-edge it appears. We precisely do not want someone who might be poached by Harvard or Yale in two years’ time, because all that does is perpetuate the pattern of insanity and possibly destabilize the ecology here when they get poached.” Instead, the department would become famous for doing things differently, in a radical, rebellious, revolutionary, paradigm shifting sense. This does not mean throwing everything away. It means genuinely opening to and cultivating ecological diversity, and seeking to cultivate the “major” by looking at where we are needed—to become responsive philosophers, to become responsive to the suffering of our own present student population and our own lived and living World (which means the local landscape as well as interwoven ecologies that may seem far away). This is our most sacred responsibility right now because we philosophize while the conditions of life fall apart all around us and in us.
How else will we address this? If we continue to do the same basic thing, epistemically speaking (and ethically and aesthetically speaking), how will we get a different result? Is it not insanity to keep rationalizing this process?

Recall that, in the case of bread, humans industrialized it, and then signs of malnutrition appeared. In response to this, instead of thinking we needed to go back to the older way or somehow rethink the whole project, humans added synthetic vitamins to the bread. Similarly, at some point we began to change the practice of philosophy, altering it into something more academic and abstract, proliferating professors of philosophy rather than philosophers. Signs and symptoms of malnutrition of the soul begin to spread, soul scurvy set in, reflected in the conditions of life as well as in the humans and their now synthetic ecologies. Instead of rethinking the project, we supplement the product with more synthetic additives: more cars, more administrators, more laptops, more journals, more concepts, more conferences, more footnotes, more distinctions, more meetings, more professors in an industrialized philosophy. We in academia produce concepts and abstractions that can be shipped all over the world, and employed to colonize and control (even if we intend them to decolonize and liberate). We can sell books and articles all over the world. We can get on an airplane and fly thousands of miles across the planet, and make our living on the activity—make our living on the backs of countless sentient beings. Meanwhile, none of this has to do with cultivating vitalizing ecologies we can live on, in, through, as. We cultivate ecologies of abstraction—the symbolic life in a pejorative sense—but fail to cultivate ecologies of mutual liberation and mutual nourishment (indeed, precisely the opposite). Because we produce all these journals and books, because we fly to
conferences and then to faraway places to decompress, we need to take more oil out of the
ground to power the servers, the printers, the laptops, the jets. It all goes together.

It is not that we are alone as philosophers in degrading the culture. No, all of us do it. But
philosophers should hold themselves to a higher ethical conscience, and somehow we all must
come together, in communion and community, and say, “This is the only problem we can work
on right now.” If the past 2500 years of philosophy in the west means anything, it should mean
that we will not sleepwalk our way back to where Socrates found himself in Athens, but now on
a global scale. Athenian culture was not monolithic, but a certain kind of monoculture spread,
leading to the degradation of the culture, and the collapse of the civilization. Similarly, western
culture as a whole is not monolithic. It’s a group of traditions, and not a matter of race, gender,
or religion. But an altogetherness has arisen, one we may call conquest consciousness, and it has
locked us in a pattern of insanity. Will we continue to produce Frankenphilosophy, philosophy
2.0, industrialized philosophy, the monetized professing of philosophy? Or will we find a better
way of knowing, informed by our own ancient traditions?

*I am not villainizing all of philosophy.* I am not sure what is helpful and what isn’t. For all I
know, the most important insight, the most life-saving insight of all time will come out of the
current ways of knowing. I only raise the question that maybe there is something important we
can know in another way of knowing, and that maybe there is something vital that could come
from a different ecology, a more diverse and realistic ecology. Moreover, it is essential to see
that professors of philosophy are good people with good hearts. This is no kind of patronizing
remark. It is an admission that our intentions (as we tend to work with intentions) don’t always
suffice. By trying to do the right thing, by trying to function sincerely, by simply living our lives, we may yet contribute to the degradation of the conditions of life. Very intelligent and well-intentioned people may be caught by the pattern of insanity because our intentions, too, have a context, one both conscious and unconscious. That context includes our vision of life, and our capacity to sense the interwovenness of things. Our intentions become increasingly skillful and realistic as they arise with a more sensitive, nuanced, discerning, wise, loving, and beautiful (and more beautifully embodied) feel for life.

These contemplations about bread emerged from the more general contemplations about time, and the cultural practices that go altogether with a misunderstanding of time (and perhaps it bears emphasis that altogetherness does not mean linear causality . . . we need to sense the interwovenness of our misunderstanding of self, world, time, nature, and more with the degraded condition of the natural world and the human soul). Time is money in our culture. We get trained to see money as good, to feel a deep conscious and/or unconscious attraction to money. We get trained to think in time, to think about time, to time travel in our minds, rehashing the past over and over in guilt, regret, and anger, and spinning ourselves dizzy over the future, in widening gyres of hope, fear, anxiety, confusion, hatred, and self-doubt.

Neurosis of various kinds comes altogether with leaving the moment and thinking about the past and the future. This leaving the moment—endless attempts to escape from Now, escape from Sophia, escape from LoveWisdom—actually makes life feel a bit disjointed. Perhaps paradoxically to the western mind, the experience of time Dogen invites us into feels more continuous (further challenging our dualistic thinking). Some of the most sophisticated spiritual
practices in the World come from the so-called Tantric traditions of Hinduism and Buddhism. The meaning of “Tantra” carries various connotations. For one, it relates to thread weaving all the way through. In one connotation, it suggests a warp thread that serves as a frame for the weaving, the continuousness of a weaving process that patterns forth all our experience (it patterns forth life). Another connotation suggests the basic sense of an unbroken continuum of mind. Even if mind arises as moment, we can experience an unbroken continuum, and even if we experience delusion, fear, suffering, and so on, this mind is continuous with the Nature of Mind. In the Tantric traditions, Nature of Mind has no beginning, and thus we can call it an unbroken, unborn continuum.

If escape is what you want,
Hide within Mind-Essence;
If you want to run away,
Flee to the place of Awakeness.
There is no other place of safe refuge.

Uprooting all confusion from your mind,
Stay with me here in rest and quiet.
~ Milarepa

When we divide up experience into set workdays, 22-minute sitcoms, 45-minute commutes, 30-minute yoga classes, 2 hour committee meetings, and so on, we can fall into a disjointed kind of experience that only feels continuous because of its incessant drain. We get little genuine rest. We feel a continuous barrage of stresses and strains from which we want to escape, but we do not have a sense of continuous clarity, ceaseless PracticeRealization. We have no true refuge. This happens in large part because of our own mindlessness and the mindlessness of the anti-Culture. We get pulled from one thing to the next in rather artificial ways—the ping of a text message, the receipt of an administrative email, the frustration of unexpected traffic, all the
various manifestations of human agendas—not because of a dance with Nature or communion with sacredness.

Our news and entertainment holds to strict temporal patterns (e.g. the “sitcom code,” the standard pattern for many, many television shows, and the horrifying fact that so-called “news” essentially gets produced as entertainment, and so never has much chance of in-forming us on the basis of wisdom, love, and beauty) so that our attention can get harvested continuously, rather than cultivated and *gifted* to life.

In a spiritual setting, a rhythmic schedule allows practitioners to enter timelessness—the rupture of ordinary time. That can only happen if they forget themselves, which opens them to the sacred, liberates them into larger ecologies of mind. But the temporal structuring of the dominant culture only seeks to get us to *lose* ourselves, to keep us open to extraction—of all kinds, at all hours. One could argue that every Culture, and every anti-Culture too, relies on trance, and the question comes to what kind of trances a Culture makes available. Trance, we could say, signifies entrainment, resonance, attunement. These notions carry some kind of synchronizing connotation (*synchronistic* in some way), but they do not necessarily happen in the manner the western mind tends to think, based on misunderstanding time. In any case, we can ask: With what do we attune? With what should we attune?

Other Cultures have lived radically differently, have tuned and attuned their citizens, their co-participants, in radically different ways. Let us return to Perlman’s musings:
Some of our Ancient Ancestors, Wanderers, left Africa. Or perhaps Africa is not the only place where Human People Emerged. Who are we to say for certain? In any case, Perlman says of those alleged Wanderers:

The wanderers went to hot lands and cold, to lands with much rain and lands with little. Perhaps some felt nostalgia for the warm home they left. If so, the presence of their favorite animals, their cousins, compensated for their loss. We can still see the homage some of them gave to these animals on cave walls of Altamira, on rocks in Abrigo del Sol in the Amazon Valley. Some of the women learned from birds and winds to scatter seeds. Some of the men learned from wolves and eagles to hunt.

But none of them ever worked. And everyone knows it. The armored Christians who later “discovered” these communities knew that these people did no work, and this knowledge grated on Christian nerves, it rankled, it caused cadavers to peep out. The Christians spoke of women who did “lurid dances” in their fields instead of confining themselves to chores; they said hunters did a lot of devilish “hocus pocus” before actually drawing the bowstring.

These Christians, early time-and-motion engineers, couldn’t tell when play ended and work began. Long familiar with the chores of zeks, the Christians were repelled by the lurid and devilish heathen who pretended that the Curse of Labor had not fallen on them. The Christians put a quick end to the “hocus pocus” and the dances, and saw to it that none could fail to distinguish work from play.

Our ancestors — I’ll borrow Turner’s terms and call them the Possessed — had more important things to do than to struggle to survive. They loved nature and nature reciprocated their love. Wherever they were they found affluence, as Marshall Sahlins shows in his Stone Age Economics. Pierre Clastres’ Society Against the State insists that the struggle for subsistence is not verifiable among any of the Possessed; it is verifiable among the Dispossessed in the pits and on the margins of progressive industrialization. Leslie White, after a sweeping review of reports from distant places and ages, a view of “Primitive culture as a whole,” concludes that “there’s enough to eat for a richness of life rare among the ‘civilized.’” I wouldn’t use the word Primitive to refer to a people with a richness of life. I would use the word Primitive to refer to myself and my contemporaries, with our progressive poverty of life.

The main part of our poverty is that the richness of life of the Possessed is barely accessible to us, even to those of us who have not chained our imaginations.

Our professors talk of fruits and nuts, animal skins and meat. They point to our supermarkets, full of fruits and nuts. We have an abundance our ancestors didn’t dream of, Q.E.D. These are, after all, the real things, the things that matter. And if we want more than fruits and nuts, we can go to the theater and see plays; we can
even sprawl in front of the TV and consume the entire world-wide spectacle. Hallelujah! What more could we want?

Thanks to our professors, we barely have access to our dangerous, demonic, possessed ancestors who thought fruits and nuts were not the real things but trivia, who abandoned themselves to visions, myths and ceremonies. Thanks to our professors, we now know that visions are personal delusions, myths are fairy tales, and ceremonies are play-acting which we can see any time in movies.

We even know a lot about Possession. Possession is ownership. We possess houses and garages and cars and stereo equipment, and we’re constantly running to possess more; there’s no limit to what we want to possess. Surely it must be said that possession is our central aim, not theirs. Rare is the professor who, like Mircea Eliade, frees himself of the armored vision and sees through the iron curtain of inversion and falsification. And even Eliade fogs what he sees by claiming to find analogies and vestiges in our world. The strait that separates us from the other shore has been widening for three hundred generations, and whatever was cannibalized from the other shore is no longer a vestige of their activity but an excretion of ours: it’s shit. Reduce to blank slates by school, we cannot know what it was to grow up heirs to thousands of generations of vision, insight, experience.

We cannot know what it was to learn to hear the plants grow, and to feel the growth.

We cannot know what it was to feel the seed in the womb and learn to feel the seed in earth’s womb, to feel as Earth feels, and at last to abandon oneself and let Earth possess one, to become Earth, to become the first mother of all life. We’re truly poor. Thousands of generations of vision, insight and experience have been erased.

Instead of abandoning ourselves, instead of savoring what little we can of their powers, we define and categorize.

We speak of Matriarchy. The name is a cheap substitute for the experience. It is a bargain, and we’re always on the lookout for bargains. Once the name is on the door, the door can be closed. And we want doors to stay closed.

The name Matriarchy is on the door of an age when women knew themselves, and were known by men, as the conceivers, as the creators of life, as embodiments of the first being, as first beings.

To know the name on the door is to know nothing. Knowledge begins on the other side of the threshold. Even the name on the door is wrong. Matri refers to mother, but archy comes from an altogether different age. Archy refers to government, to artificial as opposed to natural order, to an order where the Archon is invariably a
man. An-archy would be a better name for the door. The Greek prefix “an” means “without.”

On the other side of the threshold, the possessed mother returns to her body and proceeds to share her experience with her kin, just as she shares fruits and nuts.

Our tongues would be hanging out for the fruits and nuts. But her sisters, cousins, nieces and nephews are hungry for the experience.

. . . . Some of the people who left the human communities remembered some of the qualities. They remembered some of the joys of possession — not possession of things but possession of Being.

They remembered — but vaguely, foggily. Surrounded by things, they lost the ability to express the qualities. They knew the age they had left was more valuable, more pure, more beautiful than anything they found since. But their language had gone poor.

It’s good to have such long passages to contemplate. Often, we rely on certain authors to save us time by condensing the arguments and descriptions of all the books they have read. We don’t have time to read widely—and even less time to sit, to walk, to participate in Nature, and learn from mountains, rivers, forests, ferns, robins, ravens, whales, wolves, and all our relations, all our Elders. If you have time to read this book, maybe consider going walking instead. Or just sit quietly.

If you have time to chatter,
Read books.

If you have time to read,
Walk into mountain, desert and ocean.

If you have time to walk,
Sing songs and dance.

If you have time to dance,
Sit quietly, you happy, lucky idiot.

~ Nanao Sakai (from Let’s Eat Stars)
But if we would like to read a bit, because we sense that reading could in-form a more vitalizing practice of life, then let us seek decisive experience, and seek a dispelment of time, a breaking of the spell of our misunderstanding. It is a spell of disenchantment, and only enchantment may heal us, an enchantment into timelessness. Let us throw out the clock and sit together, contemplating with care so that we can reorient our practice of life.

This long passage by Perlman comes from a point of view informed by a study of Culture, a study of the soil of soul, which we might call “cultural anthropology,” but which we should call Cultural Ecology, and mean by this the interwovenness of Nature and Culture. Considering the matter carefully, we might hardly express our stupefaction regarding the dearth of “anthropological” and Ecological study in philosophy programs. It would help students tremendously if we designed undergraduate and graduate programs that at least made space for (if not required, which seems wiser) the proper study of Nature and Culture (“anthropology” not as the “study of man,” but as the study of Culture in its nonduality with Nature, Culture as Experience). Most students would gain an incredible amount of insight if we would let go of making them spend so much time studying Descartes, Kant, and a few other of the darlings of institutionalized philosophy (we could even include logic here, which, in the current university setting and the current global context, is perhaps one of the silliest courses for both philosophy majors and non-majors—excepting those who may want to do work that would presuppose it, and those students should be supported with gusto). We do this largely as a matter of “scholarship,” and not because we think these hours of study will help students to Cultivate Wisdom, Love, and Beauty. Indeed, one cannot easily see how these three weigh into our decisions.
In the spirit of Cultural Ecology, and sitting together without the clock, so that we may more intimately understand each other, let us also consider some long passages from a few remarkable “anthropological” accounts, stories of LoveWisdom presenced in Ecologies of practice that have given fruit to realizations we can perhaps only damn in western culture. Here we nod to The Book of the Damned (1919), by Charles Fort. Fort wrote, “By the damned, I mean the excluded,” and he intended his book to present a long procession of the damned, meaning strange experiences, the anomalous, including the appearance of objects in the sky. Fort wrote: “The power that has said to all these things that they are damned, is Dogmatic Science” (4). Does that seem too strong a turn of phrase? Damned?

Writing about the way damnable things have appeared in popular culture, where people only have time to view them in the form of movies, television shows, and so on, Victoria Nelson suggests that contemporary “secular Westerners” are “cut off at the neck from a good portion of their own religio-philosophical tradition,” and so, “The greatest taboo among serious intellectuals of the century just behind us, in fact, proved to be none of the “transgressions” itemized by postmodern thinkers: it was, rather, the heresy of challenging a materialist worldview. And few did” (2002: 16).

To challenge time in the way we must means challenging the altogetherness of western civilization’s insanity and its scientistic, intellectual taboos. We speak here of a cultural mind, a cultural unconscious, and the personal and cultural shadow material we need to confront. The

“shadow” signifies the aspects of ourselves we repress, because they seem heretical or unacceptable to our ego. We all—scholars included, and perhaps especially so, given the dogmas of “science,” “objectivity,” and “reason” dominant in the academy—we all need to do a better job of confronting the unconscious (indeed, Jungian psychologists have written about what an ethical revolution would take place if only we would turn and face the unconscious more directly). There are unconscious dynamics in our scholarly research that we might beneficially inquire into. Nelson has some reflections that bear on this too:

We should never forget how utterly unsophisticated the tenets of 18th-century rationalism have left us, believers and unbelievers alike, in that complex arena we blithely dub ‘spiritual’. Even as we see all too clearly the kitsch of New Age religiosity and fear the rigidity of rising fundamentalism, we remain alarmingly blind to our own unconscious tendencies in this same direction. Our conventional secular bias whispers to us that the ideas we see naively articulated on the cinema screen (ideas as blasphemous to secular humanists as they are to the religious orthodox), if they are to be taken seriously at all, signal a backward slide into religious oppression and intolerance. What our perspective does not allow us to recognize is the positive and enduring dimension of such ideas when they are consciously articulated in our culture. We forget that Western culture is equally about Platonism and Aristotelianism, idealism and empiricism, gnosia and episteme, and that for most of this culture’s history one or the other has been conspicuously dominant—and dedicated to stamping the other out. (288)

Our contemplation of time has to do with getting beyond these dualities, and their back-and-forth jostling of the mind, a back-and-forth that unfolds in time. If we consider consciousness that does not unfold “in time,” we may encounter the damned, which includes people, Culture, and Experience that the rational, scientific mind finds itself needing to reject, reduce, write off, deconstruct, discount, critique, marginalize, and so on. What do we fear?

Again, as part of this fear and altogether with the soul’s imperatives, the dominant culture leaves us no time to contemplate the strange, the uncanny, the anomalous data that threatens the dominant paradigms. The soul won’t let us leave these things alone, so they have no other outlet
but mass media, the only place we have time to interact with them, but in a simplified form that makes it easy to consume and dismiss. The relationship thus gets watered down, limiting us, colluding in some ways with the pattern of insanity. At the same time, it may create moments for some people, it may create small interruptions of the pattern of insanity. Overall, we would be much better off if philosophers and psychologists worked with this material more actively, intimately, and publicly, giving it the care it deserves. In part, we make some attempts at that together here. Perhaps, by moving with care, we can sense some of what we fear.

The anthropologist E. Richard Sorenson has offered us a small treasury of consciousness, a treasury of ways, a treasury of how-we-do-things (how we could do things), a Treasury of Indigenous LoveWisdom. In his work, Sorenson documents the fact that, as he puts it, “basic consciousness can differ strikingly across eras” (we could better say, across ecologies, or across Nature-Cultures). In particular, he focuses on what he terms “pre-conquest consciousness,” exceedingly rare in his time, and more so now (we will consider work he wrote in the 1990’s, based on fieldwork that goes back even earlier). He claims that this type of consciousness manifested stably in the era before western conquest, and that he had both the great fortune to see it functioning, and also the sad misfortune (but relative gift) to see it fall apart under the influence of western culture. Sorenson writes,

The type of consciousness peculiar to that era [the pre-conquest era] focuses liminally, not supraliminally (as is the norm today). It spawns mental capabilities, and a sense-of-truth, very different from our modern type. It generates a way-of-life that is simultaneously individualistic and collective—qualities immiscible in modern thought and languages. Their fusion in that earlier era is one of many indications of the profoundness of the mental gulf separating that era from our current one. This premodern type also spawn a spontaneous group rapport so alien to our 20th century that modern beings

81 No small point.
scarcely can perceive it, much less appreciate it.\textsuperscript{82} When seized by hostile or domineering cultures, this preconquest type of consciousness collapses.\textsuperscript{83} The type of consciousness typical to that era focuses on direct sensory experience.\textsuperscript{84} Therefore cognition is not divided into clearly separable units. Experience being continuous, not discrete, cannot therefore be managed by syntax and logic, as in modern thought.\textsuperscript{85} The dialectic type of inquiry underlying our modern sense-of-truth is but a ship passing in the deepest darkness of the distant night to such mentality. Just as invisibly their sense-of-truth evades Western sensibility.\textsuperscript{86} Such differences pose questions not only regarding the reconcilability of truth across eras but about mental evolution too.\textsuperscript{87} For as yet there is no way to know whether today’s type of consciousness reflects a positive or negative turning in the evolution of mentality.\textsuperscript{88} (1997: 1)

Sorenson summarizes the characteristics of this pre-conquest consciousness as follows:

1) that their preconquest type of consciousness focuses liminally; 2) that it differs fundamentally from the supraliminal type dominant in the world today; 3) that it emerges from a sensually empathetic tactile infant nurture common to its era but shunned in ours; 4) that it spawns a coalescing of human affect in growing children; 5) that this affect coalescence heightens spectacularly during adolescence to produce an expansive hypersensual rapport both with people and with nature; 6) that such rapport nullifies nascent negative emotions sometimes triggered in the course of active living; 7) that the preconquest people are, as a result, largely free of negative emotions; and 8) that they are acutely vulnerable to negative emotions when in contact with them. (2)

\textsuperscript{82} Another major point.
\textsuperscript{83} Yet another.
\textsuperscript{84} Quite important.
\textsuperscript{85} Again, the duality between the continuous and the discontinuous, and the western habit, enshrined in and encouraged by language, to analyze, the break up and eventually break down the Living World.
\textsuperscript{86} From “scarcely perceive” to “darkness” and “invisibility.” This invisibility matters more than we can say.
\textsuperscript{87} But, if Paul Shepard and others have it right, our western developmental path involves an “ontogenetic crippling,” which means we have in some way devolved.
\textsuperscript{88} Far too cautious a statement. We need only look at the conditions of life. Though pre-conquest societies too exhibited differences in skill and poise, in their relative wisdom in relating to the sacred-creative-patterning of Nature, we can have no doubt regarding the unskillfulness and lack of wisdom exhibited by the dominant culture. And, again, the dominant culture could transform in ways that allow for the preservation and further cultivation of anything at all which wisdom validates as skillful, graceful, ethical, beautiful.

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This liminality stands out. It may remind us of the notion of the *bardo*, the *between* of Tibetan Buddhist Philosophy. The book we incorrectly call “The Tibetan Book of the Dead” would more properly have the title in English that Robert Thurman gave it: *Liberation Upon Hearing in the Between*. This *Between* can connote the space between thoughts, the stopping of ordinary thinking, the stopping of time, the moment when the bottom drops out and we enter an existential free fall, the shift from an agenda-mind into choiceless awareness. Because of the impermanence of things, we essentially live continuously at a threshold. If we stop time, we enter, we cross this threshold, pass through the gateless gate. Anything could trigger this entering. Spiritual practice only means the Art of Entry. We enter in “the Between”—because there is nothing to “enter.”

Nothing . . . not in the sense of a nihilistic “nothingness,” but in the sense of not “having,” and of never-not-already, never-not-complete. Hence, our inquiry can function like a bardo, like a *Between*, if we allow it. In life, we encounter In-Betweenness again and again. What matters is what we make with the *Between*. The Tibetan Sage Milarepa sang out, “The precious pot
containing my riches becomes my teacher in the very moment it breaks.” Many of us have experienced this—maybe everyone has at least tasted it, felt it in the gut, as a sudden dropping out, a sudden “Oh!” when what we were clinging to slipped away from us. The moment of bottom-dropping-out places us at the threshold, what Trungpa (1992) called the “mysterious ground, which belongs to neither that nor this” (4). Anything that can rupture our “this and that,” anything that can rupture what we take for granted (including time), and thus place us at the threshold.

Imagine that we really do stand at a threshold—at every moment—but we cannot see it, cannot sense it. What would it mean? How and why do we cover it over? How could we let go of the covering-over? How could we self-liberate into, across the threshold?

In an ongoing way, we try to get ground under our feet, in the midst of some deeper sense of the groundlessness of things, the sense of impermanence, the sense of “firewood gone”. Placing things in time and space, knowing by means of our Cartesian coordinate system of concepts, all based on a misunderstanding of self, world, time, space, objects . . . this all maintains the illusion of control, is the delusion of control, and it ensures we don’t have time to see beyond the illusion of time, space, control, barrier, self, object, world. The Between offers a moment of cutting through, passing through the barriers and delusions.

What is it that, if we only had time to see, sense, feel, we would see, sense, feel? What is it that our busyness conspires to keep us from sensing, receiving, realizing? If we had, not merely “all
the time in the world” (which might just as well lead to incredible boredom), but no-time (a rupture of time). What might we experience?

“Doing time” means imprisonment. And yet, we all do time every day. We DO time. Dogen, the Trobrianders, the Cultures studied by Sorenson, and many Indigenous Cultures and spiritual traditions invite us to stop “doing” “time”. This stopping happens in the Between. As Chögyam Trungpa put it, the Between itself “is the meditation experience” (1992: 4), and meditation experience is what Dogen means by being-moment. Being-moment means we leave the time in which we contrive and control, as if we had dropped the contriving of body, mind, self, world, as if we suddenly said, “I don’t have time for this anymore,” or, “I don’t have to do this anymore . . . I don’t have to live like this.” All the doing stops, the clinging and craving stops, the self-doubt and confusion stops. We cross the threshold, and we taste life (sapienza, wisdom as taste), experience it intimately—at least for a moment. Culture should provide a context for such moments, a context that supports us to realize them (to scientifically verify them, thus verifying Nature and Culture, and letting Nature-Culture verify us), and a context that supports us when we slip out of them.

Perhaps the Cultures Sorenson studied did not, shall we say, live ceaselessly in the Between. But maybe they Practiced-and-Realized a more liminal awareness, an awareness to threshold, awareness in threshold, a drawing near to the numberless gates, gateless gates of reality that appear as each moment. In any case, Sorenson discovered what he called a “hypersensuality” that functioned like an energy holding the Culture together in activity. It emerged
developmentally in adolescence from what he termed a “sociosensuality” that itself developed in childhood.

Sorenson does a fine job detailing the role of Eros in the pre-conquest groups he lived with. But let us get a broader vision and see Love at work (in various guises), and see an interwovenness at work that we might better term EcoSensual Awareness. Again and again Sorenson describes an interbeing with Nature, even if he makes some duality between Nature or the Forces of Nature on the one hand, and the humans he observes on the other. Relatively speaking, we can imagine those humans, too, can perceive dualistically. Indeed, even in a Culture rooted in wisdom-love-beauty, realization depends on practice. Put another way: Even in the wisest Culture, not everyone becomes equally wise (despite their inherent capacity for wisdom). Though a pre-conquest Culture may know far more about raising Elders (as opposed to mere “adults”), we need not assume sagehood becomes realized by all, or even needs to be (relatively speaking).

Now, this ecosensual awareness (let us see that term where Sorenson uses “hypersensuality,” and think it as the aliveness of the threshold, an aliveness and aloveness in the placeless place, the atopos, a nonduality of place and placelessness) does not readily appear to our typical mind. It belongs to an altogether way of life. And this goes to the heart of our inquiry into knowing. In his contribution to the book Tribal Epistemologies, Sorenson brings up knowing in many ways, including directly:

Most anthropologists are aware that what comprise the standard habits, inclinations, and activities of humankind in one culture may seem quite exotic in another. When the separateness of peoples is extreme, incompatible modes of awareness and cognition sometimes arise, as occurred between the preconquest and postconquest eras of the world. Basic sensibilities, including sense-of-identity and sense-of-truth, were so contradistinctive in these two eras that they were
irreconcilable. Even core features of life in one era were imperceptible to people in the other. While such disparate cognitive separation may be rare, a single occurrence is sufficient to make anthropology an epistemological problem.

Moreover, when irreconcilable modes of cognition emerge within humankind, it becomes more obvious that sense-of-truth is the product of mental evolution within a particular cultural framework. Epistemology may well be a noetic discipline, but it also emerged as a cultural phenomenon from the early Western process of civilization in the Mediterranean Basin. As a product of culture, it becomes a subject for anthropological inquiry.  

Here we find the suggestion that perception arises as conditioned, and our practices of perception limit what we can know, what can even become salient to our consciousness in the first place (and what, then, must remain invisible or even nonexistent). We cannot know something that never appears, because we cannot allow it to appear, cannot Practice-and-Realize it.

In everyday life, for instance, we may not have a functional capacity to experience an act of kindness as an act of kindness. An acquaintance of mine informed me that when her daughter transferred schools, from, let us say, a “challenged” public school to a progressive one, she had to go through a special interview process. The process became necessary when students from her daughter’s original school reliably became violent and stressed when the children at the new school tried to be nice to them—not in any special way, but in treating them as they all treated one another. The teachers and administrators realized that the new students could not perceive an act of kindness, but only saw threats and harassment. The strangeness of these threats (not the kind they had grown used to) made them feel violent and stressed. Once they received some education on kindness and healthy socialization, the new students calmed down. In order to

89 The full text of his essay is available online as well: http://ranprieur.com/readings/preconquest.html
avoid problems, the school took to screening new students for the capacity to perceive kindness as kindness, and to providing therapeutic education when needed.

This sort of basic experience arises all over the place. For instance, beginning Tango dancers face an incredible challenge in seeing what happens when two even slightly advanced dancers dance. Relational-dynamism that never occurs in ordinary life appears like sparks of embers, flickering briefly then fading. All sorts of things happen that the beginner simply cannot see. Same with a beginner in life. We need to keep a Beginner’s Mind, but learning still happens, and we must value it—without reifying it into “expertise”.

Sorenson admits difficulty seeing. He admits that, because the “type of refined collective hypersensuality” he observed “does not occur in the West,” he could not be considered an adult in these groups (a possible case of perceived ontogenetic crippling). Developmentally speaking, “the capability for advanced hypersensuality comes only after adolescence,” an adolescence of nurturing in the womb of sociosensuality, and the larger wombs of the ecosensual awareness of the adults and elders as well as the womb of Nature. The roots of ecosensual awareness thus begin to reach into the soil and the soul (something more than what we in the west call “ecoliteracy,” a symptomatically western textual term, as if we cannot allow ourselves to realize Nature if Nature transcends our words and concepts, if we have to renounce our addiction to labels and labeling, if we have to quiet our chatter, forgo our cleverness, and listen with a non-conceptual dimension of ourselves). Given this, Sorenson writes, “despite my age, I belonged with the children. And it’s what seemed to be expected” (1998: 47).
How does this development unfold? Sorenson details a remarkable kind of child rearing, with infants and little children cradled in the ecosensual awareness of the adults (the advanced form, what Sorenson calls “hypersensuality”) and of the other children (the preliminary form, “sociosensuality”). The children are, more properly speaking, cradled in the ecosensual awareness of life—not merely the ecosensuality of other sentient beings, but the ecosensuality of sentient being, something close to primordial awareness. According to Sorenson:

The outstanding social condition is a sociosensual type of infant and child nurture that spawns an intuitive group rapport and unites people without need for formal rules. The outstanding psychological condition is heart-felt rapprochement based on integrated trust. This provides remarkable efficiency in securing needs and responding to nature’s challenges while dispensing ongoing delight with people and surroundings . . .

. . . . in the deep New Guinea forests I was dumbfounded by the lush sensuality of infant care I saw . . . infants were kept in continuous bodily contact with mothers . . .

90 We must, of course, take great care here. We cannot enter these Cultures, and we must avoid co-opting them. The question of whether Indigenous Cultures share certain commonalities of vision has received an affirmative answer from many Indigenous people (see the work of Gregory Cajete, Jeanette Armstrong, Evan Pritchard, and others). The further question of whether some of these commonalities also appear in various spiritual traditions has also received an affirmative answer (see the work of Peter Gold, Stanley Krippner, Michael Harner, and others). We seek here to challenge the way of knowing of the dominant culture, and we seek the possibility of better ways of knowing. We contemplate a certain set of possibilities, and we draw on a variety of sources to illuminate their potential meaning and significance. For instance, here we want to consider ecosensual awareness, and we look to the study of Culture for possible manifestations of this, for it means nothing if we cannot practice-and-realize it. We cannot indulge in mere hypotheticals or in mere theory. We need to know, and knowing means realization. If an individual or group have potentially incorporated a possibility we might want to open to, we should inquire into it. Through a multi-culturally enriched vision, we can sense the sheer conditioned nature of our experience, sense how differently we might experience life, and thus sense that what matters has to do with seeing this conditioned nature, seeing how experience depends on practice. Seeing this, we see the vital nature of practice itself, and how it goes altogether with realization, and thus how some practices better express this very Nature of practice, this co-dependent arising of our experience. In looking with humility at other cultures, we practice on the one hand the respect that says of another culture’s wisdom, “I accept that,” and we practice on the other the experience of the saint as outlined by Chesterton: We allow Sophia to illuminate all things for us, including other cultures, and in turn our own. We can only understand or wonderstand by means of Her illumination (and thus only by means of our own capacity to presence WisdomLoveBeauty), so let us acknowledge that, and proceed with care.
or the mothers’ friends—on laps when they were seated, on hips, under arms, against backs, or on shoulders when they were standing. Even during intensive food preparation, or when heavy loads were being moved, babies were not put down. They had priority.

There was always a place for them against the body of a ‘mother’ or close associate. Loads could be shed or lightened, but babies were simply not put down, not deprived of constant, ever-ready, interactive body contact—even when the group was on the move under difficult conditions. Babies responded to this blanket of ever-ready empathetic tactile stimulation by tactile responses of their own. Very quickly they began assembling a sophisticated tactile-speech to transmit desires, needs, and states of mind. They didn’t whine or cry to get attention; they touched. While babies everywhere are liminally aware, the constant empathetic tactile contact required to produce a sophisticated type of preverbal communication is rare—except among preconquest peoples.

Eliciting delight from babies was a desired social norm, and attentive tactile stimulation was the daily lot of infants. It included protracted body-to-body caressing, snuggling, oral sensuality, hugging, fondling, and kissing. The seductive aspect of the play was frequently collective as older children singly or in combination used their inventive wiles to delight a baby. In their hamlets crying might be heard in reaction to accidental pain, but I don’t recall a single case of disgruntled whining or demanding crying.91

Elsewhere he describes what further unfolds this way:

By age seven, children had started to spontaneously pool behavior and affect in wordless synchrony toward ad hoc common ends. It was during adolescence that rapport deepened to produce a rapid flow of independence merged with unity. It merged individualistic impulse with synchronous activity. As they moved together, these groups of teenagers constantly enlivened each one all the others by a spirited individualistic input into a unified at-oneness. In English (and other Western languages) such a state is terminologically contradictory—e.g., impossible, that is, beyond Western understanding. There are no good words for it even in the Oxford Unabridged. When words are used to describe it, they bump clumsily against each other, as in “individualistic . . . unified at-oneness”—another indication of the gap separating preconquest mentality from that of today. (1997: 6)

Sorenson tries to get us to see the effectively vast gap between liminal awareness and experience on the one hand, and the consciousness and experience of the dominant culture on the other.

Because of the pervasiveness of the dominant culture, and because its presence leads to the

91 http://ranprieur.com/readings/preconquest.html
breakdown of threshold awareness and experience, we have little or no understanding of it in the dominant culture. We do not observe it, and we do not cultivate it, do not practice-and-realize it. In terms of a way of knowing, this kind of threshold awareness leads to a different sense of things like identity, number, space, truth, individual, collective, and more. Recall that this threshold awareness leads to groups that manifest a simultaneity or synchronicity of the “individual” and the “collective”. We cannot conceive of it, and we seem to have a hard time perceiving it when we might encounter it. Sorenson says, “Two unorthodox procedures going beyond the dialectic approach to truth of our Western culture were required to bring an important type of nonwestern consciousness to light.” In other words, he relied on a more rigorous practice-realization, more than analyzing and constructing texts.

In the course of daily living in a variety of preconquest enclaves, a clear, though undefinable, commonalty of sensibility sometimes connected across cultural barriers, even in the absence of a common language. It required spontaneous, instinctive friendship beyond the level of ordinary discourse, as when a heart-felt liking for someone simply just arose. As mystical as that might seem, the affect exchanges then made possible led to sustained, adaptive, experiential interactions much deeper than those enabled merely by conversation. Experiential depth is what eventually revealed the major role played by affect coordination in preconquest life. Without this nonverbal crosscultural bridge, it would not have been possible to grasp why preconquest mentality was so vulnerable to anger, deceit, greed, and aggression. Nor would it have been possible to notice crucial subtleties of sense-of-name, sense-of-space, sense-of-number, sense-of-truth, and sense-of-emotion. 

Doesn’t it seem interesting that Sorenson says this threshold awareness might appear “mystical” to our ordinary consciousness? And what should we make of its vulnerability to anger, deceit, greed, and aggression—in light of the fact that it seems every spiritual tradition in the World has teachings about how to work with these, often seeing this work as fundamental to spiritual

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92 http://ranprieur.com/readings/preconquest.html
93 http://ranprieur.com/readings/preconquest.html
transformation? Meanwhile the philosophy of the dominant culture seems to encourage the practice and realization of these very characteristics, and philosophers in the academy do little to teach students how to transform. The cultivation of states of anger, greed, aggression, and deceit go altogether with conquest, and this leads to the total breakdown of threshold awareness. We in the dominant culture live in a context that encourages the invisibility of threshold awareness, discourages its cultivation, and then encourages and even insists upon its dissolution if it were to somehow arise. What are we not able (or at least far from likely) to become conscious of, simply by living in the dominant culture? What does the culture make likely as our experience? What does it make likely as our world? The general answer seems to be something degraded, limited, limiting.

Altogether with our misunderstanding of time comes a misunderstanding of space and place.

Sorenson gives the following considerations regarding threshold awareness and space:

Just as body language originated in empathetic responsiveness to affect, so did sense-of-space. These preconquest people had no standard way to partition lands, to measure time and distance, to project abstract boundaries onto regions, or to impose abstract spatial concepts. Geographic sensibility was simply affect relationships thrust out onto surroundings. Such geography was haphazard and rarely uniform. It fluctuated over time, from place-to-place and from individual-to-individual.

Meaningfulness emerged from the affect associated with a place—e.g., comfort, excitement, enjoyment, eagerness, interest, delicious foods, good company, etc. Such ‘geographical’ entities had recognizable centers, but they overlapped and graded imperceptibly into one another—just as did their kinship and their languages. Such geography, though clear enough at centers of rapport, was indistinct and fuzzy where affect association lessened or became ambiguous. All boundaries, spatial and otherwise, were therefore hazy, inconsistent, and ambiguous.

Navigating such affect-space is not at all like barreling down the Beltway to Bethesda or even going to Mars. Feelings mattered, not hours, kilometers, or abstract directions. When I meandered through the forests within the affect-space
of New Guinea friends, one and then another would branch to complex, divergent different paths, regrouping variously along the way—because that’s how their affect-geographies were panning out that day. At first traveling in affect-space seemed entirely unworldly—much too indirect, labyrinthine, snail-paced, and intellectually disorderly. I conceived space through maps and compasses, schedules and boundaries, and was geared mentally to a Euclidean sense-of-space. I was map cognitive. Among these people, feelings about locales were what mattered, and it was feelings that defined them. Arbitrary geographical divisions were devoid of such meaning, so had no relevance to them and were unrecognized. A locale’s name varied according to the numerous affect relations different people had with it. There were no abstract sectionings of space, no geometric projections onto space, no projected boundaries to undo their sense of interdigitation.

. . . . When I first went into the region I was still a somewhat cocky Westerner with little crosscultural sensibility. I repeatedly tried to get my point across with maps and compasses and even aerial photographs. All useless. Every time I tried to explain a-to-b directness, boundaries, or standard measures, though they seemed eager to get the point, they eventually just went blank.

Some concluded I was playing word games and would simply laugh. In those days the territory was mapped only in the very crudest sense (from hastily produced World War II aerial photographs without ground information). So reliance on local friends was the only way I could find my way around. My overwhelming daily problem was how to guess which local friends might have the most favorable socio-geography for where I had to go that day. It was grievously perplexing at first—then it became a deeply moving introduction into the world of affect-geography.94

The role of affect, touch, intuition, and sensitivities that go beyond abstraction, beyond ordinary talking, should stand out. One feels one’s way through life, through Nature. It involves a felt sense arising altogether with a clarity of awareness, a stability of heart-mind, a synchronicity of heart-mind-body-world-cosmos, a groundedness in the groundlessness, a centering that thrives as precariousness spontaneously unfolds. It’s a Jazz state of being, improvised by the soul, in concert with the souls of countless sentient beings, the soul of sentient being.

94 http://ranprieur.com/readings/preconquest.html
One shortcoming we might note in Sorenson’s description has to do with the sense of affect-geography (perhaps already an unskillful expression) getting reduced to “projection”. While Sorenson rightly says that we project boundaries onto Nature, he still says the Indigenous People “thrust” affect into it. This seems an artifact of western thinking. Perhaps it did not occur to Sorenson to try and experience the interwovenness of Nature-and-Culture, of organism-and-environment. He keeps them separate. According to the western mind, affect like this must reduce to a “projection,” for it could not have any reality as a co-creation-discovery of Human-and-Nature. One must wonder how many non-western languages even have a word for “nature”. Why have one word for “humans” and then another word for “everything else”? To have a word that orients us toward the sacredness, to the sacred-creative-ordering makes sense. But western culture consistently dualizes “nature” and “culture,” “organism” and “environment”. Geography as wildness, as Nature, surely presences the precariousness of Nature, of Natural Wildness. One finds no paved roads. Moving, living, means way-making that is way-seeking. Why not imagine that the making-seeking gets guided by felt sense, or, better put, a whole heart-mind-body-world-cosmic sense-making, a total dynamism, a wholeness of activity, and that this sense-making co-arises as Nature, as Nature-Culture? Indeed, we would better err by calling this a process of reception, rather than “projection”—indeed a much more skillful error, a skillful means of expression in the right context, because we cannot hear the World when we will not listen, and have no time to listen, to sit quietly and receive our proper use and function. We cannot receive the World’s ceaseless invitations and inspirations of co-discovery-creation. We cannot sense the interwovenness of all things, and yet we must if we want a better way of knowing, because evidently human mind co-arises with other minds in, through, as the living landscape, the wholeness of Nature. This altogetherness is, much to the chagrin of conquest consciousness,
inconceivable, and thus attempts to conceive and control seem like a joke. And so the Indigenous People would laugh at Sorenson. It is as funny as, “Sell me your land.” These go altogether, and from this altogetherness arise many tragedies. Again, we are not narrow-mindedly picking on “white” people here. We inquire into a style of consciousness, one Sorenson will remind us does not exclusively appear in western culture, but one which the western bundle of traditions seems to have brought to a zenith.

Perhaps a better way of knowing invites us into the Between, neither “projection” nor mere “reception”. Perhaps it does this in part by telling us of the one who dwells in the Between:

The Shaman—one who knows—
took seven steps
into the other side
and returned
to tell us something
we could not understand
perhaps to Love.

The origin of the steps
we could not determine
the energy of the steps
we could not detect with our detectors,
Geiger Counters of reason and reconstruction,
we could not calculate with the compass of ideas
the direction of his steps,
nor could the transit of thought
triangulate the location
of the first step
or the last.
All conjecture failed,
our various mental states failed,
speech failed, for we could not label it,
and where speech seemed driven to make distance,
to push away and make firm boundaries,
the Shaman Expressed Interwovenness.

All extrapolation in our column-and-row assault failed to find a boundary.
we could not see any other land or is-
land, but we knew he Spoke
in Gestures and Incantations of Intimacy,
we knew he Conjured the Moon and Sun.
We knew he did not begin or end
but he would die
somehow like the rest of us
or maybe more.
Some said he carried the Blue Stone of an alchemist,
that It Spoke to him.
I never saw such a stone
never heard its Voice,
but I knew he kept a Fiery Bird
in the branches of his chest
and once I felt its Rhythm.

We seem to launch a column-and-row assault on life, using numbers, words, beliefs, concepts to keep life at a distance, to overwrite Experience and maintain delusion. Number and time go together in the dominant culture, and Sorenson notes that the alternative Sense of Space he observed extends to number:

Counting, like boundaries, took on importance only where supraliminal consciousness was developing, i.e., in the agricultural regions of the north where sweet potato had become the staple. In the forests of the south, where liminal consciousness was most highly evolved, few could count above five without great effort. They had no precise names for higher numbers, and scarcely any for the lower digits. The word for five was a cognate of their word for hand. Some understood that several hands meant larger quantities; but beyond two hands (ten) the word was usually ‘many’. Sometimes a foot would be added, or a nose. One friend added his penis in a humorous demonstration of the foolishness of taking the task of counting seriously. When it was erect, he said, it was worth even more. Quantity was impressionistic, not numerical. What mattered was the magnitude of collective joy produced—not how many items could be counted. Depending on taste and circumstance, a single unit might be more important than many units at another time or place. Plants and animals collected during hunting-gathering were rarely of the same size and kind, so counting rarely had much point. Counting was indeed like mixing penises with toes, and just as foolish, which was the point my friend was trying to make.95

95 http://ranprieur.com/readings/preconquest.html
This must sound strange to us. What would we do if we couldn’t count beyond five dollars, couldn’t purchase eggs by the dozen, couldn’t count private property in hundreds of acres, couldn’t fill oil barrels by the billions? Let’s not rush.

Nietzsche has some interesting suggestions to aid our inquiry. Here he addresses himself to “scientists” and “scientific thinkers”:

Do we really want to permit existence to be degraded for us like this—reduced to a mere exercise for a calculator and an indoor diversion for mathematicians? Above all, one should not wish to divest existence of its rich ambiguity: that is a dictate of good taste, gentlemen, the taste of reverence for everything that lies beyond your horizon. That the only justifiable interpretation of the world should be one in which you are justified because one can continue to work and do research scientifically in your sense (you really mean, mechanistically?)—an interpretation that permits counting, calculating, weighing, seeing, and touching, and nothing more—that is a crudity and naivety, assuming that it is not a mental illness, an idiocy.

. . . A “scientific” interpretation of the world, as you understand it, might therefore still be one of the most stupid of all possible interpretations of the world, meaning that it would be one of the poorest in meaning. This thought is intended for the ears and consciences of our mechanists who nowadays like to pass as philosophers and insist that mechanics is the doctrine of the first and last laws on which all existence must be based as on a ground floor. But an essentially mechanical world would be an essentially meaningless world. (GS 373, “Science” as a prejudice)

Existence as “an indoor diversion” . . . an indoor diversion for mathematicians, philosophers, coders, gamers, binge-watchers, shoppers, gamblers, consumers of every kind . . . What a strange thought. What do we practice and realize?

Nietzsche might have enjoyed the joke of sticking body parts into the process of counting—embodiment as a sensitive critique of the activity of disembodying, abstracting, dividing up—and embodiment as a return to meaningfulness. Earlier in the same section, he speaks a bit more
broadly, to scholars in general—many of whom think of themselves as “scientific” in one way or another, and who must, consciously or not, bend a knee at the altar of scientific materialism:

It follows from the laws of the order of rank that scholars, insofar as they belong to the spiritual middle class, can never catch sight of the really great problems and question marks; moreover, their courage and their eyes simply do not reach that far—and above all, their needs which led them to become scholars in the first place, their inmost assumptions and desires that things might be such and such, their fears and hopes all come to rest and are satisfied too soon.

We have no time to seek deeper nourishment and satisfaction. Most people in academia work on problems they can tackle, problems, in a sense, they can conquer and control—which might mean the narrowest, most boring type of question. We don’t have time for more. We don’t have time for boldness, but only for conquest—mistaking the self as conquistador, the presencing of aggression, for the self-as-refuge, the self-in-mutuality, a genuine fearlessness.

This not-having-time-for-boldness has become especially problematic in philosophy. Recall how Walter Kaufmann put it, speaking about philosophy in particular: “What used to be a rare vocation for uncommon individuals who took a bold stand has become an industry involving legions”—an industry, an industrial lovewisdom, made up of legions (a term for armies)—and those legions cannot encourage themselves or their students to work on questions like the ones Spinoza and Hume inquired into (1972: 47). But even Kaufmann seems to miss the issue of practice. He does get at it in one way, but in this passage he focuses on having the time and the boldness for writing great books, and he says that no one in the university encourages themselves or their students to write such books precisely because “these books are so great and so bold” (47). Set the books aside: We do not have time for boldness. Nor do we have Practices for Realizing boldness, fearlessness, wisdom, equanimity, great love, great joy. What is boldness? Not mere intellectual daring. This Kaufmann sees in part, but he does not always emphasize,
Perhaps as a consequence of his own intellectualism—though I think of him as a person of action as well. Nevertheless, even this criticism should give academics pause, and it applies far beyond the domain of philosophy. Moreover, it applies far beyond any single domain, but applies as much to the fact that we do not have communities of inquirers composed of philosophers, artists, and scientists together working on demanding questions and challenges, working alongside members of a local community, as part of a spiritual democracy or a spiritual “anarchy” (if we understand the latter term to indicate much more than mere “lawlessness” and chaos). What truths, what truthfulness, what knowing have we cut ourselves off from because we limit our Ecologies of Practice-and-Realization? In our universities, the scientists do their work, the philosophers do another work (at times trying to mimic the scientists), the artists yet another (perhaps establishing their identity in contrast to science, or in countless other ways inviting unconscious limitations). Two scientists, even in the same general field (say, physics), may have difficulty truly understanding one another, to say nothing of two scientists in relatively differing fields (say, physics and biology). How would an artist help the scientist? How would members of the community help? How might the philosopher help them all? As for the latter question, we could make a minimal suggestion along these lines:

Every good musician can play competently. They can reliably pick up their instrument and make music worth hearing. But all good musicians know the difference between playing competently and entering a rarer space in which they transcend their ordinary mind and the music comes alive in a more compelling, almost miraculous way. In such a case, the musician may hear a recording of the performance and say, “Wow. How did I ever do that?” In fact, they know they did not “do” that music. Somehow, the music played itself, as if by an act of grace. And yet, perhaps
paradoxically in relation to our innate sense of self, the musician feels most alive, most empowered, and most authentic in such moments.

Similarly, a painter knows what it is like to visit this same space of inspiration, such that the painting in some sense paints itself. The artist must not only visit this space of inspiration for the art to flow, but they must find ways of, so to speak, keeping the smaller parts of the psyche in balance when they attempt to take control of the process, for this can derail the flow of inspiration, and the artist would then fall into making the painting from a more narrow place.

The philosopher’s job is to facilitate entrance into this space of inspiration, this bardo, this Between, as well as facilitating an ongoing presence in that space—as a way of life, ecosensual awareness as living, loving experience. This is the space from which, through which, as which a better knowing arises, and we can think of it as an epistemic space, a space of more skillful knowing. The scientist already relies on it as much as the artist, and this is indeed part of why collaboration between art, science, and philosophy (artists, scientists, philosophers, and the general public) can function so well: Better ways of knowing, no matter what kind, arise from the same space of inspiration, and they arise only as we liberate ourselves into larger ecologies of mind, which of course already involve the interwovenness of the things we currently refer to as “science,” “art,” “philosophy,” and so on. They already involve the interwovenness of what we would call a “problem” or “question” and its “resolution” or “answer”.

This is not a reified space. We cannot point to it, and there is no formula or recipe for entering it. There are only practices and insights cultivated in the philosophical/spiritual/religious traditions
of the World which help us to bring this space to realization, in, through, as our own way-seeking/way-making. All cultures have depended on this space, this spaciousness of inspiration, and some of them have invested considerable resources in the cultivation of practices that facilitate entrance to it, liberation in, through, as this spaciousness that we already are. The west is unique in marginalizing such practices, relying on willy-nilly entrance to it (many people cannot enter it well at all, a few can enter it with some reliability, but almost no one has learned to dwell there for any length of time, save the atapos philosopher, the saint, the sage—and even these would perhaps benefit from what we have learned from all cultures up to the present day, including the western traditions), and this has consequently produced some rather narrow theories and practices that bring about significant negative side-effects, such as mass pollution, mass extinction, and the threat of climate collapse and global conflict. Only more skillful entrance into and abiding in, through, and as this spaciousness, which we may call Original Mind (source of all genuinely Original Thinking, as opposed to the mere novelty of “thinking outside the box”), can resolve the complex problems that now confront us. It is perhaps too early to suggest such things. We will need to contemplate further. But we have come far enough to make such suggestions at least tentatively, as hypotheses we would need to verify by means of experiment.

Entrance into Original Mind relies on the synchronization, the synchronicity of heart-mind-body-world-cosmos. Though we have used this formulation many times, it may still sound cumbersome or strange, but we need precision if we want to shift our own and the larger culture’s way of knowing, and these five dimensions have precise meanings that translate into precise qualities of practice. This we will need to outline in more detail in future work, but we
have sketched some of it already in the present inquiry, and will sketch more details as we go. Suffice it to say, epistemology is in one sense a study of embodiment and embeddedness. A better way of knowing will not truly help us (not truly be a better way of knowing) if it does not arise as a kind of ecosensual awareness, something that positively transforms our embodiment.

Nietzsche captured a core aspect of any realistic epistemology when he asked, “To what extent can truth endure incorporation?” This is only to ask, “To what extent are humans capable of actually knowing better?”—because there can be no disembodied knowing in this World of ours, and better ways of knowing can only manifest by means of more skillful and poised embodiment (we can call this the formal transcendence of the fallacy of context). We must become more graceful, more fluid, more artistic and scientific in our way of moving in the World, our way of Cultivating the World onward (i.e. in the sense of Nature-Culture nonduality), in our way of relating to ourselves and others, in our way of touching and being touched, speaking and listening, thinking with life-promoting vision, thinking in, through, as vitalizing ecologies. And now Nietzsche’s question becomes more urgent, because we can see that, especially for a planet of almost 8 billion humans, we must also ask, “To what extent can we endure, can life as we know it endure, if we fail to better incorporate truth?” This is not a matter of epistemic absolutes, but a question of the skillfulness or unskillfulness of our whole way of life, which we cannot ever untangle from our way of knowing. Philosophy has only to do with knowing better by living better, and living better by knowing better. Philosophy and spirituality teach us the altogether shift into better ways of knowing, thus liberating in us our fullest capacity to cultivate the whole of life onward. Science and art (like all human endeavors) must be in service to life, not in service to any typical human agenda (what Gregory Bateson referred to as “conscious purpose”),
and philosophy helps all of us take up that fundamental act of service, which amounts to a
“higher” purpose, which we need not conceive in any dogmatically “religious” sense, but which
we can all of us—theist and atheist alike—see as the meaning of life.

We should treat these reflections still as seeds, and even by the end of our inquiry they will
remain barely germinated hypotheses. For now, let us clarify them as hypotheses by considering
a few other characteristics in what amounts to a kind of existence proof of alternative ways of
knowing, ways that might relate differently what we call the artistic, the scientific, and the
spiritual. The features of naming, truth, and emotions that Sorenson outlines deserve careful
contemplation. Let us begin with emotions:

Emotions
Nascent negative emotions spontaneously faded within the general ambience of
empathetic rapport. This affected recognition of emotions. When we showed
photographs of, for example, full-blown anger, the people least touched by
outside cultural forces, became strangely agitated. Some went dumb. Others were
entirely tongue-tied. Many trembled, perspired profusely, or looked wildly all
about. Not just confounded, they were fearful too. In the communities of intuitive
rapport, full-blown negative emotions were rarely seen (if ever). They knew little
of such things. To see full-blown anger in our photographs left them stunned,
frightened, and disoriented. Even in photos not intended to show anger, they
zeroed in on subtle anger traces not noticed by people in more aggressive cultures.
(1997: 8)

Sorenson’s description brings to mind one from another anthropologist, one who spent a great
deal of time in Ladakh, both in its pre-conquest and post-conquest state:

At the end of one summer, I went with Ngawang Paljor, a sixty-year-old thanka painter,
to Srinagar in Kashmir. He was traditionally dressed in woolen goncha, hat, and yak-hair
boots, and in the Kashmiris’ eyes he was obviously from the “backward” region of
Ladakh. Wherever we went, people made fun of him; he was constantly teased and
taunted. Every taxi driver, shopkeeper, and passerby in some way managed to poke fun at
him. “Look at that stupid hat!” “Look at those silly boots!” “You know, those primitive
people never wash!” It seemed incomprehensible to me, but Ngawang remained
completely unaffected by it all. He was enjoying the visit and never lost the twinkle in his
eye. Though he was perfectly aware of what was going on, it just didn’t seem to matter to
him. He was smiling and polite, and when people jeeringly shouted the traditional Ladakhi greeting, “Jule, jule!” he simply answered “Jule, jule!” back. “Why don’t you get angry?” I asked. “Chi choen?” (“What’s the point?”) was his reply. Ngawang’s equanimity was not unusual. The Ladakhis possess an irrepressible joie de vivre. Their sense of joy seems so firmly anchored within them that circumstances cannot shake it loose. You cannot spend any time at all in Ladakh without being won over by the contagious laughter.

At first I couldn’t believe that the Ladakhis could be as happy as they appeared. It took me a long time to accept that the smiles I saw were real. Then, in my second year there, while at a wedding, I sat back and observed the guests enjoying themselves. Suddenly I heard myself saying, “Aha, they really are that happy.” Only then did I recognize that I had been walking around with cultural blinders on, convinced that the Ladakhis could not be as happy as they seemed. Hidden behind the jokes and laughter had to be the same frustration, jealousy, and inadequacy as in my own society. In fact, without knowing it, I had been assuming that there were no significant cultural differences in the human potential for happiness; it was a surprise for me to realize that I had been making such unconscious assumptions, and as a result I think I became more open to experiencing what was really there.

Of course the Ladakhis have sorrows and problems, and of course they feel sad when faced with illness or death. What I have seen is not an absolute difference; it is a question of degree. Yet the difference in degree is all-significant. As I return each year to the industrialized world, the contrast becomes more and more obvious. With so much of our lives colored by a sense of insecurity or fear, we have difficulty in letting go and feeling at one with ourselves and our surroundings. The Ladakhis, on the other hand, seem to possess an extended, inclusive sense of self. They do not, as we do, retreat behind boundaries of fear and self-protection; in fact, they seem to be totally lacking in what we would call pride. This doesn’t mean a lack of self-respect. On the contrary, their self-respect is so deep-rooted as to be unquestioned. (Norberg-Hodge, 1992: 83-4)

Similarly, the linguist Daniel Everett who lived among the Amazonian Pirahãs shares these general impressions near the end of his book, Don’t Sleep, There Are Snakes:

Groups like the Pirahãs offer novel, deeply useful, and alternative examples of how to deal with perennial and ubiquitous problems such as violence, rape, racism, the treatment of disabled members of society, child-parent relations, and so on. The fact, for example, that no Amazonian group that I have worked with has “motherese” or baby talk—that is, a special, watered-down way of talking to little children—is interesting. The Pirahãs lack of baby talk seems to be based on the belief of Pirahã adults that all members of the society are equal and thus that children should not be treated any differently from adults, by and large. Everyone has responsibility for the community and everyone is cared for by the community.

Looking more closely at Pirahã language and culture, there are other, equally important lessons for us. The Pirahãs show no evidence of depression, chronic fatigue, extreme anxiety, panic attacks, or other psychological ailments
common in many industrialized societies. But this psychological well-being is not due, as some might think, to a lack of pressure. It is ethnocentric to suppose that only industrialized societies can produce psychological pressure, or that psychological difficulties are found only in such societies.

True, the Pirahãs don’t have to worry about paying their bills on time or which college to select for their children. But they do have life-threatening physical ailments (such as malaria, infection, viruses, leish-maniasis, and so on). And they have love lives. And they need to provide food every day for their families. They have high infant mortality. They regularly face dangerous reptiles, mammals, bugs, and other creatures. They live with threats of violence from outsiders who frequently invade their land. When I am there, with a much easier life than the Pirahãs themselves have, I still find that there is plenty for me to get worked up about. The thing is, I do get worked up, but they do not.

I have never heard a Pirahã say that he or she is worried. In fact, so far as I can tell, the Pirahãs have no word for worry in their language. One group of visitors to the Pirahãs, psychologists from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Brain and Cognitive Science Department, commented that the Pirahãs appeared to be the happiest people they had ever seen. I asked them how they could test such a statement. They replied that one way might be to measure the time that the average Pirahã spends smiling and laughing and then to compare this with the number of minutes other societies, such as Americans, spend smiling and laughing. They suggested that the Pirahãs would win hands down. In the more than twenty isolated Amazonian groups I have studied over the past thirty years, only the Pirahãs manifest this unusual happiness. Many others, if not all, that I have studied are often sullen and withdrawn, torn between the desire to maintain their cultural autonomy and to acquire the goods of the outside world. The Pirahãs have no such conflicts.

My own impression, built up over my entire experience with the Pirahãs, is that my colleague from MIT was correct. The Pirahãs are an unusually happy and contented people. I would go so far as to suggest that the Pirahãs are happier, fitter, and better adjusted to their environment than any Christian or other religious person I have ever known. (278-9)

Sorenson too remarks repeatedly at the joie de vivre of the Indigenous People he lived with. Our whole practice of emotions in the dominant culture seems caught up in confusion and incoherence, and the presence of anger and aggression, even at subtle levels, perhaps cuts us off from ourselves, from a joy and zest for life, a peacefulness and rapport with themselves, each other, and with Nature that we could practice-realize.

Let us turn to Sorenson’s summary of naming and truth in Ecologies of Threshold Mind:
Names
There were no formal names for people or for places. Names were improvised, usually playfully in response to life’s circumstances. A name lasted for a while, then a new one came along. These new names emerged whimsically from notable events and situations. Individuals responded to whatever name they knew they might be called by. Formal names came into being only after collapse of liminal consciousness.

Truth
The tactile language that developed in infancy linked truth to affect. The more truthfully feelings were expressed, the more rewarding were responses. So true feelings, expressed as openly and as clearly possible, became the crucial means to life for infants and growing children. Their affect-talk (their tactile language) only worked where personal feelings were nakedly aboveboard and accurately expressed. So they placed their hearts-on-sleeves as faithfully as they could. In this way pure truth of feeling became the basis of preconquest social life. Sense-of-truth emerged from the need for truthful affect exchange in that type of society. (1997: 7)

We might notice how naming here resonates with Nietzsche’s understanding of the narrowing force of language. If life flows (not as a “thing” that flows, but if life presences as flux, flowing, active relational openness) if nothing remains truly fixed, then our typical use of naming (and navigating, and the forcing of time and human agenda) may in fact encourage misperception. If the self is relational (or “facultative,” using one of the technical “scientific” terms), then it depends in some sense on context. We might characterize the self as contextualized activity, “cut off” from the past in Dogen’s sense. Self arises as moment.

We all have had the experience of nicknames that worked in one context, and which we either experienced as becoming outmoded, or we accepted as a way to fix a certain aspect of someone’s identity. Naming becomes a way to control the uncontrollable. Only the PracticeRealization of virtue can reliably give rise to the relatively reliable, the skillful, graceful, realistic transformation of things. We will return to these challenges of language again, as we contemplate Sorenson’s own struggle to turn these invisible workings into something perceivable.
to him, and at least available to us as inspiration for our own Practice—for only by means of experiment can we verify and wonderstand them.

We should note again that language in and of itself is not the problem—even though western languages do seem to place us at a disadvantage at the outset. Liberating language, even in a western tongue, empowers, vitalizes, and transforms life onward. The issue has to do with our obdurate tendency, our well-practiced habit, our karmic situation of using language in ways that embattle us against ourselves, each other, and reality, including the narrowing of “language” into “words” alone, without deep practice of wordless communion-and-communication, wordless resonance, synchronicity, and mutual attunement. We have suggested that the essence of language is attunement, not the “sending of messages”. Touching the World, touching each other, we speak-and-listen, we commune-and-communicate, we give-and-receive, in the same gesture, like stepping forward and backward at the same moment.

Again, this commentary on features of preconquest consciousness has to do with sensing their resonance with spiritual teachings. It is as if we could look at these features and say, “Ah! This reveals or expresses some aspect of reality to which so many spiritual traditions seem to point.” It is not to say, “This reduces to that,” but to say, “Can we look and open to the impossible, the inconceivable things that LoveWisdom invites us to experience, to verify as our lives?”

Those with a heart for LoveWisdom may find the sense-of-truth described by Sorenson intriguing, and perhaps either troubling (therefore, in some cases, worthy of dismissal) or inspiring. In western culture, Plato invited us to see that knowing depends on the knower, and
thus to some degree truth depends on the teller. If what we know depends on the process by which we come-to-knowing-and-truthfulness, then it depends on our way of living. Truth in the richest, most skillful and realistic sense does not arise as a function of facts or propositions, and we can’t simply “check” “the world” to see if our propositions somehow “mirror” an “ultimate reality” existing “out there”. Rather, when we Practice Original Mind, Original Thinking, we enter the interwovenness of things, liberate ourselves into ecologies that transcend the epidermis. Truth then reveals its sensitivity to context.

We face this Question: Might we discover that, in some contexts, truth is not really possible, or at least not likely? Or, put another way: Might we discover that western culture has excluded itself (and its beings, the beings interwoven with it) from certain kinds of truth/truthfulness—maybe even vitalizing kinds, desperately needed for our well-being just now, perhaps even our survival? This is like saying we may have become too discoordinated to presence certain kinds of skill and poise—at a time when skill and poise have become an imperative. Or, put yet another way: Given that truth depends on what we practice and make real, has western culture made a lot of unskillful truths readily available, while making certain potentially empowering truths, empowering truthfulness, relatively unavailable?

What a thing to contemplate . . . That we might have to put ourselves on the line in order to arrive at truthfulness, that *truthfulness-and-knowing demands vulnerability from us!* (Ah, back to Plato we go, and to Christ too . . . back to that which we abandoned in the west . . . ) Truth demands risk and renunciation, in the sense that we must risk the ego, risk what it clings to, and renounce what doesn’t function, even if we feel fear, self-doubt, self-loathing, and confusion
(much of this Plato has Socrates *embody* for us in *Apology*, *Protagoras*, and *Republic*, among other places). Given that these considerations implicate our *unconscious*, we find ourselves in the worst kind of tangle, one which philosophy as it has become seems ill-equipped to handle—but which the spiritual traditions (including many exemplars in wester philosophy) most definitely invite us to face.

We may find so-called “primitive” people embarrassing for their nakedness. But what if knowing depends on *nakedness*? What if it depends even on the vulnerability of the unknown and the precarious? What if we must meet each moment, each situation, each sentience, each Ecology of Sentience and Sensuality with intimacy and deep trust, however shaky-tender that trust may be at first? Somehow we must trust what we know and what we don’t know to function, trusting our own functioning, the functioning of life.

But it scares us. We think we need control. Someone asks us, “What are you doing?” (or maybe, “Where have you come from, and where are you going?”) and somehow the truth is, “*I don’t know.*” Of course, often we have some sense of what’s unfolding. But, from a vaster vision, maybe we simply must say we do not know. Playing chess, our hands play. Painting a picture, the brush paints all by itself, along with the light, the tides, the dust in the room, the dead painters of the past appearing in the floorboards and the atmospheric pressure. We stand in the kitchen, cooking for a houseful of people. We taste the soup and say, “It needs more salt.” Something bigger functions there, and the ego tries to limit it. We don’t wonderstand the wholeness of cooking as activity of life, as thinking itself. To quiet the discursive mind and give ourselves, gift ourselves totally to cooking means the presencing of thinking. What happens
when we taste soup? Do we taste the soup, or does Mind Taste Mind, does Cooking Taste Cooking, does Mind Taste Cooking, does Mind Taste Living a Human Life, Taste Being with Ingredients, Taste Being in a World of Eating-and-Being-Eaten, allowing something to emerge in mutual nourishment? Is this tasting and also thinking? Do we taste gastronomy and alchemy at the same time—allowing alchemy to arise as tasting, allowing alchemy to arise as the play of Mind-and-Nature? Or do we too quickly limit things, cutting off the horizons instead of dancing them?

We seem to uproot ourselves from Earth, cutting off our own Indigeneity, and keeping it at bay, keeping us clothed in concepts, time, “civilization,” control, and the known. We wear the fig leaf of ego, and would rather be physically naked than drop our self-centered approach to life. We don’t have time to be naked and vulnerable. We have so much conquest awaiting—the conquest of travel, the conquest of entertainment, the conquest of knowledge and experience, the endless conquests of the marketplace.

Sorenson tries to describe a contrast between conquest consciousness and what he observed in more Indigenous Culture prior to sustained contact with the cultures of conquest (mainly the dominant culture). He saw something almost incomprehensible to the dominant culture, because the dominant culture cannot cultivate it, offers almost no context for its truthfulness, no Practices for its Realization, and thus must see it as strange, not true, not knowing, something primitive, superstitious, and uncivilized. The incomprehensibility of these Cultures includes the potential for a nonduality of the individual and the community, and much more than this, for it seems to include a nonduality of Nature-and-Culture, and we may call them Nature-Cultures.
Our inquiry into this cannot escape grave challenges. We will again and again attempt to understand by means of our thinking, our agendas, our sense of time, place, truth, and so on. Sorenson says, “No Western words exist which accurately convey the kind of deep rapport this is. I call it hypersensuality because it emerges out of sensuality and then surpasses it” (1995:12). We find here the possibility of a truth, a truthfulness, a coming-to-knowing that depends more explicitly on intimacy—with ourselves, with each other, with life.

We are not interested in any romanticized notions. It is not that “hypersensuality” is precisely what we need in a better way of knowing. Whatever the better way of knowing is, we should allow it to include any valuable and viable aspects of western culture too, and allow it to transcend any limitation we might find in this or that particular expression of knowing in this or that Nature-Culture. We do not need to fixate, reify, romanticize, or obscure. The question always remains in one sense simple: Is there anything here that looks like a better way of knowing than what we have? But it remains subtle in that we must also look to a broad sense of spirituality to co-discover-create what will function now, in this context. We keep an eye on wisdom, love, and beauty as it appears in various traditions, and we ask if we can better practice-and-realize wisdom, love, and beauty than we currently do, and if so how and why. The very notion of Nature-Culture invites us to consider our own context of truth and ask how it might be limited and how it might be liberated.

Look at how Sorenson tries to describe the overall nature of the context of truth he witnessed:

Any form of subjugation, even those barriers to freedom imposed by private property, are the kiss of death to this type of life. Though durable and self-
repairing in isolation, the unconditional open trust this way of life requires shrivels with alarming speed when faced with harsh emotions or coercion. Deceit, hostility, and selfishness when only episodic temporarily benumb intuitive rapport. When such conditions come to stay and no escape is possible, intuitive rapport disintegrates within a brutally disorienting period of existential trauma and anomie.  

And here:

The community imperative is an ever-present sociosensuality uniting everyone but tactilely expressed mainly by the children. Among adults tactility gets replaced by hypersensuality. Minimally the whole community must instinctively (not by rule) endorse the yens and whims of all those in it. Ideally it must exude an empathetic heartfelt warmth by each one for all the others so that whenever pleasure arise in any of them it rises in them all. This enables happiness to keep building up so that it can culminate at adolescence in that ecstatic silent hypersensuality.

The individual imperative requires that relations be consensual. Coercion is so deep a violation of rapport it paralyzes life as if such acts were so far beyond the realm of rationality that no response is possible. They have no formal rules or regulations nor anyone who would or could enforce such things. No one forces anyone against their will or demands obedience (even of children). When no welcoming consent to some interest or inclination is forthcoming, the impulse fades without sign of disappointment or annoyance, and no melancholy or chagrin is seen when someone’s passion does not catch on. In the grand melange of ardors constantly presented by these active children, something just as good will be lying there in wait. If the same impulse again arises, it might be entertained the next time around. All depends on momentary mood and context. Nothing seems to be a social blunder. It’s just that the mood and interests of the group whirl in different ways at different times. They all seem to know this, and take whatever life proffers at the moment. As for adults their hypersensuality constantly adjusts to the yens and passions of the children, remains ever ready to support whatever might be in their hearts.

Imperatives such as these hold up only where formal rules are not imposed. On islands where mainlanders have brought rules of precedence and conformity, these more traditional nomads blank out, their affect temporarily paralyzed. Less traditional ones get drunk. (1998: 48)

What can manifest prior to the disruption, the noise of the dominant culture? Sorenson details several fascinating happenings that we can receive and reflect with. Each case presents intimacy-in-activity.

96 http://ranprieur.com/readings/preconquest.html
Agat and Oohh soon moved with synchronous, delicately executed caution toward a group of squid (a very skittish beast) resting on the bottom of the sea not far off. They came in from different sides, as if choreographed. Though Leit had been watching quietly from above, she lurched suddenly to left. The squid, carefully being stalked, moved out so fast I could not see which way they went. Agat and Oohh showed no sign of annoyance or regret. Instead their eyes sparkled with excitement as they glanced about to see what happened. A distant moving lobster had caught Leit’s eye and she’d quickly turned to track its movement, to keep it in her sight. A slight gesture showed them where it went and they dispersed so as to maximize the chance of keeping it in sight in case it moved again. It was En who finally flushed it, and Agat who speared it. Adding exquisiteness to the event (as they like to do), just as Agat’s spear darted toward the lobster, Oohh, who had been turning very slowly to his left, flipped his spear into a prized fish that had been retreating toward him from a steady slow advance by Leit. They had all the while been synchronizing movements so that the lobster and the fish could be speared together. Either one speared separately would have spooked the other. With two quarries thus obtained during complex in-synch actions, a special surge of ecstasy seemed to flow throughout the group. As much as they like squid, that loss was nothing compared to conjointly bagging a lobster and prized fish. (1998: 53)

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When Epuul was still a stripling lad in 1987, I spied him brashly standing free atop the elevated pointed prow of a longtail boat throttled to the top, careening out along the island’s lengthy pier toward sea. He was off with pals to spear some fish to eat. Abruptly, with no forewarning, he leapt down off the prow to land hard on the starboard lip. That veered his boat straight at another coming in. Though collision was but seconds off, neither helmsman (nor any others) showed the least concern. No one made the slightest move to alter course as if what was happening was so commonplace that not the slightest thought was needed.

As if choreographed, Epuul leapt again, this time off the boat in an upward arc destined for the water. That swerved his boat from head-on crash, but left him enroute to a dunking had not a wave, long rolling in across the bay from a distant passing trawler, at that very moment crested up against the approaching boat to push its starboard lip just under Epuul’s falling foot. He swayed there for a moment as the boat rocked up, then catapulted off (with another stretch of legs) onto the outer lip of a boat tied up at pier. Its other side jerked up to put just at his hand a coil of fishing line that was lying there while with his other hand he swung up on the pier, each move in accent to the initial rhythm.

Out on the pier a smallish tyke, his brother, was snagging minnows with a friend. Upon seeing Epuul bearing down, he flicked one out. As it was arcing toward the pier, Epuul snatched it from the air, flipped it off his brother’s hook, and inserted in on his own while synchronously dropkicking the plastic bottle (on which the fishing line was wound) into a back-spin. Just line enough spun out to
let him swing the bait around his head in ever widening arcs to heave it out to where he’d seen a great fish shadow—all synchronized to the onset beat.

The great fish bit. With cadenced overhand Epuul played it in, yanked it up, and slammed it on the pier (to knock it out) still following the rhythm. On rebound he twisted out the hook, hoisted up the fish and heaved it back without a glance across his shoulder to his tiny brother (to take to their house) as with an accentuated cadence he strode onward to pier’s end and stepped out into the air just as his chums, who’d circled round to see just what was up, were tooling past in front. He landed on the prow to stand just where he’d been. With that, his virtuoso free-form dance with nature ceased. Accustomed to such capers, his fishing-mates without a word turned the speeding boat outward toward their reef. (1995: 2)

In another episode, Sorenson tells how he got thrown from a boat in the midst of tremendous waves and intense conditions. It seemed improbable that he could get rescued by his Indigenous Friends:

Epuul soon returned [in the boat], but a wave thrust up and threw him off. So it was another turn across the violent windward front. This time I didn’t see it. Then there he was yawing, veering, skidding straight in at me, this time on my windward side, so that the boat would blow toward me. But its edge remained so high I couldn’t reach it. Then the hull bashed down and pushed me under. I came up choking at the stern just under the propeller which was whirling in the air. There was Epuul atop the steering boom jamming down with all his weight keeping the propeller off me. He swayed uncertainly as the boat tossed up and down, but he kept his perch until the wind snatched the boat away again.

That’s when his face and stance transformed, when his motion maestroism vanished. He stopped looking all about, ceased his flurrying and his scurrying, his ramming and his jamming, seemed to close his mind to everything. He looked as if bewitched, as if stripped of sense impression. Overleaping common sense, scarcely glancing at the sea, he rammed the throttle to the top and aimed into a mounting tower of sea.

Ooin instantly rigidified, went pale, froze on the spot, stared out as if his life were ending. It seemed an act beyond the pale, utterly irrational, out of mind. The boat shot up, began its flip to upside down, when a corner of the wave suddenly crashed so hard upon a forward corner that it whipped the boat around in one great jerk. That flung Epuul off the stern, feet out over water, hands clutching on the steering boom. The force of flinging out that way swerved the boat onto a course directly at me at unnerving speed. A mounting hill of sea pushed me to the side, lunged up at the boat, stopped it in its tracks, though the propeller was still churning at full tilt. It then slithered down into the trough beside me, edge tilting down until I got my arms across and tumbled in. (1995: 7)
If one were to walk into a room in which the film of such events played on a glowing screen, one would likely wonder if a Marvel Comics storyline had gotten cinematic treatment. These happenings seem to come from the realm of the Mutant Superhero. But Sorenson got the opportunity to taste this for himself—just a tiny taste, but still a taste:

Though the ship was fully laden, it started heaving high into the air, smashing down again and yet again into successive troughs with stupefying shudders. I feared it would break up. Some began to moan. The crew got seasick. In a spirit of the moment, and emulating island style, I loosed the rail I’d been tightly clutching and threw a dramatic pelvic thrust into the storm just at the apex of a massive rise of ship. A Westerner would think this mock defiance. Not so the people here. A resounding cheer broke out. To them it signified a sensual linkage with the storm, therefore a kinship, therefore the cheers. As if in response the winds slacked off. (5)

What a Synchronicity! What a Rupture of time and space! But, actually, Sorenson does not make clear whether he truly tasted an entrance into ecosensual awareness, entrance into inconceivability, the inconceivability of our interwoveness—which synchronicity presences in, through, as, with us. He only says this:

When my short “erotic” dance with that adventitious natural force was done, fear and trembling had given way, elan had broken out, friendships had been established. These were extraordinary findings. They showed that erotic synchrony with fearsome overwhelming natural forces quells anxiety, inspires enthusiasm, makes firm friends of strangers. (12)

He seems to taste the remarkable rapport within the human realm, but he may have limited it.

However he might have experienced it, he had great difficulty making sense of it, as must we it seems. Sorenson gives the following commentary:

On the surface these events are but adventure stories. When examined closely, questions rise: What shall we make of such displays of prowess? How do such amazing skills emerge? What enabled Epuul to manage fierce tumult with such confident aplomb? Wherefrom did his trances come, apparently of two types? How did Ooin, a stranger from another isle, so quickly gain rapport with Epuul?
What enabled instant synchrony between Epuul and his tiny brother on the pier? Or with his fishing friends in the speeding boat?

No sooner had I come into the region than I was confronted by peculiarities. I began recording as best I could without delay, for I’ve learned that mind does not easily retain extraordinary apperceptions. No matter how vivid an event might be when it occurs, those parts that are extraordinary don’t hold well in mind. Memory needs ordinary things to which to anchor recollection. Extraordinary events, by definition, don’t have much ordinariness. Therefore I started documenting right away to get uncommon aspects down before they might pass from mind which all too quickly can occur when events are odd. Though making records prior to understanding may seem a risky sport, the alternative is to skip what is unusual. Sometimes anthropologists must grasp at phenomena they don’t yet understand.

The more peculiar an event, the less likely appropriate English words existed to describe it. There always was a gap separating actuality from words. The stranger the event, the wider was the gap . . . Eventually, patterns of occurrence could be seen. From those patterns it was clear that much of human interaction there was impelled by eros-based subliminal awarenesses. Often, words were but a froth atop unarticulated sensibilities. Eros, an experience difficult to pin down verbally, proved surprisingly accessible to this kind of subliminal inquiry. As the subliminal awarenesses firmed up, eros-impulses could be seen coursing widely through communities and beyond. (1995: 8)

Here we find an example of froth-making, discussed early in our inquiry. We see a genuine struggle, one faced by so many mystics, to try and put into words what defies all words and concepts, what bursts the boundaries of language, identity, logic, and worldview—and perhaps reading it, we scarcely touch all of that, busy as we make ourselves with labeling, tidying up, making it expedient, reading in the “causal” links (as Lee mentioned regarding the Trobrianders). We see Sorenson struggle with the commonizing force of language that Nietzsche brought our attention to, but maybe we only see him “claim” to struggle, while we take it in at a distance, with our own worldview firmly intact. These issues can hardly be overstated. It takes time to deal with language as a froth, and the froth keeps us at a distance from the deep waters of the soul.
Sorenson seems to want to come up with a theory for all of this, a bit of froth that he hopes will invite us into the water rather than keeping us at the surface. We can recall here Buddha’s simile of the raft, and his caveat about handling philosophy the way we would handle a poisonous snake, treating words and concepts as skillful means. Sorenson builds a raft out of eros, to help us make a metaphorical crossing into some understanding of pre-conquest consciousness, and which we contemplate here as a way to understand Liminal Mind, Bardo Mind, Original Mind (these, too, are metaphors, so we capitalize them to emphasize Buddha’s caveat). Sorenson’s raft is a nice raft. There is something important in the acknowledgement of Eros, we could say, just as there is something important in Buddha’s acknowledgment that we all experience suffering of various kinds, his invitation for us to acknowledge our own suffering and the suffering of others. Similarly, we can sense the value in saying the energy of love moves life. It moves all of us. Even in spiritual matters, we follow a tradition or a teacher because we fall in love. We find the limit of our practice (thus the limit of our realization) in the limit of our love, and we could sum up the whole of spirituality as opening the heart, opening to love.

One way or another, we do have to deal with love. As so many cultural traditions have insisted, we must acknowledge this power, and acknowledge how we work with it, acknowledge our skill or lack of skill, our grace or lack of grace. Sorenson noticed that the Cultures he observed provided a way for their people to allow the energy of love to manifest skillfully and realistically. We enter the mystery, we presence it with skill and poise. Sorenson saw Nature-Culture that offered entry into the mystery, entry into Nature. We in the dominant culture, we who stand “outside” of Nature, should contemplate with care:

Propelled by the rise of new erotic powers, adolescents surge out in quest of deeper contact with surroundings. An astonishing kinetic integration with habitat
begins occurring. This same eros-impelled playfulness injects rapture into serious activity, nourishes rapport, makes games of work . . .

By adolescence’s end, a profound rapport with nature has been accomplished. Flamboyant displays of kinetic prowess then start declining. The older teenaged boys become less impulsive as younger boys, enraptured by the prowess of those older, gravitate to them to learn. Often enchanted by such attention, the older boys with humor, sometimes awe, become enthralled, even mesmerized, as their younger comrades spit forth, with tactile punctuation, their zestful whims and aspirations. Such passion mellows older youths, kindles empathy, lessens ego drive, opens inner hearts, engenders trust, tones down flamboyance. A quieter rapport shapes up within them linking psyches. It diffuses through youth gangs and beyond. To them it is a more wondrous type of rapport.

No Western words exist which accurately convey the kind of deep rapport this is. I call it hypersensuality because it emerges out of sensuality and then surpasses it. As such hypersensuality is attained, adolescent slapdash starts giving way. (1995: 10)

We see here a developmental patterning into attunement, which every true Culture should provide. How crucial for us to realize a more wondrous type of rapport, a wondrous attunement with Nature and with each other, an attunement mystery that transcends the merely “erotic”. The dominant culture has no widespread, useful understanding of what to do with erotic and kinetic energy, and it does not invite us to surge in quest of intimacy with Nature, intimacy with sacredness, intimacy with our own HeartMindBodyWorldCosoms—intimacy with Mind-Sacred, Sacred-Nature, Nature-Culture, Culture-Sacred, Sacred-Mind, Mind-Nature, Nature-Mind, Mind-Sacred. It offers no teachings on how erotic and kinetic energy may propel us into transcendence. Instead, our media overflow with images of sexuality and violence. How could we ever practice-realize intimacy with our own Mind? How could we ever practice-realize a wondrous rapport with Nature, with reality itself, with reality as Sacred? Who thinks such a wondrous rapport would offer more joy than we could get in sexual encounters? Who thinks vitalizing engagement with Nature and with Mind could offer more than we get from books, from research, from entertainment, from entertaining distractions of all kinds?
This intimacy defies words—perhaps, as Sorenson suggests, it most explicitly denies western words. Can we open ourselves to the possibility that we have no context for realizations that might transform us in ways we do not even think possible—realizations that might even save our lives, save our World before we degrade it beyond a tipping point which will prove catastrophic? Opening to possibilities we don’t think possible . . . Can we even frame them? How would we approach them? Perhaps we must try and think along with Krishnamurti’s suggestion:

look, we never put the impossible question—we are always putting the question of what is possible. If you put an impossible question, your mind then has to find the answer in terms of the impossible—not of what is possible . . . But we never put the impossible question! The impossible question is this: can the mind empty itself of the known?—itself, not you empty the mind. That is an impossible question. If you put it with tremendous earnestness, with seriousness, with passion, you’ll find out. But if you say, ‘Oh, it is possible’, then you are stuck. (1972, Dialogue 4)

Which in turn resonates with something Jung wrote:

The unconscious always tries to produce an impossible situation in order to force the individual to bring out his very best. Otherwise one stops short of one’s best, one is not complete, one does not realize oneself. What is needed is an impossible situation where one has to renounce one’s own will and one’s own wit and do nothing but wait and trust to the impersonal power of growth and development. (VS 110)

We find ourselves in an impossible situation with respect to the collapse of the conditions of life and the need for a radical shift in our way of knowing and our way of life. Facing the fullness of this, we may then ask an impossible question.

Let us consider two other examples—examples of a different way of knowing. These two come from Robert Wolff, who spent time in Malaysia in the 1960’s, working for the government as a psychologist. He often heard the bureaucrats describe more Indigenous people as lazy or stubborn or both, but it always seemed like a label based on limited and limiting assumptions.
At one point, the Malaysian government came up with a rational scheme for land development that would increase “productivity,” give people an “income,” and bolster the “gross national product.” Such things seem like marvelous benefits to the nation and its people. Politicians all over the world seek such things, and the dominant culture obsesses about such things—although, we might clarify by saying the real obsession has to do with increasing the income of a very small number of people.

In any case, Malaysia’s “wealth” came largely from rubber and tin at that time. The new scheme would involve clear-cutting pristine jungle and planting rubber trees. The government wanted to make it easy for the Indigenous people to agree to the scheme and to “profit”. The government would do the clear-cutting, the planting, and the maintenance for the first two years (they planned to use arsenic to control weeds), at which point the rubber trees would reach sufficient maturity for tapping. The Indigenous People would then tap the trees and reap the reward. But the Sng’oi, the Indigenous People, refused to participate—always politely, but with no “explanation”. A government official implored Wolff to try and convince the people to play along. Wolff describes what happened:

When next I visited an aborigine settlement and we were sitting around in the early evening, I told them what the government official had told me about the land development scheme and the role they, the Sng’oi, could play in it. What did they think?

As usual there was a long silence. People looked thoughtful but nobody said anything for a long time. I thought that perhaps they had not understood the question.

I repeated [the question, explaining the government scheme] . . .

A longer silence.

Finally one man spoke up. As usual, he obviously spoke for the group . . .

There was a slight hesitation in his voice, then he continued, “When you cut the
forest, and then you plant one tree, you can grow only that one tree. After that the soil is dead.”

They all nodded that yes, this was true.
I was not sure I had understood, but that was all they would say. They smiled but they did not answer any further questions.

Back in town, I asked my own questions. The average life span of a rubber tree is forty years, a rubber planter told me. After the first generation of rubber trees, well, yes, he guessed, they sort of let things go after that. But he thought you could probably plant more rubber trees, maybe with some fertilizer added or something. He was not too clear about the future—he was too involved getting as much rubber out of his trees in the forty years that they would grow. To him forty years was more than enough time to make his fortune, retire, and get away from it all.

I went back to the government department that had asked me to explain the scheme to the aborigines. When I gave the very short and rather simple-sounding answer the Sng’oi had given me, it did not make much of an impression on the officials in the room. Their faces showed clearly that they felt this was another typical aborigine evasion and not really an answer.

In the back of the room an Englishman was on the telephone; he joined us a little later. I repeated that the aborigines I asked had said only that “when you cut the forest and grow one tree, after one generation the soil is dead.”

He became excited, took my arm, and said, “Come with me.”

We got in his Land Rover and went for a short ride to an agricultural research station just outside Kuala Lumpur. On the way there he explained that they had picked a small section of jungle, one hectare (about two acres), and had roped it off, making a grid by marking trees. Now they were doing a census of all the plants that grew in that small area.

When we arrived he showed me the one-hundred-meter (about three hundred feet) by one-hundred-meter square, with lines marking smaller squares. Then he took me into a little shack where they kept the paperwork. They had finished counting the trees, he said, and now were counting shrubs, bushes, and vines. After that, he said, would come the even more difficult job of counting the smaller stuff on the ground the mosses, lichens, and other minuscule plants.

“And,” he concluded with obvious regret in his voice, “we cannot even begin to look at the organisms in the soil.”

I do not remember the count, but there were, say, three hundred trees there. Then he said, “The most amazing thing is that with all these trees, there are very few species with more than one individual.” The trees in the census plot were all different. There were at most two, rarely three of the same kind.

He sat me down; we were going to have a lecture. He explained that because this jungle looks so lush, so rich in plants, all different, most people think it is the soil that is so fertile that it can support all that variety. “Not so.” His voice reverberated inside the little shack. “It’s not the soil but the variety itself that makes the richness possible. What one plant takes out of the soil,” he explained many times in different ways, “another puts back into the soil . . .
He sat back in his chair, our knees almost touching in the small space. “And as for rubber, only growing one generation . . . of course, they are right, those friends of yours. Absolutely right. After forty years the ground is so depleted you could not even grow grass on it. That is an exaggeration—grass grows on concrete—but you see what I am getting at. After forty years or so, that soil is dead.”

I began to understand a little more about a people who had a completely different way of seeing the world . . . .

Forty years is too far into the future for most Westerners to think about. We run businesses looking ahead to the next quarter . . . .

The Sng’oi . . . did not have much use for money . . . The could not be a party to destroying the land. They were part of the jungle. They could no more kill the forest than they could destroy their own skin.

They sometimes made jokes about people who felt they could own land. A child had said to me, “How can you own ground? We belong to [literally ‘with’] the ground.” (105-9)

Gosh . . . don’t we all want to retire and get away from it all? Away from what? From the Earth?

From the soil and the soul on which we depend?

A certain kind of religious person might initially balk at the invitation to know ourselves as belonging to the Earth, to know the ground as sacred, and thus they might refuse to take off the sandals of thought, the sandals of time, the sandals of the known because we stand on holy ground. But they might soften upon deeper contemplation. The divine made the Earth and made human beings, humus beings of the Earth, with sacred inspiration breathed into us, and thus into our sky, into our trees, into countless flowers and grasses. The old joke goes that the Divine so loved birds that It made trees for them, and so loved trees that It made birds for them. Humans so loved birds they made cages for them, and so loved trees they cut them down to write words on them. Trees, birds, fungi, soil, air, water, humans, all go together, while cages and books must be handled as something intrusive with which we must take the utmost care, noticing how often we have acted out of ignorance. We could not thrive here if we did not belong—to this place, to each
other, to this Earth and its beings, and to the sacredness infusing it, them, and us, the divine presence that thrives here with us, as us. To belong to/with the ground means belonging to/with the sacred. We cannot live except with the land, through it, as it. But most of us do not know this. We don’t live in a context that pollinates such knowing, such insight.

It can happen, but even when such an insight arises, it may arise much more partially than it might in a more Indigenous Culture. Again, the dominant culture could become Indigenous, could return to the Earth and to the sacred, return us to holy ground, holy mountains, rivers, marshes, forests, and deserts. As of now, we live in a culture of profanity, in which it makes sense to pursue “gross domestic product” over and above Gross National Happiness, Peace, and Well-Being; Gross National Wellness-of-Ecologies-and-Their-Beings; Gross National Wisdom; Gross National Interwovenness. What would a philosopher’s role in the Culture be if we all had an interest in Gross National Wisdom, Love, and Beauty? And yet, what else could we possibly have an interest in—especially when we see the practice-and-realization of these as the essence of health, holiness, peace, and well-being?

Wolff Experienced another, perhaps even more remarkable case of knowing, a case of extraordinary knowing. He experienced many, but we will consider just one of them. At one

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97 Again let me recommend, to everyone but especially academics, Elizabeth Lloyd Mayer’s book, Extraordinary Knowing. The reader may like to follow that up with Infinite Awareness: The Awakening of a Scientific Mind, by Marjorie Hines Woollacott, and perhaps Varieties of Anomalous Experience, edited by Cardeña, Lynn, and Krippner, or maybe Transcendent Mind, by Baruss and Mossbridge (published by the APA—a pleasant surprise), or Irreducible Mind, by Kelly and Kelly. One might voice reservations about any of these presentations, because no treatment of the Extraordinary will escape great challenges, like the ones we keep trying to remind ourselves of here. Russel Targ’s talk on his own research involving Extraordinary Knowing may also prove both interesting and helpful. The fact that he mentions
point he had to go to Port Dickson, on the coast of Malaysia. He had been visiting a Sng’oi village and announced that he had to leave to go to the coast. None of these jungle dwellers had ever been to the coast. He asked if anyone wanted to come along. One man said he would go.

At the time, Wolff did not realize this man, named Ahmeed, was something like a Shaman. He later explained to Wolff, “It is my work to bring new knowledge to the People [the Sng’oi—literally, “the People”]” (141). Ahmeed had this job, but he, like the rest of the small settlement, was unlettered, and so his knowing had to come from other sources.

Not long after they arrived in Port Dickson, Ahmeed made his way to the coast, and he stood for a long time among some casuarina trees near the beach. Wolff felt that Ahmeed wanted to be alone. Every time he looked for Ahmeed, he saw him standing with the trees, facing the water.

Wolff took Ahmeed back to the jungle, then decided to stay the night. The next morning, a few villagers approached him. They said Ahmeed had seen some important things during his visit, and that they would hold a ceremony that evening in which he would share them. They invited Wolff to stay, and he accepted.

The sharing of knowing happened in a ceremonial space, in a ceremonial context. The People consecrated the space using an incense resin, and they opened the ceremony with a kind of dance.

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Padmasambhava, the great Buddhist philosopher-sage should be received with wonder: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hB10cwyn5GY
around the space along with a particular kind of vocalizing, called keening, that makes use of monotonous, trilling tones. The whole thing sent chills up Wolff’s back:

Suddenly Ahmeed spoke in an unusually loud and deeply sonorous voice. At first he remained seated, swaying, his eyes closed. His voice was different, not his normal speaking voice; it came from deep in his chest. He spoke with great authority.

He began: He had gone with me to the Great Ocean. It took a long time to get there; even in a car, it was far away. There was a slight pause, as if he was thinking how to continue. By that time I could understand some of what he was saying; he used many Malay words, which might have been because their language has no words for the Great Ocean, as he called it, and many of the other things he described.

The dancers sat down but continued keening very softly (it is very difficult to keen softly, I learned later), swaying their bodies in perfect harmony this time. Ahmeed continued speaking with great authority: When we had arrived in Port Dixon [he said “the coast”] and he got out of the car, he heard *shshsh, shshsh*, the sound of rain when it is still a little distance away, very softly, *shshsh, shshsh, shshsh*. (He heard the sound of waves on the beach, but I knew he had never before seen a beach or an ocean.)

He looked up and said, “There was not a cloud in sight. The sky was clear. Where could that sound come from, *shshsh, shshsh, shshsh*?” He made walking motions to suggest walking a few steps from the car. “And then I saw the Great Ocean: *AAHHhhhh*.”

Briefly there was total silence, then the people continued their swaying and soft keening.

Ahmeed went on: “There was great fear in this heart.” (There is no possessive pronoun in Malay; one cannot say my heart.) “So much water . . . Listen! In front of you there is water as far as you can see.” And he repeated: “As far as you can see.”

The people were silent now, awed and afraid. I could feel their wonder, but also their fear. The Sng’oi live in deep jungle in the mountains. The only water they know is rainwater and the water of jungle streams. Water is feared; rainstorms destroy, mountain streams are unpredictable.

Ahmeed went on: “As far as you can see there is water, and if you stand as far as you can see, there is still more water as far as you can see from there.” The people were listening, spellbound. Nobody moved; nobody made a sound. It was as if they were holding their breath.

A few times Ahmeed repeated, “As far as you can see is water, and you stand there—*again* as far as you can see is more water, and *again* you stand where you cannot see any farther—*again* there is water as far as you can see.” Then he said, “The water is *everywhere,*” ending on a sort of sigh.

Some people were hunched over, cringing from this concept of endless water. Ahmeed said again, “Much fear in this heart,” and put his hand over his heart. “Much fear, because all this water eats the land”—just as the water of little
jungle streams “eats” the land of its banks when rains swell streams to raging rivers.

There was a long silence. Nobody said anything. More people were hunched over, some holding their hands to cover their heads. A woman, sitting in a corner, holding a small child, cooed softly, “Don’t cry, don’t cry . . .”

Now Ahmeed stood up straight, looking down at the people of the settlement who were bent over, fearful, silent. He stood for a few minutes, then, in a strong voice, he said: “That night, when I go to the Real World [a Place visited in Dreams], I meet the Lord of the Great Ocean. Datok Laut Besar” (he used Malay words). The Lord of the Great Ocean told him not to be afraid, that the Great Ocean would not eat the land; the land was floating on the ocean.

A sigh of relief went through the people . . .

Then Ahmeed said a strange thing: “All that water is heavy.” He bent over to indicate indicate great weight; you could see his shoulders stoop with the heaviness of all that water. “Heavy, all around the world, very heavy.” He went on, “The whole world is covered with the Great Ocean.” He cupped his hands about eighteen inches apart, as if to mark a globe. “All of it covered with Ocean, and the land floats on the water.” His body movement suggested that the land was lighter than the ocean; that is why it would float on the water.

“The land is so big, there is so much land floating on this Ocean that it does not move, or maybe only a little, and we do not feel it moving.”

There was a long silence, as if to let the people get used to the ideas Ahmeed had presented so far . . .

“All this water,” he said, “and underneath the surface”—underneath that which can be seen—“is a whole world, in some ways like this world.” He used his hands to accompany his words. “There are mountains under what-can-be-seen, very tall mountains, some of them.” He motioned high, high up with one hand.

“And there are valleys deeper than any valleys we have here. All through that Great Ocean there are streams, huge rivers”—currents—“that flow all around the world, around and around.” His hands went around an imaginary globe again. “These streams are so immense”—the word he used means something like “bigger than big”—“that they sweep all the fish around too. And there are many other animals as well, not just fish. There are animals so huge . . . bigger than elephants.”

The people made a soft waahhhhh sound. “Animals that are flat”—he clapped his hands once—“and animals that are like snakes, but bigger, much bigger. But do not be afraid—the Big Ocean cannot eat the land. The land floats, and the animals in the Big Ocean can live only there; they cannot come on land.” He repeated in a singsong, “Do not be afraid. The Lord of the Great Ocean has told me, do not be afraid because the land floats on the water, and the animals in the ocean cannot come on land.” (134-8)

Wolff naturally felt puzzled at how Ahmeed could know so much. Sure, the knowledge appears imperfect, but it seems odd for an unlettered person who never left the jungle to somehow know
that we live on a globe, that the globe is covered mostly by water rather than land, that the Great Ocean has mountains and valleys in it larger than any on land, that ocean animals are larger than land animals, that the ocean has vast currents in it, and so on. Wolff later tried to make some sense of Ahmeed’s knowing, and he even asked him what the Lord of the Great Ocean looks like: Ahmeed seemed surprised, thought about it, then said, “Datok Laut Besar is not a person. It is easier to tell people about the Ocean when you can say Datok Laut Besar. No . . . I did not see a person. I find the Great Ocean in my heart” (141).

Such a claim is already damned by western science, damned before it could ever reach our supposedly open minds. We could organize a long parade of such stories, some appearing as more convincing or astonishing than others, depending on the reader. We even have them in the realm of academia, and in the realm of scientific and other peer-reviewed journals, in which phenomena such as precognition or presentiment, remote viewing, influence over random event generators, and other anomalous happenings have appeared with sufficient statistical power to warrant publication. One can look up the work of Daryl Bem, Russel Targ, Julia Mossbridge, Dean Radin, Etzel Cardeña, and many others to find out about these anomalies. Most of us don’t have time to explore these things. Those who make time for them get pushed to the margins. We explore Indigenous Peoples in this chapter in part because they often have a different sense of time, and a different sense of science. They practice a science that goes altogether with the conditions of life—the conditions of Nature-Culture. They don’t live under the boot of Captain Clock. They don’t live for a bottom line. They don’t orient their science toward anything else but what all science must orient: Sacredness, and the sacred activity of cultivating life onward. Western science is far from immune to having a bottom line. One can say our science, like
everything else, has become infected with bottom-line thinking, and thinking inflected by a
conception of time that might make certain kinds of knowing highly unlikely, and all science has
turned from gaya scienza to some species of dismal science. Consider these words from Chief
Oren Lyons:

I was asked one time by a reporter, “Well, Chief,” he says, “what’s your
bottom line?” The question stumped me. I didn’t have an answer because I didn’t
know . . . So I thought about it, and when I thought about it, it was really quite
easy to answer: We don’t have a bottom line; we live in a circle, in a cycle.
Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter, Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter. There’s no bottom
line . . . bottom line is a terminology for economics . . .

When you live in a society where there is a bottom line, and that is what
you’re bound with, then you have to make an effort to find the cycle, and that
takes time. It takes real effort, and it takes being there. You can’t pick that up in a
book. You just gotta be outside, you gotta be outdoors. It’s all there.98

Jeanette Armstrong, an Indigenous Elder who also has a western Ph.D., said something in the
same spirit, but she inverted the sense of the economic, trying to invite us to see that, while we
attempt to control and tame Nature, Nature has unshakeable demands, with which we must
attune or face consequences:

The point to me seems obvious, that the root of today’s problem is how humans
chose to live insulated from nature’s mediation of their behavior within a system
of reciprocities in which everything that takes must also give.

I can also see that it has something to do with a belief, a belief in ever increasing
the insulation from nature’s economic requirements of us as humans in the way
we are.

. . . . Indigenous economics is a lived experience. We are socialized into that lived
experience. It’s not something we can learn about from a book or something we
can learn about from a far distance from what we need in our lives.

We are needed in that place by those things that live there in that place.

So one of the things that I see is that at the level of individual, personal
knowledge, some of those things are lost.99

98 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7KAy5AHY1K8
99 https://youtu.be/1b9BVGDW6sw
Again, a sense of intimacy. This feel for “economy” relates to a lost connotation in the Greek oikos, which we can savor through metaphor: “Oikos” means home, dwelling. The economy does not have to do with “managing the household” (the meaning we take from the Greek), but rather abiding, dwelling in balance, being at home—not “ordering a household” or “ordering a market,” but attuning with the sacred-creative-ordering of the Cosmos, because this is our home, we are our home. This at-homeness does not exist in the dominant culture’s notion of “economics,” which has so much to do with competition, conquest, accumulation, aggression, and all the rest.

We do not PracticeRealize abiding at peace, an abiding joy (gaya scienza), dwelling in, through, as our sacred home, the home fashioned for us by the divine, by the mystery. We do not PracticeRealize homo sapiens, who tastes life, arriving at direct knowing, constituted in, through, and as living, loving relationships, ecstatic relationality. Instead, we practice and realize homo economicus, the economic beast, the creature bound by time, constellated in inequality, constituted by “race” and “class” and “nation,” simultaneously limited by “science” and “religion,” filled with the many certainties of an indoor life, cut off from Nature, atomized and often lonely, the fearful craving being with the great weapon of reason (employed to make other weapons, of “development,” war and propaganda, the latter including what we call marketing). We can perhaps turn to those who don’t have time, don’t need time, don’t follow a bottom line, but try to “follow along with things”. The great Chinese Philosopher Zhuangzi put it this way:

T’ien Ken was wandering on the sunny side of Yin Mountain. When he reached the banks of the Liao River, he happened to meet a Nameless Man. He questioned the man, saying, “Please may I ask how to rule the world?”
The Nameless Man said, “Get away from me, you peasant! What kind of a dreary question is that! I’m just about to set off with the Creator. And if I get bored with that, then I’ll ride on the Light-and-Lissome Bird out beyond the six directions, wandering in the village of Not-Even-Anything and living in the Broad-and-Borderless field. What business do you have coming with this talk of governing the world and disturbing my mind?”

But T’ien Ken repeated his question. The Nameless Man said, “Let your mind wander in simplicity, blend your spirit with the vastness, follow along with things the way they are, and make no room for personal views—then the world will be governed.”

Nameless has no name because he got past the fixedness that goes altogether with habitual naming (recall here Sorenson’s comments about naming, and Nietzsche’s too). He wants nothing to do with the mind of control (a mind of conquest). He finds the question so foolish, and he perhaps wants to take no chance of getting pulled out of freedom (so to speak) to deal with a mind of profanity. He wants to say, “You are asking the wrong question!” He wants to just laugh and walk away. But, out of compassion, he tries to explain in words, though the explanation must necessarily limit. The Chinese Sage Laozi gave similar advice, another attempt at compassion that also has its limits:

These are the Four Great Powers:
Humans Follow Earth
Earth Follows Cosmos
Cosmos Follows Dao
Dao Follows Only Itself (Dao De Jing, 25—translation adapted from Mitchell)

If you want to be a great leader,
you must Learn to Follow Dao.
Stop trying to control.
Let Go of fixed plans and concepts,
the World will Govern Itself. (57)

Laozi also realized that this letting go, this stopping of controlling presents profound challenges to us:

Approach it and there is no beginning;
follow it and there is no end.
You can’t know it, but you can be it, 
at ease in your own life. 
Just realize where you come from: 
this is the essence of wisdom. (15)

Do we have time for no beginning, no end? Do we have time to just sit outside, Attuning 
to/with/as the sacred-creative-patterning?

Zhuangzi challenges us to contemplate our hesitation, our resistance, our thinking-we-know:

Once a man receives this fixed bodily form, he holds on to it, waiting for the end. Sometimes clashing with things, sometimes bending before them, he runs his course like a galloping steed, and nothing can stop him. Is he not pathetic? Sweating and laboring to the end of his days and never seeing his accomplishment, utterly exhausting himself and never knowing where to look for rest—can you help pitying him? I’m not dead yet! he says, but what good is that? His body decays, his mind follows it—can you deny that this is a great sorrow? Man’s life has always been a muddle like this. How could I be the only muddled one, and other men not muddled?

If a man follows the mind given him and makes it his teacher, then who can be without a teacher? Why must you comprehend the process of change and form your mind on that basis before you can have a teacher? Even an idiot has his teacher. But to fail to abide by this mind and still insist upon your rights and wrongs—this is like saying that you set off for Yueh today and got there yesterday. This is to claim that what doesn’t exist exists. If you claim that what doesn't exist exists, then even the holy sage Yu couldn’t understand you, much less a person like me! (translation by Burton Watson)

Gifted in reciprocity. The Original Mind. Clearly, we have a paradox, or a muddle, or some kind of perplexity. We follow the mind of time, the mind of agendas, the mind of the bottom line, and we degrade our souls, degrade the World, desacralize and dismiss. What mind can we follow? And how do we follow that Mind? Can we find that Mind in books? In arguments? Or only in attunement? How can we, together, make some progress, using words? Zhuangzi says, we need to use clarity:
Words are not just wind. Words have something to say. But if what they have to say is not fixed, then do they really say something? Or do they say nothing? People suppose that words are different from the peeps of baby birds, but is there any difference, or isn’t there? What does the Way rely upon, that we have true and false? What do words rely upon, that we have right and wrong? How can the Way go away and not exist? How can words exist and not be acceptable? When the Way relies on little accomplishments and words rely on vain show, then we have the rights and wrongs of the Confucians and the Mo-ists. What one calls right the other calls wrong; what one calls wrong the other calls right. But if we want to right their wrongs and wrong their rights, then the best thing to use is clarity.

Everything has its “that,” everything has its “this.” From the point of view of “that” you cannot see it, but through understanding you can know it. So I say, “that” comes out of “this” and “this” depends on “that”—which is to say that “this” and “that” give birth to each other. But where there is birth there must be death; where there is death there must be birth. Where there is acceptability there must be unacceptability; where there is unacceptability there must be acceptability. Where there is recognition of right there must be recognition of wrong; where there is recognition of wrong there must be recognition of right. Therefore the sage does not proceed in such a way, but illuminates all in the light of Heaven. He too recognizes a “this,” but a “this” which is also “that,” a “that” which is also “this.” His “that” has both a right and a wrong in it; his “this” too has both a right and a wrong in it. So, in fact, does he still have a “this” and “that”? Or does he in fact no longer have a “this” and “that”? A state in which “this” and “that” no longer find their opposites is called the hinge of the Way. When the hinge is fitted into the socket, it can respond endlessly. Its right then is a single endlessness and its wrong too is a single endlessness. So, I say, the best thing to use is clarity.

To use an attribute to show that attributes are not attributes is not as good as using a non-attribute to show that attributes are not attributes. To use a horse to show that a horse is not a horse is not as good as using a non-horse to show that a horse is not a horse, Heaven and earth are one attribute; the ten thousand things are one horse.

What is acceptable we call acceptable; what is unacceptable we call unacceptable. A road is made by people walking on it; things are so because they are called so. What makes them so? Making them so makes them so. What makes them not so? Making them not so makes them not so. Things all must have that which is so; things all must have that which is acceptable.

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100 What a profound question!
When Zhuangzi says, “From the point of view of “that” you cannot see it,” it should remind us of what Sorenson, Dogen, and so many other students of Culture and soul have said: From the point of view of the mind of time, the mind of this-and-that, the mind of analyzing and labeling, the mind of subject and object, the mind of habitual thoughts, cravings, clingings, and doubt, much remains invisible. The landscape itself remains so invisible to us—the landscape of Earth and the landscape of Soul. We don’t know our own Mind, much less the Experience we keep ourselves cut off from—Jung’s “breakthrough of total experience” we keep at bay—and we don’t know that wholeness and holiness of Experience because of not knowing the Mind, the land, the cycles, the sacred-creative-patterning of Nature.

A poetic turn of phrase: The ten thousand things are One Horse—the Windhorse of the Soul. We can yet ride it. But we must get off our own high horse first. It may seem that we take too much care here, that we spend too much time on the challenges of an open mind, the challenges of language, the challenges of time itself. We don’t have time for all of this. Can’t we get to the point? But if we cannot see the point, then what’s the point? And if there isn’t a “point” in the way we mean “point,” what then? It would be like saying to Sophia, “Cut to the chase,” and Her replying, “There’s no chase in this story, kid.”

Really: Can we take too much care? What does the question indicate? Perhaps some of us underestimate the challenge. Or, perhaps some readers haven’t suspected that we might suggest stranger things than we so far have. We merely knock at a gate here. We approach a threshold. To cross it, we must empty ourselves of more than we at first suspect, and that seems to take
time, time to give up time. We don’t sense how much we cling to, or how tightly we cling to that which we think we know.

Zhuangzi also warns us that what Sorenson calls pre-conquest consciousness on the one hand, and what we may call conquest consciousness on the other (to characterize the western or dominant mode of mind), create each other. All things depend on PracticeRealization. We cannot simply “return” to a pre-conquest mind as if such a thing exists in and of itself. The mind of conquest has affected all things. We need to learn the spiritual lessons of its activity, including the way it produced a breakdown of the pre-conquest liminal awareness. Sorenson describes this in some detail:

As contact increases intuitive rapport starts crumbling, followed by instinctive sociosensuality. Surgings spontaneously well up for some time from deep psychic reservoirs. They don’t last. Once expressed in the open they are struck down by hostility or aversiveness. Eventually these instinctive surgings emerge covertly within small sociosensual groups. These groups protect, sustain and enrich themselves by discouraging empathetic integration outside the group. They develop rites, rituals and initiations that establish rules of kinship and behavior. Tactile aversiveness replaces sociosensuality outside these groups—a fundamental change in the way-of-life. In the preconquest situation human affect remains fully in the open, entirely honest, undisguised and expressed publicly. In the new covert system empathy and rapport are expressed according to the rules worked out by kindreds. Trust, empathy, affection and rapport are norms within these kindreds. Outside them deception, competition, selfishness and tactile aversiveness are the rule. (3)

... When outside contact becomes substantial, and sustained, the open sensual verve and spirit of traditional daily life collapses. They cannot withstand sustained contact with hostility, anger and selfishness. Such contact causes hypersensual rapport to disintegrate. When hypersensual rapport is gone, liminal consciousness starts converting to a supraliminal form. At first there is a shrinking from sociosensual contact. As aggressive contacts increase, such aversiveness increases. It cuts savagely at intuitive rapport, destroys it in a twinkling. Eventually, feeding on itself, the aversiveness suddenly balloons out in a catastrophic grand finale of cultural collapse in which the community-wide intuitive rapport collapses.
Following the collapse, a temporary existential abyss settles. From it the “savage savage” emerges. This new type of being pursues material possessiveness to the edge of law and beyond and extravagant elemental sex to the very limits of human physiological capability. Alcohol and drugs when obtainable are seized frantically. A comraderie sustains marauding bands (a type of covert group). They see themselves as jolly pirates. From outside the group they’re seen as thieves and murderers. (4)

Sorenson offers an excerpt from his field notes, detailing the effects of western education on Indigenous People:

[Students home on holiday from the western schools] strut in gangs among the houses, short shrift the empathetic tempers of their younger siblings, mock their subtle sociality, bully their attunement, ridicule their tactility. They crudely joke with one another, play painful tricks on happy local kids, sometimes reward their sensuality with crude aggressive sex. Such rudeness was not seen on the isle two years ago.

. . . . There can be little doubt that the school experience is what has bestialized these boys. Enforced obedience, competitiveness, and the anti-tactile mores of school-life erase the integrative capabilities bequeathed by early childhood. Modeled on the Western system, those mainland schools, at this instant in the history of these people, provide a natural real-life laboratory wherein the impact of such education on subtle empathy and compassionate attunement can be examined. It’s not a happy sight.

Commenting on these notes, Sorenson writes:

Similar progressions from joyful attunement to despondency and then bestiality were observed in Nepal when Jyapu children first started going to school; in Mexico where Tarahumara Indian children were attending a Mission boarding school; in Oceania, India, and Sri Lanka where children of traditional populations made their first forays to formal schools (5)

Western education apparently realizes a breakdown of truth, intimacy, resonance with Nature, attunement with the sacred. Why? Does western culture mean aggression, competition, self-centeredness, deceit, the need for medication, the pressure of time, the forcing of agendas? We may want to protest against such a characterization, but what do we actually practice and realize—considered in its fullness? How do we organize our society? We have competitiveness and self-centeredness built into our vision, and it manifests in the education process. Our
practiced vision does not realize homo sapiens, a child of wisdom, love, and beauty, a being living in and cultivating forward, imagining onward a sacred World. Rather, to say it again, we practice and realize homo economicus in place of homo sapiens. Homo economicus lives in a world of matter that doesn’t matter, and homo economicus manifests, “by nature,” as a “rational,” self-interested, atomized, and competitive being. Such a being cannot fully realize a nonduality of unity-and-diversity, individual-and-community, Human-and-Nature, Mind-and-Nature, Nature-and-Culture, Nature-and-Sacredness. Homo economicus cannot realize truth dependent on intimacy and openness. Every attempt to practice deeper intimacy and openness seems to demand some measure of rebellion against the dominant culture—and the question comes to how consistently and coherently we will practice that rebellion. So many seemingly spiritual people limit it.

Clearly we practice more than bullying in western culture. At the same time, we practice plenty of bullying, even at the level of the Oval Office, where we have placed many a bully in power. The history of the U.S. could perhaps get framed as a story of bullying. But, no matter what we have done to “civilize” ourselves, and to incorporate some semblance of sensitivity, inclusiveness, and even basic compassion into our educational practices, this question remains: Do such gestures amount to no more than making a topiary?

Imagine we plant a very large and beautiful garden, with all sorts of food we need to get through the year. Over time, we find many plants in the garden suffering. We trace the problem to a strange-looking shrub with a root system extending all throughout the garden. The shrub has colonized the garden and weakened all the other plants. We take out the shears and begin
trimming away. We end up transforming the shrub into the image of a giant flower. It might look like an excellent topiary, but we have left the roots intact, and the whole garden remains at risk. We have done nothing truly revolutionary, and we did in fact find ourselves in a situation that demanded significant transformation—not “revolution” for the sake of “revolution,” but a need to uproot something. To what degree do we subtly bully ourselves, each other, and the World? Those who spend any time observing closely will perhaps feel shocked. Can we uproot it?

The inner movements of consciousness:
When their true nature is not realized, are ignorance itself.
This is the root of all karma and disturbing emotions.
When their true nature is realized, consciousness is self-aware wisdom,
The source of all positive qualities.
~ Milarepa

Surely we have many, many things in western culture worthy of preserving. That goes almost without saying. We could then frame the problem as one of development, in which something at one stage gets preserved in a way, like the transition from atom to molecule, or the shift that happens in our twenties when the neo-cortex comes into a state that changes how we make practice and realize our experience. However we frame it, some uncomfortable degree of transformation might have become long overdue, as if we were a bunch of 40 year-olds behaving very much like teenagers.

It seems worthwhile to provide just a bit more evidence about the breakdown of Liminal Mind. We do this in part because it goes together with a few considerations of language, and one of the things we might want to consider has to do with the so-called Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. Loosely, this hypothesis suggests that language comes altogether with a different way of experiencing, including our way of thinking, and thus our language may constrain what we can think.
Researchers have been able to verify certain kinds of differences. Even time can be experienced differently, in ways that go together with linguistic habits. For instance, in an article called, “The Whorfian time warp,” Bylund and Athanasopoulos (2017) describe differences in the framing of time in Spanish and Swedish. Busy Swedes, like many English speakers, tend to speak of a “long” day, while busy Spaniards tend to speak of a “full” day, as do Greeks. The researchers found that, within limits, they could provoke differences in the perception of time. For instance, participants might watch a line grow on a screen. One group might see the line grow 4 inches in 3 seconds. Another might see the line grow 6 inches in the same span of time. But, depending on their language, they might rate the time differently: Speakers of Spanish would sense roughly 3 seconds of time no matter whether they saw 4 or 6 inches of growth, but Swedes would think more time had passed, seduced by the association of time with length. Obviously no one would think that a line growing 106 inches in 3 seconds actually took 106 seconds, or even more than 10. But a difference somehow exists, and it’s not clear what it means.

John Lucy reported in 1997 the following oddity:

A recent set of studies has explored the relation between language and the incidence of occupational accidents in Finland. Occupational accident rates are substantially lower in Sweden than in Finland and among the Swedish-speaking minority within Finland despite working in the same regions with similar laws and regulations (Salminen & Hiltunen 1993, 1995; Salminen & Johansson 1996). This difference emerges even when controlling for the type, status, or hazard of the occupation or the rate or language of accident report. Researchers have attempted to account for this difference by reference to structural differences between Swedish and Finnish (Johansson & Strømnes 1995, Salminen & Hiltunen 1993).

These language differences were first analyzed by Frode J. Stromnes, a Swedish experimental psychologist who became interested in why it was so difficult for him to learn Finnish. He contrasted comparable operators in the two languages and concluded that Swedish prepositions can be represented in terms of a vector geometry in a three-dimensional space whereas Finnish cases can be represented in terms of a topology in a two-dimensional space coupled with a
third dimension of time (or duration) (Stromnes 1973, 1974a, 1976). Stromnes supported this analysis with a number of ingenious experiments and observations (Stromnes 1974a,b). What emerges in practical terms is a Swedish emphasis on information about movement in three-dimensional space and a Finnish emphasis on more static, Gestalt relations between borders of figures. A later study of cinematic style found that Indo-European (Swedish, Norwegian, English) productions formed coherent temporal entities in which action could be followed from beginning to end across scenes, whereas Ural-Altaic (Finnish, Hungarian, Estonian) productions showed more emphasis on static settings with only transitory movement and formed coherent person-centered entities in which scenes were linked by the emotional Gestalts of persons (Johansson & Stromnes 1995, Johansson & Salminen 1996, Stromnes et al 1982).

Based on preliminary observations of factories, the hypothesis was formed that the Finns organize the workplace in a way that favors the individual worker (person) over the temporal organization of the overall production process. Lack of attention to the overall temporal organization of the process leads to frequent disruptions in production, haste, and, ultimately, accidents (Johansson & Salminen 1996, Johansson & Stromnes 1995). At the moment, concrete evidence for this interpretation is lacking, but research on production processes is under way to test the hypothesis. (303-4)

I have not found the follow-up work. In any case, the suggestions are interesting, and work continues to the present on these sorts of considerations, and the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis in weaker forms still offers interesting pathways for inquiry. While Whorf may have gone a bit far in his claims, we can nevertheless appreciate that a language may seduce us into certain habits of thinking, as Nietzsche tried to point out with the cogito and as one might suggest with Indo-European languages in general.

Consider the case of Guugu Yimidhirr, an Aboriginal language of the Indigenous people of Australia. The language has no words for ego-centric cardinal directions. One cannot say, “Pick up the stone on your right,” or, “Turn left here.” One can only say, “Pick up the stone to the north of you,” or, “Turn west.” This encourages a constant engagement with the landscape, a constant de-centering of the self—or, we might say, a more obvious constitution of the self as contextual activity.
Consider the following artefact, from E.K. Neumaier-Dargay, the translator of an important text of Tibetan Buddhist philosophy, from the translator’s introduction to the text:

Buddhist philosophy rejects one basic assumption made by all Indo-Germanic languages, that is, the assumption of the I as centre and origin of all activities and events. To put it bluntly, a sentence like “I read a book” is wrong from a Buddhist viewpoint: It is not that I do something to the book; rather, a Buddhist would argue, something happens in a field consisting of a book, a person (“me”), and an event, i.e. “reading.” Consequently a Buddhist way of saying it would be “there is the reading of a book with regard to me.” Indo-Germanic languages do not allow for such flexibility in their grammatical structures. The example sentence is bad English just as it would be bad Sanskrit, if I had bothered to translate it literally. Because of the Buddhists’ unhappiness with the active mode, the prominent position of the agent, etc., they preferred in their Sanskrit writings nominal constructions. That is, they transformed a structure essentially governed by the subject and its dependent verb into one that is governed by verbal nouns. Our example from above would then read “book-read-by-me.” In the course of time Buddhists developed this form of language into a true art, so that they were able to produce long and complex sentences consisting of nothing but verbal nouns and their attributes. Under the influence of such thinking the activity becomes an event that happens in a field of interdependent factors with none superior to the others. By the late 8th century C.E. the Buddhists had largely transformed the something to the book; rather, a Buddhist would argue, something happens in a field consisting of a book, a person (“me”), and an event, i.e. “reading.” Consequently a Buddhist way of saying it would be “there is the reading of a book with regard to me.” Indo-Germanic languages do not allow for such flexibility in their grammatical structures. The example sentence is bad English just as it would be bad Sanskrit, if I had bothered to translate it literally. Because of the Buddhists’ unhappiness with the active mode, the prominent position of the agent, etc., they preferred in their Sanskrit writings nominal constructions. That is, they transformed a structure essentially governed by the subject and its dependent verb into one that is governed by verbal nouns. Our example from above would then read “book-read-by-me.” In the course of time Buddhists developed this form of language into a true art, so that they were able to produce long and complex sentences consisting of nothing but verbal nouns and their attributes. Under the influence of such thinking the activity becomes an event that happens in a field of interdependent factors with none superior to the others. By the late 8th century C.E. the Buddhists had largely transformed the Sanskrit language into a tool suitable to express a Buddhist world-view.

When the Indian Buddhist texts were brought to Tibet during the late 7th and 8th centuries to be translated into her native idiom the difficulties dwindled away. Tibetan was still a very young language at that time, and flexible enough to accept
readily Buddhist philosophy as a basis for developing a more formalized grammatical structure. A factor which encouraged this trend was that Tibetan did not belong to the Indo-Germanic languages but to the Tibeto-Burmese family of languages. These languages do have quite different grammatical premises. For instance, they do not distinguish different categories of words (a word may function as a noun one time and as a verb at another time); active and passive modes are rather the exception than the rule; and expressions which can be understood in only one way are considered a sign of mental immaturity. All these characteristics influenced the way the text is translated here. After all, the reader of the translation should be able to catch a glimpse of the aesthetics of this Buddhist text. (42-3)

It employs metaphoric language, typical of the Vedic literature, when it refers to the ground of being as “all-creating sovereign;” it uses metonymic language (signifying something other than the word alleges) by interpreting the term rang byung ye shes, self-originated or autonomous pristine awareness, as being void of any object to become aware of; in its discussion of doctrinal matters of Buddhism the texts applies a descriptive language. These three phases, metaphoric, metonymic, and descriptive, are indicative of three phases in human history: the archaic, the scholastic, and the modern. Thus the [kun byed rgyal po, all-creating sovereign] is a text which aspires to include the entire literary tradition of India and Buddhism by transforming each of its distinctive traits into a cipher meaningful only within a web of paradoxes. This fabric of signs, each eluding rational conceptualization, is designed to lead the reader to experiencing the overpowering message of silence or the muteness of language. Language itself becomes a web of illusion veiling the depth of being. The text will take us from the surface of Buddhist doctrinal elements (such as the three forms of Buddha’s existence) to the depth of final integration where all distinctions coincide in oneness. (13-14)

Buddhist philosophers transformed the language over time. But most significantly, they also cultivated a style of consciousness—one that realized itself, realized something about reality as in tension with linguistic practices, and then tried to reshape the language as best it could without inventing a new one. As we have seen, the western tradition as a collective includes varying conceptions of time and space, which might seem to count against the suggestions we have made here. But such a criticism misses the spirit of our inquiry, for all the western traditions share a style of consciousness which we have characterized as conquest consciousness. Such a style of consciousness may experience a long day or a full day, but that it experiences a busy day is more
than likely. Better put: More than likely, it experiences time as the clock dictates, or orders its experiencing on the basis of clocks and calendars, and not as natural rhythm; likely it experiences time as something that happens to it, rather than a function of its participation and attunement; quite likely, it experiences time in relation to agendas of doing, competing, planning strategically, obsessing about the past, worried about the future is quite likely; and it likely experiences the kind of ego-centrism that would make few of its speakers think it important to struggle against the habits of their own language. People speaking English ordinarily lack philosophical or spiritual reasons for rejecting the predominance of nouns and the subject-object structure of the language, and yet precisely these sorts of deeper issues might matter in shifting our way of knowing. It might present surprising challenges to resist such deep habits, and there seem to be languages that do not make the same sorts of errors, if we can allow ourselves, at this point, to consider them as possible errors. Whatever Whorf’s sins, we certainly know that some Indigenous languages have a very different structure that seems to go along with different philosophical commitments, different practices and realizations, different values, achievements, and consummations, and we don’t have to take the word of anyone in the dominant culture for it. Perhaps that was the biggest error in the controversy around Whorf’s claims: He should have let Indigenous People speak for themselves.101

Boroditsky (2001) tested speakers of Mandarin and English. English speakers think of time horizontally, while Mandarin speakers think of it vertically. Time, for English speakers, spreads out in a horizontal line, not as a ladder. Consider Boroditsky’s summary of findings:

In one study, Mandarin speakers tended to think about time vertically even when they were thinking for English (Mandarin speakers were faster to confirm that March comes earlier than April if they had just seen a vertical array of objects than if they had just seen a horizontal array, and the reverse was true for English speakers). Another study showed that the extent to which Mandarin–English bilinguals think about time vertically is related to how old they were when they first began to learn English. In another experiment native English speakers were taught to talk about time using vertical spatial terms in a way similar to Mandarin. On a subsequent test, this group of English speakers showed the same bias to think about time vertically as was observed with Mandarin speakers. It is concluded that (1) language is a powerful tool in shaping thought about abstract domains and (2) one's native language plays an important role in shaping habitual thought (e.g., how one tends to think about time) but does not entirely determine one’s thinking in the strong Whorfian sense. (1)

Interesting findings, but the conclusions do not fully touch what we try to approach in our inquiry, precisely because Sorenson establishes the altogetherness of a style of consciousness and a way of thinking, speaking, living. The more revolutionary effects of a shift of consciousness depend on context. To test speakers of English and Mandarin still keeps one in the realm of conquest consciousness, as does testing Spaniards and Swedes. Meanwhile, the forms of consciousness that might involve better ways of knowing could have a peculiar sensitivity to destabilization in the presence of the conquest form, which now predominates.

The good news is that we can think about time differently—or, think time differently, practice and realize our experience differently. But we should find it more interesting that we might accomplish something beyond thinking time vertically as opposed horizontally. It matters that Finns could learn to think of space in ways Swedes do—if they have to work in factories. But in the case of space and time, the possibilities of rupture matter more than these more modest effects. Though worker safety is not at all a modest issue in one sense, it is yet more revolutionary to ask about the sanity of having factories in our ecologies in the first place, and more revolutionary still to inquire into experiences that rupture our habitual sense of space and
time in ways that go far beyond lines growing on a screen. But testing is not easy, since conquest consciousness and its effects pervade almost universally, and even if they didn’t one would have a hard time maintaining ecological validity once one had gotten a very different way of knowing isolated from its context and situated in a brain scanner. This may be in part why so many “para-normal” findings come with incredibly significant results, but results which often carry a more modest effect size. In other words: It’s happening, and it seriously challenges our paradigm, but it seems to be subtle, at least in the lab. Of course, the lived experience of other ways of knowing often veers far from mere subtlety. Experientially, it can change one’s whole life, and even save one’s own life or the life of another. In any case, we should not exclude the possibility that language both reflects and encourages worldviews that themselves exclude, marginalize, or make unlikely certain kinds of experience that would in turn challenge the worldview.

These experiences tend to have an emotional energy, perhaps tapping into the Eros which Sorenson discusses, and maybe tapping into more than that. Wolfgang Pauli, who won a Nobel Prize in physics and was highly regarded among his scientific peers, thought that certain kinds of rupture experiences depend on emotional energy. He was particularly interested in synchronicities, which we will discuss later and can for now think of as coincidences that are too meaningful to be thought of as mere coincidence. What is now called by some the Pauli-Jung conjecture involves theorizing about the nonduality of mind-matter that gives rise to

102 We find a tension here between the statistical methods employed in various sciences and our lived, unique experiences. The lived experiences have an unconscious dimension that we try to exclude in the laboratory, and the statistical methods used from psychology all the way to quantum physics may cover over our ability to detect the deeper non-linear, seemingly acausal connectedness of things—what Bohm refers to as an implicate order, or what we make think of as a holographic quality to the Cosmos.
synchronicities, and to think into a science of the future that would allow some kind of unification of physics and psychology. In light of Sorenson’s fieldwork, and the above comments about significance versus effect size, I am reminded that some of the results in what we call the “paranormal” involve rather high effect sizes for certain individuals—until they get bored. The ecology of the lab is not the same as an ecology in which what we call the “paranormal” needs to be drawn from as part of an intimate and emotionally charged life situation. Gieser discusses some aspects of this, citing interesting letters from Pauli. Here, “the Σ concept” refers to Synchronicity:

Pauli wanted to place the emotional experience of meaning and involvement, i.e. the affective factor, at the centre of the Σ concept. He returned to this in connection with his interest in the parapsychological experiments which were being conducted in various parts of the world at this time: by J.B. Rhine at Duke University and R.A. McConnell at Pittsburgh University, both in the USA, and by S.G. Soal and F. Bateman in England. What was interesting to Pauli was that they showed positive results – over the statistical average – when the experimental subject was emotionally involved and expected something from the experiment. This was often the case at the start of the study, whereas the result deteriorated – reverted towards the statistical average – as more experiments were conducted. The subject began quite simply to be bored by the experiment. This phenomenon was given the name of ‘fatigue (decline) effect’ (Ermüdungseffekt). Pauli also called it the pernicious influence of the statistical method on the synchronistic phenomenon. In a conversation 1957 between Pauli and Hans Bender, holder of a chair of parapsychology in Germany, Bender confirmed the importance of the affective factor in the investigation of so-called parapsychological phenomena.

The same principle, i.e. strong feeling or involvement as an ordering factor, had been in action in the astrological experiments which Jung conducted in the course of his work on synchronicity. Jung had presumably intended to show that astrology is based on some kind of acausal connection between its symbol system and people born at particular times. Instead his astrological experiments resulted in a demonstration of the effect of synchronicity in the researcher and his interest in or expectation of a particular research result. For Jung observed that at the beginning of his experiment he obtained a result which statistically confirmed the predictions of astrology, but as material accumulated it evened out into a non-significant, statistically average result. Pauli was rather surprised that Jung did this ‘experiment’ at all. To him it was obvious that one cannot establish synchronicity by a statistical method. He was therefore extremely satisfied that Jung had reached the conclusion that the statistical method erases all trace of the
confirmation that had at first been expected. Pauli discusses this in a letter to Markus Fierz.

The news in your last letter that C.G. Jung’s results concerning the aspects ‘typical of marriage’ in the horoscope fell entirely within the bounds of statistically predicted variation is to me a source of unmitigated satisfaction. A test of this kind, in which every irrational factor is eliminated and the unconscious has no chance to operate (a comical thought that we physicists of all people have to draw the attention of the psychologists of the unconscious to this!) cannot turn out in any other way! The sciences are quite good enough to predict the negative outcome of such an attempt, and it was only the product of a mind quite without scientific training to expect anything else from it! For here we are concerned with the reproducible and not with the unique. It is about the latter that statements are possible which are additional to the scientific conclusions, but without invalidating them. (I use ‘the unique’ so broadly as also to include isolated groups of events, not only single events.)

The relationship between what the synchronicity principle seeks to describe and what one may arrive at using a statistical method is a true complementarity relationship. The statistical measurement excludes precisely what synchronicity emphasizes: the mental state of the observer. Therefore this ought to be included as an essential part of the definition of the synchronicity concept. Pauli formulated this as follows:

It actually seems to me a general and essential attribute of synchronistic phenomena, one that I would even like to incorporate into the definition of the term ‘synchronicity’; in other words, whenever an application of statistical methods, without consideration of the psychic state of the people involved in the experiment, does not show such a ‘pernicious influence’, then there is something very different from synchronicity going on.

If there is one thing that Pauli has learned from quantum physics, it is that the statistical character of the laws of nature is the price that has to be paid in order to maintain reproducibility in physics. In other words the statistical method saves science from the detested, isolated, non-repeatable instance: it can be placed in brackets. By increasing the amount of measurements of individual cases one obtains a total statistical picture which approaches the result of the classical theory. The area where the results of quantum theory merge with the predictions of classical physics is labelled statistical correspondence. From the point of view of quantum theory classical causality is regarded as a special case within the framework of general probability calculation. (284-6)
It is not at all clear that we should think no Synchronicity can stand up to the statistical method, and Pauli will later accept a broader view of Synchronicity provided by Jung. We will need further contemplation of these matters later. The main issue for us now has to do with the possibilities for practice and realization that our culture makes less likely, and which language itself, in conjunction with worldview, may seduce us into. If we don’t know how to develop a heightened emotional-rational experience, a refined form of thinking in, through, as an ecological, ecosensual awareness, then we may reduce the appearance of ways of knowing that depend on such heightened states, states of achievement, consummatory states. If our manner of doing science, and our manner of thinking, speaking, and moving further rigidify and reify us into being cut off from such ways of being and knowing, we remain stuck. If there is any flexibility in languages, and if they can either reflect and encourage (presence and cultivate) the ways of knowing that interest us, or reflect and encourage ways of knowing that can create negative side-effects, then we may see at least some of our troubles in the English language and other languages of the dominant culture.

David Bohm was interested in the connections between seemingly modest linguistic habits and seemingly revolutionary changes in worldview. How does language encourage bad views? How does it encourage a style of consciousness characterized by fragmentation and conquest? Here are some thoughts from Bohm’s *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*:

> In the previous chapter it has been pointed out that our thought is fragmented, mainly by our taking it for an image or model of ‘what the world is’. The divisions in thought are thus given disproportionate importance, as if they were a widespread and pervasive structure of independently existent actual breaks in ‘what is’, rather than merely convenient features of description and analysis. Such thought was shown to bring about a thoroughgoing confusion that tends to permeate every phase of life, and that ultimately makes impossible the solution of individual and social problems. We saw the urgent need to end this confusion,
through giving careful attention to the one-ness of the content of thought and the actual process of thinking which produces this content.

In this chapter the main emphasis will be to inquire into the role of language structure in helping to bring about this sort of fragmentation in thought. Though language is only one of the important factors involved in this tendency, it is clearly of key importance in thought, in communication, and in the organization of human society in general.

Of course, it is possible merely to observe language as it is, and has been, in various differing social groups and periods of history, but what we wish to do in this chapter is to experiment with changes in the structure of the common language. In this experimentation our aim is not to produce a well-defined alternative to present language structures. Rather, it is to see what happens to the language function as we change it, and thus perhaps to make possible a certain insight into how language contributes to the general fragmentation. Indeed, one of the best ways of learning how one is conditioned by a habit (such as the common usage of language is, to a large extent) is to give careful and sustained attention to one’s overall reaction when one ‘makes the test’ of seeing what takes place. . . .

In scientific inquiries a crucial step is to ask the right question. Indeed, each question contains presuppositions, largely implicit. If these presuppositions are wrong or confused, then the question itself is wrong, in the sense that to try to answer it has no meaning. One has thus to inquire into the appropriateness of the question. In fact, truly original discoveries in science and in other fields have generally involved such inquiry into old questions, leading to a perception of their inappropriateness, and in this way allowing for the putting forth of new questions. To do this is often very difficult, as these presuppositions tend to be hidden very deep in the structure of our thought. . . .

What, then, will be our question, as we engage in this inquiry into our language (and thought)? We begin with the fact of general fragmentation. We can ask in a preliminary way whether there are any features of the commonly used language which tend to sustain and propagate this fragmentation, as well as, perhaps, to reflect it. A cursory examination shows that a very important feature of this kind is the subject-verb-object structure of sentences, which is common to the grammar and syntax of modern languages. This structure implies that all action arises in a separate entity, the subject, and that, in cases described by a transitive verb, this action crosses over the space between them to another separate entity, the object. . . .

This is a pervasive structure, leading in the whole of life to a function of thought tending to divide things into separate entities, such entities being conceived of as essentially fixed and static in their nature. When this view is carried to its limit, one arrives at the prevailing scientific world view, in which everything is regarded as ultimately constituted out of a set of basic particles of fixed nature.

The subject-verb-object structure of language, along with its world view, tends to impose itself very strongly in our speech, even in those cases in which some attention would reveal its evident inappropriateness. For example, consider the sentence ‘It is raining.’ Where is the ‘It’ that would, according to the sentence,
be ‘the rainer that is doing the raining’? Clearly, it is more accurate to say: ‘Rain is going on.’ Similarly, we customarily say, ‘One elementary particle acts on another’, but, as indicated in the previous chapter, each particle is only an abstraction of a relatively invariant form of movement in the whole field of the universe. So it would be more appropriate to say, ‘Elementary particles are on-going movements that are mutually dependent because ultimately they merge and interpenetrate.’ However, the same sort of description holds also on the larger-scale level. Thus, instead of saying, ‘An observer looks at an object’, we can more appropriately say, ‘Observation is going on, in an undivided movement involving those abstractions customarily called “the human being” and “the object he is looking at”.’

These considerations on the overall implications of sentence structures suggest another question. Is it not possible for the syntax and grammatical form of language to be changed so as to give a basic role to the verb rather than to the noun? This would help to end the sort of fragmentation indicated above, for the verb describes actions and movements, which flow into each other and merge, without sharp separations or breaks. Moreover, since movements are in general always themselves changing, they have in them no permanent pattern of fixed form with the rheomode which separately existent things could be identified. Such an approach to language evidently fits in with the overall world view discussed in the previous chapter, in which movement is, in effect, taken as a primary notion, while apparently static and separately existent things are seen as relatively invariant states of continuing movement (e.g., recall the example of the vortex).

In his book, Bohm proposes experimentation with a mode of language—not a new language, but something recognizable as English, though in a mode of communication in which verbs predominate. He called this mode the rheomode, a theoretical notion developed on the basis of his philosophical and scientific insights (e.g. though we seem to practice and realize a Newtonian universe, we seem to live in a cosmos unlike that one—we actively practice delusion, and we call it a scientific view).

Interestingly, F. David Peat, a physicist and collaborator with Bohm was later contacted by Leroy Little Bear of the Blackfoot Nation. Little Bear had noticed similarities between a vision of reality offered by quantum physics and the vision of reality offered in Blackfoot Culture, what
we might call its scientific/philosophical dimension. Little Bear had also been looking into Bohm’s work, and thought that as a scientist he might be more open to sincere conversation about these resonances than many other establishment scientists.\(^3\) Bohm agreed to meet with Little Bear and others, and as they spoke, Bohm began to learn a little about the Blackfoot language, he realized it sounded a lot like his rheomode, and he found their worldview resonant with his own.

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\(^3\) Bohm suffered significantly from the politics, psychology, and bad philosophy one finds in academia, including science. His polite comments about it can be viewed here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QI66ZglzcO0 I myself was interested to hear about a fellow philosopher whose science bubble was burst not so long ago. This philosopher was so eager to go out among the scientists, to escape “the popes” of philosophy departments and finally speak with rational people fully committed to evidence. He found quite a mess. One researcher seemed to be keeping up a line of work he knew was going nowhere, but which was central to funding his lab. Another researcher kept a very good scientist out of key conferences, because they had been in a sexual relationship that turned sour. Another researcher seemed to be fudging data, but no one was sure enough to try and prove it, and the researcher had enough status that mere suspicion, however seemingly well-founded, would not suffice. All of this is rumor. But we can find accusations based far less on hearsay. For instance, Professor Ian Harris, an orthopedic surgeon, has written a book called *The Ultimate Placebo*, in which he argues that, while surgeons do not likely recommend surgery in any consciously manipulative way, the evidence for its benefits might be surprisingly less convincing than one would hope, given the risks and potential negative side-effects. Similarly, physician-scientist John Iannidis argued that so-called evidence-based medicine has become invaded by industry (see “Evidence-based medicine has been hijacked,” Journal of Clinical Epidemiology Volume 73, May 2016, Pages 82-86). The history of science shows there are more spiritual demands placed on the scientist than many of them are able to deal with, outside of spiritual/philosophical training. We speak of “science” as if it could exist outside of any context (ah, Dewey’s fateful error again), outside of ecologies that bring about the mutual development of science, societies, the scientists as full human beings, and the world they study and live in. Our whole inquiry again and again touches on this key notion: Science cannot exist in any rigorous or sustainable fashion except as part of a spiritual practice, a spiritual way of life in a spiritually rooted culture. The same holds for art and all other human practices. There is no “exclusively” human practice aside from our gifts to Nature, to Sacredness, as part of our participation, our fulfilling our ontological-ethical-aesthetic responsibilities.
Peat went on to write a book called *Blackfoot Physics*. He also wrote an article called, “Blackfoot Physics and European Minds.” Here is how he summarizes some of what he learned from the Blackfoot Elders:

it could be objected that, unlike the arts, science is objective and, from a cultural point of view, value-free. It is for this reason, it is said, that indigenous and marginalized cultures cannot really co-exist beside industrialized nations and are doomed to extinction. I do not believe this is true. Traditional cultures have enormous power and may, in the end, act to transform or renew our own technological society.

My test case is that of the Blackfoot people, a nation who once occupied an area of the North American plains east of the Rocky Mountains but now today live in reserves in Montana, US and reservations in Alberta, Canada. By tradition, they were hunters of buffalo; travelling with their tepees in the summer and wintering along river banks. Their language is a member of the great Algonquin family which runs from the Cheyenne in the central US plains though the Blackfoot and up into northern Canada with Ojibway and Cree finally into the Naskapi of Labrador.

My encounter, as a representative of Western science, with the Blackfoot was neither systematic nor anthropological. It was more an ongoing friendship and a series of discussions about our respective world-views. In turn, this led to a number of circles in which Western scientists sat with Blackfoot and other Native American Elders. . . .

. . . they taught me that we all possess a similar capacity and buried deep within the European mind lies something that may be able to temper the momentum of our present path. We are all indigenous people, in the sense that each of us is the carrier of a sacred relationship to the natural world and has access to a wider vision of a reality long denied.

What is the nature of Blackfoot reality? Certainly it is far wider than our own, yet firmly based within the natural world of vibrant, living things. Once our European world saw nature in a similar way, a vision still present in poets like Blake, Wordsworth and Gerard Manley Hopkins who perceived the immanence and inscape of the world. Nevertheless our consciousness has narrowed to the extent that matter is separated from spirit and we seek our reality in an imagined elsewhere of abstractions, Platonic realms, mathematical elegance, and physical laws.

The Blackfoot know of no such fragmentation. Not only do they speak with rocks and trees, they are also able to converse with that which remains invisible to us, a world of what could be variously called spirits, or powers, or simply energies. However, these forces are not the occupants of a mystical or abstract domain, they remain an essential aspect of the natural, material world. It is not so much that the Blackfoot live in an extended reality but that our own Western vision had become excessively myopic.
This wider reality embraces flux, movement, change and transformation. The creator of the land, Napi (the Old Man), is also its trickster, one who is constantly changing form, traversing boundaries and upsetting preconceptions. For example, what the West takes as the aberration of multiple personality becomes the acceptance that an individual is not a fixed thing but fluid, a being whose multiplicity is reflected in the way a person’s name keeps transforming during their life.

How is one to maintain orientation in a universe in which everything is caught up in the river of transformation. How can anything be preserved from change? The answer lies in participation within the flux by means of acts of renewal. (566-7)

I mentioned Little Bear and Heavy Head (2004), “A Conceptual Anatomy of the Blackfoot Word.” The title of the article deliberately evokes a tension, which we can contemplate here in relation to Peat’s reflections. The Indigenous authors write:

We chose to exploit this particular metaphor, the juxtaposition of anatomical conceptions as an instrument for describing and understanding other complex experiences, to illustrate an important observation: that this association indexes a fundamental theme at the very heart of Western culture, as evidenced in the structure and utility of the modern English language. The anatomy metaphor is not only attractive for the English speaker; it actually makes perfect sense to him. . . It seems fair to claim that the anatomical metaphor is something of a Western imperative, in that its influence in both thought and action entirely prevalent in all dimensions of their experience . . . Not all peoples make sense of the world in this way . . . (31)

They seem to see the English universe and the Blackfoot Cosmos as incommensurable, the former composed of “solids within solids,” and the latter a “flux dynamics of massive fluidity” (32). Thus, they say they cannot possibly explain Blackfoot in the medium of English, since the English language reflects so well a metaphysical orientation toward objects and analyses. We should perhaps pause here to consider the entire sensibility of “analytic” “philosophy,” and perhaps ask ourselves if the whole thing is founded on and/or expresses bad metaphysical assumptions (even though some of its practitioners eschew “metaphysics”). As for Little Bear and Heavy Head, they seek to “relay merely the existence of another intellectual tradition, one that could very well be of some relevance in contemporary discussions of such important
concerns as the nature of cognition and the explanatory dilemmas of quantum physics” (32). To do that, they say they need to thoroughly distance themselves from all of those familiar categories of language structure and, foremost of these, that which is known in the common form of English as the word. Our reason for this departure is that there simply is nothing of this order in the Blackfoot tongue. One could not argue, without considerable imposition, for the existence of any recognizable morphemes, lexemes, or sentences, nor of such classes as nouns and verbs. In fact, there must be very little carryover from science founded on Indo-European models of speech and thought if we are truly to approach any Blackfoot sense of meaning . . . (32)

They consider the example of the word “chair”:

One common Blackfoot equivalent of the abstract English singular “chair” is asóópa’tsisi . . . most directly transcribed to English as become-sit-facilitate-ing [note that it has four dimensions—n.k.]. There is nothing in this breakdown which could be equated with the static quality of the “chair” as known to the English speaker, and no indication of its concrete existence in a real world outside the human experience. It is not a noun (a thing) nor a verb (an interaction between a subject and either himself or an object). Instead, what we register in asóópa’tsisi is a facilitating event, logically interrelated and dependent upon a human event that is in-fact cited as an aspect of asóópa’tsisi as a happening. (33)

Consider how Little Bear and Heavy Head try and transcribe from Blackfoot a sentence that in English indicates something like “that boy brought this chair”: “by-way-of-transfer-move-ing that-familiar-ing young-yet-state-of-ing this-near-ing become-sit-facilitate-ing” (37). Something in us may want to say, “Alright, but we still get the meaning.” What does it indicate when we want to close down like this? Why do we find it so tempting? Why do we have a hard time understanding the difference a different worldview can make, in the most practical and intimate sense?

Interestingly, some of us may make fun of Whorf for claiming that, to put it in crude terms, since Hopi has no word for time, then the Hopi do not experience time. But why should we think that
alternative experiences of time are not possible? Speaking from experience in the practice-realization of Indigenous ways of knowing, Little Bear and Heavy Head suggest that something inconceivable to conquest consciousness might arise in a Liminal Awareness with a different experience of life:

Upon thorough examination, it becomes apparent that time or tense, in the view position of the [“completed saying” linguistic structure], is experienced differently by the Blackfoot speaker than it is in the linear Western past-present-future ensemble. We could even go so far as to assert that there is no encounter with “time” (as such) in Blackfoot world view and, therefore, disclaim any existence of tense in the language. (34)

Little Bear and Heavy Head conclude their article with the suggestion that Western languages—perhaps, we could suggest, as a reflection of a style of experience or a style of consciousness—seem to create obstacles for the incorporation (in Nietzsche’s sense) of the findings of contemporary physics. They do not put it this way, but we might say we remain stuck in a Newtonian universe, even though our own science suggests that we live in a different reality. But, without the capacity to practice-and-realize such a reality, to run the experiment of incorporation, we don’t really know that reality. We may claim to know about it, or claim to speak about it. But we ourselves remain stuck, and the general epistemology of practice-realization suggests this marks a direct, even if unintentional admission of ignorance. This is just a part of why Gregory Bateson wrote a memorandum when he was a University of California Regent that claimed the UC education is (like most education in western culture) obsolete.

Again, this has to do with practice. We can try and work with a couple of examples that may give us a feel for how, by the standards of practice-realization, we live an outdated epistemology. First, let us say we make a photographic image in the old-school way, using non-digital media like film or a photographic plate. We can develop the plate or the film and produce what is called
a negative—not a print, but the developed medium that recorded the image. Once we have that negative, even if we don’t hold it up to a light source, we can often recognize an image. Once we hold it up to the light, the image may become even clearer. If we then cut the film or plate in half, we get only half the image in each piece. If I make an image of you, and we cut the image in half, we will see only half of you in each piece of the plate or film.

Making a hologram involves us in a very different process. First of all, consider the way holographic film looks: If we look at the photographic plate on which the image is held, we see diffraction patterns, not an image. It may look like nonsense to our ordinary eyes in the context of incoherent light. We may go so far as to say the totality is inconceivable to us. And, again, ordinary, incoherent light will not help, no matter how bright. We need to know how to know the image, and that requires a coherent light source, like a laser. Coherence made the image, and coherence reveals it.

If we cut the film or photographic plate in half, we get two pieces, and each piece contains the whole image. It is not two halves, but two wholes. If we make a hologram of an apple, and we look at the film plate, we would only see a diffraction pattern. It doesn’t look anything like an apple or even a “scrambled up” apple. If we shine a light through the plate, we get a 3-dimensional apple. If we cut the plate in half, and we shine a light through just that half, we still get a whole 3-dimensional apple.

Now, imagine that we could make a hologram of a place in Nature, maybe one with a broad view in the background. Just after we make that image, a beautiful butterfly lands on a tree branch
near enough to the camera that we could easily see it in the image, and we decide to make another image. If these were ordinary photographs, we would think that just one part of the image had changed, namely the place where the butterfly is. But looking at the diffraction patterns of the two images, they are totally different. We know that if we take the image with the butterfly and cut it in half, each half contains the whole image. We could cut that half in half, and again the whole image would be there. Thus, the little butterfly is in the whole image. The butterfly affected every aspect of the whole. The butterfly is interwoven into the whole.

Check your own intuitions. Does it seem like, in the practice of everyday life, you live as if the world functions like ordinary film, or like a hologram? If we are honest and rigorous about what it means to know and what we can claim to know on the basis of lived experience, it seems we have such a limiting and limited view that we don’t truly wonderstand that the presence (or absence) of the butterfly changes everything. We tend to live and think as if the world were like an ordinary photograph. Such a view has certainly received intellectual criticism—and how could it not if things don’t seem to actually be that way? For instance, Rorty’s Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature could have been called Philosophy and the Photographic Image of Nature. Even though some people may agree with some, much, or even all of the spirit or substance of Rorty’s critique, we still practice and realize a representational theory of mind and a correspondence theory of truth. In practical terms, we live in a photograph, not in a living ecological hologram (an ecogram?). In most cases, we live as if we make an image “in the brain,” and we then check to see how well the image matches up to reality. We certainly like to pretend this isn’t the case, and, to say it again, we may make all sorts of intellectual criticisms about it, as we do with theories of language and other things based on such a feel for life. But we
miss that this is a feel for life, a style of mind that no amount of intellectual critique seems likely to uproot. Functionally, we behave as if we have a brain that receives “data” from the “outside” “world,” and we hide behind our own skin, not aware that the outside world really does come alive “in” us. We are hooked by an “image,” an image that itself embodies distance rather than intimacy, and one that thus keeps us outside of the symbolic/religious/spiritual/philosophical life we need, a life of vitalizing imagination, which does not mean mere fancy or whimsy but the visionary capacity of intelligence. An image in the proper sense is not restrained to the “visual”.

Returning to the hologram, we could imagine making a holographic movie. In such a case, we would understand the whole pattern shifts moment to moment, even if something small comes in from outside of the frame. A single leaf falling in the scene would transform the entire seen at once. Every rustle of wind, every shift of light would change the whole scene. And if we could see the living hologram of that scene, see it without having to resort to a hologram but instead to somehow touch the intimacy of the living interwovenness of things, see it in ceaseless transformation as everything moves, growths, shifts, thinks its way into being, then we ourselves would become liberated into that fuller ecology of mind.

In our own lives, we make barriers with the mind. We block our capacity to sense this living interwovenness. We make barriers against sensing, barriers against reality, barriers against interwovenness, barriers between ourselves and the nonduality of unity and diversity, self and other. The butterfly has its own life, and yet it cannot have its own life without its interwovenness, without your life and my life. The butterfly cannot exist without trees, wind, grass, sun, moon, river, human. Job had to learn this lesson as well: We can’t manipulate the
World, and even the Divine finds the World startling and wondrous, and the Divine seems to imply that Job could learn a lot by simply wondering at Creation, studying and learning from the sentient beings inhabiting it with great natural perfection.

In a similar manner, it seems that you exist “over there,” which for you is “here”. I exist “here,” but it is your “there”. If we could sit at a table together and enjoy some tea, I could ask, “Where am I?” You would naturally point at me and say, “You are there.” But, in fact, I am located at your “here,” and you would do better to point at yourself, saying, “You are here.” You might do even better and just laugh at the question. Our cognitive science indicates that we show up for each other in the intimacy of awareness, in a nonlocal way. But our localized epistemology, the one we naïvely practice and realize, gives us a world of parts, times, and barriers. By means of practices of Liminal Awareness, by means of the cultivation of Arts of Awareness, we can escape this sort of obsolete thinking, liberating ourselves into a sense of health and wholeness that goes beyond any mindless assertion that “we are all one”.

Nevertheless, there is a not-two-not-one that seems important to practice-realize, and which allows us to correct an error. Recall that Bateson somehow sees the loss of a sense of unity, a loss of an aesthetic and sacred sensibility, as an epistemological mistake. A wide range of experiences seem to trigger a self-healing process with respect to this wound of twoness, of distance, of subject-object/self-world/Culture-Nature/Mind-Nature/profane-sacred split.

Through these sorts of considerations, we try to get at the stuckness of our habitual way of knowing. Everything we try to do to “fix” the problems of the world or of our own soul will
come up against this epistemological mistake. In a non-local epistemology, we realize we cannot “locate” “myself” “someplace”. Again, we can try to evoke a sense of this, and some vague sense of an alternative. Let’s say we see a photograph of ourselves, a portrait for instance, of our head and shoulders. If someone asks us, “Who is that?” We would naturally say, “That’s me.” But does this really hold up? Thought experiments about brains in vats aside, if we cut you off at the shoulders, you won’t likely function. You won’t still be you. Worse yet, of course, the photo is just the surface of you, as is an image in a mirror—which makes it puzzling that we think of a mirror as a test of self-awareness which we then apply to non-human beings to see if they are as clever as we. Why do we think we are what we look like, or that we are what we see in a mirror?

We have discovered that the microbiome influences mood, appetite, and weight. The microbiome has been connected to depression, autism, and the performance of elite athletes. It is not “I” who wins the race, but an ecology. “My” “mood” seems like mine. But if the microbiome constitutes it, what shall we make of it? If we could “zoom in” on ourselves to examine our lung capacity and the strength of our diaphragm, the composition of our microbiome, the epigenetic state of our cells, we would see all sorts of things that clearly constitute our experience. Can we locate ourselves in any of them?

If we “zoom out,” our body would appear again. As we keep zooming out, we would see the room, the air and lighting which constitute our experience—no air, no experience reportable in this realm. We zoom out further to see the Earth, with sky and oceans. We get increasingly inclusive.
When someone looks at us up close, they may only see our eyes. If they could only see our eyes, that would be all they could point to in order to locate us. Would they be correct? Are we “in there”? They might magically make our eyes vanish, but we could still carry on. We are not in the eyes. If they back up, they see our whole body. That’s more of us. But, they might magically take certain parts of it without thereby disrupting us catastrophically. Meanwhile, we have just been looking out, so to speak. Perhaps we were looking up at the sky. Perhaps we were looking at the Sun for a moment, just glimpsing it. At such a moment, are we the Earth looking outward, just as on a different scale we are something looking out of eyes that are themselves composite, made up of millions and millions of living cells? If a person could stand on the Sun and look back, the Earth would be like our body, with an “awareness” somewhere “in there” looking out. They would point and think, “My friend is there.” If they magically made the atmosphere of the Earth vanish, we would be done for. If they made the Sun vanish, we would be done for. Those things seem much more intimately us, in that sense of a deep, deep interdependence.

In order to have experience, we need air, water, Sun, soil. As we include more, we include what is quite essential. Wiping out the microbiome would have all sorts of negative consequences, but wiping out the ecology ruins us. Yet we so easily forget that somehow or other, we are the ecology. There is an undivided wholeness, one that both Bateson and Bohm seem to think we need to realize in order to correct our way of knowing.

Little Bear and Heavy Head agree. They cite Bohm and note that his view and the Blackfoot view arise from a sense of reality as “an unfragmented, unbounded whole,” and that “theoretical
discussions between cultures” might ease some of the problems we face. But this is not another mindless praise of “wholeness”. We have to think our way into knowing better.

As Bateson suggested (and Nietzsche would applaud), it somehow has to get into our instincts. If we know that our water comes from a well, and someone is about to poison it, we may feel that keenly, one might say at an instinctive level. We realize, perhaps intimately, that we depend on that well, that our experience goes altogether with whatever is going on deep in the ground “over there” (we should pause just there: Our experience arises dependent upon what goes on deep underground . . . how foolish to go carelessly digging things up . . .). Somehow we can realize our interwovenness with that water, because it feels intimate. But we are such linear thinkers, by practice, that we forget all the time. We habitually try to localize ourselves, and we thus cover over a nonlocal reality.

Imagine that we could zoom out of the Earth and look at it, and that we could say, “That’s me! That’s us!” Even then, it is part of us. We need to keep zooming out. As far as someone goes outward, our awareness remains at the center of the picture. We aren’t a “thing,” but neither is the rest of it. It’s all relational. Every “thing” we see is constituted by what isn’t there. The microbiome depends on the Sun as much as “I” do.

The inability to find something non-relational, the inability to find something that will persist through observation, becomes the realization of what we are.

The scientist says, “I’m going to do science.”
The philosopher asks, “Who is?”

“I am.”

“Who are you?” asks the philosopher.

Why such a question? Because, how can we do “science” if we don’t know who is doing it—and therefore what this “science” even is or needs to be? Next thing we know, we will begin running experiments on ourselves—but without realizing it.

That indeed has happened. We are the guinea pigs, the rats in a self-made cage that we think we rather fancy, because we call it “civilization” and “technology”. The experiment we are running, or a few aspects of it: What is it like to increase toxicity in the body, what is it like to drink degraded water, what is it like to breathe degraded air, what is it like to live in degraded ecologies? We think we are running an experiment “here,” in the lab, but the experiment happens in a nonlocal Cosmos, and thus comes altogether with a way of life, with a way of practicing and realizing how to cultivate life onward, and thus goes everywhere and comes right back, not to the “here” of the experiment, but the “here” of the body and mind, the heart and soul of the experimenter. It is not like someone sitting on a branch, sawing off the branch. It is the tree cutting itself down, not knowing it is a tree. We breathe the air of the experiments. We may admit we have to breathe the air, but this still localizes ourselves.

How will I allow myself to be in you, and how will allow you to be in me? This is a central question in nonlocal epistemology—not some naïve question of, “What do I know?” but, “How am I with, for, as you? How do I let relationships constitute me and the World? How do I
presence the mystery? How will I be lived by sacred powers and inconceivable causes that fools may pretend to understand?”

These are pragmatic questions, because they are spiritual. They can only be scientific by being spiritual, by connecting to meaning and emotional or spiritual energy. It’s very concrete: How will we show up in the forest, and how will we let the forest show up in us? How do we allow ourselves to show up in those we love, in those we don’t love, in those to whom we are indifferent? In part, a nonlocal epistemology reveals that a localized way of knowing is just too stupid to answer certain kinds of questions, and too dull to recognize the intelligence, the mind that “surrounds” it on all sides. We can think here beyond Frans de Waal’s valuable question, “Are we smart enough to know how smart animals are?” Are we intelligent enough to recognize how much intelligence surrounds us? We don’t know very much about what intelligence is and how it operates—or else we wouldn’t have put the conditions of life at risk, wouldn’t have degraded our own surrounding intelligence as we have. The problem seems to relate to a localized epistemology that doesn’t get at the interwovenness of things—a way of knowing, a way of doing things reflected in and perpetuated by our manner of thinking, speaking, and moving.

Again, if you look at me, you think I show up “outside” of you. You point to me and say, “You are over there.” But I actually show up for you “in there,” “in” “you”. And there is no “me” showing up “in here,” inside of what I might call “me,” otherwise there would be an “object” “here” where there is only a luminous and knowing spaciousness, a spaciousness that always has room for you to appear, along with the forest, the sky, the moon, the stars. The whole World
shows up HERE, and it need not do so with or as the habit, the practice-realization of a reified subject-object duality. I show up for the trees, and the trees show up for me, intimately and immediately, in an altogetherness and interwovenness, we know each other, even if what I call my conscious mind lacks access to this knowing. The trees show up in my lungs, in my bones and flesh. I open my eyes, and: “Tree!” I don’t have to “do” anything. Tree shows up, verifying the Self I really am when I have forgotten (not merely lost) the self I think I know, and simply let Tree appear. Tree shows up HERE, NOW, though, from one perspective, seeming to be “over there”. If I walk over to touch the tree, once I get there, only part of the tree appears—speaking quite relatively. By the time I touch the tree, even though I touch the whole Cosmos, relatively speaking I touch a part. The whole tree shows up, filling the Cosmos, but I touch only part of it if I forget this, remembering the self instead.

Tree exists in a state of grace, never trying to be what it isn’t. But we try to be what we are not: Something localized, something with a face other than the Face of the Divine, the Face of the Mystery. That’s probably too poetic for some of us, but, then, what are we trying to be at moments when the poetic or the mystical sound too poetic or mystical?

Nondual knowing stops trying to “know the world,” because, so to speak, first we must know ourselves. We go around trying to “know” the world, but we don’t know the knower. When we begin to find “problems” in the world, we must STOP. Evidently what we do creates problems. Is that because we show up for the World as a problem? The World has no “conscious purposes,” and so it never intends to show up for us as a problem. Only when we practice the knowing and doing that go together with conscious purposes do we find problems.
Let us just once more consider this strange possibility: Could each of us point at the Earth (as opposed to “the organism,” or our body, our head, or some other part) and say, “That’s me! That’s us!” Could we say that of the World, of the Cosmos?

When Black Elk shared his vision, he described a series of ascensions, and a view of the Hoop of the Nation (what we might call the Sacred Circle of Beings). At one point he even becomes an eagle. Then he is riding a horse again:

And a Voice said: “All over the universe they have finished a day of happiness.” And looking down I saw that the whole wide circle of the day was beautiful and green, with all fruits growing and all things kind and happy.

Then a Voice said: Behold this day, for it is yours to make. Now you shall stand upon the center of the earth to see, for there they are taking you.”

I was still on my bay horse, and once more I felt the riders of the west, the north, the east, the south, behind me in formation, as before, and we were going east. I looked ahead and saw the mountains there with rocks and forests on them, and from the mountains flashed all colors upward to the heavens. Then I was standing on the highest mountain of them all, and round about beneath me was the whole hoop of the world. And while I stood there I saw more than I can tell and I understood more than I saw; for I was seeing in a sacred manner the shapes of all things in the spirit, and the shape of all shapes as they must live together like one being. And I saw that the sacred hoop of my people was one of many hoops that made one circle, wide as daylight and as starlight, and in the center grew one mighty flowering tree to shelter all the children of one mother and one father. And I saw that it was holy. (33)

Oddly enough, something vaguely similar can happen in the case of space travel—perhaps the closest thing a “scientific” culture, a conquest consciousness, can get to a Shamanic Journey or Vision Quest. The journey to space, the home leaving, the rupture out of ordinary context, seems to be extreme enough to shake one at least a little out of the habits of fragmentation, distance, reason, and analysis. Our epistemology could be characterized as an epistemology of transcendence, or self-transcendence. Perhaps it should not surprise us then that an experience of
self-transcendence precipitated by space flight could trigger a shift out of conquest consciousness. Yaden et al. (2016) wrote a study of self-transcendent experiences in space flight, noting that, “Viewing the Earth from space has often prompted astronauts to report overwhelming emotion and feelings of identification with humankind and the planet as a whole” (1). This is the experience we tried to consider earlier, the notion that someone could point, not to our “body” or to us as “an organism,” but could point to the Earth, and we might experience that as “me”—perhaps with the ordinary sense of me-ness, the habit of ego, dropped away. The authors write,

The overview effect, as the experience is called, refers to a profound reaction to viewing the earth from outside its atmosphere White (1987). A number of astronauts have attributed deep feelings of awe and even self-transcendence to this experience (e.g., Linenger, 2000; Mitchell &Williams, 1996; White, 1987). Astronaut Edgar Mitchell described it as an “explosion of awareness” (White, 1987, p. 38) and an “overwhelming sense of oneness and connectedness . . . accompanied by an ecstasy . . . an epiphany” (Hunt, 2015, p. 73). White contends that the overview effect refers more generally to the experience of viewing common landscapes from far above, such as from a mountaintop, though the view of Earth from space provides the quintessential version of this experience (White, 1987, p. 1).

Astronauts attribute short- and long-term emotional benefits to these experiences (White, 1987; Stuster, 2010), but the scientific community has only recently begun to take a serious interest in these effects. (2)

They offer a sampling of astronaut experiences:

It’s hard to explain how amazing and magical this experience is. First of all, there’s the astounding beauty and diversity of the planet itself, scrolling across your view at what appears to be a smooth, stately pace . . .

I’m happy to report that no amount of prior study or training can fully prepare anybody for the awe and wonder this inspires. (NASA Astronaut Kathryn D., as cited in Robinson et al., 2013, p. 81)

I had another feeling, that the earth is like a vibrant living thing. The vessels we’ve clearly seen on it looked like the blood and veins of human beings. I said to myself: this is the place we live, it’s really magical. (Chinese Space Program Astronaut Yang Liu, as cited in Chen, 2012, p. 288)
If somebody’d said before the flight, “Are you going to get carried away looking at the earth from the moon?” I would have said [sic], “No, no way.” But yet when I first looked back at the earth, standing on the moon, I cried. (NASA Astronaut Alan Shepard, as cited in Nardo, 2014, p. 46)

You . . . say to yourself, ‘That’s humanity, love, feeling, and thought.’ You don’t see the barriers of color and religion and politics that divide this world.” (NASA Astronaut Gene Cernan, as cited in White, 1987, p. 37)

You identify with Houston and then you identify with Los Angeles and Phoenix and New Orleans . . . and that whole process of what it is you identify with begins to shift when you go around the Earth . . . you look down and see the surface of that globe you’ve lived on all this time, and you know all those people down there and they are like you, they are you—and somehow you represent them. You are up there as the sensing element, that point out on the end . . . you recognize that you’re a piece of this total life. (NASA Astronaut Rusty Schweikart, as cited in White, 1987, p. 12)

Before I flew I was already aware how small and vulnerable our planet is; but only when I saw it from space, in all its ineffable beauty and fragility, did I realize that humankind’s most urgent task is to cherish and preserve it for future generations. (German Cosmonaut Sigmund Jahn, as cited in Hassard & Weisberg, 1999, p. 40)

The feeling of unity is not simply an observation. With it comes a strong sense of compassion and concern for the state of our planet and the effect humans are having on it. It isn’t important in which sea or lake you observe a slick of pollution or in the forests of which country a fire breaks out, or on which continent a hurricane arises. You are standing guard over the whole of our Earth. (Russian Cosmonaut Yuri Artyushkin, as cited in Jaffe, 2011, p. 9)

From space I saw Earth—indescribably beautiful with the scars of national boundaries gone. (Syrian Astronaut Muhammad Ahmad Faris, as cited in Hassard & Weisberg, 1999, p. 1)

You’ve seen pictures and you’ve heard people talk about it. But nothing can prepare you for what it actually looks like. The Earth is dramatically beautiful when you see it from orbit, more beautiful than any picture you’ve ever seen. It’s an emotional experience because you’re removed from the Earth but at the same time you feel this incredible connection to the Earth like nothing I’d ever felt before. (NASA Astronaut Sam Durrance, as cited in Redfern, 1996, p. 1)

During a space flight, the psyche of each astronaut is re-shaped; having seen the sun, the stars and our planet, you become more full of life, softer. You begin to look at all living things with greater trepidation and you begin to be more kind and patient with the people around you. (3-4, 6)
These passages should bring to mind Rumi’s, “This is certainly not like we thought it was!” I think it can be all-too-easy to read this as “merely poetic” musings after a really cool experience. We should at the very least hold tenderly, in ongoing re-membering, such phrases as, “no amount of prior study or training can fully prepare anybody for the awe and wonder this inspires,” “you feel this incredible connection to the Earth like nothing I’d ever felt before,” “During a space flight, the psyche of each astronaut is re-shaped,” “the earth is like a vibrant living thing,” and, perhaps most of all, “The feeling of unity is not simply an observation.” Not simply an observation, but something that can shift one’s way of life, and even prompt a search for other ways of knowing, as in the case of Edgar Mitchell, who, though scientifically trained, founded the Institute of Noetic Sciences (IONS), which has done important and rigorous work to document so-called “para-normal” phenomena, other ways of knowing. Publications done at IONS have appeared in peer-reviewed academic journals—research which I think a good number of philosophers would find dubious, but which they also likely know little about—and thus do not realize that it exceeds the standards of most published science.

Again, I think that we have a tendency to dismiss these sorts of experiences, in part because of the kinds of fallacies Dewey, James, Nietzsche, and other philosophers tried to get us to face. James certainly comes to mind, because of his cogent critique of what he termed “medical materialism”:

Perhaps the commonest expression of this assumption that spiritual value is undone if lowly origin be asserted is seen in those comments which unsentimental people so often pass on their more sentimental acquaintances. Alfred believes in immortality so strongly because his temperament is so emotional. Fanny’s extraordinary conscientiousness is merely a matter of over-instigated nerves. William’s melancholy about the universe is due to bad digestion — probably his liver is torpid. Eliza’s delight in her church is a symptom of her
hysterical constitution. Peter would be less troubled about his soul if he would take more exercise in the open air, etc.

A more fully developed example of the same kind of reasoning is the fashion, quite common nowadays among certain writers, of criticising the religious emotions by showing a connection between them and the sexual life. Conversion is a crisis of puberty and adolescence. The macerations of saints, and the devotion of missionaries, are only instances of the parental instinct of self-sacrifice gone astray. For the hysterical nun, starving for natural life, Christ is but an imaginary substitute for a more earthly object of affection. And the like.

We are surely all familiar in a general way with this method of discrediting states of mind for which we have an antipathy. We all use it to some degree in criticizing persons whose states of mind we regard as overstrained. But when other people criticise our own more exalted soul-flights by calling them ‘nothing but’ expressions of our organic disposition, we feel outraged and hurt, for we know that, whatever be our organism’s peculiarities, our mental states have their substantive value as revelations of the living truth; and we wish that all this medical materialism could be made to hold its tongue.

Medical materialism seems indeed a good appellation for the too simple-minded system of thought which we are considering. Medical materialism finishes up Saint Paul by calling his vision on the road to Damascus a discharging lesion of the occipital cortex, he being an epileptic. It snuffs out Saint Teresa as an hysteric, Saint Francis of Assisi as an hereditary degenerate. George Fox’s discontent with the shams of his age, and his pining for spiritual veracity, it treats as a symptom of a disordered colon. Carlyle’s organ-tones of misery it accounts for by a gastro-duodenal catarrh. All such mental over-tensions, it says, are, when you come to the bottom of the matter, mere affairs of diathesis (auto-intoxications most probably), due to the perverted action of various glands which physiology will yet discover.

And medical materialism then thinks that the spiritual authority of all such personages is successfully undermined.

Let us ourselves look at the matter in the largest possible way. Modern psychology, finding definite psycho-physical connections to hold good, assumes as a convenient hypothesis that the dependence of mental states upon bodily conditions must be thorough-going and complete. If we adopt the assumption, then of course what medical materialism insists on must be true in a general way, if not in every detail: Saint Paul certainly had once an epileptoid, if not an epileptic seizure; George Fox was an hereditary degenerate; Carlyle was undoubtedly auto-intoxicated by some organ or other, no matter which, — and the rest. But now, I ask you, how can such an existential account of facts of mental history decide in one way or another upon their spiritual significance? According to the general postulate of psychology just referred to, there is not a single one of our states of mind, high or low, healthy or morbid, that has not some organic process as its condition.

Scientific theories are organically conditioned just as much as religious emotions are; and if we only knew the facts intimately enough, we should doubtless see ‘the liver’ determining the dicta of the sturdy atheist as decisively as
it does those of the Methodist under conviction anxious about his soul. When it alters in one way the blood that percolates it, we get the Methodist, when in another way, we get the atheist form of mind. So of all our raptures, and our drynesses, our longings and pantings, our questions and beliefs. They are equally organically founded, be they of religious or of non-religious content.

To plead the organic causation of a religious state of mind, then, in refutation of its claim to possess superior spiritual value, is quite illogical and arbitrary, unless one have already worked out in advance some psycho-physical theory connecting spiritual values in general with determinate sorts of physiological change. Otherwise none of our thoughts and feelings, not even our scientific doctrines, not even our dis-beliefs, could retain any value as revelations of the truth, for every one of them without exception flows from the state of their possessor’s body at the time.

It is needless to say that medical materialism draws in point of fact no such sweeping skeptical conclusion. It is sure, just as every simple man is sure, that some states of mind are inwardly superior to others, and reveal to us more truth, and in this it simply makes use of an ordinary spiritual judgment. It has no physiological theory of the production of these its favorite states, by which it may accredit them; and its attempt to discredit the states which it dislikes, by vaguely associating them with nerves and liver, and connecting them with names connoting bodily affliction, is altogether illogical and inconsistent.

Let us play fair in this whole matter, and be quite candid with ourselves and with the facts. When we think certain states of mind superior to others, is it ever because of what we know concerning their organic antecedents? No! it is always for two entirely different reasons. It is either because we take an immediate delight in them; or else it is because we believe them to bring us good consequential fruits for life.

When we speak disparagingly of ‘feverish fancies,’ surely the fever-process as such is not the ground of our disesteem — for aught we know to the contrary, 103 degrees or 104 degrees Fahrenheit might be a much more favorable temperature for truths to germinate and sprout in, than the more ordinary blood-heat of 97 or 98 degrees. It is either the disagreeableness itself of the fancies, or their inability to bear the criticisms of the convalescent hour.

When we praise the thoughts which health brings, health’s peculiar chemical metabolisms have nothing to do with determining our judgment. We know in fact almost nothing about these metabolisms. It is the character of inner happiness in the thoughts which stamps them as good, or else their consistency with our other opinions and their serviceability for our needs, which make them pass for true in our esteem.

Now the more intrinsic and the more remote of these criteria do not always hang together. Inner happiness and serviceability do not always agree. What immediately feels most ‘good’ is not always most ‘true,’ when measured by the verdict of the rest of experience. The difference between Philip drunk and Philip sober is the classic instance in corroboration. If merely ‘feeling good’ could decide, drunkenness would be the supremely valid human experience. But its revelations, however acutely satisfying at the moment, are inserted into an
environment which refuses to bear them out for any length of time. The consequence of this discrepancy of the two criteria is the uncertainty which still prevails over so many of our spiritual judgments. There are moments of sentimental and mystical experience — we shall hereafter hear much of them — that carry an enormous sense of inner authority and illumination with them when they come. But they come seldom, and they do not come to every one; and the rest of life makes either no connection with them, or tends to contradict them more than it confirms them. Some persons follow more the voice of the moment in these cases, some prefer to be guided by the average results. Hence the sad discordancy of so many of the spiritual judgments of human beings; a discordancy which will be brought home to us acutely enough before these lectures end. (23-5)

Because of our whole way of life and our style of thinking—and because of the demands of an epistemology of practice-realization—we cannot help keeping certain data at a distance. We hear about visions, conversions, ecstasies, and so on that we cannot help thinking about as neurological events that don’t correspond to any clearer, truer, and/or more subtle reality, despite the fact that the so-called noetic quality of these experiences gives them a feeling of greater reality than the one the medical materialist (usually an atheist) takes as real—another fact the materialist readily attempts to dismiss. Nevertheless, as one group of researchers summarized their findings:

Religious, spiritual, and mystical experiences (RSMEs) are often described as having a noetic quality, or the compelling sense that the experience feels “real.” In this exploratory, multimethod study, 701 participants completed questions about the subjective qualities of their RMSEs, reported the impact of their RSMEs on various life domains, and provided written descriptions of their experiences for quantitative linguistic analysis. The majority of participants (69%) reported that their RSMEs felt “more real than their usual sense of reality.” This quality of realness was associated with positive self-reported impacts on family life ($r = .16$), health ($r = .22$), sense of purpose ($r = .29$), spirituality ($r = .30$), and reduced fear of death ($r = .24$). Participants who reported experiences as feeling more real used more language referring to connection, a greater whole, and certainty (“love,” “all,” “and,” “everything”) and fewer first-person pronouns, cognitive processes, and tentativeness (“I,” “me,” “think,” “probably”). (Yaden et al. 2017: 54)

We can suggest here again that maybe our style of consciousness and our way of knowing is a symptom, and that we would better call that style of consciousness the thing that needs healing,
as evidenced by its effects in the world. While we might think of “mystical experiences” as “beyond the limit” in philosophy, perhaps we should consider at least some of them as the necessary medicine for the kind of philosophizing we ordinarily do in the academy and in our everyday lives when we live under the influence of a conquest style of consciousness. Perhaps some kinds of knowing only come from, not fevers or “drugs,” but rather from practices of Nature-Culture, such as meditation and simply spending time in Nature, developing an intimate relationship with Nature, one we cannot get from books or lectures. They may also come from certain kinds of traditional Shamanic practices, including the use of holotropic medicines (sometimes referred to as “psychedelics”).

Let us consider an artefact from Strassman’s careful scientific inquiry into DMT experience, keeping in mind that a brain flooded with DMT may be, as James put it, “much more favorable for truths to germinate and sprout in” than our habitually practiced-and-realized brain. Strassman describes one non-white participant, called Carlos, as expressing skepticism that the “white man’s medicine” would offer much (which actually makes sense: even though DMT is integral to Indigenous Medicine, a laboratory setting turns it into “white man’s medicine”). However, Carlos had a rather intense experience at the high dose of .4mg/kg. After this dose, in the course of recording the experience, Strassman said to Carlos, “One of our volunteers likes to say ‘You can still be an atheist until 0.4.’” To which Carlos replied, “This is true” (230). What is our atheism if it gets overturned by a little DMT? And what is our atheism if we try and hold onto it,
either by avoiding certain experiences or by clinging to it despite evidence of other kinds of reality?\textsuperscript{104}

The fuller documentation of his experience is worth considering. After this higher dose, Carlos refers to himself in the third-person as he describes what happened, thus indicating a powerful decentralization of the ego. The shift from geo-centric to helio-centric is less profound than the shift from ego-centric to holo-centric (almost anagrams in both cases, a re-ordering, a New Cosmos). The degree of realization we see here cannot be determined, because one would have to see it in living practice, in ongoing practice-realization, but I have added emphasis where a different way of knowing is directly mentioned:

At 12 minutes he said,  
\textit{Please remove my eyeshades.}  
Laura did so.  
\textit{It was really quite special. I wasn’t human for about three and a half minutes.}  
\textit{This dose creates a level of stress that’s unparalleled in the annals of Carlos’s history.}  
He cleared his throat and said,  
\textit{I met myself as the Creator.}  
“Creator of . . . ?”  
\textit{The Creator of all. I’ve had that realization before, but not at this level.}  
“One of our volunteers likes to say ‘You can still be an atheist until 0.4.’”  
\textit{This is true.}  
Carlos took a deep breath and began telling us what had happened. It was difficult to keep up with his rate of sharing his incredible story.  
\textit{There was the sound of the entire universe, more like a hum. It was pervasive, overwhelming. I thought, “Holy moly, how did I get into this?” Things weren’t right and were getting more wrong all the time. Then my ability to perceive as a}

\textsuperscript{104}More recently, Griffiths et al. (2019) examined a large group of people who had undergone a mystical experience: n = 809 Non-Drug, 1184 psilocybin, 1251 lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD), 435 ayahuasca, and 606 N,N-dimethyltryptamine (DMT). They found that, whether the experience was spontaneous or facilitated by a plant teacher, “More than two thirds of those who identified as atheist before the experience no longer identified as atheist afterwards. These experiences were rated as among the most personally meaningful and spiritually significant lifetime experiences, with moderate to strong persisting positive changes in life satisfaction, purpose, and meaning attributed to these experiences.”
human being winked out. There were no more emotions, because emotions work only up to a certain point.

I saw a man lying in a hospital room. He was naked with a person on either side of him, one female and one male. At first they didn’t look like anybody I knew. They were perfect generic human beings. I recognized, in context, that they were me, you, and Laura. The way of knowing was totally different from this reality. I didn’t know I was in a study of any kind.

There was something wrong with him. He was there to get better. The hospital was a healing center. What was wrong with him was death. The naked person was dead. What killed the person was the stress from the DMT. None of my guardians or protectors made an appearance. They were out of the loop.

He was healed, more than healed. He was reborn. He got cured from death, healed from death. And then he became the creator of a whole universe.

I gradually became more and more solid and moved toward my everyday presence. I watched the universe’s creation down from fundamental mental energy to a vibratory rate to material things. I realized I was recreating the hospital and the room. As the world jelled more and more, I wanted to see it and asked to have the eyeshades taken off. I became fascinated with my fingers, like a newborn.

I’ve taught classes on how the universe is a construct of your own mind. And here it was happening. My attitude was different when I knew you were my creations. I felt as close to you as to my own son and daughter.

I would have to say my experience was a classical death/rebirth experience. I had done it before, but never in the same way as with DMT. It was spectacular in imagery, texture, and atmosphere and had incredible lighting and effects. Boil it down and it’s very, very classic.

The 0.2 was harrowing—this was way beyond. I knew the boundary beyond life existed. I never thought I’d be there, though, at such an early age. It’s one of those things that old men talk about, like “once I got there.” It’s just the wrong place and time. I expect these sorts of things in the mountains with my friends in a more ceremonial setting. (230-1)

The lack of ceremonial setting puts a demand on the soul to supply missing context—which it always has the capacity to do, however in general this will have a more limited value in terms of depth and persistence of realization. But, again, the question here has to do with what we think happened, and what we habitually hold onto that experiences like this might get us to let go of.
In an interview, Aldous Huxley was asked about the value of psychedelics and the heightened perception they facilitate. The interviewer asked if “imaginative writers” would benefit from it.

Huxley replied:

Well I think the people who would benefit most of all are professors. I think it would be extremely good for almost anybody with fixed ideas and with a great certainty about what’s what to take this thing and to realize that the world he has constructed is by no means the only world, that there are these extraordinary other types of universe which we may inhabit and which we should be very grateful for inhabiting I think.105

Other types of worlds, accessible only by means of other ways of knowing. This should give us pause.

Another of Strassman’s participants had this exchange with him:

“How do you feel about the third dose?”
You should patent it. I guess it’s too late for that. If I could only hold onto this feeling. If everybody did this every day the world would be a much better place. Life would be a lot better. The potential for good is so great. Feeling good within yourself. I guess meditation is supposed to get you to the same place.
“I’m not sure that’s possible.”
Me neither.
Ten minutes into her third dose, Cassandra started smiling. Just then, there also was a horrible coughing out in the hall.
I can still feel it. I hold all this stuff, the shit, in the left side of my abdomen. I got the message this time to let go of all that. lean still feel the relaxation. It’s warm and tingly.
This seemed like an opening. If she retreated or attacked in response to my next few comments, I’d leave well enough alone. However, she seemed to be asking for some help.
“What do you hold on to?”
The pain.
“What pain?”
I guess all the pain.
She began crying.
I guess all the pain I ever felt.
“There’s a lot there?”
Yeah.

105 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l6xp0XxVvOk
She began crying more heavily.
“It’s okay to feel it, and cry, and to let it go, too.”
That’s the good part, to let go of it.
At 15 minutes she sighed,
I feel like I have a new body. It’s so much more aware.
“It is yours.”
She laughed dryly, then began crying more deeply.
These aren’t sad tears, they are tears of enlightenment.
“It doesn’t matter.”
I felt her bristle as she said,
Yes it does.
Reflecting back to her even more closely, I offered, “I guess they are a cleansing sort of tears.”
Yes. I’ll be a guru after this morning. You know how everyone’s quest is to find the meaning or the purpose of life? Well, it’s to feel this way. Life doesn’t cut it normally.
“What do you mean?”
Everything about life. It’s not very empowering. You aren’t taught to focus on yourself. To realize the strength you have in yourself. Life throws you into the victim role. I know that’s a trite expression, but I think it’s true. Things do happen when you’re out of control with your life. These DMT experiences are like the height of meditation, accessing inner power and inner strength. You know that question in your rating scale about “higher power or God”? Well, I’m uncomfortable with that idea because it implies outside, but I do contact something deeper and more inside. This session was more combined, in terms of the presences joining me and me being the focus of it more. The first trip was just me, and the second trip was more the presences; this was a combination.
“How do you feel about the fourth dose coming up?”
It’ll be the best, it’ll be even better. I am going deeper and deeper through these layers.
Immediately after giving Cassandra her last dose, people began talking loudly outside the door. At 6 minutes we heard a huge crash. Five minutes later she said,
I feel very loved.
“That’s a nice feeling.”
Yes, warm.
She looked sad and tapped the fingers of her right hand against the bed.
I’m feeling a lot.
There was a horrible sound outside the door, someone drilling in screws. I thought about how incredible it was that our volunteers could disregard all the chaos of a hospital ward and still have such profound experiences. Cassandra lifted the eyeshades but kept her eyes closed. Then she opened her eyes half-mast, gazing straight ahead. She looked up at the ceiling and began crying again.
“What are you feeling?”
Everything will be okay. I don’t need to worry about all my doubts. Things like “Where will I go? What will I do?” It’s reassuring.
“An optimistic feeling?”
Yes, it’s very refreshing. It feels like there are thousands and thousands of separate parts of me and this drug brings them all together. It feels very complete.

“You said you felt loved.”

It was a feeling in my chest. It was warm. My whole chest felt inflated. It was a really good feeling. I was loved by the entities or whatever they are. It was very pleasant and comforting.

Cassandra and I spoke a few weeks later by phone.

She said, “There have been profound physical changes, very beneficial ones. It feels as if I got my stomach back. Now for the first time in years I’m able to breathe deep into my stomach. I’m more optimistic. That’s worn off a little bit by now, but not extremely. I can remember the optimism in meditation. It’s like having the deepest possible tissue massage. On the third trip I was really able to let go. I guess I was hurt in there when I was raped. That’s where I hide things and protect myself, constantly clenching them. Years of keeping those feelings tightly kept in my abdomen. I feel a lot freer.

“DMT is far better than any therapy ever was for me. All therapy reminds me of is how bad things were and are. On DMT I saw and felt myself as a good person, as loved by the DMT elves.”

I asked, “Elves?”

“There was a sense of many visitors. They were jovial, and they had a great time giving me the experience of being loved. With each dose there was more and more of a fulfilling safe and comfortable familiar feeling.

“It would be great to do DMT maybe once a year to put a perspective on things and see where I’m at and heal me. The freedom in my abdomen is still there. The clenching is back again a little bit, but on a more consistent basis I can remember that I was able to really clear it out. (171-3)

These “elves” seem to be a common factor in many DMT experiences. Philosophically, this seems almost astonishing. Why would people take a holotropic medicine and have similar experiences—of “elves”?

The profundity (even what we might call the improbability) of the DMT experience was perhaps best captured by Terrence McKenna, who said: “why this is not four-inch headlines on every newspaper on the planet, I cannot understand because, I don’t know what news you were waiting for, but this is the news that I was waiting for.” His fuller description is worthy of careful reflection:
I’ve been at this fairly steadily since 1964, and have tried to do everything with a certain level of attention and reverence . . .

In the course of sorting out as many peculiar and bizarre possibilities as life could offer me in many places my attitude was always critical. My attitude was always a “show me” attitude. I don’t believe in faith. I don’t believe in belief. My favorite gospel story is the story of the apostle Thomas, who was not present when Christ came the first time after the resurrection to the upper room. And then later Thomas came to the apostles and they said, “The master has been here,” and he said, “You guys have been smoking too much of that red leb.” . . . Thomas said, “Unless I put my hand into the wound, I will not believe it.” And then time passed, and then Christ came again to the upper room. And he said, “Thomas, come forward, put your hand into the wound.”

. . . My conclusion about this story is that alone among all humanity and all times and places, only one person every touched the incorporeal body of God. Thomas the doubter touched because he doubted. It was not necessary that the believers should be vouchsafed such a boon, but the doubter was awarded the supreme enlightenment.

Ok, so much for that. So my thing has always been—whether you present me with a diet, a social arrangement, a sexual conundrum, a work of art—my criterion is, “Is it shit, or is it Shinola?” I’m happy to give you the benefit of my personal life’s experience preceding along those lines. I want to talk about what to my mind is the quintessential hallucinogen, and consequently the quintessential spiritual and magical tool of this dimension. And that is DMT, dimethyltryptamine, a compound that occurs in the human nervous system. It occurs in many many plants. It is the commonest hallucinogen in all of nature. And I don’t know how you got to where you are this afternoon, but the way I got here is by testing and by hoping and by pursuing a magical—if that’s the word—a miraculous, transcendental ideal that, over the course of life, experience strips from you. You know, you have to get a job, your first love is not your last love, slowly this pristine shining belief in perfectibility is eroded by the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, you know, the dark oxen that turn the millstones of the world.

But I am here to tell you that it is real. There is a doorway into another dimension. Aladdin’s lamp is real. Fairyland is real. Magic is real—in the most real sense, in the same sense that what we call reality is real. And I learned this through this compound. And one of the great puzzles about this compound is why more people don’t know about it. . . .

So, DMT, like all things in this world, has a physical body, a presence and a presentation. In this case it looks rather like earwax. It is orange. It is crystalline. It smells vaguely of moth balls. And, for my money, it is the lapis, the quintessence—the universal panacea at the end of time has sent a reflection back
through the temporal labyrinth, and wherever this touches, wherever this concedes, the mystery is fully present.

So what is it, then? Well, it’s an experience, and I maintain it’s the most intense experience you can have this side of the yawning grave—without doubt. I mean, people say, “Is it dangerous?” Well, the answer is, “Only if you fear death by astonishment.” Yes, that’s a joke here. It’s not a joke there, because you find yourself literally holding your heart to verify that you have not, in fact, had a coronary thrombosis induced by wonder, terror, reverence, and astonishment. . . .

You’re at the center of a mountain or something. And you’re in a room which aficionados call ‘the dome’ and people will ask each other ‘did you see the dome? Were you there?’ It’s softly lit, indirectly lit, and the walls - if such they be - are crawling with geometric hallucinations: very brightly colored, very iridescent with deep sheens and very high reflective surfaces. Everything is machine-like and polished and throbbing with energy.

But that is not what immediately arrests my attention. What arrests my attention is the fact that this space is inhabited - that the immediate impression as you break into it, is there is a cheer. The gnomes have learned a new way to say “Hoooooo-----raaaaay!” You break in to this space and are immediately swarmed by squeaking, self-transforming elf-machines, these things which are made of light, and grammar, and sound that come chirping, and squealing, and tumbling toward you. And they say “Hooray! Welcome! You’re here!” . . . and my immediate impression, no matter how many times I do this—and I’ve done it maybe 30 or 40 times which isn’t a lot in a lifetime of worshipping it—my immediate impression is that they are welcoming. There is something going on which I over the years come to call LUV— L, U, V. Not “light utility vehicle,” but LUV that is not like Eros, or not like sexual attraction. I don’t know what it’s like exactly. It’s almost like a physical thing. It’s like a glue that pours out into this space. And my immediate impression in there is, I’m appalled. I’m appalled at how far I’ve come.

And one of the strange things about DMT is that it does not affect your mind in an ordinary sense, in that, you know, drugs they make you giggly, they frighten you, they stimulate you, they depress you. DMT does none of this. You go to that place with all your groceries. You’re there, and you’re there thinking, “Jesus H. fucking Christ, what is this? What is it?” And you’re thinking, “I must be dead, I’ve done it this time.” The psychedelic mantra: “I’ve done it this time. I must be dead.”

And meanwhile these things are literally in your face. And what they do is they jump into your chest and then they jump out again, and what they’re doing—and this is the point I think—what they’re doing is they are singing, chanting, speaking, in some kind of language that is very bizarre to hear. But what is far more important is that you can see it. They speak in a language which you see.
And this is completely confounding, because syntax is not something you ordinarily reach out and touch. And in this space that’s what happening. And so like jeweled self-dribbling basketballs, these things come running forward. And what they are doing with this visible language that they create, is they’re making gifts—they’re making gifts for you. And they will say [imitates alien language] which condenses as something which looks like a cross between a Sopwith Camel, a Havana cigar, a piece of abalone, an opal, and nookie, and they offer it to you.

And you’re looking at this thing, and as you look at it, it also transforms, changes, speaks, sings, undergoes metastasis, undergoes metamorphosis. And these things are just accumulating. And each elf-machine creature elbows others aside, says, “Look at this, look at this, take this, choose me!” And as you direct your attention into these things, you have the overwhelming conviction that if you could bring a single one of these objects back to this world, that somehow you wouldn’t have to say anything. You would just walk up to people and say, “Friend,” and people would say, “Oh my god! You got a piece of the action, the real action!”

This state of ecstatic frenzy—and it’s like a bugs bunny cartoon running backwards in cyberspace or something—this state of incredible frenzy goes on for about three minutes, and all the time the elves are saying, “Don’t give way to wonder. Do not abandon yourself to amazement. Pay attention! Pay attention! Look at what we’re doing. Look - at - what - we’re - doing, and then do it! Do it!”

And it’s this thing where then everything stops and they wait, and you feel like a torch, a spark, lit in your belly that begins to move up your esophagus. And eventually when it reaches your mouth, your mouth just flies open and this language-like stuff comes out. Acoustically, it’s [imitates alien language] But what you’re – you’re not hearing it. The startled friends who sent you to this place are putting up with this. What you’re experiencing is a visual modality where these tones are surfaces, shading, colors, insets, jewels—you are making something. You know, erase, move forward, add cerulean, put in stippling—it’s that sort of thing.

. . . . and often it’s very erotic, although I’m not sure that’s the word. But it’s something, it’s almost like sex is the surface of something of which this is the volume. And I’m a great fan of sex. I don’t mean to denigrate it. I mean to raise DMT to a very high status. But it’s astonishing. . . .

So, this is an experience which in some form—I mean it will be different for each one of you—but in some form at least what will be similar to my description is how dramatic it will be. It will hit you as hard as it hit me, if you do it right. This, to me, this experience is of a fundamentally different order than any other experience this side of the yawning grave. And why religions have not been built around it? Why empires have not risen and fallen around the control of its
sources? Why theology has not enshrined it as its central exhibit for the presence of the other in the human world? I don’t know. I can tell the secret. As you notice, nothing shuts me up. But why this is not four-inch headlines on every newspaper on the planet, I cannot understand because, I don’t know what news you were waiting for, but this is the news that I was waiting for.

It’s an incredible challenge to human understanding to try and make sense of this. . . . the DMT thing is—it’s like an avalanche of orgasmic beauty, but a certain kind of beauty. The only words that I can find for the kind of beauty that it is, is bizarre, alien, outlandish, outré, freaky, and at the very edge of what the human mind seems to be able to hold. Well, where is this coming from? And what is happening?

. . . . This has to be taken seriously. In other words, the “it’s only a hallucination” thing—that horse shit is just passe.106

We see in this experience a dimension McKenna refers to as LUV, something beyond the sexual (apparently, startling so), something that might be an even more intense presencing of what Sorenson called hypersensuality. Just as Sorenson felt this hypersensuality functioned as a glue that held the Culture together, perhaps we could intimately know a dimension of Love that holds all of Nature-Culture together, holds the whole Cosmos together. In this sense, McKenna’s description actually resonates with the experiences and teachings (doctrines) of a wide variety of traditions. Reading the Avatamsaka Sutra feels like an invitation to touch something every bit as intimate and inconceivable as what McKenna describes, and the Buddhist traditions (like many traditions around the world) have practices that, though they take much more time to master than DMT (which even McKenna characterizes elsewhere as requiring art and practice), can take us to the same place. McKenna himself managed to verify some cross-cultural resonance when he asked a Tibetan yogi to try DMT:

So how can it be then that a compound which each of us carries—right here—right in the pineal gland, right in the Ajna chakra—the Philosopher’s Stone is no further away than that—how can this be secret from us? How can we be trapped in a dimension of such limitation and such mundanecss when our own nervous

106 [link](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=adDRsqEj4PU)
systems, and the ecology around us, and our own history over the past half million years argues that this is what we were born and bred for? This is where we belong. This is what “at play in the fields of the Goddess” must mean. And somehow history has made us dysfunctional, buried the mystery.

. . . . some of you may have seen, years and years ago, this B movie about a guy who has a big ranch in Mexico, and one of the campesinos comes rushing back from having encountered a brontosaurus in the forest, and he can only point inarticulately at the woods and say “Something, something, something, something!!” And that’s what I am: I’m a monkey, and I’ve come back to the troop, and I’m telling you there’s something over the next hill that is off the scale, off the scale. And I have made it my business to, you know, delve, I’m a delver, I’m a noetic archaeologist—obscure heresies and strange rites and all of this stuff: been there, done that; it’s all pale soup compared to this. And so, I hype it to you simply to try and inspire you to explore it. We are, at the present state, in the position of explorers of the new world fifty years after Columbus. We have notebook entries. We have partial maps. But we don’t have a complete map of what this thing is. It’s another dimension. It is literally another dimension.

I took DMT to a Lama of great accomplishment—not one of the grab-ass can of Budweiser welded to the good right hand Lamas, but a real Lama. This guy was over 90 when he smoked DMT, and since his wheel has turned. And he said to me, he said, “It’s the lesser lights,” he said, “You can’t go further into the Bardo and return.” And so I think that we stand at the brink of an enormous frontier.

Here the Lama explicitly mentions the Bardo, the Liminal, the Threshold. In some sense, DMT is the meditation experience, and it requires a spiritual ecology to render its finest fruits. We could cultivate that ecology. Though I have not tried this form of DMT myself, as a philosopher standing on the near side of sagehood, I would welcome the experience, and trust the practice of philosophy as I have so far engaged it to provide the proper context for working with it.

We may find it interesting that McKenna talks about this as reclaiming our own minds, our own birthright. This resonates both with what people like Paul Shepard and (as we shall see) C.L. Martin say about our paleolithic inheritance, but also with what so many sages teach about our spiritual inheritance. Meditation in particular, and spiritual practice in general (from rites and
rituals to ceremonies and celebrations, and everything in between), is about reclaiming our mind, our body, our World, our Cosmos, our birthright, what cannot ever be taken once we really remember it, reclaim it, renew it in the Now. Here is McKenna inviting our own experience along these lines: inviting the rupture of barriers that keep us out of the Bardo—barriers that are nothing but habits, ways of practicing, ways of living, a style of consciousness characterized by fear, craving, self-doubt, boredom, weariness, anxiousness, and so on:

I didn’t get into this business by being an airhead, or a screwball. My attitude was always: If it’s real it can take the pressure. You know, you don’t have to pussyfoot around the real thing.

I studied yoga, I wandered around in the east, I was fast shuffled by beady-eyed little men in doties. I know the whole spiritual supermarket and rigmarole, and I find nothing there to interest me on the level of 5 grams of psilocybin mushrooms in silent darkness. I mean that is where the pedal hits the metal, that is where the rubber meets the road.

And the inspiration for me to get up and talk to an audience like this simply comes from the fact that I cannot believe that this could be kept under wraps the way it has. I mean I kidded with you earlier that they would make sex illegal if they could. Well, they can’t, so it isn’t. But, the psychedelic experience is as central to understand your humanness as having sex, or having a child, or having responsibilities, or having hopes and dreams—and yet it is illegal. We are somehow told—we are infantilized—we’re told, “You can wander around within the sanctioned playpen of ordinary consciousness, and we have some intoxicants over here if you want to mess yourself up, we’ve got some scotch here, and some tobacco, and red meat, some sugar and a little TV so forth . . .”

But these boundary dissolving hallucinogens that give you a sense of unity with your fellow man and nature are somehow forbidden. This is an outrage. It’s a sign of cultural immaturity and the fact that we tolerate it is a sign that we are living in a society as oppressed as any society in the past.

My thing is not about my opinion, or what I saw in Africa, or anything like that. This is—get it straight—this is about an experience. Not my experience. Your experience. It’s about an experience which you have . . . you must do the experience. . . . This is an art, it is something that you coax into existence . . . anything worth doing is an art, that is acquired. This is part of our birthright, perhaps the most important part of our birthright. These substances will deliver, it is the confoundment of psychology and science generally, and that’s why it is so touchy for cultural institutions. . . .
The way I think of these psychedelics or a different way is that they are catalysts for the imagination, catalysts to say what has never been said, to see what has never been seen, to draw, paint, sing, sculpt, dance and act what has never before been done. To push the envelope of creativity and language—and, what’s really important is, I call it the felt presence of direct experience, which is a fancy term which just simply means we have to stop consuming our culture, we have to create culture, don’t watch TV, don’t read magazines, don’t even listen to NPR, create your own road show.

The nexus of space and time where you are now is the most immediate sector of your universe. And if you’re worrying about Michael Jackson, or Bill Clinton, or somebody else, then, you are disempowered. You’re giving it all away to icons, icons which are maintained by an electronic media so that you want to dress like X or have lips like Y, or something. This is shit brained, this kind of thinking. That is all cultural diversion.

. . . you want to reclaim your mind, and get it out of the hands of the cultural engineers who want to turn you into a half-baked moron consuming all this trash that’s being manufactured out of the bones of a dying world.  

We are seeing something of a resurgence of serious interest in holotropic or psychedelic medicines. We may go so far as to call it a renaissance, and to think of Husserl’s comments about the other Renaissance. Can the model be philosophy again? Not without philosophers who do the hard work of helping to heal our way of knowing and living. However, without genuine, vitalizing philosophy, the new explorers will be left only or mainly with guidance from what passes as philosophy in our culture. I do not mean just the academic stuff, which no one will bother reading anyway. What I mean is that a “visionary” in this culture is Elon Musk, and a “soul doctor” is Dr. Phil. Without serious philosophy/spirituality/religion to guide them, people will be left in a spiritual supermarket, in which they may want lots of spiritual chocolate pudding, and will do everything they can to avoid spiritual arugula, spiritual rutabaga, and wild spiritual berries. We need the roots and fruits of serious traditions.

107 [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UIG25NdOwIs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UIG25NdOwIs)
This renaissance has seen research supported by no less than the Veterans Administration. Some of these medicines can do more for soldiers with PTSD than years and years of conventional “therapy”. The work of Roland Griffiths, Michael and Annie Mithoefer, James Fadiman, and others has documented, even within the current scientific paradigm, the remarkable potentials these medicines offer, including healing maladies of the soul like depression and opening up creativity and more skillful styles of thinking.

Walter Pahnke, who had an MD and a PhD from Harvard, wrote about a variety of psychedelic experiences, including what he called the “cognitive psychedelic experience,”

characterized by astonishingly lucid thought. Problems can be seen from a novel perspective, and the inner relationships of many levels or dimensions can be seen all at once. The creative experience may have something in common with this kind of psychedelic experience, but such a possibility must await the results of future investigation. (1969: 6)

Though it may seem that philosophers should take a sincere interest in a natural substance with a documented potential to increase lucidity of thinking, they might also find it interesting to consider the fifth type of experience described by Pahnke:

The fifth and last type of psychedelic experience may ultimately prove to be the most valuable and is the focus in regard to treatment of the dying patient. This experience has been called by various names: psychedelic-peak, cosmic, transcendent, or mystical. Nine universal psychological characteristics were derived from a study of the literature of spontaneous mystical experience reported throughout world history from almost all cultures and religions. When subjected to a scientific experiment, these characteristics proved to be identical for spontaneous and psychedelic mystical experiences. (6-7)

Like McKenna, Pahnke and his co-author for another article saw a frontier in these medicines:

With these drugs, science stands on an awesome threshold. Some religious leaders would undoubtedly consider it improper for man to tread upon the holy ground of the unconscious, protesting against the exploration of “inner space” as they have
campaigned against the exploration of outer space. But man’s apparent destiny to seek an ever greater comprehension of the nature of reality cannot be thwarted or suppressed. The importance of research proceeding in harmony with the highest known ethical principles, however, is dear. (Pahnke and Richards 1966: 206)

“An awesome threshold.” The threshold of Threshold Awareness, the liminal of Liminality. The authors titled the article most wonderfully: “Implications of LSD and Experimental Mysticism.” The experimental spirit, rooted in the ethical, should win the day. Given the view of philosophy we have explored, we could retitle the piece: Implications of Holotropic Medicines and Experimental LoveWisdom.

Because of his age and his status in the culture, Michael Pollan’s book on holotropic medicines should be of great interest to philosophers. As a way to conclude these particular considerations, let us consider a substantial selection of his thoughts about these medicines, based on his own experience and that of others:

even a moment’s reflection tells you that attributing the content of the psychedelic experience to “drugs” explains virtually nothing about it. The images and the narratives and the insights don’t come from nowhere, and they certainly don’t come from a chemical. They come from inside our minds, and at the very least have something to tell us about that. If dreams and fantasies and free associations are worth interpreting, then surely so is the more vivid and detailed material with which the psychedelic journey presents us. It opens a new door on one’s mind. And about that my psychedelic journeys have taught me a great many interesting things. Many of these were the kinds of things one might learn in the course of psychotherapy: insights into important relationships; the outlines of fears and desires ordinarily kept out of view; repressed memories and emotions; and, perhaps most interesting and useful, a new perspective on how one’s mind works.

This, I think, is the great value of exploring non-ordinary states of consciousness: the light they reflect back on the ordinary ones, which no longer seem quite so transparent or so ordinary. To realize, as William James concluded, that normal waking consciousness is but one of many potential forms of consciousness—ways of perceiving or constructing the world—separated from it by merely “the filmiest of screens,” is to recognize that our account of reality, whether inward or outward, is incomplete at best. Normal waking consciousness might seem to offer a faithful map to the territory of reality, and it is good for many things, but it is only a map—and not the only map. As to why these other
modes of consciousness exist, we can only speculate. Most of the time, it is normal waking consciousness that best serves the interests of survival—and is most adaptive. But there are moments in the life of an individual or a community when the imaginative novelties proposed by altered states of consciousness introduce exactly the sort of variation that can send a life, or a culture, down a new path.

For me, the moment I recognized the tenuosity and relativity of my own default consciousness came that afternoon on Fritz’s mountaintop, when he taught me how to enter a trance state by means of nothing more than a pattern of rapid breathing and the sounds of rhythmic drumming. Where in the world has that been all my life? This is nothing Freud or any number of psychologists and behavioral economists haven’t told us, but the idea that “normal” consciousness is but the tip of a large and largely uncharted psychic iceberg is now for me something more than a theory; the hidden vastness of the mind is a felt reality.

(408-9)

It feels important to linger with this, especially the, “Where in the world has that been all my life?” My students tell me this all the time when I teach them basic compassion meditation and other forms of philosophical practice. Here Pollan lauds a practice—a simple practice of breathing, which so many philosophers could easily engage with, experiment with, and come-to-know something about their own heart, mind, body, World, and even Cosmos. Consider the difference this seems to make: We all can spout theories about the mind. What of the felt reality? Why would we ever—ever—forgo reality, forgo lived experience for the pale substitute of abstractions we can analyze and argue over? It’s as if much of philosophy is based on a kind of category error, an error in thinking wisdom, love, or beauty will be found in propositions, as if we really could get what we need by constructing and analyzing texts. Of course, it cannot be found in a narrow “quest for experience” either.

Pollan touches on what many people touch on: The need for context, which includes ongoing practice-realization. These experiences are just experiences. They are fleeting. They may reshape one’s entire life, but their potential for good will always depend on practice-realization, on the
fullness of our intention, on the quality of our ethical lifestyle, on the way we apply effort, attention, and awareness. Nevertheless, the experiences seem tremendously important for shaking us out of the habitual ways of knowing that keep us caged. A profound experience can allow us to throw them off, and only our practice will determine the extent to which habit and ignorance can reclaim us. Pollan knows that he only tasted something—but even one taste of something profound (Sophia as Sapienza) would outweigh most everything a typical student gets from a typical philosophy class (or four years or six years of them) in today’s academy:

I don’t mean to suggest I have achieved this state of ego-transcending awareness, only tasted it. These experiences don’t last, or at least they didn’t for me. After each of my psychedelic sessions came a period of several weeks in which I felt noticeably different—more present to the moment, much less inclined to dwell on what’s next. I was also notably more emotional and surprised myself on several occasions by how little it took to make me tear up or smile. I found myself thinking about things like death and time and infinity, but less in angst than in wonder. (I spent an unreasonable amount of time reflecting on how improbable and fortunate it is to be living here and now at the frontier of two eternities of nonexistence.) All at once and unexpectedly, waves of compassion or wonder or pity would wash over me.

This was a way of being I treasured, but, alas, every time it eventually faded. It’s difficult not to slip back into the familiar grooves of mental habit; they are so well worn; the tidal pull of what the Buddhists call “habit energies” is difficult to withstand. Add to this the expectations of other people, which subtly enforce a certain way of being yourself, no matter how much you might want to attempt another. After a month or so, it was pretty much back to baseline.

But not quite, not completely. For much like the depressed patients I interviewed in London, who described being nourished and even inspired by their furloughs from the cage of depression, the experience of some other way of being in the world survives in memory, as a possibility and a destination.

For me, the psychedelic experience opened a door to a specific mode of consciousness that I can now occasionally recapture in meditation. I’m speaking of a certain cognitive space that opens up late in a trip or in the midst of a mild one, a space where you can entertain all sorts of thoughts and scenarios without reaching for any kind of resolution. It somewhat resembles hypnagogic consciousness, that liminal state perched on the edge of sleep when all kinds of images and scraps of story briefly surface before floating away. But this is sustained, and what comes up can be clearly recalled. And though the images and ideas that appear are not under your direct control, but rather seem to be arriving and departing of their own accord, you can launch a topic or change it, like a
channel. The ego is not entirely absent—you haven’t been blasted into particles, or have returned from that particular state—but the stream of consciousness is taking its own desultory course, and you are bobbing and drifting along with it, looking neither forward nor back, immersed in the currents of being rather than doing. And yet a certain kind of mental work is getting done, and occasionally I have emerged from the state with usable ideas, images, or metaphors. (409-10)

Here he mentions the liminal space, which, McKenna would remind us, requires skill and art to navigate. Thinking as this spaciousness, Liminal or Original Thinking, does not happen just because of a bag of tricks. These medicines will become “medical” “science” rather than Medicinal Wisdom if we don’t work with them skillfully (we shall have more to say about this distinction later). That holds for every Art of Awareness we might consider, from meditation to mandalas to working with Yijing (the ancient Chinese field guide of relational knowing). But, it matters that Pollan entered this space, and that he could easily understand, even wonderstand its basic goodness and usefulness in the best sense of the term. We can all enter this space, because we are this space.

A genuinely healthy Nature-Culture helps us to understand what we are, and helps us to live in, through, as this spaciousness. That is how it supports our peace and joy and overall well-being, making our well-being, our good mind and good heart, integral to the well-being, the good mind and good heart, of all ecologies. We enter the practice-realization of the health, healing, holiness, and wholeness of the World and the Cosmos. Pollan saw—even with what seems to be a more limited philosophical life, that is, in comparison to the much more richly contextualized ways of life manifested in living traditions which one finds almost always in at least partially degraded forms these days—even with a more bare-bones spiritual orientation, Pollan saw how he could become intimate with the landscape of his own soul.
Spiritual practices, Arts of Awareness, Arts of Knowing have to do with becoming familiar with our own souls, our own minds, our own heart-mind-body-World-Cosmos—in ways that cultivate the conditions of life, love, and liberation. What else do we think philosophy should be about? And what do we have to say if it seems we need to know better, know radically differently in order to realize such a sacred intention? Pollan continues:

My psychedelic adventures familiarized me with this mental territory, and, sometimes, not always, I find I can return to it during my daily meditation. I don’t know if this is exactly where I’m supposed to be when I’m meditating, but I’m always happy to find myself floating in this particular mental stream. I would never have found it if not for psychedelics. This strikes me as one of the great gifts of the experience they afford: the expansion of one’s repertoire of conscious states.

Just because the psychedelic journey takes place entirely in one’s mind doesn’t mean it isn’t real. It is an experience and, for some of us, one of the most profound a person can have. As such, it takes its place as a feature in the landscape of a life. It can serve as a reference point, a guidepost, a wellspring, and, for some, a kind of spiritual sign or shrine. (410)

Here, Pollan does not, technically, get things philosophically out of whack. He rather experiences the difficulty of taking experience seriously, and becoming familiar with the nondualistic, nonlocal epistemology that intimate experience seems to invite, in many if not all traditions (sometimes only in certain branches of a tradition, but it seems to live everywhere). If we just say, “It’s all in the mind,” we may emphasize dualities that don’t really have a leg to stand on: mind-body, mind-nature, self-other, mind-heart, spiritual-scientific, profane-sacred, and other dualisms break down, and they break us down if we cling to them, since they don’t seem to help us practice and realize a healthy world, and in fact seem to contradict something in reality. In an interview, Jung tried to get at this in terms of the general tendencies of introversion and extroversion that show up in both individuals and cultures. It perhaps helps to read his comments in light of his collaboration with the great physicist Wolfgang Pauli to develop a
nondual theory of mind-matter, the so-called Synchronicity Hypothesis, or the Pauli-Jung Conjecture:

psychic events are facts, are realities, and when you observe the stream of images within, you observe an aspect of the world, of the world within. Because the psyche, if you understand it as a phenomenon occurring in living bodies, is a quality of matter, just as our body consists of matter. We discover that this matter has another aspect, namely a psychic aspect. It is simply the world seen from within. It is just as though you were seeing into another aspect of matter. This is an idea that is not my invention. Old Democritus talked of the spiritus insertus atomis, the spirit inserted in atoms. That means the psyche is a quality which appears in matter. It doesn't matter whether we understand it or not, but that is the conclusion we come to if we draw conclusions without prejudices.

And so, you see, the man who goes by the influence of the external world—say society or sense perceptions—thinks he is more valid because this is valid, this is real, and the man who goes by the subjective factor is not valid because the subjective factor is nothing. No, that man is just as well based, because he bases himself on the world from within. So he is quite all right even if he says, “Oh, it is nothing but my fantasy.” Of course that is the introvert, and as the introvert is always afraid of the external world, he will be apologetic about it when you ask him. He will say, “Yes, of course, I know those are my fantasies,” and he has always a resentment. And as the world in general, particularly America, is extraverted as hell, the introvert has no place, because he doesn’t know that he beholds the world from within. And that gives him dignity, that gives him certainty, because, nowadays particularly, the world hangs by a thin thread, and that thread is the psyche of man. Suppose certain fellows in Moscow lose their nerve or their common sense for a bit, then the whole world is in fire and flames.

Nowadays we are not threatened by elemental catastrophes [well, now we have made those too—n.k.]. There is no such thing in nature as an H-bomb—that is all man’s doing [plastic too, and all the rest—n.k.]. We are the great danger. The psyche is the great danger . . . And so it is demonstrated in our day what the power of the psyche is, how important it is to know something about it. But we know nothing about it. Nobody would give credit to the idea that the psychic processes of the ordinary man have any importance whatever. One thinks, “Oh, he is just what he has in his head. He is all from his surroundings.” He is taught such and such a thing, believes such and such a thing, and particularly if he is well housed and well fed, then he has no ideas at all. And that’s the great mistake, because he is just what he is born as, and he is not born as a tabula rasa but as a reality. (JS: 303-4)
It may prove helpful just now to pause just for a moment to contemplate Jung’s work with Pauli. In particular, let us consider a passage from Gieser’s fascinating study of the collaboration and relationship between these two fascinating figures. Here, Gieser emphasizes Pauli’s views, and that serves as a good balance for our many considerations of Jung’s views. In reading this, we can hold McKenna’s “dancing in the fields of the Goddess” in mind, as well as his and Sorenson’s reflections on LUV, Eros, and hypersensuality, and also the notion of a supraliminal vs. a liminal kind of knowing:

What began to happen around the turn of the [20th] century must according to Pauli be interpreted as the return of the feminine principle. Einstein’s theory of relativity showed that neither time nor space are absolute categories but that they are intertwined. Man, the observer, immediately returns to the world of science when Einstein states that space has to be defined from the position of the observer in a movable system of reference. The universe can no longer be defined as an intrinsically dormant mechanistic system, but has to take into account the conditions under which reality is observed. This tendency was further strengthened by the advent of quantum physics: both Werner Heisenberg’s uncertainty relation and Niels Bohr’s complementary principle place the observer and the process of observation in the centre of the laws of physics and deal a sharp blow to the law of causality. Instead every observation is now seen as a unique creative act, where it is necessary to choose perspective on reality. It is in the meeting of subject and object that reality is created.

From Pauli’s perspective this means the beginning of the return of the feminine principle to the Western worldview. Eros shows how things are interrelated, linked to each other. But anima is also linked with the deepest mysteries of existence – the rhythm of life and death and the creation of the unique. Pauli’s dreams increasingly often contained a dancing woman with oriental features, whom he called the Chinese woman. This anima personified psychophysical mystery, in other words the connection between body and soul, matter and psyche. In this way she represented the direct opposite of the prevailing scientific viewpoint, where psyche and matter are still entirely separate. She embodied the psychophysical secrets, including sexuality and the ‘parapsychological phenomena’. With her dance she stood for a dynamic asymmetrical principle, in contrast to the static and mechanical principle of classical science. She also represented a new unified form of contemplation where feeling, emotional interest, intuition and ethical questions receive as much room as the intellect in scientific work. In contrast to meaningless chance, she represented meaningful coincidences. Time, which in classical science constitutes only a mechanistic, linear progress of hands on a clock, is from the Chinese
woman’s perspective a succession of unique instants with a distinctive quality of their own, which unite the now of outer reality with that of inner reality.

Western science has created a sharp distinction between man and matter. Matter is treated as a dead object which is at man’s disposal. Therefore Pauli felt guilt on behalf of his science to the great mother, which demands restitution. Just like the old alchemists, Pauli considered that modern man has to realize that every manipulation of matter also has repercussions on man himself and reflects his own inner state. He believed that science could only develop in the right direction if it was realized that physical reality is connected with man’s mental reality. The feminine perspective implies a focusing on the totality and searches for the unity which bridges the division of the world into exclusive opposing pairs. Classical physics from Galileo-Kepler-Newton to Einstein represents, to Pauli, a largely patriarchal thinking. Physics has not yet recognized that the mental state of the observer may be able to influence the observed natural process. The mental element, observation as a psychological process, is as yet an unconsidered fact in the self-understanding of science. Pauli felt that his Chinese woman symbolized a subterranean wisdom, nature’s own intrinsic knowledge. Western man needs the wisdom of the dark mother goddess as a counterweight to the products of the masculine intellect. In physics as a discipline, this would imply an increased cross-scientific activity: one must climb down from the abstract, causal and mathematical models to the source and roots of life, in other words move nearer to biology, psychology and parapsychology. . .

. . . Pauli sought a transcendental reality, in other words a reality which goes beyond the opposing pairs, but which nevertheless is able to include them in a symmetrical manner within a greater whole. He did not seek a transcendence in the ‘supersensory’ sense. To him it was of the greatest importance for matter to be given as large a place in the worldview as the non-material. . .

. . . Pauli believed in the possibility of a unified science – an additional inheritance from his godfather Ernst Mach – which could unite psychology, physics and biology in a general science of life. Unlike the positivists, on the other hand, he did not see the unifying factor in the possibility of reducing these disciplines to sensory impressions or to general laws of physics – he sought instead a common deep structure for all disciplines.

One of the insights reached by both depth psychology and quantum physics is that one must reckon with at least two levels of reality. One is the naively perceived everyday world which is controlled by consciousness, a world of culturally specific categories and images. This is the world of classical physics and everyday perception. Then we have the non-visual – or unconscious – level, at which our classical laws and rational images no longer apply. To understand this deep level both physics and psychology have been compelled to work with symbols, probability and ‘underlying structures’. It is at this deeper level that Pauli believes that objective reality is to be found. Pauli had hopes for a future research into these deep levels of the human psyche, i.e. scientific studies of cognitive functions, creativity and the process of dreaming that has not at all been realized by today’s psychology. Instead depth psychology has become the big business of therapy that he feared. Scientific psychology on the other hand is still
locked in its nineteenth-century mechanistic view of the mind, with its ‘modern’ metaphor of the computer. (342-4)

As a philosopher, I feel overjoyed at the appearance of Sophia in Pauli’s dreams. Pauli also had dreams that he sensed as carrying an alchemical import. In a letter to Jung he wrote:

I would just like to say a brief word of thanks for sending me your treatise on alchemy. It was bound to be of great interest to me, both as a scientist and also in the light of my personal dream experiences. These have shown me that even the most modern physics also lends itself to the symbolic representation of psychic processes, even down to the last detail. Of course, nothing is further from the thoughts of modern man than the idea of penetrating the secrets of matter in this way, for he would actually rather use these symbols to penetrate the secrets of the soul, since it seems to him that, relatively speaking, less research has been done on the soul, and it is less familiar than matter. (from Gieser: 200)

Pauli thought that his vivid dreams about physical processes, including atomic and sub-atomic processes, should be understood in light of alchemy. Why? Because, in a certain sense, he may have—by the Grace of Sophia—touched the need for scientists to embrace alchemy, to see themselves as the alchemists did: as children of Sophia. The work of science is not “outer work” done on “external” “matter,” but always a spiritual task, in service to life, in service to Sophia. Losing that vision, we make the same mistake some alchemists did: We get hooked by conscious purposes and conquest styles of thinking, and we start spreading suffering rather than healing.

Gieser does a pretty nice job of getting at this:

Pauli took the example of the radioactive nucleus, which so often occurred in his dreams. There the nucleus was presented as something incredibly charged and numinous, which caused Pauli to assume that it represented a modern symbol of the Self, like the philosopher’s stone with the alchemists. He thought that this symbol might have a collective significance, not merely a personal significance for himself.

But perhaps there is a lesson to be learned from alchemy’s mistake of attributing to the lapis the ability to help in the manufacture of genuine gold. For it seems to me important for us, too, not to attach any particular expectations of external, material success to the occurrence of the central symbol. This appears to be very closely
connected with the ‘epilogue’ of your treatise, where you touch on
the questions of ascribing psychic contents to the ego and the risk
of the inflation of consciousness. Maybe the alchemists’ idea that
they could really make gold by using the lapis can be seen as an
expression of such an inflation of consciousness. [letter from Pauli
to Jung]

Pauli thought that we have something to learn from the mistakes of the
alchemists – those who believed that gold could be created with the philosopher’s
stone. The mistake lies in attaching material hopes to what should instead
symbolize man’s striving for an inner value. As Pauli regarded the radioactive
nucleus as a modern parallel to the lapis of the alchemists, one may wonder how
he viewed contemporary research into the atomic nucleus. He says that one can
see the alchemists’ hopes of creating gold as an inflation of consciousness, in
other words as a sign of human arrogance.

If one were to develop further this parallel drawn by Pauli, one might ask
whether perhaps many modern physicists have unconsciously attached high
expectations to the radioactive atomic nucleus. Could they have been driven
by something which goes far beyond the concrete nucleus, by something like the
lapis of the alchemists – i.e. by the dream of a substance which can give a never-
falling force and a possibility of transforming everything into whatever one
wants? In modern times, when physics has become totally separated from a
contemplative consideration of the cosmos, one might be able to draw the parallel
with the period when alchemy began to degenerate into gold-making and to lose
its function as a route to individuation. The vulgar alchemists, with their hopes of
creating gold with the aid of the philosopher’s stone, are the counterpart to the
physicists of modern times, with excessive hopes pinned on the radioactive
nucleus. It would solve everything, just like lapis: give access to inexhaustible
energy, create material prosperity and peace on earth. These exaggerated hopes
again express a seeking for the Self in a concrete and vulgarized form. This is a
sign, then as now, of the hubris of consciousness and it can finish only as foretold
in the myth of Icarus – with Icarus’ fatal dive into the sea. (202-3)

We must take care to appreciate the incredible value of this sort of thinking. It precisely tries to
avoid a bag of tricks approach in which the physicist, for instance, might try to “use” dreams or
“use” LSD to “come up with ideas,” or “solve problems in physics,” or even “fix” our
“neuroses”. We lure ourselves into this sort of error all the time, for instance every time we try to
speak about the value of dreams by reciting Kekule’s discovery of the structure of benzene in a
dream, or Singer’s development of the sewing machine. This is all essentially a kind of sin
against Sophia—obviously not of same variety as dreaming up nuclear bombs (which our atomic
physicists of course did), or of dreaming up the horrifying application and proliferation of nuclear bombs, but we do benefit from seeing how this all comes out of a style of thinking, and that by means of liberating ourselves out of that style of thinking, and into deeper intimacy with ourselves, our World, and the knowing made possible in that liberating activity, we can begin to return to Sophia, return to the work of healing and the cultivation of more vitalizing ecologies. We have to handle all arts of awareness the way we would handle a poisonous snake, and we have to handle them in the context of philosophies, ways of life, that we likewise handle like poisonous snakes. This should not create anything other than an attitude of love, an attitude of wisdom-love-beauty, an attitude of joyful appreciation, and not some sort of dryness.

With respect to Pauli’s vision, it feels important to emphasize the notion of a unity of the disciplines, and to view it through our meta-analysis, for our sense here has to do with touching a deeper level of knowing, one that transcends the ego and makes possible all the partial insights we have so far claimed as knowledge. The unification Pauli sought could be seen as a kind of alchemical transmutation that would allow us to stop treating the lead of partial insights as gold, and to instead pursue the deeper work of actually bringing abundance into the World—because the Nature of the World is abundance.

In relation to these passages, the one by Jung and the others by and about Pauli, we can see the great need to both value the psyche—to see psyche/soul/mind as sacred—but also to see how what happens “in the mind” happens “in a living ecology, in the World, in the Cosmos”—for otherwise the noetic quality of Cosmic meaningfulness suddenly becomes senseless. We fail to practice-realize the great interwovenness of things, and so we end up sucked back into ignorance.
This too speaks to our need for philosophical/spiritual/religious traditions—traditions of practice.

For we must *become familiar* with the landscape of the soul, the inner-outer ecologies of soul, as part of a practice of cultivating these living, loving landscapes. To enter these spaces means something to the *land*—to the soil as much as the soul—or we have limited it, and perpetuated a pattern of insanity. But all of this was contemplation with Pollan. Let us continue with Pollan’s reflections:

For me, the experiences have become landmarks to circle around and interrogate for meaning—meanings about myself, obviously, but also about the world. Several of the images that appeared in the course of my trips I think about all the time, hoping to unwrap what feels like a gift of meaning—from where or what or whom, I cannot say. There was that steel pylon hovering over the landscape of self. Or the image of my grandfather’s skull staring back at me in Mary’s mirror. The majestic but now hollowed-out trees in which my parents appeared to me, liable to topple in the next windstorm. Or the inky well of Yo-Yo Ma’s cello, resonating with Bach’s warm embrace of death. But there is one other image I haven’t shared that I keep thinking must contain some important teaching, even as it continues to mystify me.

My last psychedelic journey was on ayahuasca. I was invited to join a circle of women who gather every three or four months to work with a legendary guide, a woman in her eighties who had trained under Leo Zeff. (She in turn had trained Mary, the woman who guided my psilocybin journey.) This journey was different from the others in that it took place in the company of a dozen other travelers, all of them strangers to me.

Befitting this particular psychedelic, which is a tea brewed from two Amazonian plants (one a vine, the other a leaf), there was a considerable amount of ceremony in the shamanic mode: the singing of traditional *icaros*, prayers and invocations to “the grandmother” (a.k.a. the “plant teacher” or ayahuasca), bells and rattles and *shakapas*, and the blowing on us of various scents and smokes. All of which contributed to a mood of deep mystery and a suspension of disbelief that was especially welcome, inasmuch as we were in a yoga studio a long way from any jungle.

The mention here of a “plant teacher” should strike the average academic philosopher as strange.

We can note that in this case the teacher has a feminine energy—an aspect of Sophia—and we may recall Pauli’s dreams here as well. Perhaps we should also recall Diotima, the teacher of Socrates, the one who *initiated* him into the mysteries of LoveWisdom.
Pollan will have to work in order to receive the doctrines and doctoring of this plant teacher. A few western anthropologists have written about the phenomena of plant teachers. Jeremy Narby spent time with the Ashaninka. He writes:

The main enigma I encountered during my research on Ashaninca ecology was that these extremely practical and frank people, living almost autonomously in the Amazonian forest, insisted that their extensive botanical knowledge came from plant-induced hallucinations. How could this be true?

The enigma was all the more intriguing because the botanical knowledge of indigenous Amazonians has long astonished scientists. The chemical composition of ayahuasca is a case in point. Amazonian shamans have been preparing ayahuasca for millennia. The brew is a necessary combination of two plants, which must be boiled together for hours. The first contains a hallucinogenic substance, dimethyltryptamine, which also seems to be secreted by the human brain; but this hallucinogen has no effect when swallowed, because a stomach enzyme called monoamine oxidase blocks it. The second plant, however, contains several substances that inactivate this precise stomach enzyme, allowing the hallucinogen to reach the brain. The sophistication of this recipe has prompted Richard Evans Schultes, the most renowned ethnobotanist of the twentieth century, to comment: “One wonders how peoples in primitive societies, with no knowledge of chemistry or physiology, ever hit upon a solution to the activation of an alkaloid by a monoamine oxidase inhibitor. Pure experimentation? Perhaps not. The examples are too numerous and may become even more numerous with future research.”

So here are people without electron microscopes who choose, among some 80,000 Amazonian plant species, the leaves of a bush containing a hallucinogenic brain hormone, which they combine with a vine containing substances that inactivate an enzyme of the digestive tract, which would otherwise block the hallucinogenic effect. And they do this to modify their consciousness. It is as if they knew about the molecular properties of plants and the art of combining them, and when one asks them how they know these things, they say their knowledge comes directly from hallucinogenic plants.

Not many anthropologists have looked into this enigma—but the failure of academics to consider this kind of mystery is not limited to the Amazon. Over the course of the twentieth century, anthropologists have examined shamanic practices around the world without fully grasping them.

A brief history of anthropology reveals a blind spot in its studies of shamanism. (1999: 10)

Like Pollan, Narby tried ayahuasca. His experience involved a humbling of the rational mind—we can recall Jung’s mention of the “demolition of rational understanding,” and take it as a kind
of prerequisite for any significant paradigm shift. It just comes with the territory, the frontier, the

Bardo. Narby writes,

Deep hallucinations submerged me. I suddenly found myself surrounded by two gigantic boa constrictors that seemed fifty feet long. I was terrified. These enormous snakes are there, my eyes are closed and I see a spectacular world of brilliant lights, and in the middle of these hazy thoughts, the snakes start talking to me without words. They explain that I am just a human being. I feel my mind crack, and in the fissures, I see the bottomless arrogance of my presuppositions. It is profoundly true that I am just a human being, and, most of the time, I have the impression of understanding everything, whereas here I find myself in a more powerful reality that I do not understand at all and that, in my arrogance, I did not even suspect existed. I feel like crying in view of the enormity of these revelations. Then it dawns on me that this self-pity is a part of my arrogance. I feel so ashamed that I no longer dare feel ashamed. Nevertheless, I have to throw up again.

I stood up feeling totally lost, stepped over the fluorescent snakes like a drunken tightrope walker, and, begging their forgiveness, headed toward a tree next to the house.

I relate this experience with words on paper. But at the time, language itself seemed inadequate. I tried to name what I was seeing, but mostly the words would not stick to the images. This was distressing, as if my last link to “reality” had been severed. Reality itself seemed to be no more than a distant and one-dimensional memory. I managed nonetheless to understand my feelings, such as “poor little human being who has lost his language and feels sorry for himself.” I have never felt so completely humble as I did at that moment. (6-7)

The humility stands out. It’s rather remarkable how arrogant we can be when it comes to what we know. Humus, humility, humaneness . . . And notice how language failed, the habitual use of language showed its hollowness, where hollowness became evident as essential.

Monica Gagliano, an evolutionary ecologist, has run experiments demonstrating the capacity of plants to learn. This is nothing short of astonishing from the standpoint of localized epistemologies and brain-as-computer metaphors, since it demonstrates extra-neuronal cognition. Of course, if mind is non-local, the findings are simply a delightful part of life. Extra-neuronal memory was also demonstrated—famously or infamously—by James McConnel, who trained
flatworms, then cut them in half, letting them grow back again. The half that could not have possibly retained memory (because it had no neurons to do so) still remembered. Very loosely speaking, this would be like taking some stem cells from your liver and growing a new you who had at least some of your memories. McConnel also did this by grinding up the worms who learned and feeding them to naïve worms. This would be like . . . well, you get the idea. Memory transfer was later demonstrated in rats, and has been replicated more recently—a shocking result that challenges current theories (see Bédécarrats et al. 2018). Karl Pribram’s theory that the mind functions like a hologram would account for the findings, but scientists will likely pursue other explanations. In any case, we consider Gagliano here because she not only showed that plants can learn, but she too experienced their apparent capacity to teach, which she documents in her book, Thus Spoke the Plant (seemingly a reference to Zarathustra, but I find no mention of Nietzsche in her book). Let’s return to Pollan’s experience:

As has been the case with all of my journeys, the night before had been sleepless, as part of me worked to convince the rest of me not to do this crazy thing. That part was of course my ego, which before every trip has fought the threat to its integrity with ferocity and ingenuity, planting doubts and scenarios of disaster I had trouble batting away. What about your heart, pal? You could die! What if you lose your lunch or, even worse, your shit?! And what if “the grandmother” dredges up some childhood trauma? Do you really want to lose it among these strangers? These women? (Part of the power of the ego flows from its command of one’s rational faculties.) By the time I arrived for the circle, I was a nervous wreck, assailed by second and third thoughts as to the wisdom of what I was about to do.

Pollan gifts us with a precious thing: He confesses his fears, and he indirectly admits the need for fairly significant spiritual context in order to arrive at a ceremony like this with a good mind, a good spirit. One of the downsides of these sorts of ceremonies is that people arrive at them the way people arrive at an intensive spiritual retreat: More or less crazy and in a state of mind not conducive to insight. I would be willing to bet that few if any Zen masters, for instance, see even
the faintest hint of insight in the first 2-3 days of a retreat, unless the student has somehow managed to increase or maintain their practice beforehand in a very deep way. Thankfully, a medicine like Ayahuasca can open us to insight in spite of ourselves—at least in some cases. But the whole process, and the whole World, would benefit from a prior engagement with philosophy as a way of life. The fear that comes up, though, is significant, and we will return to it.

At the end of the day, can we suggest that fear is the biggest factor in keeping philosophers from exploring alternative ways of knowing? I often imagine that Plato handled his *Apology* rather like a poisonous snake. I think he must have used it at a point at which a student had had begun to see the value of philosophy and had then to decide if they were going to seriously pursue a philosophical life. The dialogue seems to say: “You could get killed for this, for really wanting to know who you are and what this world is. Are you ready for that?” I imagine he would follow that up with lessons on how much we need to give up, how we need to let go of what we think we know, and how we need to enter into a different way of knowing, one that apparently delivers insights that cannot simply be told. Pollan, and the people he interviewed for the book, experienced an ineffability with holotropic medicines that perhaps resonates with the ineffability of LoveWisdom that Socrates expresses in the *Republic*.

In any case, the ego doesn’t have much of a chance against a sufficient dose of medicine like Ayahuasca, and, once the medicine begins to work, the ego can no longer stand in the way of insights it ordinarily obstructs:

But, as has happened every time, as soon as I swallowed the medicine and slipped past the point of no return, the voice of doubt went quiet and I surrendered to whatever was in store. Which was not unlike my other psychedelic experiences, with a couple of notable exceptions. Perhaps because the tea, which was viscous
and acrid and unexpectedly sweet, makes its alien presence felt in your stomach and intestines, ayahuasca is a more bodily experience than some other psychedelics. I did not get sick, but I was very much aware of the thick brew moving through me and, as the effect of the DMT (ayahuasca’s active ingredient) came on, imagined it as a vine winding its way through the curls and convolutions of my intestines, occupying my body before slowly working its snakelike way up to and into my head.

There followed a great many memories and images, some horrifying, others magnificent, but I want to describe one in particular because, although I don’t completely understand it, it captures something that psychedelics have taught me, something important. Because there was still some light in the room when the ceremony began, we were all wearing eye masks, and mine felt a little tight around my head. Early in the journey, I became aware of the black straps circling my skull, and these morphed into bars. My head was caged in steel. The bars then began to multiply, moving down from my head to encircle my torso and then my legs. I was now trapped head to toe in a black steel cage. I pressed against the bars, but they were unyielding. There was no way out. Panic was building when I noticed the green tip of a vine at the base of the cage. It was growing steadily upward and then turning, sinuously, to slip out between two of the bars, freeing itself and at the same time reaching toward the light. “A plant can’t be caged,” I heard myself thinking. “Only an animal can be caged.”

I can’t tell you what this means, if anything. Was the plant showing me a way out? Perhaps, but it’s not as if I could actually follow it; I am an animal, after all. Yet it seemed the plant was trying to teach me something, that it was proposing a kind of visual koan for me to unpack, and I have been turning it over in my mind ever since. Maybe it was a lesson about the folly of approaching an obstacle head-on, that sometimes the answer is not the application of force but rather changing the terms of the problem in such a way that it loses its dominion without actually crumbling. It felt like some kind of jujitsu. Because the vine wasn’t just escaping the confines of the cage, it was using the structure to improve its situation, climbing higher to gather more light for itself.

The reference to a koan is strained, since koan (a term from Zen Buddhist philosophy) should be considered one of the Arts of Awareness that can help liberate us into a better way of knowing, but Pollan gives no sense of understanding what koan are or how one would actually work with a koan. However, he does seem to use the term effectively enough here. It’s worth noting that one of the people Pollan interviewed for his book found their experience with holotropic medicines inspiring for their spiritual practice—in Zen philosophy. Pollan visited Johns Hopkins, where
some of the most interesting recent work with psilocybin was done, by Roland Griffiths and other researchers. As Pollan describes it:

To listen to these people describe the changes in their lives inspired by their psilocybin journeys is to wonder if the Hopkins session room isn’t a kind of “human transformation factory,” as Mary Cosimano, the guide who has probably spent more time there than anyone else, described it to me. “From now on,” one volunteer told me, “I think of my life as before and after psilocybin.” Soon after his psilocybin experience, Brian Turner, the physicist, quit his job with the military contractor and moved to Colorado to study Zen. He had had a meditation practice before psilocybin, but “now I had the motivation, because I had tasted the destination”; he was willing to do the hard work of Zen now that he had gotten a preview of the new modes of consciousness it could make available to him.

Turner is now an ordained Zen monk, yet he is also still a physicist, working for a company that makes helium neon lasers. I asked him if he felt any tension between his science and his spiritual practice. “I don’t feel there’s a contradiction. Yet what happened at Hopkins has influenced my physics. I realize there are just some domains that science will not penetrate. Science can bring you to the big bang, but it can’t take you beyond it. You need a different kind of apparatus to peer into that.” (73–4)

For his part, Roland Griffiths’s own encounters with the volunteers in the 2006 study reignited his passion for science, but they also left him with a deeper respect for all that science does not know—for what he is content to call “the mysteries.”

“For me the data [from those first sessions] were . . . I don’t want to use the word mind-blowing, but it was unprecedented the kinds of things we were seeing there, in terms of the deep meaning and lasting spiritual significance of these effects. I’ve given lots of drugs to lots of people, and what you get are drug experiences. What’s unique about the psychedelics is the meaning that comes out of the experience.” (75)

The prospect of “unprecedented” results should seem attractive to philosophers—especially given how Griffiths contrasts it with “drug experiences”—but it seems particularly valuable that these sorts of experiences can become synergetic with a holistic philosophical way of life.

However, we still seem to stand at a threshold here. It seems the scientific training of most westerners keeps them somehow at a distance from an even more radical shift. We may be approaching it though. Our inquiry seeks to orient us toward it. It would be as ineffable as any of
these experiences—at least in some sense. But clearly we would all be able to get along, to communicate, to cultivate life onward. We would not be stuck in a liminal space that prevents contact, communication, or compassionate activity in the living, loving World. We are trying through our inquiry to find out how to become more effective at taking care of the World. The whole point of considering this sort of material “beyond the limit” has to do with the commitment we must have to take care of wisdom wherever we find it, and to cross any ethically available threshold, no matter how fearful we feel, if the threshold seems to offer potentially empowering, healing insights.

Continuing with Pollan’s final reflections on Ayahuasca and his overall experience with these medicines:

Or maybe the lesson was more universal, something about plants themselves and how we underestimate them. My plant teacher, as I began to think of the vine, was trying to tell me something about itself and the green kingdom it represents, a kingdom that has always figured largely in my work and my imagination. That plants are intelligent I have believed for a long time—not necessarily in the way we think of intelligence, but in a way appropriate to themselves. We can do many things plants can’t, yet they can do all sorts of things we can’t—escaping from steel cages, for example, or eating sunlight. If you define intelligence as the ability to solve the novel problems reality throws at the living, plants surely have it.

They also possess agency, an awareness of their environment, and a kind of subjectivity—a set of interests they pursue and so a point of view. But though these are all ideas I have long believed and am happy to defend, never before have I felt them to be true, to be as deeply rooted as I did after my psychedelic journeys.

The un-cageable vine reminded me of that first psilocybin trip, when I felt the leaves and plants in the garden returning my gaze. One of the gifts of psychedelics is the way they reanimate the world, as if they were distributing the blessings of consciousness more widely and evenly over the landscape, in the process breaking the human monopoly on subjectivity that we moderns take as a given. To us, we are the world’s only conscious subjects, with the rest of creation made up of objects; to the more egotistical among us, even other people count as objects.

Psychedelic consciousness overturns that view, by granting us a wider,
more generous lens through which we can glimpse the subject-hood—the spirit!—of everything, animal, vegetable, even mineral, all of it now somehow returning our gaze. Spirits, it seems, are everywhere. New rays of relation appear between us and all the world’s Others.

Even in the case of the minerals, modern physics (forget psychedelics!) gives us reason to wonder if perhaps some form of consciousness might not figure in the construction of reality. Quantum mechanics holds that matter may not be as innocent of mind as the materialist would have us believe. For example, a subatomic particle can exist simultaneously in multiple locations, is pure possibility, until it is measured—that is, perceived by a mind. Only then and not a moment sooner does it drop into reality as we know it: acquire fixed coordinates in time and space.

The implication here is that matter might not exist as such in the absence of a perceiving subject. Needless to say, this raises some tricky questions for a materialist understanding of consciousness. The ground underfoot may be much less solid than we think.

This is the view of quantum physics, not some psychonaut—though it is a very psychedelic theory. I mention it only because it lends some of the authority of science to speculations that would otherwise sound utterly lunatic. I still tend to think that consciousness must be confined to brains, but I am less certain of this belief now than I was before I embarked on this journey. Maybe it too has slipped out from between the bars of that cage. Mysteries abide. But this I can say with certainty: the mind is vaster, and the world ever so much more alive, than I knew when I began. (410-14)

These suggestions related to holotropic medicines, like the suggestions above from Heavy Head, Little Bear, and Peat, invite us to think more deeply about the Liminal Mind, what makes it possible (and what it makes possible), and how it might collapse (and what subsequently become more possible or less possible in its relative, even near-total absence). This Liminal Mind seems like a proper expression of what I would call Original Mind, by which I mean the source of what we tend to call “original thinking,” but which the dominant paradigm co-opts into its own pattern of insanity, such that most original thinking amounts to more of the same. Part of what we want to contemplate relates to the relative instability of Original Mind, the relative ease with which insanity can overwrite it. We can easily presence insanity and a kind of incoherence, so much so that we cannot fathom coherence and a truly healthy Mind. They seem like “myths” or “woo-
woo”. We love to shout, “Woo! That’s just woo!” Can we not entertain serious possibilities, perhaps threatening possibilities, regarding our own insensitivity and incoherence?

We are talking about a revolution in our sense of Health, Healing, and Holiness. We saw this with the work of Berry and Shepard, and also in Jung, Nietzsche, and others. Recall the case of Semmelweis. Vyner draws a similar parallel:

. . . the mortality rate after amputations at the Glasgow Royal Infirmary from 1864 to 1866, when Joseph Lister first began to do surgery there, was forty-five percent. It was fifty percent in Edinburgh and thirty-nine percent at the best hospitals in Paris.

The problem was that medicine had not yet come to understand the little animals we now call bacteria. At that time nobody knew that these little animals could cause disease. It was thus routine, even at the greatest of hospitals, for a surgeon to leave his dissecting laboratory and come do surgery on a patient in blood stained clothing without even washing his hands.

This all changed when Lister read Pasteur’s work. Lister immediately understood the implications of Pasteur’s discovery of microorganisms for the practice of surgery, and he initiated the practice of operating under antiseptic conditions. At his instigation, his surgical ward at the Glasgow Royal Infirmary began to use carbolic acid to cleanse their instruments, wash their hands, cleanse a patient’s wound or incision and to cleanse the wards in which the patients stayed. A mere year later, the mortality rate on Lister’s surgical ward had fallen to three percent!

Now imagine for a moment, that we are in the midst of a similar bout of ignorance in which we have, as a species, misunderstood the nature of the healthy mind for at least several millennia now, if not longer. That just as surgeons knew nothing of the pathogenicity of bacteria as recently as the mid-nineteenth century in Europe, that our species has not yet recognized that the egocentric mind is actually a pathogen, and that as a result, generations of children have been unwittingly and unintentionally brought up to have a fundamentally unhealthy mind.

Imagine further that this unhealthy state of mind is actually the psychological cause of several of humanity’s most troublesome and intractable problems; that the ego is the cause of the moods, inner conflict and inauthenticity that make the average human being uneasy and unhappy. That the ego is also the psychological foundation of war, religious intolerance, racism and the caustic belief that there is only one truth and one good way to live.

If science were to unequivocally establish that all of this is true, and that the egocentric mind that we all have is actually an unhealthy mind, what would we do about it? Would we not, like Lister, take matters in hand and find a way to
stop propagating the egocentric mind from one generation to the next? Would we
not also set out to find out if there is another type of mind that is a healthy
mind?108

In part, we want to inquire into the connections of knowing and true well-being, wholeness,
healthiness, holiness, and healing. And we want to look at how a joie de vivre, along with a sense
of the sacredness of our ecologies, may vanish with the advent of conquest consciousness.
Sorenson wrote some fascinating field notes on his experience of watching a seemingly healthy
Mind-Nature-Culture fall apart:

I’m out, back from the Andaman where I’ve just been through an experience I’ll
not soon forget. Only by pure chance did I happen to be there when their
extraordinary intuitive mentality gave up the ghost right in front of me, in an
inconceivable overwhelming week. I’m almost wrecked myself, in a strange
anomie from having gone through that at too close a range, and from staying up
all night too many times to try to understand just what was going on . . .

There really was no way to have predicted that, just after I arrived, the acute
phase of their ancient culture’s death would start. To speak abstractly of the death
of a way-of-life is a simple thing to do. To experience it is quite another thing.
I’ve seen nothing in the lore of anthropology that might prepare one for the speed
by which it can occur, or for the overwhelming psychic onslaughts it throws out.
Nor does my profession forewarn of those communicable paroxysms that hover in
the air which, without warning, strike down with overwhelming force, when a
culture’s mind gives way.

Yet this is just what happened when the traditional rapport of those islands was
undone, when the subtle sensibility of each to one another was abruptly seared
away in a sudden unpredicted, unprecedented, uncognated whirlwind. In a single
crucial week a spirit that all the world would want, not just for themselves but for
all others, was lost, one that had taken millennia to create. It was suddenly just
gone.

Epidemic sleeplessness, frenzied dance throughout the night, reddening burned-
out eyes getting narrower and more vacant as the days and nights wore on,
dysphasias of various sorts, sudden mini-epidemics of spontaneous estrangement,
lacunae in perception, hyperkinesis, loss of sensuality, collapse of love,

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https://www.academia.edu/31547604/THE_HEALTHY_MIND_Chapter_2_The_Healthy_Mind_Assumption
impotence, bewildered frantic looks like those on buffalo in India just as they’re clubbed to death; 14 year olds (and others) collapsing on the beach, under houses, on the pier, in beached boats as well as those tied up at the dock, here and there, into wee hours of the morn, even on through dawn, in acute inebriation or exhaustion. Such was the general scene that week, a week that no imagination could have forewarned, the week in which the subtle sociosensual glue of the island’s traditional way-of-life became unstuck.

To pass through the disintegrating social enclaves was to undergo a rain of psychic blows, a pelting shower of harrowing awarenesses that raised goose flesh of unexpected types on different epidermal sites along with other kinds of crawlings of flesh and skin. There were sudden rushes, both cold and hot, down the head and chest and across the neck, even in the legs and feet. And deep inside, often near the solar plexus, or around heart, or in the head or throat, new indescribable sensations would spontaneously arise, leave one at a loss or deeply disconcerted.

. . . . Eventually I retreated, mentally exhausted, cognitively benumbed, emotionally wrung out. I tried to thwart that siege (when I finally recognized it for what it really was) by getting key people out. A useless foolish gambit; for no one would leave the spot, as if they were welded to it, as if it held some precious thing they very greatly loved, which they neither would nor could abandon.

When the mental death had run its course, when what had been was gone, the people (physically still quite alive) no longer had their memory of the intuitive rapport that held them rapturously together just the week before, could no longer link along those subtle mental pathways. What had filled their lives had vanished. The teensters started playing at (and then adopting) the rude, antagonistic, ego-grasping styles of the encroaching modern world, modeled after films and then TV. Oldsters retreated into houses, lost the ir affinity to youngsters, who then turned more to one another, sometimes squabbling (which did not occur before).

It seems astonishing that the inner energy of such passings is so undetectable to minds not some way linked to the inner harmonies and ardors of the place. Research-distance yields abstractions like ‘going amok’, which could have been easily applied that week, or ‘revitalizing movement’, which also could have been (in a perverse kind of way). It seems that only by some mental coalescence with the local lifeway can one access its deeper psychic passions, not just those of adolescence, but graver ones like those which for a time were released in inconceivable profusion, when the collective subtle mind of the islands, built up over eons, was snuffed out.

Similar processes, perhaps not always so dramatic, seem to occur when any domineering or abstractly focused alien culture (whether Western, Sinic, Indic, or Islamic) impacts on a preconquest people. To the degree that the in-depth readjustment requires new relationships between the awareness and manipulation
centers in the cerebral cortex and the centers of emotion in the mid and lower brains, they represent physiological as well as psychological change and therefore raise important questions about the promise and condition of the state of humankind.  

Having watched such a collapse, and having seen the pre-conquest consciousness in action, Sorenson sketches a history of the rise of conquest consciousness, a thumb-nail sketch of how “an integrative human mental evolutionary development was destroyed by the emergence of an adversarial one.” Sorenson claims that “all four major civilization developments of the world (Western, Sinic, Indic, and Islamic) have conquistadorial features,” but he sketches the western one to make his point. Let us consider a few of the broad strokes he makes:

It is common knowledge that agriculture enables larger populations. We also know that larger populations sometimes outstrip the natural resources they depend upon (much like what happened with sweet potato in New Guinea). In primeval Mediterranea agricultural innovation would have come on come on spottily at first, here and there, not everywhere at once; in some places it started a millennium later. Where regions became congested, and new land resources scarce, the free-range requirement of preconquest life disappeared—slowly at first since surrounding virgin lands would for quite some time be able to absorb pressed peoples. Eventually, however, there would be confinement, confrontation, and conflict. At that point in the evolution, a psychological transformation commenced, one that focused with growing intensity on emergent cognitive abstractions and symbols by which to anchor claims to property. As these took hold, possessiveness evolved as a basic human trait.

. . . . As this civilizational process continued, in the pattern of its onset, philosophies of governance emerged. They were first a means to anchor conquest, then to manage seized property and wealth according to the wishes of the conquerors. Formal ideologies to conjoin governed peoples emerged. Loyalty to an abstract idea of nation began grasping hearts and minds. Since states that managed resources rationally became stronger, reasoned argument became a power tool. While truth in conquered territories could be arbitrarily imposed, in keeping with the nature of conquest, states that managed resources rationally became stronger. Reasoned argument developed. Such refinements as the zetetic, elenctic, and meiotic modes of dialectic reasoning emerged and were eventually formalized in the dialectic systems of Socrates and Aristotle. Since a conquest ethos lay at their root, it should not be surprising that the dialectic form was conquistadorial as well. It enabled one to dip into the kaleidoscopic maelstrom of

109 http://ranprieur.com/readings/preconquest.html
direct sentient experience, drag out chunks, and make latent mental entities of them—as if by such capture, as if by such conquest of the senses, a higher reality was bestowed. It produced a means by which the elements of the sentient world could be materialized, conquered, and controlled according to the interests and desires of established rulers.

It seems worthwhile for scholars, scientists, and ordinary people to contemplate this entwinement of abstraction, extraction, property, and control. And we should perhaps contemplate it in light of the Flynn effect, the finding that average I.Q. scores have gone up rather dramatically over the past century. If we were to look at the average I.Q. of the people of 1900, and compare them to our own, they would score about 70, which marks the edge of so-called mental retardation. Conversely, if the most average of us could go back to 1900 and take an I.Q. test, we would likely rate as a genius.\textsuperscript{110} But we haven’t become a culture of geniuses. If we consider the altogetherness of time, language, abstraction, distance, conquest, and aggression, and the altogetherness of timelessness, communion, concreteness, intimacy, cooperation, mutuality, co-discovery-creation, and the basic nature of PracticeRealization, we may wonder if we have not become a culture of sophisticated fools who have gotten very good at teaching stupidity that looks like intelligence, cleverness lacking Wisdom, conquest in place of coherence (all of it rationalized in one way or another)—though the incoherences mean that rationalizations almost never appear in a universal form, and each group finds their rationalizations superior, but all rationalizations facilitate the same thing: the degradation of the conditions of life). Sadly, we have only concepts here to provoke us into experience and experimentation. But words and their wind can move us.

\textsuperscript{110} Watch James Flynn himself summarize some of the issues at play: https://www.ted.com/talks/james_flynn_why_our_iq_levels_are_higher_than_our_grandparents?language=en
Jeanette Armstrong offers some further reflections that may help just now:

[Western civilization is] grounded in the belief that the Grandmother [Nature] is wild and needs taming and that Indigenous Peoples are wild and need taming.

First they tamed Grandmother to make things. Taking things, easy to take without giving back. Taming the land. Agriculture was a way first to increase human advantage to sustenance. However, it also increased populations that now needed more and more and so more land was taken from other living things.

Agriculture needed easier tools in order to produce more and more. Then it created a need of tools for war in order to keep the tamed lands and tools to take more land from more peoples. Then it was necessary to make more war tools so taking was easier.

It was necessary to make more tools and to teach people to run the new tools to feed their families. It was necessary to make them believe that they could be wealthy and thus happy. It creates junk-ease.

Tools were made to reach into every house with that in mind. To keep people believing in making more tools to make life easy, and to rush to use new tools and thus to believe they need such tools. And so it is necessary to tame more and more—necessary to make junk easier and easier and they might be happier.

We have junk-ease, arising from our junk-knowledge. The Keurig coffee machine typifies this sort of junk-ease: It’s junk, and it supposedly makes life easier. Indeed, a recent news story quotes a woman as saying about her single-use coffee machine, “That thing is my life.” She also said, “But I know that tossing the empty little cups in the garbage after I use them isn’t the most environmentally friendly thing to do.”¹¹¹ Rather astonishing—to try and live with that sort of incoherence and incongruence. Armstrong might say the woman senses “nature’s economic requirements of us as humans in the way we are,” but her relationship with time, her relationship with work, her entanglement in a thousand abstract agendas reinforces that “ever increasing . . . insulation from nature’s economic requirements.” The same news story reports that in 2015, the

last year for which data were available, Keurig alone produced 10.5 billion of those little plastic cups, and other companies also produce them. Indeed, market share of single-serve machines has reached 41% of U.S. consumers!

This has led some people to consider banning the single serve cups. Of course, the pattern of insanity holds, and plenty of people will step in to tell us we needn’t worry, as in the case of Adam Minter, writing in the *Chicago Tribune*. Mr. Minter reasoned, using the figure of 8.5 billion plastic cups made in 2013, that this would come to a mere 25,500 metric tons of plastic, which amounts to .01 percent of the solid waste generated in the U.S. each year. He notes that we throw out 860,000 tons of books each year. He fails to note that plastic cups do not biodegrade (though, some elements in books might not either). But the insanity comes to the suggestion that 25,500 metric tons of plastic is okay (860,000 tons of books is no small symptom either).

A similar line of thinking arrived in our midst courtesy of the U.S. government, run as it is by so many people who want to keep us hooked on junk-ease, people who want us controlled, people who want to keep the mind of conquest going. From a recent National Highway Traffic Safety Administration Report:

> Using the IPCC estimated carbon budget, as of 2011, approximately 51 percent, or 515 Gt C (1,890 Gt CO2), of this budget had already been emitted, leaving a remaining budget of 485 Gt C (1,780 Gt CO2) (IPCC 2013b). From 2011 to 2015, CO2 emissions from fossil fuels, cement production, and land-use change totaled approximately 50 Gt C (183 Gt CO2), leaving a remaining budget from 2016 onwards of 435 Gt C (1595 Gt CO2) (CDIAC 2016). Under the No Action Alternative, U.S. passenger cars and trucks are projected to emit 23 Gt C (83 Gt CO2) from 2016 to 2100, or 5.2 percent of the remaining global carbon budget.

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Under Alternative 1, this projection increases to 25 Gt C (91 Gt CO2) or 5.7 percent of the remaining budget.

The emissions reductions necessary to keep global emissions within this carbon budget could not be achieved solely with drastic reductions in emissions from the U.S. passenger car and light truck vehicle fleet but would also require drastic reductions in all U.S. sectors and from the rest of the developed and developing world. In addition, achieving GHG reductions from the passenger car and light truck vehicle fleet to the same degree that emissions reductions will be needed globally to avoid using all of the carbon budget would require substantial increases in technology innovation and adoption compared to today’s levels and would require the economy and the vehicle fleet to substantially move away from the use of fossil fuels, which is not currently technologically feasible or economically practicable.\textsuperscript{113}

This makes for exceptionally \textit{logical} thinking, and we should receive it as an astonishing artifact.

Since improving emissions on U.S. cars won’t, by itself, save the climate from collapse, we shouldn’t bother doing it. We have our agendas. We can forget attunement with our home (or its Creator).

Armstrong’s discussion of junk-ease brings to mind the experience of Helena Norberg-Hodge, who, again, spent many years in Ladakh, witnessing its pre- and post-conquest state:

In the traditional economy, time was plentiful and limited only by the course of the seasons. However much work there was to be done, life was lived at a human pace and everyone could afford to be patient. By contrast, the modern economy turns time into a commodity—something that can be bought and sold—and suddenly it is quantified and divided into the tiniest fragments. Time becomes something costly, and as people acquire new “time-saving” technologies the pace of life only gets faster. The Ladakhis now have less time for each other and for themselves. As a result, they are losing their once-acute sensitivity to the nuances of the world around them—the ability, for instance, to detect the slightest variations in the weather, or in the movement of the stars. A friend from the Markha Valley summed it up for me: “I can’t understand it. My sister in the capital, she now has all these things that do the work faster. She just buys her clothes in a shop, she has a jeep, a telephone, a gas cooker. All of these things save so much time, and yet when I go to visit her, she doesn’t have time to talk to me.” One of the most striking lessons that changing Ladakh has taught me is that

\textsuperscript{113} http://www.ranum.com/linkedimages/ld_cafe_my2021-26_deis.pdf
while the tools and machines of the modern world in themselves save time, the new way of life as a whole has the effect of taking time away. (1992:106)


The “development” of conquest consciousness, conquest experience, the conquest world, brings a strange kind of impoverishment, an impoverishment of the soul, an impoverishment of connection, an impoverishment of intimacy, an impoverishment of true ease. The impoverishment includes not only the relatively spiritual realm, but the material one as well, as both the number of stupid “jobs” increases along with inequality. Consider this reflection from Norberg-Hodge:

In 1975, I was shown around the remote village of Hemis Shukpachan by a young Ladakhi named Tsewang. It seemed to me that all the houses we saw were especially large and beautiful. I asked Tsewang to show me the houses where the poor people lived. Tsewang looked perplexed a moment, then responded, ‘We don’t have any poor people here.’ Eight years later I overheard Tsewang talking to some tourists. ‘If you could only help us Ladakhis,’ he was saying, ‘we’re so poor.’ (Norberg-Hodge et al. 1995: 93)

Let us return to Liminal Awareness, the vision of it, the possibility of the impossible it could inspire us to practice-and-realize. Perhaps with inconceivable things, we need some degree of via negativa, a “not this” sort of conversation. The mind needs some sort of contrast in order to sense, some “news of a difference,” some “News of the Cosmos”. Sorenson reflects on the news of the Cosmos that non-conquest consciousness heralds:

For several years after I began contacting preconquest peoples like those described above, I considered their type of consciousness an oddity, a kind of naive primitive emotionality, one perhaps suitable only for small, isolated groups, but certainly for no one else. It took a long time for me to realize that they had evolved their own sophisticated type of cognition that was simply different from what I (or anyone I knew) was used to. And I came to realize that such mentality could not be considered primitively ignorant if only because it was so sensitively intelligent and beneficially responsive. It moved more facilely, more harmoniously, and more constructively than do the mentalities associated with today’s postconquest world. Furthermore, it provided for an astonishingly rewarding and zestful life.
This sophisticated development of human mentality may be realizable only in preconquest settings . . . It would be unreasonable to assume that human mentality evolved the same way everywhere during prehistoric times. Less altruistic types also evolved. It appears that at least one such combative type in Mediterranea progressively demolished its earlier preconquest type of life.

. . . Under such conditions the logical sense-of-truth of our Western ‘Age of Reason’ simply remains outside their realm of reason. Instead of applying rules logically sorted out (to know just where they stand or how they must fit in) . . . preconquest infants boldly thrust their sentient interests and awarenesses into an empathetic experiential maelstrom. The boundary-resistant, fluctuating pulses of cognition they experience there leave logic at a loss, therefore undeveloped. This may seem primitive, even a madhouse to those whose sense-of-reason is built on clear concepts logically examined. Yet a remarkably harmonious, on-the-mark intuitive rapport was the lot of these preconquest peoples. Such nonlogical rapport presents serious problems both for epistemologists and anthropologists, as it does for modern ‘common folk’. For many years, my logical mind considered such cognitive separations insurmountable. Now I think that they only are when inquiry is held too rigorously within a single culture’s ethos and system of beliefs.

Questions going far beyond the quandary stated at the beginning of this chapter are raised. As fascinating as we may find the impact of conquering cultures on preconquest groups, it pales before the challenge to epistemology posed by the existence of a system of cognition not based on symbolic logic. We of Western training may find it virtually impossible to see how truth can be demonstrated without recourse to symbols that are logically controlled. When I first came face-to-face with these experientially-based modes of cognition wherein logic was irrelevant, they slid right past me. I did not even see them. Even when I did begin to catch on, I tended to doubt such perceptions once I was again within the confines of Western culture . . . eventually . . . I began to question whether symbolic logic was actually the only means to get at truth. Now I rather think that alternative routes to truth may exist within the immediacy of a type of experiential awareness that perhaps moves in extra-sentient directions not yet brought into the realm of our modern sense-of-truth. My slowness in this matter leads me to believe it may take modern humankind some time to identify and make use of these perhaps more rarefied mental capabilities.

If such capabilities could indeed be realized, what practical significance might they have on the world as it has currently evolved? Integrative (as opposed to adversarial) approaches to truth might benefit a population that is becoming increasingly congested in its planetary home. Freeing epistemology from the so-called ‘Age of Reason’ might even bring scholarly benefits, such as opening areas of inquiry notoriously resistant to logical investigation, e.g., the visionary quests of sorcerers, the meditational insights of lamas, or just those evanescent understandings people sometimes grasp in that never-never land between sleep
and waking. It might also help us understand those awareness flows that can occur across seemingly impenetrable cultural and cognitive barriers, as, for example, when liking is astir. Inquiry into such matters has long resisted both syntax and logic as well as the crucial pillars underlying them: e.g., quantification, measurement, and classification. A new way of looking would seem required.

Finally, in the ultimate analysis, we do not yet have a way to know if the postconquest type of consciousness that dominates the world today represents a positive or negative shift in the evolution of mentality. This question of fundamental values bears on all of humankind and on the future of humanity. Thus, of all the questions raised, it is the one that most demands an answer.

We might indulge the suggestion that Sorenson has played it coy here. The evidence of harms arising from conquest consciousness abounds. Perhaps the more challenging question comes to how we preserve the positive aspects of western and other conquest cultures while engaging in a practice-realization of re-Indigenizing ourselves.

Sorenson does pinpoint value as a root issue. In 1985, the UN established the Global Forum of Spiritual and Parliamentary Leaders on Human Survival. The group included His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Mother Theresa, and Chief Oren Lyons of the Haudenosaunee of the Native Peoples of Turtle Island (a.k.a. North America). This group met at various locations around the world over the course of 6 years. In 1991, while meeting in Tokyo, they agreed to summarize their work. They agreed on a single statement to capture the essence of their understanding: *Value Change For Survival*. Our culture needs guidance right now on how to begin shifting its values as an intelligent response to current conditions, as well as a more Wise, Loving, and Beautiful expression of our own ideals. LoveWisdom must offer that guidance, including LoveWisdom practiced-and-realized in Indigenous traditions.

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114 See for instance http://www.indigenousvalues.org/newsletters/showarticle.php?article=111
Love itself has much to teach us, as Sorenson realized:

Possessing a protean character, love lies more fluidly within the human frame than language. Following its own inner protocols, love seems able to evade the stable kinds of labeling required for logical inquiry. In exotic cultures it is hard to see at all. In the eastern Andaman, its workings were initially invisible to Western eyes. It was necessary to firm up subliminal awarenesses before the workings out of eros could even be detected there. Though difficult to deal with scientifically, love plays such a profound role in the affairs of humankind that it begs experimental types of scrutiny. (1995:1)

The poet e.e. cummings comes to mind:

since feeling is first
who pays any attention
to the syntax of things
will never wholly kiss you;

This one too:

when God decided to invent
everything he took one
breath bigger than a circustent
and everything began

when man determined to destroy
himself he picked the was
of shall and finding only why
smashed it into because

And Wallace Stevens:

Rationalists, wearing square hats,
Think, in square rooms,
Looking at the floor,
Looking at the ceiling.
They confine themselves
To right-angled triangles.
If they tried rhomboids,
Cones, waving lines, ellipses —
As, for example, the ellipse of the half-moon —
Rationalists would wear sombreros.
Too many of our philosophers, scientists, and other academics wear the square hats of the modern conquistador, picking the was of shall and smashing why into because, following along with the culture of clinging, rather than following along with the Way, with the sacred (which they do not perceive, and thus do not perceive as important). Intentionally or even ironically, many of us in academia end up perpetuating the culture’s pattern of insanity, rather than living forth as its conscience. As Nietzsche put it, we seem to long for a “world of truth,” one that “can be mastered completely and forever with the aid of our square little reason” (GS 373). But this is nothing more than conquest consciousness at work: We want to *master* the World, not *attune* with it. We want square tomatoes to fit along the edge of our bottom line. In our culture, the conversation with Love goes worse than this:

Philosophy: \( (x)(y) [x \text{ love } y \supset (\Sigma w) w \text{ is a representation such that . . . . . . . }]) \)

Love: ♥ *How I do dote upon thee . . . ♥*

Why does philosophy speak like this? In the west, according to Sorenson we experienced,

A fracturing of love into *Bacchanalian* and *Sublime* occurred during the early Greek foundations of Western culture. Out of that schism Western ethos grew. The ethos molded the Western type of consciousness. In the eastern Andaman, eros was not cleaved at all. It shaped a type of psyche not countenanced by the West since its prehistory. (1995: 1)

Sorenson suggests that,

Western consciousness thus developed along quite different paths. Reared and schooled didactically, we of the West learn principally through verbalized instruction. Throughout our education we are required to behave per stated rules, and to assume standards, duties and responsibilities imposed by others. At formal education’s end, we seek wealth and power to express our ego needs and inner cravings. We yen to remake surroundings in accordance. With so many ego-driven people being produced this way, we have a society where many different egos vie, where conflict and competition become norms. Peace must then be

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maintained by codes of conduct, laws and regulations. These must be didactically conveyed. When adolescent erotism surges, it makes people in the system ill at ease. It even frightens them. They pretend it isn’t really there, stamp on it when pretense becomes untenable. Adolescence in the West becomes a time to dissimulate and pretend.

On Epuul’s island there were no laws and regulations, nor were they needed. Likewise for pretense. Consciousnesses emerged instinctively in harmony with others. I had to suppress my inbred contentious instincts before I could even see this (1995: 11)

In these sentiments, he seems to play the following passage from Laozi in reverse:

I let go of the law,
and people become honest.
I let go of economics,
and people become prosperous.
I let go of religion,
and people become serene.
I let go of all desire for the common good,
and the good becomes common as grass. (Ch. 57)

Once the common good gets lost, we begin to desire it. As we lose true serenity, we need “religion” and “spirituality” to mediate. Once we lose prosperity—recall that Perlman and others argue that this is can be seen as the default state when we are possessed of being, possessed by Nature, possessed in relational openness—we have to develop economics. As economics encourages the collapse of honesty, we need all sorts of laws—and we arrive at a point at which we cannot effectively imagine “letting go” of the law. Laozi invites us to sense, invites us to verify that, attuned with the Way, attuned with Nature, attuned with the Sacred, “the law would be written in our hearts” (32). Though we may find it hard to imagine for ourselves, Sorenson found this to hold in the cultures he witnessed, and we could perhaps practice and realize it for ourselves.

But realizing it for ourselves presents us with the challenges we have tried to bring out. Let us say that we would like to access a better way of knowing. What will we do? For instance, we
might like to consider dreams as a way to know better. But then we need to ask: Can we even dream anymore? There are all sorts of things that we would have to consider, and all sorts of practices we would have to experiment with in order to know by means of dreams. But, Can we even dream? We must include in this question the context: A degraded situation in which we not only suffer from sleep deprivation, but we also suffer from what Naiman (2017) calls “the silent epidemic of REM sleep loss.” I am not sure if we can see how spiritually significant this is, since we require a revolution in concept-constellations in order to fully sense it, constellations like “health,” “philosophy,” “knowing,” “dream,” “sacred,” “ecology”. If we don’t see dreaming as essential to the health of and our knowing of soul and soil, of self and world, mind and body, Nature and Culture, then we don’t see what a serious spiritual-philosophical-psychological-biological-ecological epidemic Naiman warns us about. Ninety readers out of one hundred might not take the lack of dream life as a spiritual emergency, but in relation to all we have considered and will consider, this falling apart of dream life seems to go together with a collapse of knowing, a collapse of a style of consciousness, a collapse of Nature-Culture, a collapse of Mind and Wisdom.

Let us try and get at what dreaming could mean. We first need a little sketching from a distance, a return to some of the considerations we have already engaged, but from a different angle, so to speak.

Essential to a way of knowing is vision, worldview, a style of consciousness, a pattern of thinking, a feel for Nature and reality, a way of speaking and moving. We have to face the pressures of language, but also the pressures of reason, and the nihilism that reason may have
sired. How do we participate in reality if so many aspects of our culture precisely inhibit a vitalizing feel for Nature-Culture and Mind-Nature? What does it even mean to “participate in reality,” and why should we care? The way we ask this question itself seems symptomatic of our crisis. Some of Nietzsche’s diagnosis of that crisis may help.

Strong (1974) offers a compelling summary of Nietzsche’s views on the interwovenness of language, thought, and reality, and it seems to me that Nietzsche has more to offer us regarding a diagnosis of this interwovenness in the western case (again, speaking about a style of consciousness). Strong convincingly responds to some of the things one might like to say about Nietzsche’s views in order to undermine them, and Strong specifically places his comments in relation to Habermas, a giant of a figure, Kantian in his commitment to reason, and surely eager to find ways to free us from having to face the more extreme demands that Nietzsche makes on our soul.

Maybe that sounds a bit histrionic. And yet, aren’t we dealing with the effects of nihilism? Is there any compelling interpretation for the collapse of the conditions of life as an event that might surprise Nietzsche, if we told him only about the advancement of technology, the growth of population, and the fact that we had not yet resolved the problem of nihilism? Maybe the explosion of technology and population in fact go together with the problem of nihilism—technology especially if we recall Dewey’s efforts to show the fallacy of thinking of “science” and “technology” as separate.
In any case, Strong reads Nietzsche as making at least three major claims: First that language constitutes our knowledge of reality and reality itself (more conservatively, we could say it has a strong impact on these, or that it significantly shapes or in-forms them—but we should recall that our more radical suggestions here are as revolutionary as Whorf’s while avoiding his basic errors), secondly that language binds our thinking and all our activity and keeps it within the reality it has constituted, and finally, perhaps most disturbingly, that language itself makes an epistemology of nihilism necessary. Strong asks, near the end of his inquiry, “What then is the epistemology of nihilism?” He answers, based on his understanding of Nietzsche: “The hidden linguistic imperatives of the categories which men now live under force them towards nothingness” (259).

We can suggest here that Nietzsche needn’t sound as naïvely Whorfian as might at first seem. The main diagnosis has to do with things like the interwovenness of reason, agency, morality, truth, science, philosophy, psychology, and—finally—language, which perhaps only bears a deeper guilt in relation to how it encourages us to remain stuck in a certain style of consciousness, such that a feedback loop develops, and the errors of bad philosophy, errors of unskillful Nature-Culture interbeing, become solidified and amplified over time. But we can reasonably consider the possibility that some Cultures had more skillful and realistic relationships with Nature, practices of attunement that allowed the development of language to go along in a basically healthier way, all things considered.

In any case, Strong brings out the emphasis Nietzsche lays on morality and control as aspects of his critique of language, thought, and reality, and it always seems to me that this really hits
home, because if we overthrow our certainty about things like subjects and agency, then we undermine the notion of “the sovereign individual,” and we appear to invite total chaos. We need to be able to hold people responsible it seems—but of course that is an assumption of our way of life, not a metaphysical verity.

Strong points out three epistemological prejudices that our language seduces us into: The subject-object distinction, the notion of agency (the supposition of a “doer” and that doer’s “free will”), and linear or narrow-minded or mechanical causality (basic cause-effect sequencing). We might see the first as an interesting challenge to Descartes, and the latter two as an interesting challenge to Kant: What Descartes and Kant arrive at as a kind of certainty, Nietzsche undermines as a function of grammar. The cogito of Descartes and the transcendental deduction of Kant (one of the tools of the philosopher’s toolkit, and one that does not rest “at the limit”—a turn of phrase that has new meaning in light of “liminal awareness”) have shown us first and foremost that language can seduce us. We might go a little further and say that language embodies, and gets us to embody, a certain form of life. But the language and the form of life, which go altogether, are not necessarily skillful and realistic. They are not necessarily wise or true. They are not somehow beautiful in and of themselves, but can only have a beauty, a wisdom, a grace, and compassionate effectiveness in relation to everything else.

Among other things, Strong helps us appreciate Nietzsche’s insight that the subject-object distinction itself creates or goes altogether with a certain kind of consciousness, one that in the western case in particular gets seduced into a-historical fantasies. I think this is very much in line
with what Dewey would later describe as the philosophical fallacy, and the delusion of the western “quest for certainty”.

Turning to Nietzsche himself, consider one of his key “Conclusions”: “The faith in the categories of reason is the cause of nihilism.” That deserves a full stop, even though he adds, “We have measured the value of the world according to categories that refer to a purely fictitious world.” (WP I, B) Not just faith in the categories of reason, but faith (and rationalization) coupled with a ceaseless application of them creates a fictitious world, one in which we have “daylight savings time,” “Earth Overshoot Day,” “bread” and other “food,” industrial “agriculture” that has left us with 60 harvests or less in some places, “development,” “democracy,” “criminals,” “philosophers,” “science”. These are fictions—all arrived at by rational processes.

Even Dewey seems caught up in some of the devotion and faith we have in things like science—which we can charitably take as evidence of their seductive power (we fall in love with reason, rationality, efficiency, technology, textual analysis). Dewey of course appears to go scandalously wrong in many places, including a passage in which he suggests the aim of human civilization “is to subordinate the materials and forces of the natural environment so that they shall be rendered tributary to life functions” (1909: 178). This could be charitably received, but it does seem at times that Dewey gets hung up on the relationship between “knowledge” and “control”. We are almost certainly not here to “control” the energies of life and “subordinate” them, to make them bear tribute to human agendas. Rather, if we had to say something, we might say we are here to co-discover-create in, through, with, as the energies of life, the “sacred powers” and “inconceivable causes”. Again, notions of control seem like signs of the seductiveness of
conquest consciousness, such that even otherwise sensitive and visionary philosophers cannot see fully enough into a more Nondualistic Way of Life.

As early as Human, All-too-Human, Nietzsche began to try and confront the interwovenness of language, thought, and reality:

Language as an alleged science. The importance of language for the development of culture lies in the fact that, in language, man juxtaposed to the one world another world of his own, a place which he thought so sturdy that from it he could move the rest of the world from its foundations and make himself lord over it. To the extent that he believed over long periods of time in the concepts and names of things as if they were aeternae veritates, man has acquired that pride by which he has raised himself above the animals: he really did believe that in language he had knowledge of the world. The shaper of language was not so modest as to think that he was only giving things labels; rather, he imagined that he was expressing the highest knowledge of things with words; and in fact, language is the first stage of scientific effort. Here, too, it is the belief in found truth from which the mightiest sources of strength have flowed. Very belatedly (only now) is it dawning on men that in their belief in language they have propagated a monstrous error. Fortunately, it is too late to be able to revoke the development of reason, which rests on that belief.

Logic, too, rests on assumptions that do not correspond to anything in the real world, e.g., on the assumption of the equality of things, the identity of the same thing at different points of time; but this science arose from the opposite belief (that there were indeed such things in the real world). So it is with mathematics, which would certainly not have originated if it had been known from the beginning that there is no exactly straight line in nature, no real circle, no absolute measure. (HH I, 11)

What he doesn’t consider is that some cultures may have been running a reasonably successful version of the experiment he himself suggests in Gay Science, an experiment to incorporate truth. That this might naturally appear in the languages of those cultures would not surprise him. Those cultures might have a different set of values, and we might not find a very precise analog for what we call and value in “reason” (think “Value Change For Survival”). In relation to this we should also consider Nietzsche’s suggestion that,

This ridiculous overestimation and misunderstanding of consciousness has the very useful consequence that it prevents an all too fast development of
consciousness. Believing that they possess consciousness, men have not exerted themselves very much to acquire it; and things haven’t changed much in this respect. To this day the task of incorporating knowledge and making it instinctive is only beginning to dawn on the human eye and is not yet clearly discernible; it is a task that is seen only by those who have comprehended that so far we have incorporated only our errors and that all our consciousness relates to errors. (GS 44)

Nietzsche doesn’t seem to understand that, aside from a sort of Darwinian pessimism that we needn’t get caught up in, spiritual and philosophical traditions have in some sense long sought to accomplish this incorporation. At times they have phrased it as getting back to an original goodness, but that doesn’t mean the original goodness doesn’t need its own process of incorporation, which includes a freeing of oneself of error, a kind of pruning away or unincorporating of error which happens with a simultaneous incorporation of wisdom, love, and beauty which manifests precisely in spontaneity. Spiritual traditions like Buddhism and Daoism make spontaneity a hallmark of spiritual achievement for the two-fold reason that spontaneity is seen as something like an essential quality of our original mind, and also a sign that wisdom, love, and beauty have become so thoroughgoing, so fully embodied that one doesn’t have to “think” about them in the ordinary manner of thinking. Another way to put it, harkening back to the very earliest passage from Bateson, is that, if we are truly wise and compassionate, our thinking already presences these. A wise and compassionate response is as intimate and immediate as turning our head when someone calls our name, not the function of abstract calculation. As Bateson said:

We face a paradox in that I cannot tell you how to educate the young, or yourselves, in terms of the epistemology which I have offered you except you first embrace that epistemology. The answers must already be in your head and in your rules of perception. You must know the answer to your question before I can give it to you. (Steps, 310)
The sort of intimacy and spontaneity that we should read into this runs through many spiritual and philosophical traditions, and the curious reader may like to consult Edward Slingerland’s work that reads the ancient Chinese traditions in relation to contemporary dual process theory, which Nietzsche, too, seems to be getting at in this passage. The conscious process differs from the instinctive process. Kahneman famously referred to it as “thinking, fast and slow.” The slow process is conscious, the fast one instinctive. Slingerland’s work can help us see how the ancient sages of China tried to recommend a union of these, a synergy, a harmony. By consciously training ourselves, we either attune the instinctive layer or, rupture and then realign the conscious layer (or maybe we do both). In either case, we rely on spiritual or philosophical practices, on Arts of Awareness.

In a culture devoid of proper Mythology (as a science of living, as an expression of LoveWisdom), what do we actually practice? We practice and get very good at certain patterns of thought, speech, and action, and these become embedded (so to speak) in our flesh and bones—our bones speak, our language emanates from our blood and guts—as well as appearing outside of us, manifested as our ecologies. We are lived by our reactivities, our freak-outs, our predilections, our consumption, our strangely designed buildings, the relationship we have with non-human beings and Nature in general, our intellectual fascinations, our manner or reading, our way of doing science, our way of getting through each day. We are lived by our philosophies—by the rationalizations of powers we pretend to understand. When we get out of attunement with life, nihilism can become our basic instinct. We become lived by nihilism, and it spills out of our thought, speech, and action.
Nietzsche seems so perceptive and insightful as he uncovers the problem of nihilism. Consider his reflections in the preface to *Will to Power*:

**Final Conclusion:** All the values by means of which we have tried so far to render the world estimable for ourselves and which then proved inapplicable and therefore devaluated the world—all these values are, psychologically considered, the results of certain perspectives of utility, designed to maintain and increase human constructs of domination—and they have been falsely *projected* into the essence of things. What we find here is still the *hyperbolic naïveté* of man: positing himself as the meaning and measure of the value of things.

This drives the rationalization. We want the world a certain way. We try to make it comfortable, and we don’t want to have to owe the world anything.

For why has the advent of nihilism become necessary? Because the values we have had hitherto thus draw their final consequence; because nihilism represents the ultimate logical conclusion of our great values and ideals . . .

Again it seems worth emphasizing the relationship between morality, truth, subjects, agency, reason, nature. He brings this out in the *Genealogy*, including in this final passage:

> We can no longer conceal from ourselves *what* is expressed by all that willing which has taken its direction from the ascetic ideal: this hatred of the human, and even more of the animal, and more still of the material, this horror of the senses, of reason itself, this fear of happiness and beauty, this longing to get away from all appearance, change, becoming, death, wishing, from longing itself—all this means—let us dare to grasp it—*a will to nothingness*, an aversion1 to life, a rebellion against the most fundamental presuppositions of life; but it is and remains a *will!* … And, to repeat in conclusion what I said at the beginning: man would rather will *nothingness* than *not* will.116

Strong summarizes Nietzsche’s critique and some of its implications this way:

> Thus for Nietzsche, the *desire to found knowledge on truth*, itself made necessary and encouraged by the epistemological categories of our language, *results in a gradual undermining of that which might serve as the basis for truth.*

> The will to truth carries a perverse necrophilia. If life is in fact appearance, and there is no “truth” to be ultimately reached, the defense of the will to truth is the

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116 Translation by Kaufmann. The last line reads: *Lieber will noch der Mensc* [sic] *h das Nichts wollen, als nicht wollen.*
assertion of the ultimate validity of a man made perspective, without there being in fact any reason why “truth” should be sought or preferred. To affirm truth as an ultimate standard is to tie oneself to exhaustion and indeed Nietzsche is led to speculate, as Freud was also later to, if there did not lie in the will to truth a “concealed will to death”. . . .

Nietzsche seems then to leave an irresoluble dilemma. The search for liberation from the oppressions and chains of bourgeois society, itself but the latest manifestation of the genealogy of the West, forces a recognition that as an individual one cannot escape society, for that which structures society also structures the self. In fact, everything that one might do in such an attempt at liberation is itself imbued with that from which one is seeking to escape. So the attempt to free oneself results merely in a reinforcement of one's fetters. Our way of being in the world makes us seek freedom, the search binds us all the more to that which we would escape and we find both that we cannot achieve freedom nor desist from searching. . . .

. . . in Nietzsche’s discovery of our anthropology by the proceeding from our language, Nietzsche’s enterprise presages that of Wittgenstein. Contrary to Wittgenstein though, Nietzsche thinks that the compulsions of our language reveal radical and uncurable sickness in Western humans. Wittgenstein had hoped for a physician to cure the “sicknesses of our understanding”; Nietzsche ultimately requires “transfiguration.” (258-60)

The emphasis on transfiguration has in part to do with the unconscious dimensions at work. We cannot change our beliefs, as if it were a matter of getting the right “propositions” in our heads. That seems to be a sort of basic error of institutionalized education and philosophy, even though so many educators and philosophers criticize the notion vehemently and insist they want “critical thinkers,” that they see some sort of intimacy in communication that goes beyond the model of sender-receiver, and so on. Nevertheless, speaking generally, we approach the matter of education in a way that does not get at “transfiguration,” in part because we lack a better vision, a better worldview than the one Nietzsche critiques, in part because we lack practices for doing anything more skillful, and in part because, altogether with the other two issues, our epistemology lacks rigor, and leaves us unable to truly know better when it comes to teaching, learning, and living (the three go together, so how, given the state of the world, could we
proclaim the skillfulness of our approach to teaching anything?). Bateson has some reflections that puts this in the framework as a problem of logical typing:

It is interesting to consider the nature of such a concept as “crime.” We act as if crime could be extinguished by punishing parts of what we regard as criminal actions, as if “crime” were the name of a sort of action or of part of a sort of action. More correctly “crime,” like “exploration,” is the name of a way of organizing actions. It is therefore unlikely that punishing the act will extinguish the crime. In several thousand years, the so-called science of criminology has not escaped from a simple blunder in logical typing.

Be that as it may, there is a very profound difference between a serious attempt to change the characterological state of an organism and trying to change that organism’s particular actions. The latter is relatively easy; the former, profoundly difficult. Paradigmatic change is as difficult as—indeed is of the same nature as—change in epistemology. (For an elaborate study of what seems to be necessary to make characterological changes in human criminals, the reader is referred to a recent book, Sane Asylum, by Charles Hampden-Turner.) It would seem to be almost a first requirement of such deep training that the particular act for which the convict was being punished when in jail should not be the main focus of the training. (MN 124)

Paradigmatic change is difficult. We seem to have evidence that we need it, and yet we seem to focus on particular actions and parts of actions—almost against our better judgment in some cases, but also because we don’t know how to go deeper. In the university, we don’t try to change the struggling student’s character, but we instead give them worksheets or assignment to help them “find and analyze arguments” and then to “critically respond.” We do all sorts of things that amount to actions and parts of actions. We may as well keep shouting, “Stand up straight!”

With respect to Nietzsche’s suggestions, as summarized by Strong above, it seems important to emphasize again the dimension of incorporation, and to do so while keeping an ecological vision, an ecological sensitivity. Nietzsche in some sense offers an epistemology that includes practice-
and-realization, and he even seems to verge into systems thinking now and then. In *Gay Science* he writes:

> But among the forces cultivated by morality was truthfulness: this, one eventually turned against morality, discovered its teleology, its prejudiced (interessiert) perspective, and now the recognition of this long incarnate (eingefleischt) mendacity that one despairs getting rid of, becomes a stimulant. Now we discover in ourselves needs implanted by a long understanding of morality—which now appear to us as needs for untruth; on the other hand, these needs are those on which the values for which we endure life seem to hang. This antagonism—not to esteem what we know and not to be allowed any longer to value those lies we would tell ourselves—results in a process of dissolution. (GS 344, translation by Strong)

This notion of incarnation matters. Interestingly, a resonance arises here with both Jung and the physicist Wolfgang Pauli. In a letter to Jung, Pauli wrote:

> I should like to thank you once again for the pleasant evening I spent with you. I shall give a lot of thought to many of the things you said, so that I can digest them properly. What made the deepest impression upon me was the central role played in your thinking by the concept of ‘incarnation’ as a scientific working hypothesis. This concept is of particular interest to me, first of all because it is supraconfessional (‘Avatara’ in India) and also because it expresses a psychophysical unity. More and more I see the psycho-physical problem as the key to the overall spiritual situation of our age, and the gradual discovery of a new (‘neutral’) psycho-physical language of unity, whose function is symbolically to describe an invisible, potential form of reality that is only indirectly inferable through its effects, also seems to me an indispensable prerequisite for the emergence of the new ἄρρι[ ]τος γάμος [sacred marriage, holy marriage, or alchemical/spiritual union of opposites—n.k.] or predicted by you. I have also clearly seen how you have linked the concept of incarnation with ethics, which, moreover, just like Schopenhauer (in his work on the basis of morality), you have based on the identity of self and neighbor at deeper psychic levels (‘what one does to others, one also does to oneself’ etc.). Is it possible to define your point of view as *incarnatio continua*? (248)

Gieser offers the following helpful commentary:

> The idea of incarnation is closely connected with Jung’s view of the unconscious as the primeval rock of consciousness, which also contains the possible future lines of development of consciousness. Incarnation is tied up with the realization of a potentially existing reality and is therefore also linked with his concept of individuation, that is, the individual’s realization of his own potential. The concept of incarnation is also related to the unique moment of creation and the
advent of something new, especially a new or changed level of consciousness. Inspiration, creative impulses and sudden insights have their origins in the unconscious. But without consciousness, the products of the unconscious are amoral. A discerning consciousness, an ethical decision, is required in order to transform the products of the unconscious into cultural products. Similarly Jung sees the statements of interaction between God and man as symbolic expressions of an urge originating in the unconscious to be made conscious. ‘... since man knows himself only as an ego, and the self, as a totality, is indescribable and indistinguishable from a God-image, self-realization – to put it in religious or metaphysical terms – amounts to God’s incarnation’. (248)

The heart-mind-body-world-cosmos is flexible, and it can incarnate a variety of possibilities. Our job has to involve something like what Nietzsche demands: Running an ethical-ontological-aesthetic experiment, which means a living spiritual practice, philosophy as a way of life.

Whatever Sorenson and Wolff witnessed, for example, most westerners cannot typically incarnate— but they remain possibilities even for those of us raised in western culture, and both Sorenson and Wolff discovered. The issue Whorf uncovered is not that one simply cannot “think” in ways that transcend the habits reflected in and encouraged by language, but that it is not common or easy, given a certain cultural-linguistic context to do so, and that one may find it quite challenging to encourage and maintain any vitalizing shift in understanding and awareness in certain culture-nature contexts (which contexts include the languages spoken).

For instance, we encountered Sorenson’s experience of synchronicity with Nature, which seemed to go together with insights into other ways of knowing. But it required submersion in a non-conquest Nature-Culture context, and perhaps it required the energy of the storm, and the synchronistic energy in Sorenson’s psyche (to speak analytically). Wolff’s experience involved studying with Ahmeed, the Shaman. We will turn to it in a moment. But, while Nietzsche’s criticisms of reason and truth remain fresh in our minds, let’s look at the experience of Daniel
Everett, the linguist who lived among the Amazonian Pirahã—and we should note that he went among them as a missionary, even though he is also a linguist:

The Pirahãs made me question concepts of truth that I had long adhered to and lived by. The questioning of my faith in God, coupled with life among the Pirahãs, led me to question what is perhaps an even more fundamental component of modern thought, the concept of truth itself. Indeed, I decided that I lived under a delusion—the delusion of truth. God and truth are two sides of the same coin. Life and mental well-being are hindered by both, at least if the Pirahãs are right. And their quality of inner life, their happiness and contentment, strongly supports their values.

From the time we are born we try to simplify the world around us. For it is too complicated for us to navigate; there are too many sounds, too many sights, too many stimuli for us to take even a single step unless we can decide what to pay attention to and what to ignore. In specific intellectual domains we call our attempts at simplification “hypotheses” and “theories.” Scientists invest their careers and energies in certain attempts at simplification. They request money from funding organizations to travel to or to build some new environment in which to test their simplifying scheme.

But this type of “elegance theorizing” (getting results that are “pretty” rather than particularly useful) began to satisfy me less and less. People who contribute to such programs usually see themselves as working toward a closer relationship to truth. But as the American pragmatist philosopher and psychologist William James reminded us, we shouldn’t take ourselves too seriously. We are no more nor less than evolved primates. It is rather ridiculous to think that the universe is a virgin saving herself for us. We are all too often the three blind men describing an elephant; or the man who looks on the wrong side of the road for his keys, simply because the light is better there. (272)

This seems like an artefact Nietzsche would savor, and it feels quite resonant in our inquiry just now. Here we have a former Christian missionary (and current academic) noting experientially the very thing Nietzsche invites us all to notice, and which we get a feel for in the passages from Husserl and Dewey we considered much earlier in our inquiry. Reason and truth function, in practical terms, not much differently than “God”—for the meaning of these terms has to do with how we live, how we practice, what we can bring to realization, not as a matter of whim or intellectual intention, but in the interwovenness of all things, altogether with, through, as a sacred-creative-ordering-in-mutuality. It is a co-discovery-creation, not anything we can force on
the basis of faith—either faith in “Reason” that inclines us toward “elegance theorizing” (a variety of junk-ease and junk-knowledge perhaps), or faith in “God” that inclines us toward “elegance preaching” and missionary work, all in the midst of a culture characterized by conquest consciousness.

We have to take great care here, because this all can sound like a post-modern tirade against “reason” and “western culture”. We are interested in something far more subtle, and far more practical—loving, intimate, joyful, healthful, healing, and eminently sane in a holistic sense.

We could suggest that we see in this passage from Everett the beginnings of a conversion, but, lacking a broader sense of philosophy and spirituality, he only seems to experience it as a de-conversion, one that shook his life apart, but for which he seems to feel deeply grateful. He quotes Jim Elliot, as we all can, especially those of us in academia caught up in a paradigm that seems to be in crisis: “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.”

Everett says, of his “de-conversion”:

> When I reached the place where I was finally prepared to take the consequences and let someone else know about my “deconversion,” some two decades had elapsed since my initial doubts. And, as I expected, when I finally announced my change of belief, it had severe consequences for me personally. It’s a difficult decision for anyone to tell his closest friends and family that he no longer shares their foundational beliefs—the beliefs that make them who they are. It must be something like coming out as gay to unsuspecting close friends and family.
>
> In the end, my loss of religion and the epistemological crisis that accompanied it led to the breakup of my family—what I most wanted to avoid.

(271)

Maybe we in academia will need to let go of what we cannot keep, in order to gain what we cannot lose—the Self, the Soul, reality, Sophia. Socrates embodies this sort of renunciation in the most positive sense of the term. Among the reasons for his refusal to escape prison and death: He
thereby *presenced* for us his incorporation of something no one could take away from him—the very pinnacle of all philosophical PracticeRealization. Perhaps we can say that *every* genuine philosophical and spiritual tradition wants this for us, wants us to realize what no one can ever take from us. However, what Everett refers to as “religion” (as *he* seems to use the term) means any aspect of any tradition that has lost sight of this, lost touch with the need to make it real, by means of concrete practice-realization. As we shall see, the Pirahãs, perhaps in some ways instinctively, accept things that seem unscientific to us—but they accept them on the basis of *experience*, not faith. Everett does not seem to ask what even Christianity might have allowed him to *experience*, if only it had taught him more skillful and realistic practices, more rigorous ways of *knowing* sacredness and making it real.

In any case, it seems important to emphasize how Everett’s insight applied simultaneously to “truth” and “God”. There is something resonant here in the thoughts of Stuart Kauffman, who, in his capacity as a *scientist* (perhaps not as a philosopher), has participated in what may yet turn out to be a revolution in science:

Perhaps the most astonishing aspect of *Investigations*, both as process and the resulting book, was my puzzled realization that the way Newton, Einstein, and Bohr taught us to do science may be incomplete. You see, in following their cornerstone examples of physics, we are taught to prestate the particles, forces, laws and initial and boundary conditions, then compute the consequences. In this enterprise, we are able to state ahead of time what the full space of possibilities is, that is, we can finitely prestate the configuration space of possibilities of the system in question. This capacity to prestate the configuration space, for example, is the central conceptual presupposition of the classical statistical mechanics of a liter of gas in its 6N-dimensional phase space of all possible positions and momenta of the N particles of gas. But I was, to my deep surprise, led to doubt that we can ever prestate the configuration space of a biosphere. (2000: x)

It may seem like a different issue, but somehow the sense that we could prestate the configurations of the universe or of life may arise from the delusions Nietzsche sought to
criticize. It appears to come from a desire for a transcendent perspective. The Pirahã Culture, like many other Cultures we have included in our inquiry, might fascinate Nietzsche precisely in the manner in which they incorporated a commitment to themselves and to life, rejecting commitments to “truth” in the sense Nietzsche found it practiced in western culture. As Everett puts it:

They have no craving for truth as a transcendental reality. Indeed, the concept has no place in their values. Truth to the Pirahã is catching a fish, rowing a canoe, laughing with your children, loving your brother, dying of malaria. Does this make them more primitive? Many anthropologists have suggested so, which is why they are so concerned about finding out the Pirahãs’ notions about God, the world, and creation.

But there is an interesting alternative way to think about things. Perhaps it is the presence of these concerns that makes a culture more primitive, and their absence that renders a culture more sophisticated. If that is true, the Pirahãs are a very sophisticated people. Does this sound far-fetched? Let’s ask ourselves if it is more sophisticated to look at the universe with worry, concern, and a belief that we can understand it all, or to enjoy life as it comes, recognizing the likely futility of looking for truth or God?

The Pirahãs have built their culture around what is useful to their survival. They don’t worry about what they don’t know, nor do they think they can or do know it all. Likewise, they do not crave the products of others’ knowledge or solutions. Their views, not so much as I summarize them dryly here, but as they are lived out in the Pirahãs’ daily lives, have been extremely helpful to me and persuasive as I have looked at my own life and the beliefs that I held, many of them without warrant. Much of what I am today, including my nontheistic view of the world, I owe at least in part to the Pirahãs. (273)

As we shall see, the Pirahãs may have also fascinated Dewey for their commitment to the immediacy of experience. They practiced-and-realized a way of life that resonates with his principle of immediate empiricism. But let us turn to Wolff, who not only had many of his western ideas challenged, but who enjoyed the great privilege of practicing-and-realizing some of the deeper insight of the Culture he encountered.
Wolff’s training with the Shaman involved wandering around in the forest, the jungle. Wolff spent many hours in a western mindset. He didn’t know how to sense, how to relate with the jungle in an active-receptive-participatory way. Finally, he says,

I decided instead to really open my ears, my eyes, my nose, my skin to whatever I could pick up in the jungle around us. I stopped abruptly. The jungle was suddenly dense with sounds, smells, little puffs of air here and there. I became aware of things I had largely ignored before. It was as if all this time I had been walking with dirty eyeglasses—and then someone washed them for me; or as if I were watching a blurry home movie—and then someone turned the focusing knob. But it was more than that—much more. I could smell things I had no name for. I heard little sounds that could be anything at all. I saw a leaf shivering. I saw a line of insects crawling up a tree. (155-6)

Something began to shift. The Shaman took notice:

Ahmeed noticed that I had been walking slower and slower while paying intense attention to the world around me. He too stood still.

“How?“ he asked.

“Well, no . . . not really . . . perhaps . . . I don’t know,” I stammered.

“Drink?“ he asked.

Afterward I realized that he had spoken very softly, so as not to intrude on what was going on inside me, and he had used simple, single words: Sit? Drink? Yes, I was very thirsty. I looked at him, thinking he would find a water vine. He was the person who knew the jungle, after all. He looked back at me with a perfectly blank expression. He was not helping. He was not talking.

Suddenly, a new thought burst in on me: maybe I could sense water. In my mind I made a sort of list: seeing water, hearing water, smelling water. I might smell water, or even hear it if it was dripping on a leaf perhaps. I looked around.

“Do not talk,” Ahmeed said—I knew he meant “Do not think.” “Water inside heart,” he said next, with a gesture of his hand on his heart. I knew he meant I should sense inside—not with my mind, but from the inside.

It is sad to have to use so many words to say something so simple. As soon as I stopped thinking, planning, deciding, analyzing—using my mind, in short—I felt as if I was pushed in a certain direction. I walked a few steps and immediately saw a big leaf with perhaps half a cup of water in it.

I must have stood there for a full minute, in awe. Not in awe of anything in particular, simply in awe. When I leaned over to drink from the leaf, I saw water with feathery ripples, I saw a few mosquito larvae wriggling on the surface, I saw the veins of the leaf through the water, some bubbles, a little piece of dirt. Reaching out, I put a finger in the water, then saw that one of the wriggling mosquito larvae had been trapped in a tiny bubble on my finger. How beautiful,
how perfect. I did not put the finger with the water droplet in my mouth, but looked back at the leaf.

My perception opened further. I no longer saw water—what I felt with my whole being was a leaf-with-water-in-it, attached to a plant that grew in soil surrounded by uncounted other plants, all part of the same blanket of living things covering the soil, which was also part of a larger living skin around the earth. And nothing was separate; all was one, the same thing: water—leaf—plant—trees—soil—animals—earth—air—sunlight and little wisps of wind. The all-ness was everywhere, and I was part of it.

I cannot explain what went on inside me, but I knew that I had learned something unbelievably wonderful. I felt more alive than I had ever felt before. All of me was filled with being.

What this other sense is, I do not know. For me it is very real. I think of it as a sense of knowing. It probably is a quality we all have to a greater or lesser degree. For me it works when I can get out of my mind, when I can experience without having to understand, or name, or position, or judge, or categorize.

It is a quality that has to be used or it fades away; just as one has to exercise muscles, so too knowing must be exercised.

I am saying this after the fact, trying to describe something that does not fit into our Western concepts, and therefore there are no words. At the time I did not think anything. I was learning how to put my mind aside and use some other sense to know.

Standing over a leaf with a little water in it, somewhere in the jungles of Malaysia, I did not think in words. I did not think. I bathed in that overwhelming sense of oneness. I felt as if a light was lit deep inside me. I knew I was radiating something—love, perhaps—for this incredible world, this rich, varied, and totally interconnected world of creations that, at the same time, gave love to me. And with the love, I also felt a very deep sense of belonging.

After a while, I slowly woke up. I came to, so to speak, and was in my body again. I looked around. Ahmeed was not where I thought he was. In fact, he was not anywhere in sight. He must have walked on, I thought. And as soon as I thought, I panicked. I realized that I was alone, that Ahmeed had left me in a strange place. I had no idea where I was, or how to get back to Three or to find Ahmeed. My first reaction was to shout, to yell, to call him. But the sense of being part of this wonderful whole was so strong that I could not raise my voice. I opened my mouth and tried to make a sound, but no sound would pass my throat. I could not possibly disturb this oneness by yelling, by feeling panicked. I could not be afraid—after all, I was part of this all-ness.

My life changed in that moment.

And then I knew I need not shout for help, I need not run after Ahmeed. I knew with a great certainty that all I had to do was put my mind aside and know where he was. Almost immediately I knew: He was not too far away. I had an impression
of him walking leisurely in *that* direction. He sauntered as if he were deep in thought, or perhaps he was thinking of me. In my mindless [i.e. habitual mind dropped off, forgotten—n.k.] state of being I sent him a voiceless hello, and it was easy to imagine receiving his slight smile that barely stretched the corners of his mouth.

Part of me wanted to join Ahmeed, go back to Three [the village] to eat and drink. But another part wanted to stay here and know this new world more intimately. I stayed.

I was certain I would find my way back to Ahmeed and the village later, when it grew dark perhaps. I have no idea how long I stayed—there is no time in that mindless state—but it was quite dark when I finally returned to the settlement.

When it was time to leave the place where I had discovered the leaf with water (I never drank any, by the way; I was not thirsty anymore), I extended my knowing to sense where the settlement was. *There*, my knowing told me immediately.

With my new and now extended knowing I became aware of a soft sound, some distance away. At first I did not recognize the sound. It seemed familiar, but I had no name for it and in that state I avoided naming, understanding, and recognizing. But this sound wanted to be acknowledged. It intruded on my being, almost as if introducing itself: I am Tiger. It was that sound between purring and growling that tigers make when they are not sleeping and not hunting. I think of it as an announcement: *I am here.* (156-60)

I like that Tiger appears here, not as something to get freaked out about, but as one of The Others who make us what we are. “I am here, I Am That I Am, and this place is holy.” It also seems important to savor, “My life changed in that moment.” Such vitalizing life-changing moments are integral to all genuine practices of LoveWisdom.

In light of this sort of experience, we can suggest that, Nietzsche gets something right and something wrong when he writes:

*Ultimate solution.*—We believe in reason: this, however, is the philosophy of gray concepts. Language depends on the most naïve prejudices.

Now We read disharmonies and problems into things because we think *only* in the form of language-and thus believe in the “eternal truth” of “reason” (e.g., subject, attribute, etc.)

*We cease to think when we refuse to do so under the constraint of language:* we barely reach the doubt that sees this limitation as a limitation.
Rational thought is interpretation according to a scheme that we cannot throw off. (WP III 522)

He gets something very right: We have dressed ourselves in drab grey garments of reason, the robes of a new religion (“science”), robes we cannot throw off. And yet—we can; perhaps we must. But what is it we throw off, and what kind of nakedness do we seek? The nakedness of “the primitive”?

We don’t know what this so-called “primitive” is. We have suspicions, perhaps misguided ones, perhaps nothing more than prejudice and limiting thinking. Calvin Luther Martin (1993) engages with some of them:

Many will respond with that oft heard reply, But we cannot go back! To which I respond, But we never left—never left our true, real context, that is. Homo is still here on this planet earth, abiding in our most fundamental and necessary nature by its fundamental and necessary terms. We left all of that only, really, in our fevered imagination. It all began as an act of imagination, an illusory image—most fundamentally, an image of fear—and so the corrective process must likewise begin with an image. Let us re-learn, as hunter-gatherers knew to the core of their being, that this place and its processes (even in our death) always takes care of us—that Homo’s citizenship, and errand, rest not with any creed or state, but with ‘that star’s substance from which he had arisen.’” (130)

This in turn resonates with L.L. Martin et al. (2014) who ask, “What would the world look like if mindfulness were the rule rather than the exception?” They give a preliminary answer:

In some ways, we already know the answer to that question. Research has shown that when people behave mindfully, they are more creative (Langer & Eisenkraft, 2009), healthier (Langer, 2009), and more liked by their interaction partners (Langer, Cohen, & Djikic, 2012). They learn better (Langer, Hatem,&Howell, 1989), exhibit less stereotyping (Djikic, Langer, & Stapleton, 2008), display greater self-acceptance (Carson & Langer, 2006), and even live longer (Alexander, Langer, Newman, Chandler, & Davies, 1989). (290)

They go on to lay out their version of the hunter-gather style of mind, and claim that mindfulness would basically put us back in touch with it. They describe resonance between how brushes with
death change people’s lives positively by turning them toward the present moment, and how both mindfulness and the hunter-gatherer lifestyle do the same. They describe many wonders of all three of these, and then conclude as follows:

Does the picture we have painted seem too good to be true? Could widespread mindfulness really give rise to a world in which people were more creative, coped better, and experienced greater happiness? We believe it could.

Keep in mind that there is evidence for most of our conclusions, and when we did speculate, we did not deviate far from that evidence. Remember also that the immediate-return lifestyle [let’s say, a lifestyle free from Captain Clock] is one that served our species well for the first 95% of its existence. It may very well be the lifestyle with which our biology is most compatible.

In fact, we consider it to be our birthright. It comes naturally to us once the constraints of our delayed-return societies are removed. If this conjecture is true, the real marvel is not that mindfulness can lead people to experience the world in the ways we have described. “The real marvel seems to be that the world isn’t experienced like this by everyone all the time, since this is, quite simply, the way things are” (Wren-Lewis, 1994, p. 110).

So, what would the world look like if people were more mindful? In many ways, it would look like the world of 100,000 years ago. That does not mean we would be living in the forest and foraging for food. It means we would be paying attention, seeing more options in the ways we could interpret the world, adjusting our behavior in response to subtle changes in the environment, and behaving authentically rather than through fixed cultural knowledge we may have introjected mindlessly. And the good news is that we don’t have to undergo anything as dramatic as a close brush with death to develop an immediate-return orientation. It can come naturally to us if we let it. Wren-Lewis (1994) captured this sentiment well, when he said:

What I suspect we need is not any kind of path or discipline, but a collection of tricks or devices for catching the Dark at the corner of the eye, as it were, and learning how to spot its just-waiting-to-be-seen presence, combined with strategies for stopping the hyperactive survival-programs from immediately explaining the perception away. (p. 114)

Perhaps with the help of a few mindfulness exercises (Langer & Piper, 1987), we could all learn to let go and look at the world and say, “It is good.”

Though the authors deserve much praise for their work, this is in some ways the kind of approach we may, quite explicitly, need to get beyond, and it seems another instance of the old epistemology’s deeply-rooted presence in science.
Among other things, the authors draw from the work of Langer, whose orientation to “mindfulness” differs too significantly from traditional philosophical practices to be taken seriously as a general recommendation for practice. It is far too anemic—and I say that with deep respect for Langer, who is a brilliantly creative and courageous researcher and a skillful thinker. But Langer’s orientation to “mindfulness,” though it contrasts favorably to the basic mindlessness of the dominant culture, would in turn contrast in almost the same way (i.e. would seem at least a bit, and maybe significantly mindless) when considered in the context of much older and broader understandings of “mindfulness”. Langer’s more limited approach fits well with the authors’ recommendation of a bag of tricks to fix our ills. The bag of tricks approach is a prominent form of our addiction to “technology,” junk-ease, and junk-knowledge (“Just give me a few exercises to do . . .”), for we cannot practice without some basic vision of the cosmos, and without basic ethical commitments, a basic style of thinking and living, and a basic sense of what it means to practice in the first place, and a basic attunement of aesthetic and spiritual sensibilities, a vitalizing mythology. Bateson offers a helpful criticism of the “bag of tricks” approach, rooted in something we consider quite rigorous, namely the “science” of “medicine”:

Consider the state of medicine today. It’s called medical science. What happens is that doctors think it would be nice to get rid of polio, or typhoid, or cancer. So they devote re-search money and effort to focusing on these “problems,” or purposes. At a certain point Dr. Salk and others “solve” the problem of polio. They discover a solution of bugs which you can give to children so that they don’t get polio. This is the solution to the problem of polio. At this point, they stop putting large quantities of effort and money into the problem of polio and go on to the problem of cancer, or whatever it may be.

Medicine ends up, therefore, as a total science, whose structure is essentially that of a bag of tricks. Within this science there is extraordinarily little knowledge of the sort of things I’m talking about; that is, of the body as a systemically cybernetically organized self-corrective system. Its internal interdependencies are minimally understood. What has happened is that purpose has determined what will come under the inspection or consciousness of medical
science. If you allow purpose to organize that which comes under your conscious inspection, what you will get is a bag of tricks—some of them very valuable tricks. It is an extraordinary achievement that these tricks have been discovered; all that I don’t argue. But still we do not know two-penn’orth, really, about the total network system.

Cannon wrote a book on The Wisdom of the Body, but nobody has written a book on the wisdom of medical science, because wisdom is precisely the thing which it lacks. Wisdom I take to be the knowledge of the larger interactive system—that system which, if disturbed, is likely to generate exponential curves of change.

Consciousness operates in the same way as medicine in its sampling of the events and processes of the body and of what goes on in the total mind. It is organized in terms of purpose. It is a shortcut device to enable you to get quickly at what you want; not to act with maximum wisdom in order to live, but to follow the shortest logical or causal path to get what you next want, which may be dinner; it may be a Beethoven sonata; it may be sex. Above all, it may be money or power. . . .

On the one hand, we have the systemic nature of the individual human being, the systemic nature of the culture in which he lives, and the systemic nature of the biological, ecological system around him; and, on the other hand, the curious twist in the systemic nature of the individual man whereby consciousness is, almost of necessity, blinded to the systemic nature of the man himself. Purposive consciousness pulls out, from the total mind, sequences which do not have the loop structure which is characteristic of the whole systemic structure. If you follow the “common-sense” dictates of consciousness you become, effectively, greedy and unwise—again I use “wisdom” as a word for recognition of and guidance by a knowledge of the total systemic creature.

Lack of systemic wisdom is always punished. We may say that the biological systems—the individual, the culture, and the ecology are partly living sustainers of their component cells or organisms. But the systems are nonetheless punishing of any species unwise enough to quarrel with its ecology. Call the systemic forces “God” if you will (Steps 440-2).

Let us first note that, on this account of life, we cannot seriously maintain an interest in “science,” because that will put us in a fundamental disconnect with life, which seems to demand wisdom and not a bag of tricks or a collection of facts. What can we possibly mean by knowledge if what we call knowledge doesn’t help us to further the conditions of life? Would any of us, for instance, rather choose a physician who seemed both to know how to heal and to have some reputation for wisdom? Why would we ever think it helpful to separate these, thinking in an ecological sense?
Let us also note that the suggestion that we might “call it ‘God’” is not as nonchalant as it may appear. There is something essential in a genuine spiritual/philosophical orientation—and by “philosophical” here we cannot mean something aside from philosophy as a way of life.

For instance, even western philosophers have noticed that, if we attend with care in the moment, we do not find our ego. The ego seems to become the center of our activity by means of a process of abstraction. We live in a culture that encourages the elaboration of the ego. The culture is, so to speak, deliberately, even connivingly ego-centric, and its language and science (including technology) encourage ego-centrism in practice. This causes problems for us, because the more we get taken out of being-moment, the more we worry about the self, obsess about gain and loss, pleasure and pain, praise and blame, fame and ill-repute, and we start engaging in conscious purposes that reflect this ego-centrism. But, consider the world of difference between Hume’s (or Dan Dennett’s) alleged inability to locate the ego and Buddha’s.

It merits special emphasis that Buddha does not give the impression of wanting to found a religion per se. He sounds like a philosopher—but by no means a professor. Rather, he is so oriented toward philosophy as a way of life that the life he recommends is the practice-realization of the atopus, and thus his students are properly called monks, for they must accomplish the rupture Hadot refers to, and in the early days the challenges of the rupture were confronted primarily through the marginalization of what we would call lay-practice, or the practice of a home-dweller. It can be so challenging to practice philosophy in the midst of a pattern of insanity that many people have found it much more practical, skillful, and realistic to
turn to a monastic setting (which needn’t actually mean living in a monastery—living alone on a
mountain, for instance, functions as a monastic ecology, depending on one’s practice). But at this
point we cannot seem to escape the acknowledgement that this may imply a demand that we
transform our notion of “civilization,” because, if “civilization” has any systemic lack of
wisdom, and if a lack of wisdom does not go unpunished by, “God,” then we will soon have hell
to pay—and we may already be making payments on the interest we currently owe—to rely on
an apt economic metaphor.

I have heard Robert Thurman talk about his brief time as a Buddhist monk as a specifically
philosophical gesture, and not a religious one. He insists that he did not seek a religion, but
sought a philosophy. He read Wittgenstein and other western philosophers with great zeal, but he
did not find a proper living philosophy, a proper philosophy as a way of life until he encountered
Buddhist philosophy. Leonard Cohen practiced Zen Buddhism for many years, and even lived
full-time in an austere monastery on Mt. Baldy for five years, but he made it clear that he already
had a religion, namely Judaism, and that Zen practice had no conflict with that religion.

Why, then, do we think of Buddhism as religious? For a variety of complex reasons, not least of
which that it liberates us into what Bateson said we could call “God”. There is something almost
inescapably sacred about the World (the central cleverness of the west lies in its capacity to
facilitate this seemingly impossible escape), and this sacredness has been so closely associated
with what we call “religion” that it seems to me almost unavoidable that Buddhism would
become “religious”—especially given its philosophical commitments to upaya (skillful means).
Even Martin Luther King touched on the overlap we approach in our inquiry. In his “An Experiment in Love” (a title that resonates with Sorenson’s work, as well as with Dewey’s, Nietzsche’s and other themes in our inquiry), King suggests that agape is, “a willingness to go to any length to restore community.” We must see that this implicitly means any *ethical* length, or else the suggestion involves nonsense. King outlines an experiment in love, not violence. And he famously suggests that: “Whether we call it an unconscious process, an impersonal Brahman, or a Personal Being of matchless power of infinite love, there is a creative force in this universe that works to bring the disconnected aspects of reality into a harmonious whole” (from *Testament of Hope*, 20).

Though we call Buddhism a religion, we can also see the Buddhist traditions as continuing the cultivation of philosophy as a way of life in a manner largely unreplicated in the west, in terms of diversity and continuity. They found many ways for lay-practitioners to realize profound, transformative insights. Liberation became available to larger and larger numbers of people. However, we have suggested here that a tension remains, fundamentally, between what civilization has become and what “God” demands, what Sophia demands—and recall again Bateson’s warning that Sophia will not tolerate a lack of wisdom.

Bateson serves as a useful touchstone for approaching the sacredness we may find if we let go of what we cannot keep and begin to practice-and-realize what we cannot lose. In reflecting on her collaboration with her father, Mary Catherine Bateson wrote:

> Gregory used to quote Kipling’s lines, “There are nine and sixty ways of constructing tribal lays, And—every—one—of—them—is—right.” (Kipling 2002). That is, I think, a fairly interesting way of talking about religion: to say that there is something that human religions are trying to get at that matters.
And they get at some of it in many different ways which include vast amounts of nonsense, much of it dangerous, but we perhaps do not yet have a better way of getting at it, whatever it is . . .

. . . . Gregory grew up in a family that sturdily insisted that orthodox religion was nonsense, and at the same time he was stimulated by exposure to religious images, metaphors and poetry that demanded a different kind of understanding.

Gregory planned the book that became Angels Fear to discuss religion and aesthetics as ways of knowing that might prove to be indispensable to human survival and to that recognition of the larger interactive system of the biosphere he called wisdom (M. C. Bateson 2004:39–40). “The sacred (whatever that means) is surely related (somehow) to the beautiful (whatever that means)” (1979: 213). For him, as a scientist, to begin to talk about religion and aesthetics was to step onto dangerous ground – Where Angels Fear to Tread – places he felt it was essential to venture, but where he was going to get into trouble with his colleagues, and he knew it. Yet the exclusion of certain ideas – the Cartesian partition of ways of knowing – seemed to him damaging.

. . . . it strikes me today that he is saying [in his book Mind and Nature] that of course there is something that looks like intelligent design in evolution, because the mind-like properties of systems are unfolding. In this sense one can see mind at work in the structure of the eye, or in the structure of the cell and what have you. But in this understanding the mind is not external. Mind is a characteristic of the unfolding organization and process, immanent and emergent.

. . . . he was proposing yet another aspect of the pattern which connects all living things, recognizing in our own mental processes of thought and learning a pattern which connects us to the biosphere rather than an argument for separation. This recognition is inhibited by the dualistic assumption that what happens in the natural world is mechanical. It is inhibited in a deep way by the Cartesian body–mind distinction, as if the natural world were purely material instead of being shaped by process and organization. Having over simplified our description of the natural world, we open the door to a compensatory leap from the recognition of the complexity around us to the insistence on a mind external to it – a deity – shaping it. “Miracles,” said Gregory, “are dreams and imaginings whereby materialists hope to escape from their materialism.” (1987:51) (in Hoffmeyer 2008: 20-1)

Among other things, our inquiry seeks to bring out how the wisdom and sacredness Bateson wanted to inquire into are available to us by means of philosophical/spiritual practices, inseparable from an ethical way of life which thus liberates us into the larger loops of mind that are the wisdom we need in order to live in harmony with, in attunement with . . . call it Sophia, God, Brahman, the unconscious, the Self, or an infinite Wisdom-Love-Beauty.
We may find it rather interesting, perhaps even inspiring (in the sense of taking in a breath of wonder) to consider how James McNeley describes the relationship between Navajo philosophy (based on his research and field interviews while living in the Navajo Nation) and Bateson’s thinking about Mind-and-Nature and its relationship to “religion”:

There are some interesting commonalities, which I wish to examine here, between the traditional Navajo conception of deity dwelling within and giving unity to the natural world, and the conception of Mind-in-nature proposed by Gregory Bateson. Angels Fear examines the similarities between such traditional religions and Bateson’s cybernetics-based model of the workings of Creatuра (the biological and social realms of the world). Tackling the “epistemology of the sacred,” Angels Fear addresses the question, “What features of human religions, ancient and modern, become intelligible in the light of cybernetic theory and similar advances in epistemology?” (page 142) Mary Catherine Bateson observes in the Introduction that Gregory had become aware “that the unity of nature he had affirmed in Mind and Nature might only be comprehensible through the kind of metaphors familiar from religion; that, in fact, he was approaching that integrative dimension of experience he called the sacred.” (page 2)

. . . . Religions are mental models of systems (Angels Fear, page 195). Thinking about the world through such models may help in understanding the way the “real” system (whatever that is) works. The Batesons’ argument runs something like this: If it is characteristic of religions that they contain ideas which are unquestioned and unquestionable—in short, sacred—the “real” systems they model contain absolute verities, too. If certain religious concepts are not communicated freely, being held “too sacred” to be freely shared, we should consider that the noncommunication of some information is found in the working of all living systems, and that this may be necessary for sustaining the integrity of the whole (pages 80-81 and 135). If religions require a leap of faith, there are similar gaps in our perception of the world where, indeed, faith is required for the continued existence of our being, and religion helps to protect that faith (pages 95-96). If religion attempts to unify experience, providing in fact a “pattern which connects” the elements of experience, then there is, in the cybernetic understanding of the world, a unity and a communicative web which is not discerned by classical science (page 196). If religions characteristically imply an ethics and an aesthetic, then there is (in the Batesons’ theory of Creatura) an implied injunction not to violate the communicative web, and there is aesthetic satisfaction in holistic perception and recognition of system integration (page 199). There exists, in sum, formal similarity between the structure of Batesonian holistic science and the structure of traditional religions. They are both good to think with (in some respects), and they both help us to think about the world in much the same way.
If this be so, how “good” is, for example, Navajo religion to think with, if we use the Batesons’ holistic model of the world as a sort of standard? Would it seem to serve the Navajo people well in understanding the world the way “post-Cartesians” understand it?

. . . . The Navajo world is one in which, throughout mythological times, its inhabitants have become progressively able to establish connections with different aspects of the supernatural—with different holy people residing within the various phenomena of nature. The goal of life is to live in a condition of balance and harmony with the powers and other inhabitants of the world. This is not easy! It requires following prescriptive teachings, correcting errors through ritual means, and always recognizing that one is a part of a communicative fabric which unites all elements of the living world. To arrive at the ideal condition of harmony, to arrive at the good, to arrive at the beautiful is to achieve identification with an abstract and enigmatic being referred to as sa’ah anagram bik’eh hozho. But this being is not a localized god or power, rather it in itself symbolizes a state of balance between the great male and female principles which underlie and give life to the entire world which was created on earth’s surface. The seeking for identification expressed in the prayer, “I am sa’ah anagram bik’eh hozho . . .” is nothing less than an identification with the whole system in a state of harmony and balance.

In looking for similarities between this Navajo construction of the world and that of the Batesons, we first find an illustration of Gregory Bateson’s claim that religion consists of “vast aggregates of organization having immanent mental characteristics” (Angels Fear, page 142)—much as does his own cybernetic model of the world. Additionally, the Navajo ideal of harmony is conceived to be achieved through, in essence, reopening channels of communication to those holy ones who have it within their power to reestablish balance and remove pathology—very analogous to the self-corrective circuitry found in Holistic Science. Other features of Navajo and of Batesonian views about thought and mind become evident in a comparison of the two; I see these commonalities:

Both hold that thought or mind is immanent in nature. Both hold that human mind and thought is not equal to—let alone superior to—that which exists elsewhere; the greater intelligence lies in nature. Both hold that there is a flow of ideas, of messages, throughout the world, and that this flow of information is critical to the maintenance of balance or homeostasis—and they even agree that such a balanced unity may have the aesthetic quality of beauty (Bateson, 1979, page 19).

Both hold that, in the interactions between human and non-human thought, distortions in human thinking may lead to disruptions in the larger world, and that human thinking must be corrected if balance, harmony, or homeostasis is to be reestablished in the world.

In the most general terms, I think that the most significant bridge between the two views is a common recognition that human life and thought are contingent upon the thought relationships established with other elements of the natural world—elements which are more pregnant with knowledge than is the limited mind of man or woman. (1987: 5-6)
We may find ourselves in strange territory here, stranger than we may feel comfortable with.

And thus we must resist the urge to co-opt or dismiss—the two poles of what we may refer to as desacralized (and now industrialized) science and philosophy in its encounter with anything vitalizing.

On the one hand, it seems useful to note a resonance here with Dewey. Let’s consider it in a roundabout way first, based on an article Dewey wrote in which he engages an interlocutor who insists on maintaining a dualism between “is” and “ought”:

After contrasting in the blankest manner the world of fact and of morals, he goes on to suggest that moral forces are not only rightfully supreme over the actual forces in the world at any time, but “are so interwoven with the order of things that nothing out of harmony with them can long stand” (p. 117). This would imply that moral forces are, and that they do not exist nobody knows where outside the actual world, but are themselves supremely actual. With this view I find myself, as I remarked, in large sympathy. If it means that “justice” and “love” are the actual forces of reality, taken at a certain angle and scope of working, it conveys intelligibly to me.

But limiting the question as best I can, I should say (first) that the “ought” always rises from and falls back into the “is,” and (secondly) that the “ought” is itself an “is,”—the “is” of action.

The “ought” is never its own justification. We ought to do so and so simply because of the existing practical situation; because of the relationships in which we find ourselves. We may, by an abstraction, which is justifiable enough as a means of analysis, distinguish between what is and what should be; but this is far from meaning that there is any such separation in reality. . . . a man’s duty is never to obey certain rules; his duty is always to respond to the nature of the actual demands which he finds made upon him,—demands which do not proceed from abstract rules, nor from ideals, however awe-inspiring and exalted, but from the concrete relations to men and things in which he finds himself. The rule, at worst and at best, is but an aid towards discriminating what the nature of these relations and demands. (1891: 198-200)

Here we see Dewey talking about love and justice as “the actual forces of reality,” a rather astonishing sort of claim, which he potentially tones down (on one way of reading, he definitely tones down) by qualifying it with the words that follow.
This more general framing gets concentrated in *Art as Experience*, where Dewey tells us that, “the closer man is brought to the physical world, the clearer it becomes that his impulsions and ideas are enacted by nature within him” (AE 339). This brings him quite close to a Jungian view, which itself either gets limited as some kind of “mere psychologism,” or liberates us into a spiritual experience of life that will not tolerate any intolerance of the mystical and the religious. We may also note here that this enactment of Nature “within” us makes our own heart-mind-body-world-cosmos the ultimate laboratory. Practicing, so to speak, “with/in the body,” “with/in the heart,” “with/in the mind,” allows us to come to insights, not simply in the manner of the Gedankenexperiments of Einstein, but heretofore (in the west at least) very minimally practiced-and-realized collaborations between artists, scientists, and philosophers.

Dewey also tells us in *Art as Experience* that, “Philosophy like art moves in the medium of imaginative mind” (AE 297). At times, even Dewey seems to lack imagination, and we need more imaginative philosophy right now. For instance, consider what Dewey says in *A Common Faith*:

> There exist concretely and experimentally goods—the values of art in all its forms, of knowledge, of effort and of rest after striving, of education and fellowship, of friendship and love, of growth in mind and body. These goods are there and yet they are relatively embryonic. Many persons are shut out from generous participation in them; there are forces at work that threaten and sap existent goods as well as prevent their expansion. A clear and intense conception of a union of ideal ends with actual conditions is capable of arousing steady emotion. It may be fed by every experience, no matter what its material.

> In a distracted age, the need for such an idea is urgent. It can unify interests and energies now dispersed; it can direct action and generate the heat of emotion and the light of intelligence. Whether one gives the name “God” to this union, operative in thought and action, is a matter for individual decision. But the function of such a working union of the ideal and actual seems to me to be identical with the force that has in fact been attached to the conception of God in
all the religions that have a spiritual content; and a clear idea of that function
seems to me urgently needed at the present time.

The sense of this union may, with some persons, be furthered by mystical
experiences, using the term “mystical” in its broadest sense. That result depends
largely upon temperament. But there is a marked difference between the union
associated with mysticism and the union which I had in mind. There is nothing
mystical about the latter; it is natural and moral. Nor is there anything mystical
about the perception or consciousness of such union. Imagination of ideal ends
pertinent to actual conditions represents the fruition of a disciplined mind. There
is, indeed, even danger that resort to mystical experiences will be an escape, and
that its result will be the passive feeling that the union of actual and ideal is
already accomplished. But in fact this union is active and practical; it is a uniting,
not something given.

One reason why personally I think it fitting to use the word “God” to
denote that uniting of the ideal and actual which has been spoken of, lies in the
fact that aggressive atheism seems to me to have something in common with
traditional supernaturalism. I do not mean merely that the former is mainly so
negative that it fails to give positive direction to thought, though that fact is
pertinent. What I have in mind especially is the exclusive preoccupation of both
militant atheism and supernaturalism with man in isolation. For in spite of
supernaturalism’s reference to something beyond nature, it conceives of this earth
as the moral centre of the universe and of man as the apex of the whole scheme of
things. It regards the drama of sin and redemption enacted within the isolated and
lonely soul of man as the one thing of ultimate importance. Apart from man,
nature is held either accursed or negligible. Militant atheism is also affected by
lack of natural piety. The ties binding man to nature that poets have always
celebrated are passed over lightly. The attitude taken is often that of man living in
an indifferent and hostile world and issuing blasts of defiance. A religious
attitude, however, needs the sense of a connection of man, in the way of both
dependence and, support, with the enveloping world that the imagination feels is a
universe. Use of the words “God” or “divine” to convey the union of actual with
ideal may protect man from a sense of isolation and from consequent despair or
defiance. (LW9: 34-5)

We can deeply appreciate even today (maybe especially today) Dewey’s comparison of militant
atheism with militant theism. But he seems to get hoist on his own petard. We can clarify this in
a moment, but let us note that Dewey’s invocation of the poetic would be endorsed by many
religious thinkers. And the fact that he specifically refers to the “ties binding” humans to nature
feels explicitly religious when we think of the significance of the term “religion”: It has to do
with binding and connection, and with reestablishing and rejuvenating those ties by means of
practice-and-realization that allow us entrance to and embodiment of the knowledge the spiritual traditions claim we can verify. In this sense, I would call myself a religious person. But, why the exclusion of “the mystical” on Dewey’s part? I would call myself a mystic with even more enthusiasm than I would call myself religious, given the cultural confusions around “religion”. But, there are perhaps just as many confusions around “mysticism”. Either way, we may detect in Dewey and in ourselves a lack of imagination with regard to religion and mysticism—by which we must mean something to do with practice-realization, and thus something integral to epistemology and Knowing in the full sense we intend in our inquiry. Consider this other passage from the same text:

The difference, however, between mystic experience and the theory about it that is offered to us must be noted. The experience is a fact to be inquired into. The theory, like any, theory, is an interpretation of the fact. The idea that by its very nature the experience is a veridical realization of the direct presence of God does not rest so much upon examination of the facts as it does upon importing into their interpretation a conception that is formed outside them. In its dependence upon a prior conception of the supernatural, which is the thing to be proved, it begs the question. (26)

Aside from any deeper critique we might make of Dewey’s suggestion here, we could take it at face value and point out that the same description applies to what we call “science”. Religion in the spiritual sense offers us experimentation, a way of life and a means of practice which allows us to verify the claims of the tradition. We would naturally want to go further and speak about the deeply poetic, symbolic, and nonconceptual aspects of this, which ultimately carry us into transcendence of all the “theory” of the tradition—just as the mysteries of Nature and the unknown always leave scientific theory as tentative in a key sense.

We could suggest the same lack of imagination ultimately stifles the profound transformation Everett seems to have experienced as he lived with the Pirahās:
All the doctrines and faith I had held dear were a glaring irrelevancy in this culture. They were superstition to the Pirahãs. And they began to seem more and more like superstition to me. I began to seriously question the nature of faith, the act of believing in something unseen. Religious books like the Bible and the Koran glorified this kind of faith in the nonobjective and counterintuitive—life after death, virgin birth, angels, miracles, and so on.

The Pirahãs’ values of immediacy of experience and demand for evidence made all of this seem deeply dubious. Their own beliefs were not in the fantastic and miraculous but in spirits that were in fact creatures of their environment, creatures that did normal kinds of things (whether or not I thought they were real). There was no sense of sin among the Pirahãs, no need to “fix” mankind or even themselves. There was acceptance for things the way they are, by and large. No fear of death. Their faith was in themselves. (270-1)

The Pirahãs had faith in themselves—but such faith clearly maintains itself in nonduality with knowing, with verification. What does one verify? There is no such thing as practice-realization in a vacuum, in some pure form without context. The Pirahãs indeed have doctrines. Everett uses the word in its pejorative sense only, and not as he describes the doctrines of the Pirahãs. “Doctrine” does not equate to “dogma” except in the case of spiritual disease. In the case of spiritual health, doctrine means “teaching,” and a “doctor” is a teacher. The philosopher as soul doctor, as physician of the psyche, plays the role of a teacher, one who facilitates the self-realization of the student—for the teacher in this case explicitly avoids trying to “give” anything to the student in the ordinary sense. The Pirahãs have a core doctrine, expressed in their language and culture, that took Everett some time to discover and begin to understand:

The word xibipíío seemed to be related to a cultural concept or value that had no clear English equivalent. Of course, any English speaker can say, “John disappeared,” or “Billy appeared just now,” but this is not the same. First, we use different words, hence different concepts, for appearing and disappearing. More important, we English speakers are mainly focused on the identity of the person coming or going, not the fact that he or she has just left or come into our perception.

Eventually, I realized that this term referred to what I call experiential liminality, the act of just entering or leaving perception, that is, a being on the boundaries of experience. A flickering flame is a flame that repeatedly comes and goes out of experience or perception.
This translation “worked”—it successfully explained to me when it was appropriate to use the word *xibipíío* (and a useful working translation is the best a researcher can hope for in this type of monolingual situation).

The word *xibipíío* therefore reinforced and gave a positive face to the pervasive Pirahã value I had been working on independently. That value seemed to be to limit most talk to what you had seen or heard from an eyewitness.

If my hypothesis was correct, then knowledge about *bigí*, beings in other layers, spirits, and so on, must come from information supplied by living eyewitnesses. As counterintuitive as it might sound initially, there are purported eyewitnesses to the layered universe. The layers themselves are visible to the naked eye—the earth and the sky. And the inhabitants of the layers are also seen, because these other beings traverse the upper boundary, that is, come down from the sky and walk about our jungle. The Pirahãs see their tracks from time to time. The Pirahãs even see the beings themselves, lurking as ghostly shadows in the jungle darkness, according to the eyewitness accounts.

And the Pirahãs can traverse a *bigí* in their dreams. To the Pirahãs, dreams are a continuation of real and immediate experience. Perhaps these other beings travel in their dreams too. In any case, they do traverse the boundaries. Pirahãs have seen them. (129-30)

The *doctrine*—the Nature-Culture teaching and practice-realization—of *xibipíío* thus carries us back to Dewey’s notion of immediate empiricism, but crucially, in a manner of profound spiritual resonance, it carries us also to Liminal Awareness, as discussed by Sorenson, and implied by other sources of doctrine we have considered. Recall that shifting into this Liminal Awareness is not a matter of snapping one’s fingers and hoping for it. To say, “Be Liminally Aware!” is probably worse than saying, “Stand up straight!” Recall the experience Wolff had, in which his supraliminal mind kept trying to assert itself. The Shaman told Wolff not to go outside of the heart—the ultimate laboratory, in its altogetherness with the Cosmos. It seems the Pirahãs demanded the same thing, at least in spirit, from Everett:

I said that our up-high father had made my life better. Once, I said, I used to drink like the Pirahãs. I had many women (exaggerating somewhat here), and I was unhappy. Then the up-high father came into my heart and made me happy and made my life better. I gave no thought to whether all these new concepts, metaphors, and names that I was inventing on the fly were actually intelligible to the Pirahãs. They made sense to me. This night, I decided to tell them something very personal about myself—something that I thought would make them understand how important God can be in our lives. So I told the Pirahãs how my
stepmother committed suicide and how this led me to Jesus and how my life got better after I stopped drinking and doing drugs and accepted Jesus. I told this as a very serious story.

When I concluded, the Pirahãs burst into laughter. This was unexpected, to put it mildly. I was used to reactions like “Praise God!” with my audience genuinely impressed by the great hardships I had been through and how God had pulled me out of them.

“Why are you laughing?” I asked.

“She killed herself? Ha ha ha. How stupid. Pirahãs don’t kill themselves,” they answered.

They were utterly unimpressed. It was clear to them that the fact that someone I had loved had committed suicide was no reason at all for the Pirahãs to believe in my God. Indeed, it had the opposite effect, highlighting our differences. This was a setback for my missionary objectives. Days went by after this in which I thought long and hard about my purpose among the Pirahãs.

Part of the difficulty of my task began to become clear to me. I communicated more or less correctly to the Pirahãs about my Christian beliefs. The men listening to me understood that there was a man named Hisó, Jesus, and that he wanted others to do what he told them.

The Pirahã men then asked, “Hey Dan, what does Jesus look like? Is he dark like us or light like you?”

I said, “Well, I have never actually seen him. He lived a long time ago. But I do have his words.”

“Well, Dan, how do you have his words if you have never heard him or seen him?”

They then made it clear that if I had not actually seen this guy (and not in any metaphorical sense, but literally), they weren’t interested in any stories I had to tell about him. Period. This is because, as I now knew, the Pirahãs believe only what they see. Sometimes they also believe in things that someone else has told them, so long as that person has personally witnessed what he or she is reporting.

(265-6)

I cannot presume to properly evaluate the situation, but it doesn’t seem surprising that Everett never thought to personally witness the divine for himself, perhaps by means of dreams. Such practices are not available in the west, and Everett is left with evaluating his religion, not in terms of the traditions it may offer for going beyond what one has been told, but in terms of the black-and-white dictates of “reason”. He tells us plainly that the Pirahãs believe in spirits, they believe in things Everett himself may not be able to see without practice. He says, “the Pirahãs can traverse a bigí in their dreams. To the Pirahãs, dreams are a continuation of real and
immediate experience. Perhaps these other beings travel in their dreams too. In any case, they do traverse the boundaries. Pirahãs have seen them” (130). But Everett would likely have had no way to “traverse the boundaries” (cross the thresholds) that keep many religious people separated from the divine (excluded from Liminal Awareness), and he would have had no way to teach the Pirahãs how to encounter Jesus—though someone like Theresa of Avilla, Hildegard of Bingen, or Meister Eckart might have been able to do so. Of course, the Pirahãs had no need for outside doctrines. Everett could see how healthy their own doctrines (doctors, teachings, practices, way of life) kept them. A similar phenomenon has surely been seen in almost every serious religious tradition to appear in the Earth.

We may have drawn near to a need for returning to where we began, and we have drawn near again to a threshold. Something a little disturbing to the contemporary mind lurks precisely here. So integral to our inquiry, we have sensed its presence many times, drawn near to it and probably dismissed it, but let us try to ask a little more about why it seems to strange to us. Jung touches on it a little:

Whether primitive or not, mankind always stands on the brink of actions it performs itself but does not control. The whole world wants peace and the whole world prepares for war, to take but one example. Mankind is powerless against mankind, and the gods, as ever, show it the ways of fate. Today we call the gods “factors,” which comes from facere, ‘to make.’ The makers stand behind the wings of the world-theatre. It is so in great things as in small. In the realm of consciousness we are our own masters; we seem to be the ‘factors’ themselves. But if we step through the door of the shadow we discover with terror that we are the objects of unseen factors. To know this is decidedly unpleasant, for nothing is more disillusioning than the discovery of our own inadequacy. It can even give rise to primitive panic, because, instead of being believed in, the anxiously-guarded supremacy of consciousness—which is in truth one of the secrets of human success—is questioned in the most dangerous way. (CW 9i: 49)
It may not at first seem scary to seriously contemplate the powers that live themselves through us. But those who have experienced such things often experience fear. In large part, in our context, this occurs because we lack a way of life that can contextualize experiences that we would currently, culturally label as anomalous. We tend to write them off, explain them away, and so on. Elizabeth Lloyd Mayer details a wide range of anomalous data in her book, *Extraordinary Knowing*. She herself experienced extraordinary knowing on at least two occasions—I mean as “the knower,” for she also had first-hand experiences of Extraordinary Knowing arising in others. In one case, she felt herself being walked (as if by a power she might pretend to understand) to a lost object which she should not have been able to locate:

My youngest sister was living with my husband and me, finishing her last year of high school. My husband’s aunt had given him an extremely showy gold watch, one he’d never wear. In a burst of generosity, he’d given it to my sister.

My sister wore it every day. But she was seventeen and careless. She’d leave it lying around in the kitchen, in the car, in the laundry room. One afternoon I was working in my bedroom when she burst in: “I can’t find that watch!” We retraced where she’d been and when she’d last had it. No luck. My husband was due home in two hours. My sister was panicked; she was sure he’d be quick to notice that she wasn’t wearing the watch and ask where it was. We circled back over all the places we’d already looked. We were about to give up.

And at that point something happened that was unlike anything I’d ever experienced. I was standing in our upstairs hall, near the door of my husband’s study. I walked into his study: deliberately, intentionally, but with no awareness of volition on my part. It was as though I was watching myself in a slow-motion film. I walked straight to a closet in the far corner of the room, a closet I’d entered maybe twice—if that—over the course of our entire marriage. As I walked, I wasn’t aware of thinking, of deciding, of choosing to do any of the things I was doing or about to do. I was just doing them. I bent down—again, it felt absolutely deliberate—and reached deep into the closet, behind a row of shoes, then behind some boxes behind the shoes. My hand went directly to a small leather case in the very back corner. I lifted out the case, stood up, and opened it. Inside was the watch.

Weirdly, I felt neither surprise nor excitement; I simply expected it. I walked out of my husband’s study, called for my sister, and showed her the watch. “Where was it?” she demanded.

I tried to tell my sister what happened, but it was hard to find the words. She looked disbelieving. I hazarded a guess as to how the watch got into my husband’s closet. Perhaps, annoyed at rescuing the watch from my careless sister
one too many times, he’d taken it and hidden it away. My sister was skeptical, but couldn’t come up with a more compelling suggestion.

I decided I’d save face for everyone. I put the watch back in the closet, and when my husband got home, I told him what a panic my sister had been in and how she’d spent all afternoon looking for it.

My husband was calm and casual in his reply. “I was wondering when she’d miss it,” he said. “She left it in the bathroom after you’d gone to work this morning. You weren’t here, so I thought I’d try teaching her a lesson. I put it away in my closet.”

He went and got it, then handed it over to me. “Tell her to be more careful with it from now on.” (58-9)

Somehow, Mayer had no conscious problem processing this experience—even though deep reflection into such an experience might lead us to question agency, subjectivity, the nature of the ethical, and the nature of knowing. But in the course of writing her book, she had another experience that did provoke more of this sort of reflection, because it somehow touched a deeper layer of ego, or at least shook the ego loose enough that she could consciously register the shock (we can recall here Jung’s notion of a required “demolition of rational understanding”).

Mayer had heard from various people that instances of Extraordinary Knowing and other anomalous phenomena often arise when we become liberated from the little box of the ego (as depicted in our “artistic” image of mind presented some time ago). If we can turn down the noise of ego, so to speak, something else can come through, as we self-liberate into larger ecologies of mind. Mayer had the opportunity to try a ganzfeld experiment, which works on this principle. The ganzfeld (literally “complete field”) involves the production of a monotone experience that perhaps cancels out the noise of the ego, in a manner perhaps loosely analogous to noise-cancelling headphones. Typically, the visual field is made monotone by covering the eyes with special goggles—easily replicated at home by cutting a ping-pong ball in half or repurposing ski goggles or other goggles that can be painted white to make a monotone visual field—and
headphones that play a uniform sound or even white noise. In a typical experiment a computer randomly assigns one of 6 images for a person to try and “send” to another person completely isolated and put in a ganzfeld experience. This goes on for perhaps 15 minutes. The person in the ganzfeld is then brought out and asked to put a group of 6 images in order, with the first-ranked image the one they think most likely to have been the one the sender was attempting to send (of course, we describe this using an obsolete model of language, for convenience). The ranking system is required, since the receiver’s first reaction may be that that have no idea which image is the one the sender was trying to get through. No one but the sender and the computer that randomly picked the image know this.

After her time in the ganzfeld, Mayer found herself unable to recognize any of the images she saw. We could say the conscious mind knew nothing—knowing as we know it knew nothing. But the graduate student assisting with the research asked her to rank the images anyway, even if it seemed random. Mayer ranked the images—apparently at random—and the grad student left the room. He returned with a sealed envelope, containing the image being sent to her “psychically”. Mayer opened it. It was the same image she had ranked as her top choice, even though she had no conscious “knowledge” of receiving it. Mayer describes her reaction:

   And at that moment the world turned weird. I felt the tiniest instant of overwhelming fear. It was gone in a flash but it was stunningly real. It was unlike any fear I’ve ever felt. My mind split. I realized that I knew something I was simultaneously certain I didn’t know. And I got it. This is what my patients meant when they said, “My mind’s not my own.” Or “I’m losing my mind.” The feeling was terrifying. My mind had slipped out from under me and the world felt out of control.

   I recovered quickly and launched in on logical explanations. First and most compelling, it must have been pure coincidence. The odds I’d picked the right card were, after all, one in six. And that uncanny feeling—I knew perfectly well that coincidence does that to people. We all want to feel magical and omnipotent and we’ll grasp for that feeling wherever we can. Uncanny feelings
are one result and psychologists ever since Freud have been coming up with reasons why.

But I knew it wasn’t that simple and my arguments with myself didn’t carry the day. Once again, I was remembering my sister’s watch. Walking straight to that box in back of my husband’s closet had taught me a feeling, a full-bodied, single-minded, wholehearted feeling I’d described as being “walked by the experience.” It was as if the experience knew me. It brought a thoroughly unaccustomed sensation to the surface, a feeling that was categorically unlike ordinary knowing. The fraction of a second that had me landing on the red sunset—so brief and so ephemeral it barely registered—was an echo of the sensation I’d had when I’d walked straight to my sister’s watch. This time I’d walked not across a room but across my mind, walked straight out of my ordinary knowing into an inchoate, uncertain mental state that—maybe—deserves to be called knowing, too. It took the graduate student jolting me into the realization that I’d picked the correct card for me to consider—maybe—letting it in. After I left the lab, I realized that I’d gotten what I’d come for: some feeling for a quality of knowing that gave me that hook for believing. I wondered if I’d see the ganzfeld experiments differently, in the sense that I’d now see that there was something there worth seeing. Part of me still insisted that picking the red sunset was merely coincidence, no more than a lucky guess and nothing to do with the ganzfeld state or tuning down the noise. (207-7)

As a child, I used to always wonder why depictions of people experiencing “paranormal” events would show them experiencing fear. Why wouldn’t someone feel joyful and excited to discover they had the capacity to “read minds” or to encounter something truly mysterious in the World? And yet, these may be the most typical sorts of reactions—explaining in part why we keep these experiences at bay, at least in a context so lacking in its capacity to empower us to receive and work with them. Given our degraded cultural context, people may experience fear and confusion in the presence of Extraordinary Knowing and other anomalous events, and that fear may extend into a fear of ridicule, because so much habit energy has gone into the dominant paradigms. This explains why some of the arts of awareness necessary for a better way of knowing cannot simply be taken up as a bag of tricks. Too much meditation, for instance, can send someone to the psych ward with a case of psychosis or other mental breakdown—something that also might have once puzzled me (“Don’t they want to experience reality?” I would likely wonder). Pollan’s
experience of restlessness and fear before trying some of the holotropic medicines comes to mind here, as do the many direct and indirect suggestions in his book about the need for a proper context—a challenge greater than most of us seem to recognize.

Shifting our way of knowing in the manner we seem to be getting at in our inquiry cannot happen in a healthy way without a healthy context, and at this point we seem to have to both aim at large-scale transformations of a tragically degraded context while simultaneously doing the best we can with the degraded context we have. An epistemology of the sacred is an epistemology of *health*. This comes both from the demands of ecology (ultimately the demands of philosophy) and the meaning of “sacred,” which originally carries a sense of activity, namely the activity of *making holy*. It is not simply “this place is sacred,” but that it has been made sacred, is being made sacred, and as we participate in reality we too make it sacred and receive its sacredness in an altogether activity of mutuality. But making holy is just making whole, making healthy, making healing. Our better way of knowing is in one sense a way of healing, a way of entering the ongoing self-healing activity of life. Bateson wrote: “the Creatura, the world of mental process, is both tautological and ecological. I mean that it is a slowly self-healing tautology” (MN: 206). However, recall Bateson’s warning about divine punishment for lack of wisdom: Though we can choose to *participate* in this self-healing tautology, attune ourselves with it, we may also resist it, or even actively misknow it, attuning instead to our own agendas. In such a case, things may become quite intense as the healing response seeks to rebalance things:

Left to itself, any large piece of Creatura will tend to settle toward tautology, that is, toward *internal consistency* of ideas and processes. But every now and then, the consistency gets torn; the tautology breaks up like the surface of a pond when a stone is thrown into it. Then the tautology slowly but immediately starts to heal.
And the healing may be ruthless. Whole species may be exterminated in the process. (MN: 206)

We will come back to the notion of participating in this tautology, as part of a better way of knowing. But let’s circle back to some of the other issues Mayer raises in the passage above. Mayer speaks of a fear, and of a sense of an unthought known (perhaps not far from the sense in which Bollas used that term)—something she apparently knew, but could not consciously think or touch. There is a known, and a threshold, a Liminal Space which we somehow may cross over into or receive from. We might live it, we might thrive in, through, as this Liminal Space or Awareness, which is “the world of mental process”—once we leave behind, or drop off, or let go of, or liberate ourselves from the narrow sense of mental process, and the narrow sense of self, we so consistently practice and realize.

In some sense, we find ourselves still coming to terms with the discovery of the fullness of the psyche, and that fullness has immense epistemological implications, as we have already suggested. As Jung puts it, here referring to this fullness as “the unconscious”:

The hypothesis of the unconscious puts a large question-mark after the idea of the psyche. The soul, as hitherto postulated by the philosophical intellect and equipped with all the necessary faculties, threatened to emerge from its chrysalis as something with unexpected and uninvestigated properties. It no longer represented anything immediately known, about which nothing more remained to be discovered except a few more or less satisfying definitions. Rather it now appeared in strangely double guise, as both known and unknown. In consequence, the old psychology was thoroughly unseated and as much revolutionized as classical physics had been by the discovery of radioactivity. These first experimental psychologists were in the same predicament as the mythical discoverer of the numerical sequence, who strung peas together in a row and simply went on adding another unit to those already present. When he contemplated the result, it looked as if there were nothing but a hundred identical units; but the numbers he had thought of only as names unexpectedly turned out to be peculiar entities with irreducible properties. For instance, there were even, uneven, and primary numbers; positive, negative, irrational, and imaginary numbers, etc. So it is with psychology: if the soul is really only an idea, this idea
has an alarming air of unpredictability about it—something with qualities no one would ever have imagined. One can go on asserting that the psyche is consciousness and its contents, but that does not prevent, in fact it hastens, the discovery of a background not previously suspected, a true matrix of all conscious phenomena, a preconsciousness and a postconsciousness, a superconsciousness and a subconsciousness. The moment one forms an idea of a thing and successfully catches one of its aspects, one invariably succumbs to the illusion of having caught the whole. One never considers that a total apprehension is right out of the question. Not even an idea posited as total is total, for it is still an entity on its own with unpredictable qualities. This self-deception certainly promotes peace of mind: the unknown is named, the far has been brought near, so that one can lay one’s finger on it. One has taken possession of it, and it has become an inalienable piece of property, like a slain creature of the wild that can no longer run away. It is a magical procedure such as the primitive practices upon objects and the psychologist upon the psyche. He is no longer at its mercy, but he never suspects that the very fact of grasping the object conceptually gives it a golden opportunity to display all those qualities which would never have made their appearance had it not been imprisoned in a concept (remember the numbers!).

The attempts that have been made, during the last three hundred years, to grasp the psyche are all part and parcel of that tremendous expansion of knowledge which has brought the universe nearer to us in a way that staggers the imagination. The thousandfold magnifications made possible by the electron-microscope vie with the five hundred million light-year distances which the telescope travels. Psychology is still a long way from a development similar to that which the other natural sciences have undergone; also, as we have seen, it has been much less able to shake off the trammels of philosophy. All the same, every science is a function of the psyche, and all knowledge is rooted in it. The psyche is the greatest of all cosmic wonders and the sine qua non of the world as an object. It is in the highest degree odd that Western man, with but very few—and ever fewer—exceptions, apparently pays so little regard to this fact. Swamped by the knowledge of external objects, the subject of all knowledge has been temporarily eclipsed to the point of seeming non-existence.

The soul was a tacit assumption that seemed to be known in every detail. With the discovery of a possible unconscious psychic realm, man had the opportunity to embark upon a great adventure of the spirit, and one might have expected that a passionate interest would be turned in this direction. Not only was this not the case at all, but there arose on all sides an outcry against such an hypothesis. Nobody drew the conclusion that if the subject of knowledge, the psyche, were in fact a veiled form of existence not immediately accessible to consciousness, then all our knowledge must be incomplete, and moreover to a degree that we cannot determine. The validity of conscious knowledge was questioned in an altogether different and more menacing way than it had ever been by the critical procedures of epistemology. . . .

. . . If, as certain modern points of view, too, would have it, the psychic system coincides and is identical with our conscious mind, then, in principle, we are in a position to know everything that is capable of being known, i.e.,
everything that lies within the limits of the theory of knowledge. In that case there is no cause for disquiet, beyond that felt by anatomists and physiologists when contemplating the function of the eye or the organ of hearing. But should it turn out that the psyche does not coincide with consciousness, and, what is more, that it functions unconsciously in a way similar to, or different from, the conscious portion of it, then our disquiet must rise to the point of agitation. For it is then no longer a question of general epistemological limits, but of a flimsy threshold that separates us from the unconscious contents of the psyche. The hypothesis of the threshold and of the unconscious means that the indispensable raw material of all knowledge—namely psychic reactions—and perhaps even unconscious "thoughts" and "insights" lie close beside, above, or below consciousness, separated from us by the merest "threshold" and yet apparently unattainable. We have no knowledge of how this unconscious functions, but since it is conjectured to be a psychic system it may possibly have everything that consciousness has, including perception, apperception, memory, imagination, will, affectivity, feeling, reflection, judgment, etc., all in subliminal form. (CW8: para. 356-8, 362)

These suggestions create challenges that go altogether. The challenges they present for epistemology go altogether with the challenges they present for ethics, aesthetics, politics, and Nature-Culture in general. The challenges of knowledge and agency go together with the "making-responsible" that Nietzsche critiques in Beyond Good and Evil, Genealogy of Morals, and other works. If we are not "the sovereign individual" of our hopes and fears, what are we? All of this goes together with justification and justified true belief. We need justifications when we cannot properly attune ourselves to the powers we pretend to understand. Even Jung, who made a career and a practice of opening to these mysteries, had surprises waiting for him at every turn, including the very "end". In a letter dated December, 1960, which Kate Hillman wrote to her then-husband James Hillman, while he was in the U.S. raising money for the C.G. Jung Institute, she describes how Jung experienced insight through the dying process:

It seems Jung almost died in September, then to his own surprise came back to life, in order to experience something new once more. He lives now in an ‘in between’ state somehow. Most often he lets himself drop off into awake nondirective states, leaving the ego and the mind out. He says he experiences truth as light, that is not with the consciousness he has preached all these years but another kind of awareness, on a very deep level . . . Jung says he does not trust consciousness in the usual sense anymore . . . Liliane [Frey] says it means giving
up a great deal to enter into this state where truth so to say lingers on a different level, that Jung has always known about it but not until now really taking it on as a change in himself. (from Russell 2013)

Jung entered the Bardo, the Between, which, again, as Trungpa put it, “is the meditation experience.” He entered “nondirective states,” which, as far as they were meditative, involve a choiceless awareness, a shift into Liminal Awareness that does not involve agency, subjectivity, time, and other elements as they typically appear in relation with conquest consciousness. Jung experiences a kind of deeper revolution, even greater perhaps than the revolution he invited us to see as implicit in the discovery of the unconscious. Here, he finds consciousness even more limited than he might have thought in light of all his experience with the unconscious (thus putting the earlier passage in a new light, the one in which he refers to, “the anxiously-guarded supremacy of consciousness—which is in truth one of the secrets of human success” (CW 9i: 49)). Does it not seem strange? What did he learn? Shouldn’t all of us philosophers wonder about it—the true philosopher in each and everyone of us? Because, it is not just Jung here, but vast spiritual traditions, including the Tibetan traditions that explicitly teach about the Bardo of death and dying, and which explicitly offer the doctrine, the teaching, the soul medicine of a primordial awareness that is itself the foundation upon which what we call consciousness depends. The Mind Science, the Nature Science of many Buddhist traditions invites us to verify this awareness for ourselves, and to allow it to change our way of knowing—our way of living, loving, and liberating. Indeed, we can only truly know it in, through, as a better way of knowing.

117 We can also think here of the apotheosis of Thomas Aquinas, which rendered all his written philosophical works, from his new perspective, as not worthy of receiving the sacred droppings of the donkeys in the stable. Here too, we could think of those decisive experiences of Rumi, Dogen, Tsongkhapa, and others.
As we make our final steps in this dimension or this expression of our inquiry, let us linger a bit on the problem of “knowledge,” by which we should mean the way what we know becomes an obstacle. Knowing should liberate—liberating possibilities in ourselves, in others, in the World. Knowing means the evolution of ecologies, the ongoing thriving of life, the activity of incarnation and re-incarnation. But “knowledge” as we tend to mean it in the dominant culture often becomes an obstacle to these vitalizing functions.

We have touched on the question of dreaming again and again, and we can consider it in relation to this problem of “knowledge”. Dreaming was once a sacred activity, even in the west. We no longer live in such a context. We do not go to a temple after fasting and praying, as the Greeks did, and then lay down to sleep with the open-hearted intention to receive a dream, a healing dream, a dream that will help us achieve wholeness, practice and realize holiness. Illness of the body can go altogether with illness in the soul, and that which can balance the soul may also balance the body—which means intertwining ecologies.

WEH Stanner offers the following Australian Aboriginal verse:

White man got no dreaming,
Him go ’nother way.
White man, him go different.
Him got road belong himself.

Stanner comments: “Although, as I have said, The Dreaming conjures up the notion of a sacred, heroic time of the indefinitely remote past, such a time is also, in a sense, still part of the present. One cannot ‘fix’ The Dreaming in time: it was, and is, everywhen” (24). It never ceases to amaze
the westernized part of my mind when we challenge time, threaten mutiny against Captain Clock. Every time it comes up, I smile in wonder at how we have lived, how I have lived.

Why bother Entering DreamTime? Why bother dreaming—as a philosophical practice, as an altogether way of life. Dreams have no impact on reality, right? (Aside from the bag of tricks approach, of course.) We “know” that dreams are “just dreams”. But do we know how to dream? Can we even dream anymore, in this context, really attend to dreaming, take care of dreaming as altogether with taking care of the World, when we must fit our lives into a schedule? We go to bed too tired, and we must wake up and immediately fall in line with an agenda. How does one maintain the dream? What if we need to lay back down and enter the dream again, because we did not finish our work? What if Sophia needs to speak to us, perhaps to offer a truth we cannot yet think, but which we could dream?

We must keep in mind that large-scale manipulation depends on abstractions and standardization. A symbol system co-opts the power, the empowerment of living-loving symbol, living-loving image, living-loving sense, and turns it into an instrument of control. The symbolic power of the clock exercises great control over us.

Jung has a delightful passage, showing the power of conquest consciousness to squash our dreamlife, reducing us to seeing the discovery of some chemical or engineering structure as a great prize for our dream life:

    When I went to East Africa, I went to a small tribe in Mount Elgon and I asked the medicine-man about dreams. He said, “I know what you mean; my father still
had dreams.” I said, “You have no dreams?” And then he wept and answered, “No, I have no dreams anymore.” I asked, “Why?” He answered, “Since the British came into the country.” “Now, how is that?” He said, “The District Commissioner knows when there shall be war; he knows when there are diseases; he knows where we must live—he does not allow us to move.” The political guidance is now represented by the D.C., by the superior intelligence of the white man; therefore, why should they need dreams? Dreams were the original guidance of man in the great darkness. Read that book of Rasmussen’s about the Polar Eskimos. There he describes how a medicine-man became the leader of his tribe on account of a vision. When a man is in the wilderness, the darkness brings the dreams—somnia a Deo missa—that guide him. It has always been so. (CW 18, para. 674)

We can see something similar at work in an anecdote Gary Snyder relates in his exquisite essay, “The Etiquette of Freedom”:

Alvar Nunez Cabeza de Vaca became unaccountably deepened after losing his way and spending several winter nights sleeping naked in a pit in the Texas desert under a north wind. He truly had reached the point where he had nothing. (“To have nothing, you must have nothing!” Lord Buckley says of this moment.) After that he found himself able to heal sick native people he met on his way westward. His fame spread ahead of him. Once he had made his way back to Mexico and was again a civilized Spaniard he found he had lost his power of healing—not just the ability to heal, but the will to heal, which is the will to be whole: for as he said, there were “real doctors” in the city, and he began to doubt his powers. To resolve the dichotomy of the civilized and the wild, we must first resolve to be whole. (27)

Why bother dreaming, when the academics, scientists, and technicians can tell us everything we need to know? Why bother healing, why seek medicine, when we could seek medication, treatments, “cures”? We would have to accomplish a renunciation. We would have to admit, “I have lost my way.” We might have to be left with nothing—which is the most positive reading of our acceleration of climate collapse: The soul will drive us to lose everything we cannot keep, so that we may realize what we cannot lose. I have seen this sort of thing work itself out very painfully in the lives of individuals. It would be tragic to see it on a global scale, even if it did return us to the sacred in a decisive way.
On the other hand, we may have to face a much more uncomfortable possibility—perhaps altogether with the more positive prospect. Jung captures it this way: “The unconscious has a thousand ways of snuffing out a meaningless existence with surprising swiftness.” But a much fuller quotation is in order, because of the way Jung weaves this problem into the larger vision of spiritual/philosophical/religious practice-realization as manifested in Alchemy. We must remember here (always Sati, remembering, mindfully aware), and handle with great care the fact that the alchemists were children of Sophia and sought the Philosopher’s Stone. They sought Wisdom, Love, and Beauty. We can then read this fuller description by Jung while remembering this, and also remembering Pauli’s reflections about alchemy. Moreover, we must keep the present particular suggestion in mind: That we look here into avoiding the suicidal impulse our species seems driven by just now. Conquest consciousness and a materialistic, nihilistic sensibility has eclipsed the Sun, the Cosmos, the Sacred. Freud inquired into melancholia and found that it functioned as if the shadow of an object had fallen over the ego:

An object choice, an attachment of the libido to a particular person, had at one time existed; then, owing to a real slight or disappointment coming from this loved person, the relationship was shattered. The result was not the normal one of a withdrawal of the libido from this object and a displacement of it on to a new one, but something different, for whose coming about various conditions seem to be necessary. The object-cathexis proved to have little power of resistance and was brought to an end. But the free libido was not displaced on to another object; it was withdrawn into the ego. There, however, it was not employed in any unspecified way, but served to establish an identification of the ego with the abandoned object. Thus the shadow of the object fell upon the ego, and the latter could henceforth be judged by a special agency, as though it were an object, the forsaken object. In this way an object-loss was transformed into an ego-loss and the conflict between the ego and the loved person into a cleavage between the critical activity of the ego and the ego as altered by identification.\footnote{www.sci.brooklyn.cuny.edu/~schopra/FREUD/MOURNING%20AND%20MELANCHOLIA.doc}
But this sense of a shadow falling over us could apply to mourning as well, for the main
difference has to do with a lack of “disturbance in self-regard” in mourning. In depression, we
hate ourselves—because we cannot have our object of love. In mourning, we cannot have the
object of our love, but we can accept the loss as not having to do with our lack of self-worth.
Obviously cases of overlap exist: “If I hadn’t been so selfish, she wouldn’t have gone out that
night by herself . . . I never deserved her love . . .” Maybe we find ourselves in something like an
overlapping case with respect to Sophia, with respect to Nature, with respect to an intimately
meaningful Cosmos, an intimately meaningful Love Affair. Consider some of Freud’s other
comments in light of our relationship with a sense of sacredness, our loss of positive
psychoterratic feedback loop Albrecht speaks about, our loss of pre-conquest consciousness, our
loss of an intimate connection to place and landscape (what eco-psychologists refer to as
topophilia), our degradation of the world and the damage this does to our biophilia. In short, read
this passage not through the lens of mere ego-psychology, but through the lens of Eco-
Psychology, and the nonduality of the human soul and the soul of the World, the intimate love
we might naturally want to express and experience for Sophia as Gaia:

The distinguishing mental features of melancholia are a profoundly
painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to
love, inhibition of all activity, and a lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a
degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-revilings, and culminates in
a delusional expectation of punishment. This picture becomes a little more
intelligible when we consider that, with one exception, the same traits are met
with in mourning. The disturbance of self-regard is absent in mourning; but
otherwise the features are the same. Profound mourning, the reaction to the loss of
someone who is loved, contains the same painful frame of mind, the same loss of
interest in the outside world - in so far as it does not recall him - the same loss of
capacity to adopt any new object of love (which would mean replacing him) and
the same turning away from any activity that is not connected with thoughts of
him. It is easy to see that this inhibition and circumscription of the ego is the
expression of an exclusive devotion to mourning which leaves nothing over for
other purposes or other interests. It is really only because we know so well how to
explain it that this attitude does not seem to us pathological.
We should regard it as an appropriate comparison, too, to call the mood of mourning a ‘painful’ one. We shall probably see the justification for this when we are in a position to give a characterization of the economics of pain.

In what, now, does the work which mourning performs consist? I do not think there is anything far-fetched in presenting it in the following way. Reality-testing has shown that the loved object no longer exists, and it proceeds to demand that all libido shall be withdrawn from its attachments to that object. This demand arouses understandable opposition – it is a matter of general observation that people never willingly abandon a libidinal position, not even, indeed, when a substitute is already beckoning to them. This opposition can be so intense that a turning away from reality takes place and a clinging to the object through the medium of a hallucinatory wishful psychosis. Normally, respect for reality gains the day. Nevertheless its orders cannot be obeyed at once. They are carried out bit by bit, at great expense of time and cathectic energy, and in the meantime the existence of the lost object is psychically prolonged. Each single one of the memories and expectations in which the libido is bound to the object is brought up and hypercathected, and detachment of the libido is accomplished in respect of it. Why this compromise by which the command of reality is carried out piecemeal should be so extraordinarily painful is not at all easy to explain in terms of economics. It is remarkable that this painful unpleasure is taken as a matter of course by us. The fact is, however, that when the work of mourning is completed the ego becomes free and uninhibited again.

Let us now apply to melancholia what we have learnt about mourning. In one set of cases it is evident that melancholia too may be the reaction to the loss of a loved object. Where the exciting causes are different one can recognize that there is a loss of a more ideal kind. The object has not perhaps actually died, but has been lost as an object of love (e.g. in the case of a betrothed girl who has been jilted). In yet other cases one feels justified in maintaining the belief that a loss of this kind has occurred, but one cannot see clearly what it is that has been lost, and it is all the more reasonable to suppose that the patient cannot consciously perceive what he has lost either. This, indeed, might be so even if the patient is aware of the loss which has given rise to his melancholia, but only in the sense that he knows whom he has lost but not what he has lost in him. This would suggest that melancholia is in some way related to an object-loss which is withdrawn from consciousness, in contradistinction to mourning, in which there is nothing about the loss that is unconscious.

In mourning we found that the inhibition and loss of interest are fully accounted for by the work of mourning in which the ego is absorbed. In melancholia, the unknown loss will result in a similar internal work and will therefore be responsible for the melancholic inhibition. The difference is that the inhibition of the melancholic seems puzzling to us because we cannot see what it is that is absorbing him so entirely. The melancholic displays something else besides which is lacking in mourning - an extraordinary diminution in his self-regard, an impoverishment of his ego on a grand scale. In mourning it is the world which has become poor and empty; in melancholia it is the ego itself. The patient represents his ego to us as worthless, incapable of any achievement and morally
despicable; he reproaches himself, vilifies himself and expects to be cast out and punished. He abases himself before everyone and commiserates with his own relatives for being connected with anyone so unworthy. He is not of the opinion that a change has taken place in him, but extends his self-criticism back over the past; he declares that he was never any better. This picture of a delusion of (mainly moral) inferiority is completed by sleeplessness and refusal to take nourishment, and - what is psychologically very remarkable - by an overcoming of the instinct which compels every living thing to cling to life.

In the face of our degradation of the planet, we may start to become increasingly restless, sleepless, and inclined to put our lives at risk. Why? Because we did not merely “cathect” some “object” and then lose the “object”. Rather, the whole possibility of meaning became degraded, corrupted, extracted, consumed, co-opted into an ego-centric pattern of insanity. Caught in the delusions of subject-object relations, we collapsed the conditions of life that make all relationality possible. We wallow in chains, in the shadow of lost meaning, in the shadow of a sacred world that we destroyed—that ego-centrism and conscious purpose destroyed, and thus the ego hates itself, however unconsciously.

We can shift from a Freudian to a Jungian register and think of this shadow not as the eclipse of meaning, but as the shadow side of “science,” “reason,” “technology.” We can thus think of the shadow as the loss of an essential illumination, obscured by a nihilism we could heal, or we can think of it as the dark side of what could be illuminating the World if only we could heal it. There are other ways to think of it as well. But, however we think of our situation, we may want to admit that we might be mourning the loss of species, and we might feel melancholia because we do blame ourselves. We may feel quite unworthy and ineffectual in the face of the ongoing loss. We may do anything we can to medicate ourselves, but the weight of this incredible loss, and our culpability in it, may incline us to increase the pace of destruction, rather than doing the much more difficult work of healing what we have broken, torn, burned, fragmented, killed. This
melancholia differs from the one Freud considers, because we really have manifested, from a certain perspective, as worthy of rebuke. It would be like someone who felt melancholy for betraying their own mother or their dearest beloved. There is a deep mourning, then, for being the perpetrators of such a catastrophe, and for coming into the world cut off from the Earth, with no vitalizing Nature-Culture, with no sense of how to find a purpose that matters.

And it matters that we cannot seem to kill without justification, even though the human species may be sadly, among mammals, the most likely by far to kill others of its own species . . . Isn’t that striking? We spend so much time trying to differentiate ourselves from other species, because of our ego-centrism . . . We tried to be the only animal who uses tools, then the only animal who makes tools, then the only animal capable of transitive inference, and on and on. We cannot find something that sets us apart—except for the fact that we seem to be the being most likely to kill others of its own species. And perhaps we are the being most inventive in the hunt. Yet, we cannot do this without justification. Once upon a time we painted The Others on sacred cavern walls, because we had to know how they participated in the life-death cycle with us, had to receive their sacred Yes in order to willfully take their lives. But now we go to the supermarket and get meat packed in Styrofoam and saranwrap—desacralization at its finest and most convenient. We are cut off, and yet we know the destruction the unfolds in our name, we know the degradation and debasement of life that goes altogether with the degradation of sacredness, and we know the incredible suffering that comes with it. We need to justify it, with nihilism or with rationalizations—or both. As Nietzsche suggested: We would rather will nothing than have nothing to will.
We should attend more to this issue of our suffering and our possible collective suicide attempt. There are a few dimensions to consider, and a variety of perspectives will help. On a basic level, Thich Nhat Hanh gets at something quite significant when he writes,

The main affliction of our modern civilization is that we don’t know how to handle the suffering inside us and we try to cover it up with all kinds of consumption. Retailers peddle a plethora of devices to help us cover up the suffering inside. But unless and until we’re able to face our suffering, we can’t be present and available to life, and happiness will continue to elude us.\textsuperscript{119}

We don’t know how to handle suffering—or joy. We don’t know what we are, and don’t seem to know how to work with whatever is arising in the moment. Even though Hanh applies the skillful means of all the philosophers in his tradition, it may behoove us to take care with the phrase, “the suffering inside us.” Though we experience suffering, so to speak, “within” our own basic mind stream, it is essential for us to recognize that the suffering we are not handling well is not merely our own personal suffering. When we see other beings suffering, we typically experience an empathic response, and this can lead to empathy distress. We will discuss this a little more later, but the basic problem here is that we can begin to numb, avoid, tune out, or otherwise fail to skillfully handle suffering in ourselves and in others—perhaps most especially so if we suspect our way of life goes together with the suffering we perceive. This is part of what almost seems like a double-bind in the ecological crisis: We have to change our whole way of life—and we want to, and we don’t want to, and we are scared to, and yet we sense we must, we know things can’t go on like this, but we want our fair share, but we sense it’s all out of balance . . .

\textsuperscript{119} \url{https://www.lionsroar.com/5-practices-for-nurturing-happiness/}
It’s not always easy to put our finger on what is going on, in our own psyche and in the collective psyche, and a variety of psychodynamic perspectives seem quite useful when it comes to a full acknowledgement of the ecological crisis and the various issues bound up with it. For instance, Searles (1972) offers some provocative reflections, including some courageous confessions. The basic hypothesis Searles offers is that “man is hampered in his meeting of this environmental crisis by a severe and pervasive apathy which is based largely upon feelings and attitudes of which he is unconscious” (361). If it is unconscious, to say it again, this means we are not conscious of it. Of course, some of us may be conscious of certain aspects of what drives us in this crisis, but somehow elements of it remain unconscious, and we must do what we can to wake up.

Searles mentions some of the more Freudian dynamics that we might find odd, but which seem worthy of reflection:

First, it is apparent in how moralistic a spirit most communications about this subject are conveyed; the speaker or writer tells us, from a morally superior and therefore safe position, projecting his own Oedipal guilt upon us, that we have raped mother earth and now we are being duly strangled or poisoned, as by a vengeful Jehovah, for our sin. Second, we are given to feel that the ecologists are calling upon us to relinquish our hard-won genital primacy, symbolized by our proudly cherished but ecologically offensive automobile, and return to a state of childhood, when genital mastery was something longed for but not yet achieved; our apathy includes an unconscious defiant refusal to do this. Third, our fear, envy, and hatred of formidable Oedipal rivals makes us view with large-scale apathy their becoming polluted into extinction. (364)

It is not clear whether the first part of this passage is meant to be how some unconscious dimension of our psyche receives the news of climate catastrophe. We certainly don’t hear a lot of “wrath of god” talk, and the moral superiority often seems directed at the worst offenders, the climate deniers and the corporate evil-doers. But any aspect of the conversation could be
received with these more stark connotations because of the fact that we are all at fault here, and most of us live our lives completely out of alignment with the nature of our situation. It’s an incredible double-bind, and could surely provoke a bit of insanity. Aside from threats to our sovereignty and our sense of guilt (and our possible ambivalence to children—not to be underestimated), Searles mentions the suicidal melancholia we considered with Freud:

Mankind is collectively reacting to the real and urgent danger from environmental pollution much as does the psychotically depressed patient bent upon suicide by self-neglect—the patient who, oblivious to any urgent physical hunger, is letting himself starve to death or walks uncaring into the racing automobile traffic of a busy street. One day recently as I was driving on the Washington beltway, observing the general custom of traveling a few miles above the speed limit, it suddenly struck me that I was essentially hurrying to get off it—to get its murderously threatening, bleak, lonely, crowdedness over with. I wondered if the same were true of most of the other drivers also, perhaps without their realizing it. I wondered, is this not a fair sample of how we all feel not only about the beltway but about our whole current life as it is? Is not the general apathy in the face of pollution a statement that there is something so unfulfilling about the quality of human life that we react, essentially, as though our lives are not worth fighting to save? (365-6)

I am not sure we register fully, at a conscious level, how ugly we have made the world, including how treacherous roads are, as artifacts of insanity, as places where we not only cut through Nature once, but cut through it in an ongoing way, cut ourselves off from Nature and from our own souls in an ongoing way. Highway and road systems mark off the human. The Others come into these places at their peril, and they often die for it, which I think upsets almost all of us when we see it, because it seems so obviously wasteful, sacrilegious. We have no good ethical, ontological, or aesthetic justification for so many roads and cars, so many profane and useless jobs. We could operate a Culture without these jobs and roads—even a Culture with significant technological development and total employment (for everyone has a place, a purpose, and it makes us sick when we cannot realize our purpose). We could just as easily have an intelligent mass transit system and wisely, compassionately, beautifully arranged work lives—work with
clear purpose, not the fake purposes of being a “team player” in a “work hard, play hard”
corporate culture that does nothing more than perpetuate the pattern of insanity. The story teller
or poet in us needs to do more than come up with slogans and sit-coms, the artist in us needs to
do more than design logos and labels, the psychologist in us needs to do more than deal with
customer complaints or close deals on used cars, the caretaker in us needs to do more than mop
floors in a soulless office building or wait tables at a restaurant that serves mass-produced veal.

Even at a modern university there are so many stupidities, so much designed ugliness, that it can
feel depressing or even degrading to participate. As faculty watch the continued corporatization
and growth of administration, as they see their work-life balance out of whack, as they struggle
to get research done while overloaded with teaching and committee work, as they see their
students stressed, overworked, living in crowded dorms and apartments, barely getting by
financially, it can be hard to feel truly peaceful and joyful. If we wanted to serve the demands of
education and the demands of sanity, we could probably double the number of faculty in most
departments (with tenure for everyone). Currently, only about 25% of academic positions are
tenure track, leaving the vast majority working as part of the precariat.\footnote{120} Adjuncts and others in
academia contend with a VUCA\footnote{121} lifestyle that intertwines with and reflects in countless ways
the lives of their students, their universities, and their world. According to a recent documentary

\footnote{120} The figure comes from the AAUP: http://www.aaup.org/issues/contingency/background-facts
Also see, Osborne, Bethany J, et al, “Introduction from the Special Issue Editors: Preparing
Graduate Students for a Changing World of Work,” Canadian Journal of Higher Education,
suppl. Preparing Graduate Students for a Changing World of Work 44.3 (2014).

\footnote{121} Volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity. This string of words, signified by the
acronym VUCA, has been used in the U.S. military and elsewhere to characterize our
contemporary global context. See, for instance, Euchner, James, “Navigating the VUCA World:
DOI: 10.5437/08956308X5601003}
on adjuncts, 31% of them live at or near the poverty line, 60% of part-time faculty have to work other jobs, and 1 in 4 part-time faculty receive public assistance.\textsuperscript{122} A report in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* indicates that roughly 360,000 people with graduate degrees applied for food stamps in 2010, including 33,655 people with PhD’s.\textsuperscript{123} Note also that if we value education, and if we see education like Socrates did (perhaps for different reasons), as one of the most crucial factors for securing the health of a society and the conditions of life that support it, we should also contemplate what it means that the average CEO makes 829 times more than the average adjunct professor.\textsuperscript{124} Adding to the problem, we find a shocking dearth of deep solidarity amongst faculty, graduate students, undergraduate students, staff, and administrators. In too many cases, the relationships within and between these groups is essentially lacking in active mutual support, at times adversarial, and in general lacking the power of functioning as a coordinated and compassionate community. In a basic way, things are not essentially better in other industries, and we all face the same ecological issues, the same designed ugliness, the same issues of nihilism, and so on. But it seems interesting to think about how dysfunctional education is.

The VUCA lifestyle, the designed ugliness, the pervasive stupidities, and more come together with ecological degradation to produce a profound sense of loss, a traumatizing that we may not fully recognize, a grief we may try to avoid even acknowledging:

> Any reading of the ecological literature makes clear that ours is a time of significant ecological loss. Evidence accrues that the sixth mass extinction is well under way, that global eco-system productivity is in steep decline, and that the

123 https://www.chronicle.com/article/From-Graduate-School-to/131795/
biosphere as a whole is becoming irreparably damaged by human actions. In addition to being the subject of intense scientific scrutiny, global environmental change and regional ecological decline are increasingly embedded within everyday experience, evoking strong mental and emotional responses.

In response, the mental health implications of global environmental change are gaining increasing research attention. This is particularly the case over the last decade, which has seen growing efforts to understand the mental health implications of climate change. Climate-related weather events and environmental changes, for example, have been linked to a wide variety of acute and chronic mental health experiences, including: strong emotional responses, such as sadness, distress, despair, anger, fear, helplessness, hopelessness and stress; elevated rates of mood disorders, such as depression, anxiety, and pre- and post-traumatic stress; increased drug and alcohol usage; increased suicide ideation, attempts and death by suicide; threats and disruptions to sense of place and place attachment; and loss of personal or cultural identity and ways of knowing.

An important concept emerging from peoples’ lived experiences of climate change directly related to mental health, but not well represented in the current literature, is what we term ecological grief — the grief felt in relation to experienced or anticipated ecological losses, including the loss of species, ecosystems and meaningful landscapes due to acute or chronic environmental change. We contend that ecological grief is a natural response to ecological losses, particularly for people who retain close living, working and cultural relationships to the natural environment, and one that has the potential to be felt more strongly and by a growing number of people as we move deeper into the Anthropocene.

To date, very little research has considered ecological grief as an area of formal scientific inquiry, although the terms ‘grief’ and ‘mourning’ are finding increased application in the description of people’s lived experiences and personal responses to environmental change. In this Perspective, we argue that ecological grief is an important emergent area for psychological and geographical inquiry that has potential to shed light on personal and collective responses to ecological loss. Further, a better understanding of ecological grief has the potential to enhance understanding of the emotional and psychological dimensions of climate change impacts; to aid identification of what climate-related losses matter to people; and to identify opportunities to cope with or heal ecological grief and human suffering due to these ecological losses. We begin by examining the application of ecological grief within scientific research exploring the mental health implications of climate change. We draw primarily (though not exclusively) upon our own multi-year research programmes around climate change-driven mental, emotional and grief responses in Northern Canada (by A. Cunsolo) and the Australian Wheatbelt (by N. Ellis) (see also Table 1). Building on this research, as well as a synthesis of available relevant literature, we then offer a broad research agenda for ecological grief that calls for an expansion of the geographic and cultural application of ecological grief concepts, deep engagement with place and land, and engagement with the emerging policy domain of climate change loss and damage. Throughout, we note that under-
standing the multitude of triggers for ecological grief, and the myriad ways in which people experience and express this grief, requires a pluralistic and interdisciplinary approach, bringing together at times differing and at times complementary research methods, disciplinary perspectives and lived experiences. We conclude by reflecting upon what ecological grief means for how we think about individual and collective mental well-being in the Anthropocene era, and for supporting the resourcefulness of individuals and communities increasingly at risk from climate change impacts.

Grief is a natural human response to loss. To grieve the loss of a loved one is a common human experience, and one that all of us will encounter throughout the course of our lifetimes. From a developmental perspective, grief is the internal physiological and emotional responses to loss, and mourning is the period of mental, emotional and personal transition as people learn to live again in the context of loss. The processes of grieving and mourning can take many forms, differ across cultures, vary greatly among individuals, and even be experienced differently by the same individual each time a different loss is encountered. Although processes of grief and mourning are well understood in the psychological literature in response to the loss of a loved person, rarely are these concepts extended to losses encountered in the natural world.20. We consider ecological grief to be a form of “disenfranchised grief” or a grief that isn’t publicly or openly acknowledged. Indeed, ecological grief, and the associated work of mourning, experienced in response to ecological losses are often left unconsidered, or entirely absent, in climate change narratives, policy and research. Yet, acknowledging hitherto unacknowledged forms of grief brings to light values and objects that are often considered outside the scope of human care and, by association, ethical responsibility. As discussed by Butler, for example, experiences of grief and mourning illuminate our relational ties and fundamental dependency upon complex ecological communities and, in turn, our ethical and political responsibilities to these systems. For Butler, and others,28–30, grief and mourning have ‘we-creating’ capacities, exposing our known, unknown and unacknowledged connections to others, and allowing for opportunities to reach across differences to connect with others. In this light, grief and mourning can also question fundamental assumptions about what we choose to value — and what we choose to grieve and mourn — including climate change-induced ecological loss and degradation. (Cunsolo and Ellis 2018: 275-6)

When we lose our essential connection with Nature, with the land, with the Others, we disrupt ecologies of mind that result in a loss of meaning altogether with a loss of knowing. Knowing and meaning go together. Our loss becomes unspeakable in a culture based on conquest consciousness—unspeakable because of its depth, and because we cannot fully acknowledge it. We cannot face it, and instead we avoid it. This may seduce us into suicidal activity, in part
because we are so out of our minds that we cannot think properly about our situation, and also because the suicidal tendencies come as a medication for our suffering. We feel a breakdown of meaning and mind with the breakdown of ecologies, we experience the suffering in ourselves and others, and we turn toward medications that themselves depend on the further breakdown of ecologies, mind, and meaning, medications like travel, shopping, consuming media, reading books, working at universities, doing scientific research, drinking, watching sports, and so on.

Imagine something in you that wants to speak, wants to say to you, “We have experienced a profound loss. Beings are dying. The World has been raided, and as material has been extracted, meaning has withered. We have to face this loss. We have to grieve and then make things right. Things have to change. We cannot go on like this.” Who knows what the voice might say? But we simply experience an out-of-kilter feeling, vague or intense. We think our discomfort has to do with stress at work, busyness, bills, family troubles, anxiety, depression. What if the anxiety comes from not listening to ourselves? What if the busyness comes from not listening, and not wanting to listen? As the work of Francis Weller and Martin Prechtel suggests, we are not very good at grief in this culture, and maybe conquest consciousness has particular trouble with grief arising as a consequence of conquest consciousness.125 As we degrade our own soul by refusing to listen, refusing to accept what the World itself communicates in, through, as our soul, we endure a kind of slow suicide, and we enact that in the degradation of the World, however indirectly we may think it happens. In such a state of grief and suicidality, in such a state of loss,

125 See Weller’s, The Wild Edge of Sorrow: Rituals of Renewal and the Sacred Work of Grief, and Prechtel’s The Smell of Rain on Dust: Grief and Praise for some reflections on grief. Their work in light of the work on ecological grief indicates we have a lot of grieving to do, and we need productive ways to face it, or else we will continue to avoid it in the most unhelpful and destructive ways.
how can we think our thinking will be reliable? How can we trust a way of knowing that seems to go together with self-inflicted harm—again, however indirect we may think it is?

Searles courageously confesses his own suicidal energies:

For several years I have spent a long day each month working as a consultant at the New York State Psychiatric Institute in New York City. One evening a year or so ago, as I was returning by cab on the Triboro Bridge, on the way to LaGuardia to catch the shuttle plane back to Washington, I was seized by an urge to leap from the cab and hurl myself off the bridge. Such urges are no stranger to me, a sufferer since childhood from a phobia of heights. But the urge this time was particularly powerful, and the determinant I was able to glimpse, this time, of this tenacious, multirooted symptom was particularly memorable, humbling, and useful to me. I felt I had to destroy myself because I simply could not face returning to my usual life in Washington, and the reason I found it intolerable to face was that I felt so shamefully and desperately unable “simply” to face the living out of my life, the growing old and dying, the commonest, most everyday thing, so my panicky thoughts went, that nearly all people do—all, that is, with the exception of those who commit suicide or take refuge in chronic psychosis.

However unique to my own individual life history must be the pattern of determinants that give rise to my particular omnipotent urge to destroy my life rather than surrender to the eventual losing of it through living and aging and dying, I insist that my urge is not entirely irrelevant to what transpires in my fellow human beings in general: I am convinced that each of us in his or her own particular way must cope with some such irrationally omnipotent reaction to inevitable loss.

I postulate that an ecologically healthy relatedness to our nonhuman environment is essential to the development and maintenance of our sense of being human and that such a relatedness has become so undermined, disrupted, and distorted, concomitant with the ecological deterioration, that it is inordinately difficult for us to integrate the feeling experiences, including the losses, inescapable to any full-fledged human living. Over recent decades we have come from dwelling in an outer world in which the living works of nature either predominated or were near at hand, to dwelling in an environment dominated by a technology which is wondrously powerful and yet nonetheless dead, inanimate. I suggest that in the process we have come from being subjectively differentiated from, and in meaningful kinship with, the outer world, to finding this technology-dominated world so alien, so complex, so awesome, and so overwhelming that we have been able to cope with it only by regressing, in our unconscious experience of it, largely to a degraded state of nondifferentiation from it. I suggest, that is, that this “outer” reality is psychologically as much a part of us as its poisonous waste products are part of our physical selves.
The proliferation of technology, with its marvelously complex integration and its seemingly omnipotent dominion over nature, provides us with an increasingly alluring object upon which to project our “nonhuman” unconscious strivings for omnipotence; hence we tend increasingly to identify, unconsciously, with this. Concomitantly, the more “simply human,” animal-nature-based components of our selves become increasingly impoverished (by reason of such factors as the overpopulation; the impersonal, driven turmoil of living in a technology-dominated society; the emphasis upon consuming material products; and so on), less and less capable of integrating our “nonhuman” components.

More comprehensively, we become increasingly unable to consciously experience as an inner emotional conflict the war between the “human” and the “nonhuman” (autistic, omnipotence based) aspects of our self; hence we project this conflict upon, and thus unconsciously foster, the war in external reality between the beleaguered remnants of ecologically balanced nature and man's technology which is ravaging them.

Many aspects of the ecologically deteriorating world in which we live foster in us, at a largely unconscious level, the mode of experience seen in an openly crystalized form in paranoid schizophrenia and postulated as characterizing the most threatened moments of normal infancy before the establishment of a durable sense of individuality. The pervasively and increasingly polluted world in which we live, where as one concerned individual was hardly overstating it when he said, “Everything we breathe, eat, and drink is going to kill us,” is reacted to as being our all-permeating enemy. This tends to paralyze us into terrorized inactivity, all the more so because in this deeply regressed mode of experience we are not at all well differentiated from the environment, hence we have no clearly separate self with which to wage a struggle with the “outer” threat. (367-9)

The more Freudian interpretations may seem odd at first, but it can prove useful to sense how our situation might resonate with suicidal depression and even psychosis. The breakdown of meaning comes altogether with suffering of all kinds. We could say that it turns the whole world into a kind of new territory, a new culture we could call Sorrowville. Sorrowville came with a dream, especially in “America,” the global capital of Sorrowville. But the so-called “American Dream” has begun to fall apart. This is because our vision of life doesn’t function. In general, what we call capitalism involves deluded visions arising from beings who lack vision. Western leaders, both political and economic, have no real vision. They only know how to do more of the same: More samsara thinking, more “growth,” more of the same policies, tactics, strategies, and
styles of thought, speech, and action that are destroying the conditions of life. People are not
really fooled by this, but we are not always sure what to do instead, and our not-being.fooled
often remains unconscious.

We have a kind of entangled hope for the “American Dream,” a hope that we can just work hard
and be able to be happy and fulfilled. This is a special kind of samsara thinking, the thinking of
the pattern of insanity that holds us. It creates Sorrowville in the extreme, because we cannot
ever arrive at true happiness and fulfillment by working hard on behalf of a destructive and
deluded system. In fact, the harder we work in a corrupt system, the more unhappy and
unfulfilled we and those around us will feel. Eventually it will destroy us. Somehow, we all seem
to sense that we want our energy to go into cultivating life and cultivating our own soul, at the
same time. But the dominant culture can only pretend to facilitate this—and pretend it does, and
the level of deceit required, including a manufactured self-deception for all its citizens, is
remarkable.

We may be able to fool ourselves a bit, and we may see some examples of people who appear
happy and fulfilled by means of their success in the various games of Sorrowville, but deep
down most of us know that things are not right, even if the self-deception mechanisms keep that
sense of things repressed, or directed only at system-sanctioned enemies (“the terrorists,” the
“bad actors” in domestic and foreign governments, “the immigrants,” and so on). Perhaps almost
everyone feels it rather directly, and it creates a difficult situation: People feel spiritually
bankrupt, and since they cannot imagine an alternative, they double down on Sorrowville. They
buy a second house in Sorrowville, they cultivate more and more ties to Sorrowville, they run for
mayor of Sorrowville (metaphorically or literally), they deepen their debt in Sorrowville, they invest more time and energy into Sorrowville, they give more blood and sweat, they give more tears and cheers, they do everything they can to promote Sorrowville, trying to get themselves to believe in it, trying to tie themselves to hope, or even acting out a deranged kind of aggression against the world, a kind of dark nihilism that says, “Nothing matters! I can’t get what I really want, so I’m going to wreck this place. I hate this place!” They begin to hate life itself, or at least behave as if they do, as if they detest Nature and refuse to see anything sacred here.

Sorrowville leads to trying to love ourselves by hating others and hating life itself, seeking fulfillment by being disconnected from ourselves and others and life. It can’t ever work. But we try awfully hard to make it work, because we are tired, frustrated, scared, hopeful, hungry . . . we can’t even name our deeper hunger or the object of our hope—not really. We don’t have the best resources for facing the situation. We just have a set of limited concepts in our samsaric thinking: Us and them, individual and collective, gain and loss, pain and pleasure, fame or lack of fame, praise and blame, haves and have-nots. This may seem overly simplistic, but we are in an important sense not very sophisticated in our thinking when we get stranded in Sorrowville (stranded like travelers who wanted to go to Shangri-La, but had to make a forced landing in some nightmarish town we never, ever wanted to visit, or, travelers who think they have indeed arrived in Shangri-La but actually wound up at a very bad carnival in the middle of nowhere). Stranded in Sorrowville, our thinking can sometimes be complicated, but it’s not particularly sophisticated, nuanced, and elegant. We’re a little too angry, fearful, confused, doubtful, deprived, and desperate for anything but rather simplistic kinds of thinking. Things may seem different in academia, but the thinking there is sometimes complicated rather than complex.
(perhaps more often than feels easy to admit), and even in the most sophisticated cases it may not involve itself in anything like the rebellion against the dominant culture that seems needed right now. Sophia thinking, the thinking of a better way of knowing, takes more patience (or inclusiveness) and generosity than we allow ourselves to have, more wholesomeness and concentration, and more joyful perseverance and wisdom, and many of these qualities are lacking in academic ecologies. Sophia thinking demands love, and we don’t get taught how to really unleash our capacity for love—which in turn demands real wisdom, real discernment, or else it is not true love.

So, even though the diagnosis might seem different between academic ecologies and other ecologies, there is more in common than we might at first think. In fact, the diagnosis applies to all those in education, including parents. Whether we are “liberal” or “conservative,” whether we are highly “educated” or not, we can sometimes think of ourselves as above the messes in the world. We think the problem rather obviously lies with “those liberals,” or some other “bad actors” or “backward thinkers” who lack our reasonable and informed perspective on life. Sometimes an advanced education, or even membership in a particular religion or political party, can give us the feeling of being beyond the kind of consciousness, beyond the evil and ignorance that has created the unprecedented disaster we all find ourselves in, but we in education, at all levels (though, in some sense maybe more so at the university level), must look at the ways in which we collude with forces that harm the conditions of life, and begin to come together to consider ways of actively recognizing and resisting these forces.
Altogether with the breakdown of the conditions of life comes the breakdown of meaning, including the meaning of education, the meaning of our work and careers, and the meaning of life itself.\textsuperscript{126} We begin to feel bereft. The conditions of life, the wisdom and wildness within and without, are our source of meaning, and they are collapsing.\textsuperscript{127}

Realizing the meaning of life is intimately interwoven with the realization of our function in life (what we could poetically refer to as our soul purpose), and neither of these can be derived from or entangled with something like “capitalism,” “business,” “money,” “economic growth,” or any kind of materialistic consumption. Our soul purpose cannot even be tied to a “career” or “job” in any ordinary sense. We do need to make a living, and we needn’t feel that a medium of exchange is inherently “dirty” or “beneath” us. However, making a living has to mean making the conditions of life thrive, and when we can sense (even unconsciously) that the way we make a living either degrades life or does little to further it, we have to talk ourselves into the meaningfulness of it (which fails even if it succeeds, because the success involves denial, repression, and an inner conflict). Without life, no meaning is possible (and vice versa), so we

\textsuperscript{126} The breakdown of relative meaning comes as a consequence of losing touch with the immediate meaningfulness of life. The meaning of anything arises in relationship with our contact with, our intimacy with the meaningfulness of life. The meaningfulness of life is not a pre-given idea or concept, but the ground of all possible meaning. Evolution, for instance, depends on meaningfulness. We can try to convince ourselves of the randomness and mechanical nature of evolution, but this is a matter of magical thinking, in the pejorative sense. We don’t live in a vast machine with “meanings” sprayed on the surface like pointless graffiti. The Cosmos is alive and alove, with meaningfulness “all the way down”.

\textsuperscript{127} Among other things, we now have research into solastalgia, nature deficit disorder, ecology, and ecopsychology that confirms how the degradation of the conditions of life degrades our psychological, spiritual, and physical health. “Solastalgia” is a term coined by the philosopher Glenn Albrecht to indicate the suffering caused by the loss of the solace which healthy ecologies provide—not just psychological “comfort” really . . . healthy ecologies are the well-spring of well-being for us.
must therefore enter into a real relationship with life—which is what philosophy as a way of life is about, what the arts of awareness facilitate, what a vitalizing Nature-Culture practices and realizes. It’s not easy in the absence of good philosophy, and as we become more and more afraid and full of self-doubt, and when the dominant culture attempts to keep itself going by means of perpetuating fear, craving, hatred, doubt, and ignorance—and a lot of destruction.

When we get scared, we can accentuate our ignorance. Our ignorance amounts to attempting to defy reality. It’s both tragic and comic that we can live our lives in a way that attempts to defy reality, and yet this is the core of “American culture,” which of course is not easy to define. The most healthy kind of Culture would focus its resources on helping every one of its members to attune with reality. That is not the case in U.S. culture, where “reality” is a brand of entertainment, and the health of the collective soul can be measured by the fact that the dominant culture elected a “reality television” “star” as its political “leader”. Such an evaluation is not itself political. We are not here debating whether, in that election, we elected the candidate with the right political ideas. Neither establishment candidate seemed the right choice if we wanted to get ourselves back in touch with reality and avert the catastrophes we are currently heading toward.

The point is that “reality” now has nothing to do with a profound, transformative engagement with life or the divine, with how things are, with our soul purpose, and with our basic capacity for wisdom, love, and beauty. But this is not a new thing, something that happened when Trump got elected, or some cultural artifact. Reality has been gone in academia for some time, we could say, if reality has to do with the kinds of things spiritual traditions and their arts of awareness put
us in touch with. Failing to verify spiritual realities, we in academia have helped to verify a post-truth landscape. This is our practice too.

Verification of wisdom, love, peace, and so on, in the laboratory of the heart, the heart-mind-body-world-cosmos, is not really an option in the modern university, and though some academics (and non-academics too) will marvel at the election of a reality television star and think it has to do with those “other” people who elected him, they may not see their own contribution to the crisis we all face. One will be hard pressed to find university courses on how to live, how to love, how to die, the importance of dream and how to work with dream, how to find one’s soul purpose, or how to know Self and World. A university course called “How to Know Reality” would be rather anomalous in the dominant culture. One could make a long list of courses that almost certainly don’t exist at all (perhaps there are a handful of such course in the whole of the U.S.) but which might be standard offerings in a more healthy culture.

Shifting our epistemology goes altogether with seeing how badly we know ourselves and the World, how unrealistically our political, economic, and educational systems function. The altogetherness matters, and today’s philosopher should likely see themselves as symbolically living out the life of Socrates. That is not a good thing. It means we have come to a crisis, and our prophesies for the culture should be foreboding. The “American dream” is quite a nightmare for many—it has infected all the beings of the planet—and indeed, as in a nightmare, many of us don’t feel we have any influence over events.
It is strange that our inquiry pushes us towards an epistemology that gives up control, but one which also must empower us. We make a duality between “control” and “no control”. Neither functions. But, in our way of knowing the political reality of the dominant culture, the vast majority of people must feel a sense that they do not control their own fate, and that injustice is systemic. We may feel skeptical about this, but we must recall again that ecologies of mind beyond the merely conscious can know things before the conscious mind does. It does seem that people have irrational conscious views, but those may arise from unconscious conflicts, or unconscious knowings the ego must repress.

In any case, recent research demonstrates that the political system is not truly democratic, and that can have a psychological impact on anyone who disagrees with those who actually control the society, especially if they also realize they are likely in a majority. It’s like we are being gaslighted on a mass scale, and that too could drive a psychotic and/or suicidal reaction, thus intensifying the pattern of insanity and impelling us to drive the conditions of life to collapse. Politics has become a theater of nihilism, and this could provoke or further any melancholy, mourning, and even suicidal feelings we have. Wrecking the planet might even give us the only form of control we think we might have, for we can sense how we have precious little control over the organization of society, even if we are supposed to have some semblance of democratic spirit in the republic.

If we have no control, and if politicians and corporations nevertheless speak as if they are doing right by us, doesn’t that seem like a kind of crazy-making? If there were any doubt about our lack of influence, Gilens and Page (2014) found that “economic elites and organized groups
representing business interests have substantial independent impacts on U.S. government policy, while average citizens and mass-based interest groups have little or no independent influence” (564). They in fact go further. At the time their work was published, no previous study had been able to apply a single statistical model to test theories of how politics actually functions in the U.S., and so we could perhaps repress our intuitions and the apparent evidence and think optimistically. But Gilens and Page found a way to do such an analysis, and they uncovered something disappointing but unsurprising:

What do our findings say about democracy in America? They certainly constitute troubling news for advocates of “populistic” democracy, who want governments to respond primarily or exclusively to the policy preferences of their citizens. In the United States, our findings indicate, the majority does not rule—at least not in the causal sense of actually determining policy outcomes. When a majority of citizens disagrees with economic elites or with organized interests, they generally lose. Moreover, because of the strong status quo bias built into the U.S. political system, even when fairly large majorities of Americans favor policy change, they generally do not get it. (576)

So, “liberals” don’t control the political “reality,” nor do unions, or “conservatives,” or immigrants, or any other group we love to blame (Jewish people, Arabs, Mexicans, whatever). Rather, a small band of economic elites control things, and they are not on the side of the average person, who is essentially disenfranchised. Ordinary citizens have little control—at least, ordinary citizens as they currently practice and realize their lives, their World. Ordinary citizens do have tremendous potential power, especially if they root themselves in wisdom, love, and beauty. As Hume pointed out:

Nothing appears more surprising to those, who consider human affairs with a philosophical eye, than the easiness with which the many are governed by the few; and the implicit submission, with which men resign their own sentiments and passions to those of their rulers. When we enquire by what means this wonder is
effected, we shall find, that, as FORCE is always on the side of the governed, the governors have nothing to support them but opinion.\textsuperscript{128}

Somehow or other, we have—all of us together—gotten opinions “in our heads” that function very well for the structures of power and domination that keep us in Sorrowville.

And it’s not just “us”. A recent Gallup poll which surveyed people from all over the world found that the U.S. is viewed as “the greatest threat to peace in the world” by a large margin (the biggest threat is not Iran, which barely registers). This too can promote crazy-making, or at least animosity, as we try to embrace the image of the U.S. as a peace-promoting society, while we sense otherwise, from our own soul and even from other people, who must then become enemies of some measure if they express a view that perceives the U.S. as less than wonderful. The survey also found that a third of those polled thought the world would be better off if there were more female politicians.\textsuperscript{129} I strongly agree. But this is a minority opinion, and, again, our general opinions are somehow conducive to the less better off world we have, the world of Sorrowville.

For some reason, many of us hold on to the opinion or the notion that we are living in a “democracy”. I am not sure how we should define that term. The philosopher Lewis Mumford gave a definition that helps get at something important about democracy:

“Democracy” is a term now confused and sophisticated by indiscriminate use, and often treated with patronizing contempt. Can we agree, no matter how far we might diverge at a later point, that the spinal principle of democracy is to place

\textsuperscript{128} Available online: \url{http://www.econlib.org/library/LFBooks/Hume/hmMPL4.html} Hume is here, I think, essentially taking up the concerns that Socrates voices in dialogues such as \textit{Meno} and \textit{Republic}. The dangers of human opinion and belief can hardly be overstated, and we cannot root a culture in opinions, even “correct” ones.

\textsuperscript{129} \url{http://www.wingia.com/en/services/about_the_end_of_year_survey/global_results/7/33/}
what is common to all men above that which any organization, institution, or group may claim for itself?\(^\text{130}\)

An important thing there seems to be a more realistic view about how we relate to each other and the conditions of life. Some things should not belong to anyone—including “individuals,” which Mumford does not specifically mention in this passage. The things we hold in common transcend organizations, institutions, and groups. They also transcend each of us as individuals. This principle actually protects us as individuals, allowing us to realize ourselves, to realize our potentials and our purpose. And it makes for common sense: If you see a hundred people peeing just upstream from where you are standing, you will not drink from the river; if you actually need the river for your survival, you will not feel ethically satisfied if those hundred people (or, a single wealthy individual) were to claim they “own” the river and can do as they please with it. Yet we allow some people or groups (including, perhaps principally, corporations) to dump toxins in our rivers and streams. We allow many corporations to do whatever they want with the land and other things we hold in common (“hold” in a caring way, things we care for altogether, that which we all hold in our heart-mind-body-World-Cosmos).

The Sauk chief Black Hawk said, “My reason teaches me that land cannot be sold. The Great Spirit gave it to his children to live upon, and cultivate as far as is necessary for their subsistence” (from Philip 2005: 31). Similarly, Crowfoot of the Blackfeet said,

Our land is more valuable than your money . . . We cannot sell the lives of men and animals. It was put here by the Great Spirit and we cannot sell it because it does not belong to us. You can count your money and burn it within the nod of a buffalo’s head, but only the Great Spirit can count the grains of sand and the blades of grass on the plains. As a present to you, we will give you anything we have that you can take with you; but the land, never. (from Philip 2005: 31-2)

\(^{130}\) Available at http://www.primitivism.com/mumford.htm
This same thought has occurred to people in western culture as well. For instance, consider this famous passage from Rousseau:

> The first man who, having enclosed a piece of ground, bethought himself of saying, “This is mine,” and found people simple enough to believe him, was the real founder of civil society. From how many crimes, wars and murders, from how many horrors and misfortunes might not anyone have saved mankind, by pulling up the stakes, or filling up the ditch, and crying to his fellows, “Beware of listening to this impostor; you are undone if you once forget that the fruits of the earth belong to us all, and the earth itself to nobody.”

Think about how this resonates with Sorenson’s findings regarding liminal awareness:

> Any form of subjugation, even those barriers to freedom imposed by private property, are the kiss of death to this type of life. Though durable and self-repairing in isolation, the unconditional open trust this way of life requires shrivels with alarming speed when faced with harsh emotions or coercion. Deceit, hostility, and selfishness when only episodic temporarily benumb intuitive rapport. When such conditions come to stay and no escape is possible, intuitive rapport disintegrates within a brutally disorienting period of existential trauma and anomie.

The Culture Sorenson studied remains inconceivable to us. It involves a nonduality of the individual and the community, and in the dominant culture we have tremendous fears around this duality. Those fears might best be healed through the practice-and-realization of nonduality, but

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131 One is tempted to read “evil society” here, not because society itself is inherently evil, but because our notion, our vision, our practice of “civilization” has so far not manifested a profoundly ethical orientation, and the consequences of that have led to significant evil. We have not rooted “civilization” in WisdomLoveBeauty. A true Culture needs to cultivate Wisdom, Love, and Beauty. Culture that does not cultivate mutual nourishment, mutual rejuvenation, mutual healing, mutual illumination, and mutual liberation is not Culture but mere “evil society,” which we refer to as “civilization” or conquest consciousness. Tragically, such societies may be filled with many lovely people who sincerely wish to do good, and whose core values have nothing to do with anything evil. The trouble is that “civil society” can co-opt the values of its citizens, and this is what makes them complicit in the evils that society does. Our situation may seem daunting, but somehow or other we have to call forth a transformation, in ourselves and in the culture.

132 From his Discourse on Inequality, available online: https://www.aub.edu.lb/fas/cvsp/Documents/DiscourseonInequality.pdf

133 http://ranprieur.com/readings/preconquest.html
it may prove challenging. We should at least note that what Sorenson and Rousseau are talking about does not mean we can have no peace and privacy. We can practice and realize a right to dwell peacefully someplace, feeling secure, feeling genuinely at home, able to have confidence in our privacy and safety. It is to say that we can only truly have this, and share it with all, if it grows out of a realistic view of the whole. The main point is that a genuine sense of being peaceful and at home in the world is a matter of philosophical practice-realization, not a matter of laws, and conflict between the individual and the collective can only arise if those have been dualized. Sorenson did not notice any such conflict with respect to pre-conquest consciousness.

Somehow or other, we (the dominant culture in particular) bought into the idea that the Earth can belong to individuals. This got bound up with capitalism and conquest in an altogether way, just as science and technology got bound up with capitalism and conquest. Science and technology arises already from conquest consciousness, and this goes altogether with the epistemic failures we can find in them. We might suggest that part of the motivation for holding onto science as we do, for fighting against any reasonable remembrance and rejuvenation of the roots of philosophy, spirituality, and religion has to do with what we have sacrificed, what we have degraded for the sake of science-and-technology (it helps to see them in their non-duality).

At some point, “the American Dream” emerged as a special variety of delusion to keep us all going along with the structures of power and domination that rule the nation and largely shape the world. The United States was, as the historian Gordon Wood points out, founded in such a way as to control any democratic inspirations that were emerging at the time—and that control continues. Wood shows that the Constitution itself was “intrinsically an aristocratic document
designed to check the democratic tendencies of the period” in order to “restore and prolong the traditional kind of elitist influence in politics that social developments, especially since the Revolution, were undermining” (1998: 513).

Wood grants that the deep division over the Constitution during the time of the Constitutional Convention is not easy to analyze, since, for instance, there were wealthy men on both sides of a political divide. Nevertheless, looking carefully, he finds that the debate was largely “a social one,” and that, even though there were wealthy men on both sides of the debate, one side seemed more interested in the general welfare, such that the debate was “fundamentally one between aristocracy and democracy” (484-5). Wood quotes one Antifederalist (those opposing the Constitution) who wrote that the Federalists were trying to essentially nullify the Revolution, in order to “lord it over the rest of their fellow citizens, to trample the poorer part of the people under their feet, that they may be rendered servants and slaves” (488).

Wood notes that the Antifederalists had a very tough time making their case, in part because “out of a hundred or more newspapers printed in the late eighties only a dozen supported the Antifederalists” (486). The Antifederalists also keenly perceived the influence of men of wealth and fame. Wood points out that, “Although to a European, American society may have appeared remarkably egalitarian, to many Americans, especially to those who aspired to places of consequence but were made to feel their inferiority in innumerable, often subtle ways, American society was distinguished by its inequality” (488). There were a host of economic, social, and political factors at work that served to mark off a de facto aristocracy whose influence was impossible for the Antifederalists to resist, because, as Wood puts it, “to the continual annoyance
of the Antifederalists, the great body of the people willingly submitted to it” (489). We are back to Hume, and also Socrates.

This is in fact the main point of our discussion here. We are trying to think spiritually and philosophically, and all of this is not meant as a history lesson in the typical sense. History can be very important—depending on how we handle it (usually not very well)—but in all our history lessons, we rarely focus on the spiritual dimension. We tend to get hung up on delusions of progress. The sins of “history” as an invention, if we reflect on them, reveal the genius of Mythology as a superior approach to organizing a Culture, a Nature-Culture, and synchronizing souls to the sacredness of life. The individual soul is interwoven with the collective soul, and this in turn is interwoven with the soul of the World. Our own liberation thus goes together with the liberation of all our fellow citizens and all our fellow beings. These things a Mythology helps to reveal. But we are stuck with “history”. Even in history, though, we can sense that we are all in this together, whether we have “conservative” or “liberal” political views. And history can also teach us that many of our views are not really ours to begin with, and that they in one way or another function quite well for the small portion of the population who actually control most of the wealth and power in our society.

Spiritually speaking we have many interesting lessons to learn from our “history” and our present. For instance, we think our ideas and opinions belong to us. I see this in my students all the time. They speak with tremendous sincerity, as if they are voicing their own ideas and opinions. A student tells me something I have heard a hundred times before, something that fits perfectly into the logic of Sorrowville, and they say it as if they were the first to think this
thought, as if they arrived at this thought by careful reasoning, and as if the thought will lead to liberation. In sharing this, I am not playing the part of the jaded teacher. The issue is that I know my students can indeed arrive at skillful thinking. They are fully capable of Sophia thinking or Original Thinking (thinking that arises from our self-liberation into larger ecologies of mind), but they are not going to do much of it in a culture that would be deeply threatened by Original Mind and its wisest, most loving and beautiful manifestations.

In general, we think our ideas and opinions belong to us, but in fact we belong to these ideas and opinions—and they will always limit us. LoveWisdom means getting beyond ideas and opinions, touching the unlimited dimension of our being, while keeping an eye on the ways we are lived by powers we pretend to understand. We have to liberate ourselves from our own opinions, even from our own sense of what is reasonable and rational—but without thereby becoming unreasonable or irrational.

We may have to liberate ourselves from many of the principles and notions that shaped the development of the dominant culture. For instance, we seem to take it as a given that we need a separation of church and state, but it is not clear that we know how that may require differentiation from the impossibility of separating spirituality and culture—i.e. that politics cannot be fully separated from religion, from sacredness, holiness, health, healing, and all matters of soul that philosophical/spiritual/religious traditions have always attended to. “Secular” can only mean inclusive, not a-religious, non-religious, or atheistic.
Consider, for instance, one of Locke’s expressions of his view of the separation of the secular and the religious, a view we can sense at work as a rationalization in the dominant culture:

I esteem it above all things necessary to distinguish exactly the business of civil government from that of religion and to settle the just bounds that lie between the one and the other. If this be not done, there can be no end put to the controversies that will be always arising between those that have, or at least pretend to have, on the one side, a concernment for the interest of men’s souls, and, on the other side, a care of the commonwealth.

The commonwealth seems to me to be a society of men constituted only for the procuring, preserving, and advancing their own civil interests.

Civil interests I call life, liberty, health, and indolency of body; and the possession of outward things, such as money, lands, houses, furniture, and the like.\(^\text{134}\)

There are at least two troubling issues here: Politics becomes focused on “materiality” and “possession” on the one hand, and the health of the soul is cut off from political life on the other. This may not be the best way of characterizing the problem with Locke’s expression, but it gets us close. Locke is one of the icons of the very epistemology our inquiry suggests we need to overcome, and given his influence on the development of the dominant culture, this stands out.

We have a basic issue of epistemology, but also an issue of the nature of philosophy/spirituality. Locke’s view here does not seem to be other than a challenge to the Socratic view, which holds that the resonance between individual soul and collective soul, and the life-and-death importance of the care of our soul, demand that our political life make a central place for the soul, and thus a central place for LoveWisdom, which for Socrates surely seems to have a religious or spiritual character. Socrates seems to recommend justice on the basis of righteousness and a direct experience of the sacredness of all things (sacred, for instance, in terms of their participation in

the Good). A healthy society depends on a healthy soul, and there seems to be no way to evade that, and the hard work comes to finding a way for that to function inclusively.

On balance we could respectfully suggest that Socrates might find Locke a “person of no account”—a major problem given Locke’s influence on the reasoning and rationalization of the dominant culture. I don’t think Locke can give an account that will stand up to scrutiny, for this dualism between the sacred and the profane seems untenable, as our inquiry continues to suggest—though, this is not a study of Locke, and we examine a few Lockean artefacts merely as representative symptoms, as part of our overall inquiry, which invites us to see the altogetherness of what we call epistemology, politics, ethics, and what we might call spirituality.

We need not say that the only alternative to this sort of Locke view is the unification of church and state. Any particular church and any particular religion cannot rule in a diverse, inclusive and democratic society. But it seems urgent to notice the negative side-effects that seem to come out of a few of Locke’s basic views, not least of which the fact that, in the dominant culture, we raise managers, CEO’s, politicians. We do not raise spiritual/philosophical Elders and philosophically/spiritually mature leaders (which would mean psychologically healthy and mature human beings). Put another way, as Sheldon Wolin demonstrates in his magisterial Politics and Vision, a political order comes with a vision, a vision of what a human being is and is for, what the World is and is for, what a society is and is for. Our inquiry suggests that this is always a philosophical matter, but philosophy as we mean it here is inherently spiritual, inherently embracing of the religious impulse. There is no way to get the spiritual out the World, the soul, the society without making all of us sick. If we like, we can be a stiff-lipped atheist.
about it and just mark this up to the sheer number of religious people in the world (even though our inquiry suggests it’s a matter of interwovenness, not mere opinion that these things go together). As Nasr points out:

Obviously, for those for whom religion is still a reality, it is much easier to appeal to religion and the religious view of nature to discover the means through which a solution would be found for the [ecological] crisis from which we all suffer.

We often forget that the vast majority of people in the world still live by religion. And yet most Western intellectuals think about environmental issues as if everyone were an agnostic following a secular philosophy cultivated at Oxford, Cambridge, or Harvard, and so they seek to develop a rationalist, environmental ethics based on agnosticism, as if this would have any major effect whatsoever upon the environmental crisis. It is important to consider in a real way the world in which we live. If we do so then we must realize why in fact religion is so significant both in the understanding and in the solution of the environmental crisis. Let us not forget, I repeat, that the vast majority of people in the world live according to religion. The statistic that is often given, saying that only half of humanity does so, is totally false because it is claimed that in addition to the West one billion two hundred million Chinese are atheists or non-religious. This is not at all the case. Confucianism is not a philosophy, but a religion based upon ritual—I shall come back to that in a few moments. There are at most a few hundred million agnostics and atheists spread mostly in the Western world, with extensions into a few big cities in Asia and Africa. But this group forms a small minority of the people of the world. Those who live on the other continents, as well as many people in Europe and America, still live essentially in a religious world. Although in the West the religious view of nature has been lost, even here it is still religion to which most ordinary people listen, while the number is much greater in other parts of the globe. That is why any secularist ideology that tries to replace religion always tries also to play the role of religion itself. This has happened with the ideology of modern science in the West, which for many people is now accepted as a “religion.” That is why the people who try to sell you many kinds of goods on television do so as “scientists”—as agents of “authority”—and always wear a white robe, not a black robe of traditional priests. They are trying to look like members of the new “priesthood.” They function as the priesthood of a pseudo-religion. Their whole enterprise is made to appear not as simply ordinary science but as something that replaces religion. For people who accept this thesis it would be feasible to accept a rationalistic ethics related to science, but the vast majority of people in the world still heed authentic religion. Consequently, for them, no ethics would have efficacy unless it was religious ethics. . . .

The fact remains that the vast majority of people in the world do not accept any ethics which does not have a religious foundation. This means in practical terms that if a religious figure, let us say, a mulla or a brahmin in India
or Pakistan, goes to a village and tells the villagers that from the point of view of the Sharī‘ah (Islamic law) or the Law of Manu (Hindu law) they are forbidden to cut this tree, many people would accept. But if some graduate from the University of Delhi or Karachi, who is a government official, comes and says, for rational reasons, philosophical and scientific reasons, that it is better not to cut this tree, few would heed his advice. So from a practical point of view the only ethics which can be acceptable to the vast majority, at the present moment in the history of the world, is still a religious ethics. The very strong prejudice against religious ethics in certain circles in the West which have now become concerned with the environmental crisis is itself one of the greatest impediments to the solution of the environmental crisis itself. (1989: 29-31)

More current demographics are not easy to determine, but I have not seen any indication that atheists and agnostics exceed roughly 7% of global population. With possibly 93% or more of our global human family rooted in something they can call religion or a religious sensibility, it is not clear how we can keep religious/spiritual concepts or a religious/spiritual attitude out of our conversation about the most serious problems we face. It’s just that we have to find ways to do this inclusively. Moreover, we can make good use of the arts of awareness and the epistemological, ethical, and aesthetic values that all religious/spiritual/philosophical traditions share. There is a common ground of wisdom, love, and beauty that can function as the common ground of an inclusive and pluralistic society that doesn’t have to try and ignore the sacred, and thus put us at odds with Nature.

There are at least a few key dynamics at work in these contemplations. For one thing, we are getting at the epistemological error Bateson pointed out. Recall Bateson’s suggestion that “our loss of the sense of aesthetic unity was, quite simply, an epistemological mistake,” and he invites us to see how “that mistake may be more serious that all the minor insanities that characterize those older epistemologies which agreed upon the fundamental unity” (MN:18). Nasr gets at the
The unifying vision which related knowledge to love and faith, religion to science, and theology to all the departments of intellectual concern is finally completely lost, leaving a world of compartmentalization where there is no wholeness because holiness has ceased to be of central concern, or is at best reduced to sentimentality. In such a world those with spiritual and intellectual perspicacity sought, outside of the confines of this ambience, to rediscover their traditional roots and the total functioning of the intelligence which would once again bestow upon knowledge its sacramental function and enable men to reintegrate their lives upon the basis of this unifying principle, which is inseparable from both love and faith. For others, for whom such a criticism of the modern world and rediscovery of the sacred was not possible but who, at the same time, could not be lulled to sleep before the impoverished intellectual and spiritual landscape which was presented to them as modern life, there was only lament and despair which, in fact, characterizes so much of modern literature and which the gifted Welsh poet Dylan Thomas was to epitomize in the poem that was also to become his elegy:

Too proud to die, broken and blind he died
The darkest way, and did not turn away,
A cold kind man brave in his narrow pride
Being innocent, he dreaded that he died
Hating his God, but what he was was plain.
An old kind man brave in his burning pride.

But because God is both merciful and just, the light of the Intellect could not be completely eclipsed nor could this despair be the final hymn of contemporary man. (1989: 39)

Later in the same lecture series, Nasr tells us that,

Knowledge of the sacred leads to freedom and deliverance from all bondage and limitation because the Sacred is none other than the limitless Infinite and the Eternal, while all bondage results from the ignorance which attributes final and irreducible reality to that which is devoid of reality in itself, reality in its ultimate sense belonging to none other than the Real as such. That is why the sapiential perspective envisages the role of knowledge as the means of deliverance and freedom, of what Hinduism calls mokśa. To know is to be delivered. Traditional knowledge is in fact always in quest of the rediscovery of that which has been always known but forgotten, not that which is to be discovered, for the Logos which was in the beginning possesses the principles of all knowledge and this treasury of knowledge lies hidden within the soul of man to be recovered through recollection. The unknown is not out there beyond the present boundary of
knowledge but at the center of man’s being here and now where it has always been. And it is unknown only because of our forgetfulness of its presence. It is a sun which has not ceased to shine simply because our blindness has made us impervious to its light.

The traditional concept of knowledge is concerned with freedom and deliverance precisely because it relates principal knowledge to the Intellect, not merely to reason, and sees sacred knowledge in rapport with an ever-present Reality which is at once Being and Knowledge, not with a process of accumulation of facts and concepts through time and based on gradual growth and development. Without denying this latter type of knowledge which in fact has existed in all traditional civilizations, tradition emphasizes that central knowledge of the sacred and sacred knowledge which is the royal path toward deliverance from the bondage of all limitation and ignorance, from the bondage of the outside world which limits us physically and the human psyche which imprisons the immortal soul within us. (267-8)

We contemplate a suggestion some will find challenging: That a vitalizing epistemology includes, rather than excludes, at least some of what we have written off as “religious”. Bateson tried to suggest that religions contain in their doctrines and practices valid and viable ways of liberating ourselves into larger ecologies of mind, and thus enabling us to take action in the world on the basis of wisdom, love, and beauty, rather than mere conscious purpose, however well rationalized on the basis of “science,” “politics,” “economics,” or “philosophy”. Religions have to do with getting us beyond our ego, and putting us in touch with . . . call it “God” if you like, or Sophia, or Brahman, or the unconscious, or the Self. If we disagree too much on what “it” says, we have either tried to commit the intellectualist fallacy, or we have made some other error—for we remain fallible beings. In any case, we can suggest here that we both require religion for what it offers in terms of liberating us into wisdom, love, and beauty, and for the sake of meeting our responsibility to the World, for it seems, increasingly so to me, that we somehow seem to need to practice and realize the sacredness of the World (and this means something in the basic spirit of “religion,” properly construed), and there are in any case too many religious people for any rigorous epistemology to simply exclude them—and that has
political implications. Excluding the religious from our epistemology is just another version of the intellectualist fallacy, one that ignores how real human beings must practice and realize in order to know. One way or another, epistemology has both a religious and a political dimension, even if we can see no further than playing the role of Confucius and trying to convince political (and religious) leaders that the society would function much better if they practiced and realized a better way of knowing, we must still try and work more holistically.

We can sense here another challenging suggestion: That any philosophically wise, loving, and beautiful notion of “liberty” and “liberation” cannot be restricted in the manner Locke seems to endorse. Indeed, Locke’s recommendations may end up backfiring—an unsurprising thing given the way a lack of wisdom never goes unpunished. Because the governments of the dominant culture applied Locke’s (and similar) rationalizations for following conscious purposes (and unconscious drives), we are suffering needless side-effects. The kind of “liberty” Locke recommends is incoherent, in spite of whatever conscious purposes he had. Similarly, “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” (to whatever degree that was inspired by Locke, and perhaps a misunderstanding of Epicurus) is also incoherent without a proper philosophical, that is Nature-Culture, context, and while no one should force a religious dogma into that context, one cannot stray far from the spiritual, and thus cannot cut off liberty from the soul by somehow orienting it to “the material”. Even Jefferson, despite his many sins, seems to have sensed this in some way, given that his first draft of the Declaration of Independence reads, “We hold these truths to be sacred & undeniable . . .”  

135 Whatever Jefferson thought about how humans would
most skillfully practice and realize life, liberty and happiness, we have arrived at a culture that
practices the pursuit of happiness in a materialistic way. Nasr touches on this in his own way—
and we should recall that he wrote this in 1999:

... even if we are not personally concerned with the metaphysical, spiritual, and
cosmological roots of the environmental crisis, we are nonetheless aware of the
fact, that outwardly (I do not say inwardly) this crisis is driven by the modern
economic system appealing to human passions, especially the passion of greed
intensified by the creation of false needs, which are not really needs but wants.
This is in opposition to the view which religions have espoused over the
millennia, that is, the practice of the virtue of contentment, of being content with
what one has. The modern outlook is based on fanning the fire of greed and
covetousness, on trying to do everything possible to attach the soul more and
more to the world and on making a vice out of what for religion has always been a
virtue, that is, to keep a certain distance and detachment from the world; in other
words, a certain amount of asceticism. There is a famous German proverb, “There
is no culture without asceticism”; and this is true of every civilization.

We are living in the first period in human history in the West in which,
except for a few small islands here and there of Orthodox or Catholic or Anglican
monasticism and a few people who try to practice austerity, asceticism is
considered to be a vice, not a virtue. It is not taught in our schools as a virtue; it is
taught as a vice, preventing us from realizing ourselves, as if our “selves” were
simply the extension of our physicality. This idea of self-realization is, of course,
central to Oriental and certain Occidental traditions. But it has become debased in
the worst way possible and transformed into the basis for modern consumerism,
which can be seen in its most virulent form in America—now fast conquering
Europe, and doing a good job of reaching India, China, Indonesia, etc. (within the
next decade we will have several billion new consumers in such countries
thirsting for artificial things which they have lived without for the last few
thousand years). And what this will do to the earth God alone knows. It is beyond
belief and conjecture what will happen if present trends continue. So what is it
that can rein in the passions, either gradually or suddenly? Nothing but religion
for the vast majority of people who, believing in God and the afterlife, still fear
the consequences of their evil actions in their lives in this world. If it were to be
told to them that pollution and destruction of the environment is a sin in the
theological sense of the term they would think twice before indulging in it. For
the ordinary believer the wrath of God and fear of punishment in the afterlife is
the most powerful force against the negative tendencies of the passionate soul.
For nearly all people on the earth who continue to pollute the air and the water,
and whose lifestyle entails the destruction of the natural environment, what is it
that is going to act as a break against the ever-growing power of the passions
except religion? The religions have had thousands of years to deal with the
slaying of the passionate ego, this inner dragon, to use the symbol mentioned in so
many traditions. St. Michael’s slaying of the dragon with his lance has many
meanings, one of which is, of course, that the lance of the Spirit alone is able to kill that dragon; or what in Sufism is called nafs, that is the passionate soul, the lower soul within us. We rarely think of that issue today. But where is St. Michael with his lance? How are we going to stop people from wanting more and more if not through the power of the Spirit made accessible through religion? And once you have opened up the Pandora’s box of the appetites, how are you going to put the genie back into the box? How are you going to be able, with no more than rational arguments, to tell people to use less, to be less covetous, not to be greedy, and so forth? No force in the world today, except religion, has the power to do that unless it be sheer physical coercion.

For the vast majority of people there is no other way to control the great passions within us which have now been fanned by, first of all, the weakening of religion and, secondly, the substitution of another set of values derived from a kind of pseudo-religion whose new gods are such idols as “development” and “progress.” But such notions do not have the power to help us control our passions. On the contrary they only fan the fire of those passions. We have been witness during the last generation alone to the ever greater debunking of the traditional religious attitudes towards the world, especially what we call in Arabic ṭaḥarrūr, that is contentment with our state of being, a virtue which is the very opposite of the sin of covetousness. Of course, the Muslims have been criticized by the West for a long time for simply being fatalistic in the face of events, of being too content with their lot. This same debunking has also been directed towards similar Christian values. But that is because of a deep misunderstanding. Where, in the current educational system in the West, is attention being paid to these traditional virtues? Even from a purely empirical, scientific point of view, these virtues must be seen as being of great value, seeing that they have made it possible for human beings to live for thousands of years in the world without destroying the natural environment as we are currently doing. These traditional virtues that allowed countless generations to live in equilibrium with the world around them were at the same time conceived as ways of perfecting the soul, as steps in the perfection of human existence. These virtues provided the means for living at peace with the environment. They also allowed man to experience what it means to be human and to fulfill his destiny here on earth, which is always bound to try to inculcate such virtues within oneself. (31-2)

This may sound strange to a non-religious person. Let’s be clear about a few things. For one, we are in no way—in no way—suggesting we need to set up a theocracy. The issue has to do with how to make sacredness part of epistemology and, thus, politics too. Over and above any thought of “fear and trembling,” we can come to sense the importance of an experience of sacredness.

Nasr speaks in part to include the full spectrum of moral development, any stage of which might benefit from a religious sensibility. We can at least provisionally accept the validity of a variety
of findings in this regard, from Kohlberg and Gilligan to more exotic theories from Jean Gebser or Clare Graves, but we can also embrace here the many philosophical/spiritual traditions of the World which seem to agree: We are capable of cultivation, of practice and realization that allows us to respond not merely on the basis of fear and trembling, but on the basis of wisdom, love, beauty, compassion, peace, joy, and wonder, and a religious sensibility may prove as helpful to facilitating insights based on, for instance, a mature ethic of care or universal moral principles as it does in the more preliminary developmental thinking that can only manage, “If I do this I’ll get in cosmic trouble.” Indeed, that level of moral development may go with a level of intellectual development that itself can broaden so profoundly that it boggles the mind that militant atheists would restrict “god” to the notions they seem to have had as children, and which they have not practiced into anything more mature but rather abandoned in an ontogenetically crippled state. In any case, we are talking here also about a view, and we can suggest it is never a “world” “view” that we mean when we speak of a worldview, but rather a Cosmic Vision, a feel for the whole, properly called a mythology, because it has a mythopoetic quality, an integration of wisdom-love-beauty. Philosophy does not really function unless it functions as mythology does. We will have to save a fuller discussion of that for another time, and here we need only reflect on the central issues: That most humans identify as religious, that religions endorse values antithetical to consumerism and to the “liberty” our secular philosophy has helped us to practice and realize, and that, most of all, religions and spiritual traditions have images, visions, doctrines, teachings, and practices for helping us to self-liberate out of ego-centric action (including consumption) and into larger ecologies of wisdom-love-beauty. If there is anything right about religions, we might say that their rightness predicts our unwellness, given the current context, and that they each have some variety of medicine that may help all of us to heal.
Among those practices are what we may call rites, rituals, ceremonies, and celebrations. These are not always easy to distinguish. Nasr offers us a few reflections that we can think of in general terms:

Another cardinal and central role of religion in the solution of the environmental crisis, one that goes to its very root, is much more difficult to understand within the context of the modern mind-set. This role is related to the significance of religious rituals as a means of establishing cosmic harmony. Now, this idea is meaningless in the context of modern thought, where ritual seems to have no relation or correspondence with the nature of physical reality. In the modern world view, rituals are at best personal, individual, subjective elements that create happiness in the individual or establish a relationship between him or her and God. That much at least some modern people accept. But how could rites establish cosmic harmony? From the modern scientific point of view such an assertion seems to make no sense at all. But it is not nonsense; it is a very subtle truth that has to be brought out and emphasized. From both the spiritual and the religious perspective, the physical world is related to God by levels of reality which transcend the physical world itself and which constitute the various stages of the cosmic hierarchy. It is impossible to have harmony in nature, or harmony of man with nature, without this vertical harmony with the higher states of being. Once nature is conceived as being purely material, even if we accept that it was created by God conceived as a clockmaker, this cosmic relationship can no longer even be conceived much less realized. Once we cut nature off from the immediate principles of nature—which are the psychic and spiritual or angelic levels of reality—then nature has already lost its balance as far as our relation to it is concerned.

Now rituals, from the point of view of religion, are God-made. I am not using the term ritual as seen from the secular point of view, as if one were putting on one’s gown and going to some commencement exercise or some other humanly created action, often called a “ritual” in everyday discourse today. I am using it in the religious sense. According to all traditional religions, rituals descend from Heaven. A ritual is an enactment, or rather re-enactment, here on earth of a divine prototype. In the Abrahamic world, that means that rituals have been revealed to the prophets by God and taught by them to man. The “repetition” of the Last Supper of Christ in the Eucharist, or the daily prayers of Muslims—where do they come from? According to the followers of those religions, they all come from Heaven. In Hinduism and Buddhism one observes the same reality. The differences are of context and world view, but the fundamentals are the same. There is no Hindu rite which was invented by someone walking along the Ganges who suddenly thought it up. For the Hindus they are of divine origin. The Muslim daily prayers, which we have all seen in pictures, were given by the Prophet to Muslims on the basis of instructions received from God. Even the Prophet did not
invent them. The Eucharist “re-enacts” the Last Supper which, as the central rite of Christianity, was first celebrated by Christ himself.

Now, these rites, by virtue of their re-enactment on earth, link the earth with the higher levels of reality. A rite always links us with the vertical axis of existence, and by virtue of that, links us also with the principles of nature. This truth holds not only for the primal religions, where certain acts are carried out in nature itself—let us say the African religions or the Aboriginal religion of Australia, or the religions of the Native American Indians—but also in the Abrahamic world, in the Hindu world, and in the Iranian religions. Whether one is using particular natural forms such as a tree or a rock or a cave or something like that, or man-made objects of sacred and liturgical art related to rites carried out inside a church, synagogue, mosque, or Hindu temple, it does not make any difference. The same truth is to be found in all these cases. From a metaphysical point of view a ritual always re-establishes balance with the cosmic order.

In the deepest mystical sense, nature is hungry for our prayers, in the sense that we are like a window of the house of nature through which the light and air of the spiritual world penetrate into the natural world. Once that window becomes opaque, the house of nature becomes dark. That is exactly what we are experiencing today. Once we have shut our hearts to God, darkness spreads over the whole of the world. This, of course, is something very difficult to explain to an agnostic mentality. But from a practical, expedient point of view at least, it should be taken into consideration even by those who do not take rites seriously, seeing what has happened to nature at the hands of those sectors of humanity who no longer perform traditional rites.

All religious people who believe in the efficacy of rites and perform them have a way of looking at the natural world and their place in it which is very different from the secularist way that has itself led us to the environmental crisis. You have all read or heard about examples of various religious rituals and their relation to nature, even in lesser known religions. Perhaps the best known, as far as displaying the direct relation between rituals and the natural world is concerned, is the rain-dance of the Native Americans, about which skeptics make jokes. But some people take it very seriously and go to Native American medicine men, the shamans, to try to get help from them to bring rain. Of course, such a thing is laughed at by official science, but that does not matter, for such a science neglects the sympathaeia which exists between man and cosmic realities. (34-5)

Here we get at issues of Synchronicity and mystical participation for which we may remain unprepared. In any case, it seems that a participatory relationship with reality, with Nature, is of paramount importance, and a better way of knowing seems rooted in mystical participation—in a rigorous sense, not in any pejorative sense of obscurantism, primitivism, superstition, or other dismissive denotations and connotations. We thus touch on yet another indication that we need a
paradigm shift. That seems to come altogether with needing a better way of knowing. We have to remind ourselves again and again that we cannot make much sense of how what we might narrowly refer to as a “religious” way of knowing can go together with what we narrowly refer to as a “scientific” way of knowing—and we have an easy way of understanding at least that much, for all it means is that our current science and our basic way of knowing are somehow incomplete, and partially incoherent. That is the least strange suggestion in our whole inquiry, but because of the ultimately radical nature of such a suggestion, the possible implications can seem strange, and we must of course take care not to lurch into desperate metaphysical speculations.

Nasr notes that this hunger for spirituality goes together with a hunger for a holistic science, and we might say a hunger for holistic culture. It seems reasonable to suggest that, all things considered, it’s more enjoyable to live in a sacred World. This seems to be true because of the altogetherness of wisdom, love, and beauty. Even an atheist like Bateson could sense this. Nasr offers the following contemplation regarding the need to think science and religion together, to practice the thinking-together of a sacred science and a science of sacredness, and the problems we face when we fail to practice and realize along these lines:

Now, one does not need to look very far to see what has happened in the modern world. Gradually, from the seventeenth century onwards, first in the West, then spreading in recent decades to other parts of the world, the legitimacy of the religious knowledge of nature has been rejected. Most people who study the views of an Erigena or a St. Thomas Aquinas on nature do so as historians. But their views are not accepted by the mainstream of modern Western society as legitimate knowledge of the world. What has been lost is a way of studying nature religiously, not simply as “poetry,” as this term is used today in a trivializing sense and not of course in a positive one. True poetry possesses a great message as far as nature is concerned, a message which itself is usually religious. In any case modern society has disassociated knowledge of nature from religion as well
as sapiential poetry itself, and relegates the religious attitude and knowledge of
nature to sentiment or “simply” to poetic sensibility.

We have wonderful examples of nature poetry in the great poetry
produced in the nineteenth century in England. The Romantic poets produced
beautiful poetry about nature. But what effect did it have on the physics
departments of the universities? Absolutely none, precisely because the science
that developed in the seventeenth century, through very complicated processes
which I cannot go into now, began to exclude from its world view the possibility
of a religious or metaphysical form of knowledge of nature. This science even
excluded the poetic view of nature in so far as it claimed any intellectual
legitimacy and sought to be more than what some would call “mere poetry.”
Modern science has clung to that monopoly very hard, even in this pluralistic age
of ours, in which everything other than science is relativized. Post-modernists
usually deconstruct everything except modern science because, if this were to be
done, the whole world view of modernism along with post-modernism would
collapse. So you have a kind of scientific exclusivity and monopoly which has
been created and accepted by most although not all people in the modern world.
Goethe, the supreme German poet as well as a scientist, rebelled very strongly
against this monopolistic claim of modern science. There were also certain
scientists, such as Oswald, who was a reputable chemist, who rejected scientific
mechanism; and one can name others. But these are exceptions to the rule. The
rule became that there is no other knowledge of nature except what is called
scientific knowledge. And if someone claims that there is a religious knowledge
of nature, then it is usually claimed that it is based on sentiment, on emotions, or,
in other words, on subjective factors. If, for example, you see a dove flying and
you think of the Holy Spirit, that is simply a subjective correlation between your
perception of the dove and your own sentiments. There is no objectivity accorded
to the reality of nature as perceived through religious knowledge. That is why
even symbolism has become subjectivized—it is claimed to be “merely”
psychological, à la Jung. The symbols which traditional man saw in the world of
nature as being objective and as being part of the ontological reality of nature
have been all cast aside by this type of mentality which no longer takes the
religious knowledge of nature seriously.

During the last thirty years, when the thirst for a more holistic approach to
nature made itself felt, something even worse occurred because neither
mainstream religion nor modern science showed any interest whatsoever in the
religious and symbolic knowledge of nature and the holistic approach to it. The
water sought for in this thirst seeped under the structures of Western culture and
came out in the form of New Age movements, nearly all of which are very much
interested in the science of the cosmos. But what they claim as science is really a
New Age pseudo-science of the cosmos. It is not an authentic traditional science,
because a traditional science of the cosmos always has to be related to a
traditional religious structure. In this New Age climate the word “cosmic” has
gained a great deal of currency precisely because of the dearth of an authentic
religious knowledge of the cosmos in the present-day world. Somehow the thirst
had to be satisfied. So we have had both excavation of the earlier Western esoteric
teachings about nature—usually presented in distorted fashion—or borrowings from Oriental religions and their teachings about nature, often distorted. Even the famous and influential book of Fritjof Capra, *The Tao of Physics*, does not really speak of Hindu cosmology or Chinese physics, but only mentions certain comparisons between modern physics and Hindu and Taoist metaphysical ideas.

To be sure there are many profound correlations and concordances to be found between certain aspects of biology, astronomy, and quantum mechanics on the one hand and Oriental doctrines of nature, of the cosmos, on the other. I would be the last person to doubt that truth. But what has occurred for the most part is not the kind of profound comparison we have in mind, but its parody, a kind of popularized version of a religious knowledge of nature, usually involving some kind of occultism or even some kind of an existing cult. The great interest shown today in Shamanism in America, in the whole phenomenon of the Native American tradition (which is one of the great and beautiful primal traditions that still survives to some extent), with weekend Shamanic sessions, is precisely because such teachings appeal to a kind of mentality that seeks some sort of knowledge of nature of a spiritual and holistic character other than what modern science provides. This phenomenon is one of the paradoxes of our day and has not helped the environmental crisis in any appreciable way. Indeed, it has created a certain confusion in the domain of religion and created a breach between the mainstream religious organizations which still survive in the West—whether they be Catholic, Protestant, or Orthodox—and these pseudo-movements and the New Age phenomenon, which they rightly oppose. The fact that these pseudo-religious movements are very pro-environment, yet in an ineffectual manner, has caused many people in the mainstream to take a stand against the very positions which they should be defending. So we have the paradoxical situation in America today where the most conservative Christian groups are those which are least interested in the environment. This phenomenon was not originally caused by the rise of the New Age religions but is certainly related to it and strengthened by it. (37-9)

Scholarship on the so-called New Age spiritualities seems to give them a warm measure of redemption (see the work of Paul Heelas, for instance). There is much to be critical about, but more often than not the critics seem to neglect the main issue: Spiritual materialism. That we can all fall prey to this matters much more than the fact that “new agers” often do. As something of a radical traditionalist, it seems to me we should be cautious about any form of self-styled spiritual practice, but I would add that the major criticism of anything new agey falls upon today’s philosophers, and not anyone in the new age movements. If philosophy departments would satisfy the spiritual hunger of the culture, we would not see so much foolishness in new age and
even mainstream religious and spiritual practice. If people come to philosophy and we do no
better than teach them Locke, Descartes, and Kant—and do it in the manner we do—then they
will naturally go elsewhere to satisfy the basic imperatives of the soul—or, they will medicate (in
all the ways the pattern of insanity encourages), or, usually and dangerously, they will do both.
And this too goes altogether with politics. It may be that, in various ways and in various times
(and further varying according to the individual and context), philosophers have actively evaded
the political. This may be an especially pronounced issue in the dominant culture. Capps (2003)
describes some aspects of this:

In *The Metaphysical Club* (2001) Louis Menand cites the Cold War as a decisive
factor in pragmatism's declining fortunes. Menand argues that pragmatism was
originally designed to ensure that our principles were not taken too seriously - or
at least not so seriously that violence might result. However, because the Cold
War “was a war over principles” (p. 441) pragmatism began to appear “naive, and
even a little dangerous” (p. 439). Menand thus concludes that pragmatism was
unsuited to a time when people felt compelled to stake their lives for their beliefs.
John McCumber argues that pragmatism's decline can be traced to McCarthyist
political intimidation. In *Time in the Ditch: American Philosophy and the
McCarthy Era* (2001) McCumber suggests that pragmatism (as well as other non-
analytic philosophical approaches) was well suited for addressing the political and
philosophical issues posed by the Cold War - so well suited, in fact, that it invited
a reactionary backlash. Thus, in contrast to Menand, McCumber concludes that
the eclipse of pragmatism and other non-analytic philosophical approaches was
the result of political pressure. Philosophers learned all too well that academics
should be dispassionate and apolitical. The dominance of analytic philosophy can
be traced to the requirement that philosophy be dry, narrow, and far removed
from the concerns of everyday life. Both explanations are compelling. On both
accounts pragmatism fell into disfavor not due to philosophical or inspirational
shortcomings but rather as a result of an increasingly hostile political
environment. If true, these theories would explain pragmatism’s eclipse less in
terms of factors internal to professional philosophy and more in terms of external
cultural factors. (61-2)

McCumber wrote an eponymous article prior to trying to make the fuller case in a book. The title
alludes to Thales, who famously demonstrated the mindlessness philosophers can fall into when
he literally fell into a well ("ditch" sounds better) while walking along, observing the heavens.

McCumber writes,

Thales has not been the only philosopher to lose his footing so badly that his for truth was impeded or even ended. Most of the time, the footing involved is political. Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Locke, Kant, and Hegel, to name a few, all at one time or another fell afoul of the social and political powers in their respective societies. Moreover, as work of Foucault will suggest, the effects of politics on philosophy may not always limited to interference with individual philosophers; politics may go on to influence nature of philosophy itself. In Germany after 1830, for example, reactionary forces purged the Young Hegelians—including such able thinkers as Feuerbach, Marx, Max Stirner, and David Strauss—from academic positions, consigning the country’s universities generation and more of the kind of egoistic charlatanry described by Lewis White

. . . men entered and left the [neo-Kantian] movement as if it were a church or political party; members of one school blocked the appointments and promotions of members of the others; eminent Kant scholars and philosophers who did not found their own schools or accommodate themselves to one of the established schools tended to be neglected as outsiders and contemned as amateurs.

Political interference with philosophers did not end with the nineteenth century, of Many Anglo-American philosophers, if they thought about it at all, would say that the debacle of 1968 in France called forth irrationalism in the thought of Derrida and Foucault, while the rise of the Nazis in Germany allowed Heidegger to claw his way to the top of the philosophical heap. England's Thatcher, apparently unwilling to tolerate philosophy at all, instigated the greatest academic exodus since Hitler. But such things—we Americans like to tell ourselves—do not happen around here. Though politics may influence philosophy in the Old World, American philosophy is an autonomous, indeed overwhelmingly tenured, discipline in the freest country on earth. The only important force shaping it has, it appears, been reason itself: the ongoing process of argument and evaluation in which American philosophers excel.

This exemption from politics may, however, be more spurious than real; certainly it cannot be taken for granted. The United States, the first country to be founded on a philosophy, has (perhaps for that reason) never been friendly to philosophers. Bertrand Russell ran up against American intolerance for the intellect and its life in 1940, when his attempt to teach in the US was pronounced by a judge to be dangerous to the “public health, safety, and morals” [Edwards 7: 235, 238]. World War II made a cold climate harsher, and five years later Brand Blanshard could write: “mathematics, physics, engineering, medicine—all the sciences, theoretic and applied, that have to do with the art of war are riding high; the humanities, including philosophy, have gone into temporary eclipse” [8]. The
Cold War, extending militaristic practices into peacetime, made the “temporary” in Blanshard’s judgment sound naively optimistic. When, as an undergraduate in the sixties, I took a course in journalism, "philosopher" was on the list of pejorative terms. By then, of course, the Cold War had already wreaked most of its havoc on American intellectual life. For just a decade earlier, little more than a generation ago now, the United States had undertaken what was perhaps the greatest intellectual purge in the history of Western democracy.

According to its most responsible spokesmen, this purge, which hit academia around 1949 and did not fully subside until about 1960, aimed at removing Communists from teaching positions. That, in itself, was an assault on both intellectual and personal freedom, because it elevated association into guilt. But the movement had a much broader base than just the House Un-American Affairs Committee (HUAC) and related govern-mental bodies, and its targets were correspondingly diverse. As one writer put it in 1955,

> It soon became clear that, whatever the ostensible goal of the early stages of this restrictive movement, its later intent was the achievement of a settled, conservative orthodoxy in the political, economic, and general social opinion of America. The evidence for this conclusion is overwhelming.... What we face is a general reaction... against the more humane, idealistic, and internationalistic tendencies of the past few decades. [Moore 623-24; also see Lazarsfeld and Thielens 55-58]

Such “general reaction” is, of course, on the rise again. HUAC, for example, has found eager successors among those whom Robert Hughes calls “the young velociraptors in Congress” [62]. Moreover, as we will see, contemporary attacks on government support of the arts and humanities explicitly echo the McCarthy Era's generalized, anti-intellectual convulsion—a convulsion in which, as Paul Lazarsfeld and Wagner Thielens, Jr., write, “what was really under attack was the quality of American education” [166]. (1996: 33-4)

It is perhaps more important than we might have thought, when we considered the matter earlier, how well contemplation of “heaps” (discussed by Rorty) fits in with structures of power, and it seems worthwhile for philosophers to think about the ways a natural reaction of fear may have contributed to the apparent “strength” of an analytical approach to philosophy, and how fear may continue to influence what we do in the academy. These reflections also cast new light on Walter Kaufmann’s suggestion that philosophers don’t want to stick their necks out, and that few of them would be so bold as to write something visionary and genuinely (not technically)
challenging. We must all handle philosophy in the manner of handling poisonous snakes—and
tries to defang the snakes (whether conscious or not, whether well-argued or not) will only
transfer the fangs elsewhere, and they may thus prove far more dangerous. Leave the snake-
handling to empowered and empowering philosophers and their empowered and empowering
students.

Even in light of such considerations, the reader may think we are being too hard on Locke, but in
fact we have no interest in picking on Locke in particular. We merely consider representative
artifacts from his work, and some of his apparent nonsense goes together in an important way
with Freud’s. Recall that Freud claimed “the principal task of civilization, its actual raison
d’être, is to defend us against nature.” This is an extraordinary claim, a symptom of basic
unwellness. But it is not far from Locke’s narrow-minded sense of Nature. Locke views Nature
as something humans walk around in, as if humans can function separately from Nature, just as if
we can have a non-spiritual political life. He seems to have a fundamentally confused view, and
this view leads to serious errors in our relationship with Nature and with each other, which gets
exacerbated to the extent that Locke influenced certain aspects of the vision of the dominant
culture. In truth, these things go together. Locke both expresses the disorder of the western soul,
and also perpetuates it, develops it, and is not alone responsible for it (especially since he wrote
many good things as well, especially when evaluated on the basis of his context). Functionally,
Locke’s views reflect and encourage a devaluing of Nature, such that human labor is what
ultimately gives Nature value (perhaps only in relation to politics, but that would leave a terrible
duality in place), and thus he justifies the notion of private property in the limited and limiting
economic sense—a sense lacking wisdom, which will not go unpunished. The devaluation of
Nature goes along with the development of capitalism and of what we call civilization. Here is a passage from Locke’s *Second Treatise on Government*:

40. For it is labour indeed that puts the difference of value on every thing; and let any one consider what the difference is between an acre of land planted with tobacco or sugar, sown with wheat or barley, and an acre of the same land lying in common, without any husbandry upon it, and he will find, that the improvement of labour makes the far greater part of the value. I think it will be but a very modest computation to say, that of the products of the earth useful to the life of man, nine-tenths are the effects of labour. Nay, if we will rightly estimate things as they come to our use, and cast up the several expenses about them—what in them is purely owing to Nature and what to labour—we shall find that in most of them ninety-nine hundredths are wholly to be put on the account of labour.

41. There cannot be a clearer demonstration of anything than several nations of the Americans are of this, who are rich in land and poor in all the comforts of life; whom Nature, having furnished as liberally as any other people with the materials of plenty—i.e., a fruitful soil, apt to produce in abundance what might serve for food, raiment, and delight; yet, for want of improving it by labour, have not one hundredth part of the conveniencies we enjoy, and a king of a large and fruitful territory there feeds, lodges, and is clad worse than a day labourer in England.

Locke seems to have a rather low estimate of Nature and of Indigenous Peoples, even though he probably spent little time in wild Nature and had no reasonable way to evaluate either Nature or an Indigenous way of life. As far as Nature goes, he shows no deep gratitude for the ways Nature labors to keep us alive. The trees labor to give us air and to hold the land in place. All beings labor like this, to maintain our altogether World. How do we mark off human labor as “special” without creating problems? As far as Locke’s comments about Indigenous People, we need only recall the many accounts of pre-conquest consciousness we have encountered to find his suggestions suspicious and misguided at best. We can see shadow elements in the western psyche lurking here. Another place this sort of error shows itself is earlier in the text. We should preface the reading with an acknowledgment of the challenges he faced and the good intentions he certainly did have in addition to some misguided notions . . . these passages have less to do
with picking on Locke than in recognizing problems in conquest consciousness that predate
Locke, but which he suffered from and then perpetuated in the sense that his philosophy seems to
have influenced a significant number of relatively significant people. Locke writes:

Sec. 26. God, who hath given the world to men in common, hath also given them reason to make use of it to the best advantage of life, and convenience. The earth, and all that is therein, is given to men for the support and comfort of their being. And tho’ all the fruits it naturally produces, and beasts it feeds, belong to mankind in common, as they are produced by the spontaneous hand of nature; and no body has originally a private dominion, exclusive of the rest of mankind, in any of them, as they are thus in their natural state: yet being given for the use of men, there must of necessity be a means to appropriate them some way or other, before they can be of any use, or at all beneficial to any particular man. The fruit, or venison, which nourishes the wild Indian, who knows no enclosure, and is still a tenant in common, must be his, and so his, i.e. a part of him, that another can no longer have any right to it, before it can do him any good for the support of his life.

Sec. 27. Though the earth, and all inferior creatures, be common to all men, yet every man has a property in his own person: this no body has any right to but himself. The labour of his body, and the work of his hands, we may say, are properly his. Whatsoever then he removes out of the state that nature hath provided, and left it in, he hath mixed his labour with, and joined to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his property. It being by him removed from the common state nature hath placed it in, it hath by this labour something annexed to it, that excludes the common right of other men: for this labour being the unquestionable property of the labourer, no man but he can have a right to what that is once joined to, at least where there is enough, and as good, left in common for others.

Sec. 28. He that is nourished by the acorns he picked up under an oak, or the apples he gathered from the trees in the wood, has certainly appropriated them to himself. No body can deny but the nourishment is his. I ask then, when did they begin to be his? when he digested? or when he eat? or when he boiled? or when he brought them home? or when he picked them up? and it is plain, if the first gathering made them not his, nothing else could. That labour put a distinction between them and common: that added something to them more than nature, the common mother of all, had done; and so they became his private right. And will any one say, he had no right to those acorns or apples, he thus appropriated, because he had not the consent of all mankind to make them his? Was it a robbery thus to assume to himself what belonged to all in common? If such a consent as that was necessary, man had starved, notwithstanding the plenty God had given him. We see in commons, which remain so by compact, that it is the taking any part of what is common, and removing it out of the state nature leaves it in, which
begins the property; without which the common is of no use. And the taking of this or that part, does not depend on the express consent of all the commoners. Thus the grass my horse has bit; the turfs my servant has cut; and the ore I have digged in any place, where I have a right to them in common with others, become my property, without the assignation or consent of any body. The labour that was mine, removing them out of that common state they were in, hath fixed my property in them.

Sec. 29. By making an explicit consent of every commoner, necessary to any one's appropriating to himself any part of what is given in common, children or servants could not cut the meat, which their father or master had provided for them in common, without assigning to every one his peculiar part. Though the water running in the fountain be every one’s, yet who can doubt, but that in the pitcher is his only who drew it out? His labour hath taken it out of the hands of nature, where it was common, and belonged equally to all her children, and hath thereby appropriated it to himself.

Sec. 30. Thus this law of reason makes the deer that Indian’s who hath killed it; it is allowed to be his goods, who hath bestowed his labour upon it, though before it was the common right of every one. And amongst those who are counted the civilized part of mankind, who have made and multiplied positive laws to determine property, this original law of nature, for the beginning of property, in what was before common, still takes place; and by virtue thereof, what fish any one catches in the ocean, that great and still remaining common of mankind; or what ambergrise any one takes up here, is by the labour that removes it out of that common state nature left it in, made his property, who takes that pains about it. And even amongst us, the hare that any one is hunting, is thought his who pursues her during the chase: for being a beast that is still looked upon as common, and no man's private possession; whoever has employed so much labour about any of that kind, as to find and pursue her, has thereby removed her from the state of nature, wherein she was common, and hath begun a property.

Sec. 31. It will perhaps be objected to this, that if gathering the acorns, or other fruits of the earth, &c. makes a right to them, then any one may ingross as much as he will. To which I answer, Not so. The same law of nature, that does by this means give us property, does also bound that property too. God has given us all things richly, 1 Tim. vi. 12. is the voice of reason confirmed by inspiration. But how far has he given it us? To enjoy. As much as any one can make use of to any advantage of life before it spoils, so much he may by his labour fix a property in: whatever is beyond this, is more than his share, and belongs to others. Nothing was made by God for man to spoil or destroy.

From the perspective of someone suffering a lack of religious tolerance and suffering from political justifications based on spiritual materialism, it can make sense to argue for a separation
of church and state that ends up sounding like a separation of sacredness and state. Perhaps, as a devout Christian of whatever variety, Locke just couldn’t get a sense of his world’s loss of sacredness, or how much more lost sacredness could get. Or perhaps he lived a profound sense of sacredness and could not imagine anyone’s doing otherwise. Of this we cannot be sure, but it does not seem so, based on his context and based on artifacts like this one.

On a positive note, Locke seems to have felt it quite natural to make arguments about government on the basis of religious doctrine. But how then did he think a duality of the sacred and the profane would end up? Scholars of Locke’s thought surely have answers, but we are looking here at a style of consciousness at work, not engaging in the endless debates of weary intellectualism. If, as Bateson suggests, relations aren’t the kind of thing we can possess, what are we to make of the notions of possession Locke seems to accept? And what are we to make of this notion of labor as a process of separation from Nature? Why isn’t labor the activity of cultivating Nature, participating in Nature? The divisions between human and Nature, mind and Nature, sacred and profane, even sacred and Nature get expressed and then perpetuated in the “history” of the dominant culture. It is a history not of progress but of separation and degradation (including the activities of analysis, philosophical and scientific).

Reading Locke’s words in light of Bateson’s myth of the tree of knowledge also helps bring clarity to the problems of conquest consciousness. Clearly Locke acknowledges that we are not to spoil, destroy, or take more than we need from Nature, but he gives no relational account of this. It is an injunction, from God, and he does not see the inherent problem in using conscious purposes to govern the use of what God has gifted to us. In any case, a separation of church and
state does not make it easy for Locke’s injunction against spoilage and destruction to become a matter of law. On what basis can it become law (assuming we are in such bad shape that we need laws)? Will we not demand, on the basis of liberty, that we can do whatever we want? Whatever the debates in ecological ethics (and they are legion, and they are typically academic in so many cases, often stuck in the old epistemology, often too boring and/or technical for the general public to care), we would need a sense of relationality to truly dispel the problems the old epistemology engenders.

In contemplating these passages from Locke, we can admit the great challenge involved in broadening our vision sufficiently to sense with intimacy that nourishment does not “belong” to us, that our labor does not “belong” to us, and that we always live by the consent of all, and also by the participation and gift of all. The consent is not explicit, in the manner of asking permission to borrow a pen. We can help ourselves by, for instance, thinking very scientifically, and asking how to point at the mind that found the acorns (in Locke’s example), or where to point at the mind that made the acorns, or to find the mind that decided its own labor matters more than the oak tree’s labor. We can ask where exactly the human begins and the so-called environment ends. Locke hides behind the relative barrier of the skin, and the relative activity of a “doer,” but our modern science easily reveals the skin as less of a bunker, and the “doer” more of an illusion than we have implicitly hoped in the “history” of the west. We need to be able to live together, but the line of argument here evidences an outdated epistemology.

These things arise together, and thus capitalism, eco-illiteracy and eco-illogic, loss of wonder, loss of meaning, loss of spirituality, loss of ecosensual or liminal awareness all go together. As
the Sng’oi and many other Indigenous People realized, and as a relational, nonlocal, ecologically rooted epistemology must emphasize, *we belong with* the land, arise in, through, as the living Land, the living World, and the notion of “owning” the land makes no sense, and could only function as a relative concept if we handled it like handling a poisonous snake. We can work with relative boundaries, and we can grant each other respect, including the respect of personal space. In some Cultures, “personal space” has far more to do with the quality of mind and heart than we would ever imagine here in the dominant culture. But owning land *doesn’t make sense* in at least some mature Cultures. Topophilia and biophilia, on the other hand, are de rigueur. We can feel deeply rooted, feel a deep sense of belonging, a pervading Beauty, and Love, and Wisdom, so that Cultivation of land and soul are not two things (the former does not mean “agriculture” but the activity of cultivating life forward). This orientation reveals our *dominant* notions of “development” and “cultivation” for what they are: degradation, exploitation, and delusion.

In looking at other societies, or considering what a wise Culture might look like, we can reexamine our notion of “progress”. What is progress? Consciously or not, we seem to see “history” as a march of “progress,” and we look at the past as pathways of “progress”. We could, on the other hand, look at pathways of potential development, ways of attunement that seem either more or less skillful. Re-Indigenizing does not mean recovering an “old” “way of living,” but recovering a verified Way forward—and verifying it for ourselves. We can only attune with life and cultivate it onward, in as healthy a manner as possible. What will we practice? Can we look at what has been repressed so that the dominant culture could ascend? This question alone makes all the difference. What did we repress to make our way of life possible? What did we
make unknowable, because of an implicit epistemic conquest and occupation, including ongoing epistemic policing? How can we see through, cut through our delusions and understand what we repressed? What was forced into the shadows may be needed for us to thrive. We can’t keep avoiding the work we need to do to look at our collective shadow, to examine what we repressed in the name of progress, so that we can mature, and so that we can uncover vitalizing possibilities for moving forward, some of them in the shadow, including ones we have called “religious” or “superstitious”.

Our pattern of insanity can be interrupted, and we cannot afford to do what humans usually do: Wait until suffering builds to such a degree that we cannot escape it. Everyone’s “bottom of the barrel” differs. For some of us, it takes painful lesson after painful lesson before we can give up something unskillful (even to the point of its being unethical, for we are excellent at rationalizing and can even chose to do something quite immoral once we have gotten far enough in our practice of insane and unwholesome ways of being). But we can raise the bottom of our barrel. We can decide: This is enough! No more! It is like Hannah Arendt’s notion that the difference between evil on the one hand and good on the other comes to this: “I shouldn’t” (but I do it anyway) versus “I cannot!” When we say, “No. I cannot do something like that,” we may save the World. We certainly save our own soul, and our soul is not-two with the souls of others and the soul of the World. Our “noble nay” makes more of a difference than we will ever understand.

Education, we might say, requires a shift from imparting knowledge to opening pathways to liberation, gateways to Wisdom, Love, and Beauty. At this particular moment, education seems to need to empower citizens to rebel, to make ethical use of the power they have, and to show
them how to know better the proper way to use that power. The need for rebellion will perhaps become a little clearer. We in fact have scientific arguments for rebellion. We will get to those a bit later. At the moment, we are just reflecting on how epistemology goes altogether with ethics and aesthetics, and politics, economics, and all the rest. To overcome the limited and limiting ideas and opinions that have been planted in the ecology of mind, we need better ways of knowing, and practices that can break apart the manufactured consent that has gotten us all to consent to catastrophe. We are lived by powers. Our opinions have been manufactured, but we think of them as truths.

Hume pointed out that those in power have nothing to support them but the opinion of the governed. Wood’s study shows that when the elitist document we call the Constitution was being framed, those wanting to challenge it in order to establish a more truly egalitarian society could not win against the public’s trust in the wealthy and the famous, and many feared to speak against those wealthy and famous people. The majority of the newspapers sided with the wealthy and famous for that reason, as did most smaller merchants. No one wanted to be put out of business for saying the wrong things about the wrong people.

Things are no different today. We complain about the “liberal media,” and yet 90% of all media—everything, from movies and television to newspapers and radio—90% of all news and media is controlled by just 6 major corporations.\footnote{http://www.businessinsider.com/these-6-corporations-control-90-of-the-media-in-america-2012-6
http://billmoyers.com/story/twenty-years-of-media-consolidation-has-not-been-good-for-our-democracy/} Corporations are not bastions of “liberal”
thought. Newspapers are a business, and they are run to make money, not to foster democracy, inform the public, enrich the culture, contribute to healing, foster a sense of sacredness, help keep us rooted in wisdom, love, and beauty. We seem to hold the magical belief that a “news” corporation could aim at providing the best “news” (whatever that is), and by means of an invisible hand, it could become most profitable as it did the best job fulfilling that aim. But this has not proven so. Thus, at the current level of corporate ownership, we are as likely to get serious critique of the structures of power as people were during the time of the framing of the Constitution—probably less so. And, just as back then, we have many wealthy and famous people to tell us what to think (some of them get elected to office), and a vast ecology of sophisticated propaganda that gets us to think certain thoughts as our own, thoughts that are very helpful to the structures of power but which we see as our “salvation,” or at least as something like political or economic “wisdom”.

This control extends beyond media. It turns out that just 10 corporations manipulate the majority of our consumption.137 Again, these are not progressive institutions, not institutions of wisdom, love, care, and compassion, not institutions dedicated to a beautiful World. They are instead dedicated to profit—not well-being, not wisdom, not peace, not benevolence, not cooperation, not anything any serious religious, spiritual, or philosophical tradition has taught us to value. Many of the largest corporations in fact profit directly from ill-being, from ignorance, from clinging and craving, from fear and self-doubt, from war and aggression. Some of the most

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137 http://www.businessinsider.com/these-10-corporations-control-almost-everything-you-buy-2012-4
powerful institutions in the world, in all of history, have a vested interest in the perpetuation of ignorance and war.

The top 10 corporations have a combined revenue that exceeds that of 180 nations. Of the 100 largest economic entities on the planet, 69 are corporations, and of the 200 largest economic entities on the planet, 153 are corporations.\textsuperscript{138} It’s worth stating the obvious fact that “economic entities” are not sentient beings, and the planet did not evolve (or was not created) to support such a false construct. These economic entities are leading the way in terms of the degradation of air, soil, and water. That’s not a matter of “liberal thinking,” but simply a reasonable assessment. We need clean air and water. No way around it. So our “economics” must be rooted in that. It is perhaps not surprising that “economics” and “nemesis” share the same etymology.

Let us remember again why we want to consider these things in our inquiry. The collapse of the conditions of life can be seen as anomalous data in relationship to our current way of knowing. The same holds for the political, economic, and social factors. Our way of knowing is a way of living. We also need to understand the unconscious factors that might drive us toward collective suicide. We further need to understand philosophy’s current and potential role, in offering ways of knowing that could better our situation.

What else do we call the problems we face but problems of wisdom, love, and beauty? The collapse of the conditions of life is not a matter of science, technology, politics, or economics, in

\textsuperscript{138} http://www.commondreams.org/newswire/2016/09/12/10-biggest-corporations-make-more-money-most-countries-world-combined
the ways that we have separated those disciplines from philosophy. It is not a problem of knowledge in the manner we typically relate to knowledge. Yes, there are many kinds of knowledge, but for the most part what we mean by knowledge and what we mean by wisdom, love, and beauty should be seen as wrongly separated in practice. In practice, knowledge has to do with facts, propositions, statistics, and so on, and it can be gathered rather mindlessly, unethically, and by means of “tools” that have almost nothing to do with life or sacredness.

Maybe another way to get at the matter comes to this: Philosophers in general do not go around telling first year college students things like this: “You should major in philosophy because the world is falling apart. You are going to get a meaningless job and contribute to the degradation of the world. You do not live in a democracy. You will need to learn wisdom, love, and beauty to work with your life well, to help the world, and realize your purpose. You will need to learn how to dream, how to dance, how to think, speak, and move in skillful and realistic ways. This is what we teach. Come and learn about yourself and your world.” That philosophers do not do this is a problem—a symptom that both reflects and feeds into the disease.

It is like saying philosophers are not sensitive to the suffering of their students. But it also has to do with our natural reaction to empathy distress. If we do not have a solid compassion practice, we must necessarily limit our exposure to suffering, or we will burn out—which itself tunes us out. Thich Nhat Hanh’s point about suffering comes back again and again: We seem to need significant training on how to work with suffering, our own and that of others.
Living in the dominant culture, living in Sorrowville, comes with a lot of suffering, and the contemporary U.S. has become a remarkable ecology of pain and suffering, not only for ourselves, but also for many others, both human and non-human. This forms the context of our thinking and knowing: the pain, the causes of the pain, the treatment of the pain, and the side-effects of that treatment. This is all part of how we know ourselves and our world. If we didn’t know ourselves, for instance, in a way that allows or facilitates the production of Amazon.com warehouses and the painful kind of work that comes with them, we wouldn’t need so many pain-relieving drugs (it’s a telling symptom that the name of the company started by the world’s richest capitalist, and a major engineer of ecological degradation, comes from the name of the rainforest). The same goes for all sorts of other jobs and also recreations, for our leisure time amounts to an industry of extraction, medication, and desperate attempts to make meaning, to deal with the lack of happenings in the culture by means of forced happenings that often create suffering for ourselves and others. Just “going on vacation” tends to involve a more significant intervention into ecologies than we care to admit. Every time we fly, beings must suffer for it. Do we really sense that? It extends to driving, and for most of us it extends to eating and maintaining our bodies, our homes, our jobs, our relationships. Our way of knowing how to live comes with gratuitous suffering.

However we look at it, it takes a process of knowing to create the kinds of pain we see in our society. We may say we know how to build airplanes, how to harness nuclear energy, how to get a rocket on the moon, but a more honest assessment would say, first, that we know how to degrade ecologies, and that includes a knowledge of how to make addictions, both to further the degradation of ecologies and to medicate ourselves as part of doing so. The leading edge of the
dominant culture naturally leads in degradation and the addictions that go with it. A 2008 study by Manchikanti and Singh found that, although the U.S. accounts for less than 5% of the global population, we account for 80% of global opioid consumption and 99% of hydrocodone consumption. Some of this opioid use happens because of physical pain. Many people cannot get through their workday without pain relievers—clearly an unnatural situation, and another symptom of our current crisis. Opioid use also happens because of emotional and spiritual pain, because the soul needs something, and we are not looking for it in the right place.

This “not looking in the right place” or in the right Way (not only the manner of looking, but the way of life, the spirituality) ends up imprisoning us. It may seem odd to suggest, but we’ve put ourselves in a kind of invisible symbolic prison that functions surprisingly well—it really does keep the soul in chains, the heart, mind, and body in bondage. Everyone is in it, so we had to build lots and lots of physical prisons to help keep up the illusion that those not inside them are “free”—at “liberty” to “pursue happiness”. There again, with less than 5% of the world population, we have almost 25% of the world’s prison population, and far more prisoners than China—which has triple the population, and is hardly an icon of “freedom”. That’s an interesting joke: Why are there so many prisons in the U.S.? To convince everyone outside of them that they are free. Similarly, we need Disneyland and other fantasy theme parks to convince us that the world we live in, the world of our practice and realization, is “real”.

It may seem paradoxical to say that all (or most) of the people outside of prisons are not really free, but things are even more insidious than that: We are in a kind of bondage, and we ourselves

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139 http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/spl/hi/uk/06/prisons/html/nn2page1.stm
keep things that way, without really seeing it. The U.S. functions to facilitate this bondage. This is the context of our thinking and philosophizing: The context of facilitating bondage and degradation.

In writing about the Antifederalists, Wood cites one who presciently suggested that the people would be made into “the instruments of their own subjugation,” and this Antifederalist therefore saw the task of the Antifederalist movement as preventing people from becoming “a groveling, distinct species, uninterested in the general welfare” (490). This shows a fairly sophisticated feeling for human psychology. Modern research helps us to understand that there is something in us, something like a switch, that can be turned away from an orientation to connect and shifted into an orientation focused on ourselves—and not in reasonable ways. In order to connect, we have to reach beyond the narrow self, and the soul always demands that we reach beyond the self we think we are. When we fail to do this, in any way (and there are thousands of ways to miss the mark), we become a “distinct species,” that is to say, an atomized being, a separated being, a being cut off from life and love. And we suffer. Indeed, that is suffering: Feeling cut off from life and love.

The thing is, we know very well in our hearts, and now scientifically too, that we are not a species of atomized beings. We are a species of interbeing, just like the rest of life, with our own special set of “individual” and “collective” blessings and gifts to realize that interbeing. The myth of the “self-interested” human being is a great example of bad mythology—bad philosophy. As a philosophical/economic/scientific hypothesis, we have overturned it with good evidence. Nevertheless, we keep plugging along with it—in part because we haven’t really,
really seen the full scope of our situation. If we did, maybe the comedian Chris Rock is correct about what our response would be, collectively:

Chris Rock: It’s hard for me to figure out people voting against their own self-interests. At some point you go, Okay: Is that what they want?

Frank Rich: Is it possible that they’re just angry, whether it’s anger at Obama or Washington in general, and they just want to lash out? If you’re angry, you don’t rationally consider what’s in your self-interest.

Chris Rock: Maybe. But we had Bush for eight years. They saw what that was. Apparently a lot of people want to go back to that. A lot of people think rich people are smart.140

Frank Rich: For all the current conversation about income inequality, class is still sort of the elephant in the room.

Chris Rock: Oh, people don’t even know. If poor people knew how rich rich people are, there would be riots in the streets.141

Do we not even know? We have data suggesting we actually don’t. Two social scientists asked 5000 U.S. citizens about their perception of income inequality and what they thought would be more ideal. The difference between the average perception of how things are and the average ideal people have in mind is perhaps as surprising as the difference between our perception of inequality and its brutal reality:

140 Note the resonance both with Hume and the situation the Antifederalists faced. 
People estimated that the top 20% of society (economically speaking) control just under 60% of the nation’s wealth. In fact, the top 20% control 84% of the nation’s wealth—and the top 1% control about 42% (and things have gotten worse since that study was conducted). That’s a very small group of people with a vast amount of wealth. And it turns out that 92% of respondents thought that the more equitable “ideal” version (which, unbeknownst to the participants in the study, the scientists modeled on an existing “socialist” economy, namely Sweden) was the best way to go. How might it feel, what might be going on in our unconscious if deep down in there we suspect things are so far out of whack with what we think is fair? And what if, deep down in there, what we think is fair is even more radical than what we express consciously? How might we feel? Would we feel a need to rebel? Would we feel suicidal if we thought we had no control? Would we feel angry if the whole system seemed rigged?
A similar finding about fairness holds with income. The U.S. is incredibly “wealthy,”\textsuperscript{142} and also has the most inequitable distribution of wealth among “developed” nations.\textsuperscript{143} But wealth is not the same as income, since wealth is the total net positive value of all one’s assets, and thus includes such things as stocks and real estate, and takes into account one’s debt. Income inequality is a related and telling feature of our society. A recent study regarding pay inequality was done in 40 countries. The authors found that the U.S. showed a “particularly pronounced” underestimation of the wage gap between CEO’s and the average worker. People guessed on average that CEO’s make 30 times more than their typical worker. In fact, CEO’s make 354 times what their average worker makes. Again, the ideal people have in mind was something very “un-American” if we take what we actually have as the “American dream”: people thought that a 7 to 1 gap would be fair.

Further questions about how rich the rich are, and what that says about the dominant culture and how we might transform it, have arisen in the context of the recent college bribery scandal, in which wealthy people paid as much as $6.5 million to guarantee their child a slot at elite universities. Presumably, these children could not have gotten in otherwise, and so we may conclude they had less than elite academic achievements. Journalist Anand Giridharadas, author of \textit{Winners Take All: The Elite Charade of Changing the World}, commented on the scandal as follows: “The college bribery scam is not a college bribery scam. It is a master class in how America—governed by a cheater, ruled by rule breakers, managed by a class that confuses its

\textsuperscript{142} Recall the U.S. is the leading WEIRD society: “Western,” “Educated,” Industrialized, “Rich,” and “Democratic”—all terms in the acronym needing quotes other than Industrialized, because all of the other terms are much more significantly relative.

\textsuperscript{143} https://www.allianz.com/content/dam/onemarketing/azcom/Allianz_com/migration/media/economic_research/publications/specials/en/Allianz_Global_Wealth_Report_2018_e.pdf
privilege for merit—functions.”¹⁴⁴ In an interview with Democracy Now, Giridharadas offered some insights into the nature of inequality as a pattern of insanity, which among other things means that attempts to “change” the pattern will tend to reflect the pattern itself, and thus perpetuate it. Let us consider some of his comments at length:

. . . when a scandal like this breaks, it’s really important for us to understand that we’ve gone from seeing 0 percent of a system to 0.003 percent of a system, right? There’s so much more here. This is a little biopsy of a world that we happen to get.

And what we learned is, as you cover on this show, America is, in many ways, rigged for the wealthy and powerful. And we know that. We have a tax code that is rigged for the wealthy and powerful. We have anti-trust enforcement that’s rigged for the wealthy and powerful. We fund public education according to property taxes, so the nicer mommy or daddy’s house, the better the school you get. America is already rigged for rich people.

The problem is, for some rich people, all that rigging that I just described is shared equally among rich people . . . You have the same first-class seat on the commercial jet that everybody—all the other rich people have. And what we found in this case was, some rich people are not satisfied with the generalized rigging that they have to share with everybody else. They want special, private, bespoke, bottle-service rigging over and above the standard rigging that rich people receive.

. . . this [the college bribery scandal] is a phenomenal glimpse, because what—as someone who’s been writing about this plutocracy for a few years, what these folks say when they hear critics like me is, “Don’t be negative. Don’t be zero-sum. We can empower the least among us. We can fight for the poor. And we can benefit and get rich. Right? It’s not zero-sum.” And you know what really is actually zero-sum? When there is one college seat, and a hard-working kid from a poor neighborhood, whose family has never sent anybody to college, but now they have a shot at that seat—they’ve worked hard, their parents took many buses to many jobs, they might be eligible for that seat—and they don’t get that seat, because someone like Bill McGlashan, private equity baron, impact investing impresario, who had a $2 billion impact fund with Bono, has locked up that seat for his son.

¹⁴⁴ https://www.democracynow.org/2019/3/15/anand_giridharadas_college_bribery_scandal_highlights
. . . . And what was so—and that makes this story so much more powerful, because you have a guy who’s had a $2 billion fund, called The Rise Fund, that was about empowering people around the world, from Appalachia to Africa, who hadn’t had opportunity. And what we now know is this guy was working to rig the system, when we weren’t looking, to make sure that those people he was supposedly empowering with his fund would never actually be able to compete with his son.

. . . . So, there are two things here your viewers really need to understand, because this is why this matters to all of us. First of all, at a more general level, this case is not a one-off, in the fact that the mechanism by which rich people were exerting wealth, influence and rigging things was charity. If you look at the Koch brothers, many others, the mechanism by which a lot of this stuff is done, and the kind of conquest of power is done, is through charity and philanthropy. So it’s very notable, but also very telling, rather than exceptional, that the mechanism here was charity. 145

These are some of the basic details. We do need to correct one very unfortunate turn of phrase: “a world that we happen to get.” Rather, we live in a world we intentionally make—even if we do so by misunderstanding the nature of intention and action, even if we do so on the basis of misunderstanding time and space, even if we do so on the basis of misunderstanding self and world. Indeed, Giridharadas would likely agree with this correction based on what he says later in the interview, and we need to inquire into those further considerations to see the pattern of insanity more clearly:

the uncomfortable fact is that when you actually look at any of the data—these people claim to love data—the data is that the very same people who are giving and doing philanthropy, and doing social this and impact that, are actually also the great hoarders of opportunity in our time. . . . Their share of the world’s wealth increases, not decreases, every year. They’re grabbing more of the pie every year, even as they help. Their share of the nation’s income has doubled since the middle of the 20th century, the 1 percent’s has. And, you know, you know all the things you’ve covered in the show. Half of this country, the bottom half of this country, has not basically seen a pay rise since 1979. You’ve had a tremendous age of innovation that has failed to translate into progress, if progress means most people’s lives getting better.

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https://www.democracynow.org/2019/3/15/anand_giridharadas_college_bribery_scandal_highlig hts
And the unmistakable fact that I learned through my reporting—I started the reporting with a question: What’s the relationship between the two halves of this paradox? On the one hand, you got all these generous rich people; on the other hand, you have the fact that it’s a age of inequality, an age of anger. America feels rigged to people. The American dream is elusive. What’s the relationship? Is it just that this charity, this philanthropy, this do-gooding is not working? It’s not working fast enough? Or is it actually that this charity and philanthropy and elite do-gooding is part of how they maintain the system that allows them to keep taking all?

And what I found through my reporting was that when these elites get involved in social change, what they do is they change change. They take leadership of change. They Columbus social change. They declare themselves now the people, the CEO of Change Inc. And they edit out, in their capacity as board members, trustees, leaders of organizations, donors to causes—they edit out forms of change they don’t want to—they don’t really like. And they encourage forms of change they believe in. So, on any issue—you take the empowerment of women. You know what they don’t like? Maternity leave. You know why? Because it’s expensive. Costs money—right?—for companies, for the taxpayer, particularly wealthy taxpayers. So what do they like? Lean in. You know why? Because lean in is free. All you got to do is tell women that patriarchy is actually a posture problem: If you just lean at a slightly different angle of recline, patriarchy gone. Well, that’s very cheap. Rich people love lean in.

. . . . “Lean in” means telling women to raise their hands more and be a little more assertive in meetings, to fight patriarchy . . . Which is, I don’t know, like telling the slaves to be nicer? I mean, like the answer to systems of oppression is not to tell people to be more pleasing to their bosses. But this is—but this is the advice from, you know, a billionaire corporate feminist, Sheryl Sandberg, who, while she was telling women to lean in, was also selling women out so that they would live under Donald Trump, because Facebook was so, you know, unwilling to deal with the cyberwar issue and the abuse-of-privacy issue and Cambridge Analytica, etc.

. . . . You know, on basic finances, a lot of rich people who get involved in this kind of change making, they love apps. Let’s have an app to help workers with precarious income smooth their income, or let’s have an app, a fintech app, to help women save more for the future. Win-win, easy. Doesn’t hurt them at all. Right? You know what they don’t like? You know, how about an initiative to actually rat out the trillions of dollars hiding in tax havens around the world? How come you don’t really have many of the big billionaires funding philanthropic efforts to expose the tax havens? It’s a serious question. I mean, if they’re really about making the world a better place, that seems like a pretty good cause. It’s revealing that they’re not interested in that cause. Why? Because they’re never—the people who have the most to lose from change can’t be placed in charge of reforming the status quo. But all of us have actually allowed that to happen. All of
us have participated in a culture that actually does sort of see Mark Zuckerberg as a change agent, that actually does see Silicon Valley as change agents, that actually does sort of buy it when ExxonMobil tries to rebrand itself as the renewable company. And so we all need to wake up and stop believing the phony story that the people with the most to lose from change can lead change.

[there is a] kind of thought leader circuit—right?—Aspen, Davos, TED—these places where rich and powerful people go to kind of take in ideas like gelato and kind of want to hear ideas that don’t threaten them, and the way that that has incentivized thinkers to kind of clip the wings of their diagnoses of the society and be more palatable to billionaires . . .

[and there are] young people, 21-, 22-year-olds on campuses, trying to decide what to do with their life, [and] their idealism has been understood and managed and coopted by JPMorgan, McKinsey, Goldman Sachs and others to convince these most talented young people we have that if you really want to change the world, you’ve got to spend a couple years at Goldman; otherwise, how will you know how to make change?

. . . [in the book] I wanted to take together this kind of complex of people and institutions that is defined by a common religion of doing well by doing good, that the best way to empower others is to also benefit yourself. Win-win. You can fight for social justice, and you can get rich.146

We live in a culture of conquest, and the modern-day conquistadors—whom we politely label, or rebrand, as CEO’s, “captains of industry,” “thought leaders,” “change makers,” and so on, referring to their epistemic policing with words like “visionary thinking”—the modern-day conquerors have invaded and conquered the processes that might challenge their domination and control, including politics, education, and a vast array of charitable and non-governmental organizations that should function as facilitators of empowerment. This includes environmental organizations of all kinds, even Greenpeace and the World Wildlife Fund, and it certainly affects philosophical education at all levels. It includes all manner of campaigns to “lift up” the people of exploited and degraded lands and cultures. Again and again, we try to cure our alcoholism with more drinking, or drinking brandy and Champaign instead of beer and vodka. We don’t

146 https://www.democracynow.org/2019/3/15/winners_take_all_anand_giridharadas_on
want dangerous ideas. Our “thought leaders” and conquistadors would do everything they could to marginalize, ridicule, and even get rid of a modern-day Socrates if one would appear. Don’t we each need to appear as such a figure, such an archetype? We all can sense this insanity, and begin to question it in the very ways that would make the conquistadors uncomfortable.\textsuperscript{147}

But waking up from this insanity does not seem so easy, because the invaders have invaded the mind so thoroughly. The strange thing that Chris Rock tried to point out is that people seem to vote as if they wanted to demand inequality, as if they wanted to say, with their vote, “Above all, let there be the very wealthy; let wealth be concentrated in such a way that it would be obscene if I really could see how rich the rich really are. Facilitate the capacity of wealth to go to very few. This is my political will.” This seems to be how people vote, and yet if you ask them on reflection how they think the society actually is or should be, they give a rather different answer.

\textsuperscript{147} The apex predators in our current, highly degraded ecology seem to be corporations. While it does not seem helpful to single out individuals, we do need to recognize that human beings keep these corporations running (human beings also run the NGO’s that have gotten infected with a corporate mentality, something like a zombie-ant fungus taking over the body and mind of an ant). In various ways, these human beings will begin to express a psychology that keeps the larger ecology going. For instance, David M. Mayer wrote, “My 20 years of research in moral psychology suggests many reasons why people behave in an unethical manner. When it comes to the wealthy, research shows that they will go to great lengths to maintain their higher status. A sense of entitlement plays a role.” He further notes that, “Wealthy individuals who are considered as “upper class” based on their income have been found to lie, steal and cheat more to get what they desire. They have also been found to be less generous. They are more likely to break the law when driving, give less help to strangers in need, and generally give others less attention.” The general problem has to do with an insane solution to insanity: Use the mindset that creates suffering to solve the suffering. But, we should see how what we call human psychology plays a role. A particular mindset goes into perpetuating the pattern of insanity, and it always involves a view of self, world, time, space, and so on. Mayer’s reflections can be found here: https://www.alternet.org/2019/03/science-explains-wh-rich-parents-are-more-likely-to-be-unethical/
from their vote. Moreover, if the practices of education did not fail people so miserably, they might support political goals radically at odds with their voting record.

There are a variety of factors that might explain these phenomena, including factors sketched by Giridharadas, and the general notion that the dominant culture indoctrinates its citizens to keep them in line, to make certain things off limits to thought, unknowable even if experienced by accident. There is also the deliberate nature of the control. We have an industrialized circus to go with our industrialized bread, and that circus includes an industrialized politics.

Calling it industrialized has a double meaning. On the one hand it means we have manufactured it, treated it as another commodity, in a process in which the consumer is ultimately consumed. On the other hand, it also means that the captains of industry have taken over. They are the overseers of the managers who manage the factory in which consent gets manufactured. Sheldon Wolin has written about this “inverted totalitarianism,” which differs from the classical totalitarian regimes by having the consent of the people managed by means other than brute force (though, not in its total absence) and by separating the state from the corporations in such a way that we cannot claim to have a state-run economy in the classical sense. In such an ecology, the corporation seems to be the apex predator, though we must see that predator itself as an ecology. Just as each human being is an ecology energy flows, “organs,” bacteria, fungi, and so on, a corporation has symbionts who direct its activities. It is a social-material ecology, driven by delusions and abstractions. But the activity of the symbionts (the CEO’s, board members, and other parasites who benefit from its action in the world) drives it as a social-material ecology that
has traumatic effects in the world. It is an organism always feverish, always hungry. Wolin notes that this predator fights dirty, and depends on a larger ecology of corruption to survive:

Over the centuries politicians and political theorists—starting with Plato’s *Republic*—have emphasized disinterestedness, not personal advantage, as the fundamental virtue required of those entrusted with state power. In recognition of the temptations of power and self-interest a variety of constraints—legal, religious, customary, and moral—were invoked or appealed to in the hope of limiting rulers or at least inhibiting them from doing harmful or evil acts. At the same time rulers were exhorted to protect and promote the common good of society and the well-being of all of their subjects. With the emergence of democratic ideas during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it fell to the citizen to assume responsibility for taking care of political and social arrangements, not only operating institutions but “cultivating” them, caring for them, improving them, and, ultimately, defending them. Democracy presumed the presence of a “popular culture,” not in the contemporary sense of packaged pleasures for a perpetually adolescent consumer, but culture in its original meaning: from the Latin *cultus* = tilling, cultivating, tending. The ideal of a democratic political culture was about cooperating in the care of common arrangements, of practices in which, potentially, all could share in deciding the uses of power while bearing responsibility for their consequences. The assumption was that if decision-making institutions of a community were left untended, all or most might suffer. A medieval aphorism summed up the traditional idea of the political, “that which touches all should be approved by all.”

In contrast, the ethos of the twenty-first-century corporation is an antipolitical culture of competition rather than cooperation, of aggrandizement, of besting rivals, and of leaving behind disrupted careers and damaged communities. It is a culture for increase that cannot rest (= “stagnation”) but must continuously innovate and expand. It accepts as axiomatic that top executives have to be, first and foremost, competition-oriented and profit-driven: the profitability of the corporate entity is more important than any commonality with the larger society. “The competitor is our friend,” according to an Archer Daniels Midland internal memo, “and the customer is our enemy.” Enron had “visions and values” cubes on display; its chief financial officer’s cube read, “When Enron says it will rip your face off, it will rip your face off.”

Perhaps the most striking embodiment of the aggrandizing culture of the corporation is Wal-Mart, the consumer’s low-cost paradise and the perfect economic complement to Superpower. In its own way it is an invasive, totalizing power, continuously establishing footholds in local communities, destroying small businesses that are unable to compete, forcing low wages, harsh working conditions, and poor health care on its employees, discouraging unionization. It is inverted totalitarianism in a corporate, imperial mode.

As the scandals about Enron and WorldCom demonstrated, the self-interest of the corporate executive takes precedence over the interests of the
institution. During the last decade corporate crimes and abuses involving the highest executive levels have been commonplace: cheating, lying, deceptive practices, extraordinary bonuses despite corporate failure, ruthless conduct, and so forth. Recall that in the Reagan presidency, corporate managers rather than public service–oriented officials dominated the upper levels of government, bringing with them a corporate ethos. Not surprisingly, “conflicts of interest” flourished. Equally unsurprising, the reverse did not occur; no corporate executive stood accused of sacrificing private interest to the common good. The effect of persistent, pervasive corporate misconduct is to promote public distrust of power-holders in general. From Superpower’s vantage point public cynicism, far from being deplorable, is one more element contributing to political demoralization and languor.

Although the doctrine of the “preemptive strike” is a controversial topic in discussions of foreign policy, there is less political controversy about its economic counterpart. Corporate competition has its preemptive strike in hostile takeovers, poison pills, and the like. These tactics of corporate power politics form a complement to Superpower politics. The corporate ethos is not one that favors conciliation and fairness or worries over collateral damage.

The broad question is whether democracy is possible when the dominant ethos in the economy fosters antipolitical and antidemocratic behavior and values; when the corporate world is both the principal supplier of political leadership and the main source of political corruption; and when small investors occupy a position of powerlessness comparable to that of the average voter. “Shareholder democracy” belongs on the same list of oxymorons as “Superpower democracy.”

At stake are the conditions that serve forms of power antithetical to democracy. The citizenry is reduced to an electorate whose potency consists of choosing among congressional candidates who, prior to campaigning, have demonstrated their “seriousness” by successfully soliciting a million dollars or more from wealthy donors. This rite of passage ensures that the candidate is beholden to corporate power before taking office. Not surprisingly, the candidate who raises the most money will likely be the winner. The vote count becomes the expression of the contributor.

“Managed democracy” is the application of managerial skills to the basic democratic political institution of popular elections. An election, as distinguished from the simple act of voting, has been reshaped into a complex production. Like all productive operations, it is ongoing and requires continuous supervision rather than continuing popular participation. Unmanaged elections would epitomize contingency: the managerial nightmare of control freaks. One method of assuring control is to make electioneering continuous, year-round, saturated with party propaganda, punctuated with the wisdom of kept pundits, bringing a result boring rather than energizing, the kind of civic lassitude on which a managed democracy thrives. A large campaign contribution represents the kind of surplus power a dynamic capitalist economy makes available.

It begins as the production of an ordinary commodity, say a computer chip, which eventually turns a profit that is then “invested” in a candidate or party or a lobbyist in order to purchase “access” to those who are authorized to make
policies or decisions. A law or regulation favorable to the donor mysteriously emerges—an immaculate deception or “earmark” with no apparent “father.” No one wants to acknowledge paternity or reveal the consensual act that produced it.

At issue is more than crude bribery. Campaign contributions are a vital tool of political management. They create a pecking order that calibrates, in strictly quantitative and objective terms, whose interests have priority. The amount of corruption that regularly takes place before elections means that corruption is not an anomaly but an essential element in the functioning of managed democracy. The entrenched system of bribery and corruption involves no physical violence, no brown-shirted storm troopers, no coercion of the political opposition. While the tactics are not those of the Nazis, the end result is the inverted equivalent. Opposition has not been liquidated but rendered feckless. (2017: 138-41)

It’s startling to think about how much violence is actually institutionalized, and how the apex predator sees the rest of us not only as prey, but as an enemy prey, perhaps an enemy prey whose face it will rip off. These are “civilized” and, relatively speaking, sophisticated forms of practice that bring to realization widespread ecologies of fear, anger, aggression, mistrust, fragmentation, degradation, extraction. This is all fundamental to our way of knowing ourselves, each other, and the world.

In thinking things through, we have to keep our eye on the spiritual lessons, which will always go against forces of oppression and domination. Among those is that we have a basic sense of justice, which is why we have to be managed and controlled. Socrates had to be put to death because he could not be controlled. He was wildness in the midst of the city, and he practiced the wildness of justice, the justice of wildness. Justice, as Cornel West likes to say, is “what love looks like in public,” and people like Socrates, Gandhi, King, Malala Yousefzai, and even Greta Thunberg live their love in a public way. It is like a drive toward ecosensuality, the nonduality of “individual” and “collective,” “organism” and “environment”.

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It is significant that Socrates inspired King. There appears to be a deep resonance in the
ecologies of black culture that have persisted in spite of the dominant ecologies of oppression.
Wolin thus provides a very good added layer of explanation for the way industrialized “justice”
operates in the dominant culture:

Inverted totalitarianism has learned how to exploit what appear to be
formidable political and legal constraints, using them in ways that defeat their
original purpose but without dismantling or overtly attacking them. . . .

Our totalizing system, nonetheless, has evolved its own methods and
strategies. Its genius lies in wielding total power without appearing to, without
establishing concentration camps, or enforcing ideological uniformity, or forcibly
suppressing dissident elements so long as they remain ineffectual. However, the
parallel lines of classic totalitarianism and inverted totalitarianism occasionally
intersect. It is true that aliens, and even some citizens, who are suspected of
having “links” to terrorists have been hauled away, kept incommunicado, and
even transported abroad to countries with more cost-effective, less tender methods
of interrogation, yet such practices are meant more as object lessons than as
standard procedures. In the same vein the United States has established only a few
extrajudicial courts (e.g., so-called military tribunals) and does not have
concentration camps, only some “detention centers” and “brigs” where, under
harsh conditions, prisoners may be held without being charged with a specific
crime. The point is to preserve an economy of fear and not to saturate the
“market.” For what is most revealing of totalitarian tendencies in our inverted
regime are not the publicized denials of due process to enemy nationals or to
misguided “freedom fighters.” The more important consideration is ensuring
domestic tranquility. But, specifically, against whom?

The United States has the highest rate of incarceration of any country in
the world, a prison system with brutalizing conditions, and one that has been
significantly privatized. Equally striking, a disproportionately high percentage of
the imprisoned are African Americans. Assuming that most of the imprisoned
African Americans have committed some crime, their incarceration would appear
to contrast with the Nazi policies that herded millions of Jews, Gypsies,
homosexuals, political opponents, and Slavs into slave labor camps for no other
reason than to satisfy irrational ideological beliefs (“racial purity”) and obtain
“free” labor. Or do the high incarceration rates among blacks reflect not only old-
fashioned racism but inverted totalitarianism’s fear of political disidence?

The significance of the African American prison population is political.
What is notable about the African American population generally is that it is
highly sophisticated politically and by far the one group that throughout the
twentieth century kept alive a spirit of resistance and
rebelliousness. In that context, criminal justice is as much a strategy of political
neutralization as it is a channel of instinctive racism.
Our government need not pursue a policy of stamping out dissidence—the uniformity imposed on opinion by the “private” media conglomerates performs that job efficiently. This apparent “restraint” points to a crucial difference between classical and inverted totalitarianism: in the former economics was subordinate to politics. Under inverted totalitarianism the reverse is true: economics dominates politics—and with that domination come different forms of ruthlessness. It is possible for the government to punish by withholding appropriated funds, failing to honor entitlements, or purposely allowing regulations (e.g., environmental safeguards, minimum wage standards) to remain unenforced or waived. What seem like reductions in state power are actually increases. Withholding appropriated money is an expression of power that is not lost on those adversely affected; waiving minimum wage standards is an act of power not lost on those who benefit and those who suffer. Such strategies play a major role in the incorporation of state and corporate power. Incorporation need not always require, for example, that corporate representatives sit on review committees that judge new drugs or gather in the office of the vice president to consult on energy policies. Power is typically exercised in a context where the participants know their cues. Recently a major television network withdrew a program dealing with Ronald Reagan after the Republican National Committee protested a scene where the former president was portrayed as less than inclusive about homosexuals. This surrender occurred at the precise moment when the Republican-dominated Federal Communications Commission was promoting greater concentration of media ownership and, in the process, ignoring an unprecedented outcry from thousands of citizens. (2017: 57-8)

We can note that “incorporation” here has a strange resonance with Nietzsche’s experiment to incorporate truth. In the dominant culture, we incorporate corporations. We know ourselves in an ecology defined by their presence, and they function like an apex predator, but one living like an invasive vine, with roots and shoots in every possible niche. We are entangled with this predator, and it has lodged itself in our bodies and minds.

Wolin suggests that part of the structural energy driving the way we know how to run a society, the way we know how to do things, the way we know ourselves, each other, and the world, has to do with the suppression of a source of energy, inquiry, and spiritual/philosophical challenge from a particular set of ecologies within the larger ecology—namely the ecologies of Black culture. But there may be other such suppressions, many occurring without the need for force or
even the threat of force. Plato is never taught dangerously even though Gandhi’s translation of the Apology was thought dangerous enough to structures of power that it was banned. Who’s going to ban Plato? Which philosophy professors will be tried for the secular equivalent of impiety and the corruption of youth?

If Wolin is correct that the structures of power need to fear the revolutionary potentials, then philosophers have yet another reason to ask themselves whether or not it is ethical, in this context, to fail to teach Gandhi and King when they teach Plato—from day one, from the introductory courses that try to do too much intellectual work and not enough practice of wisdom, love, and beauty, such that we could realize, in mutuality, new ways of knowing ourselves, each other, and the world.

Cornel West refers to this vein in Black culture as the Black prophetic tradition. In the introduction to his book, *Black Prophetic Fire* (co-written with Christa Buschendorf) West writes:

> Are we witnessing the death of Black prophetic fire in our time? Are we experiencing the demise of the Black prophetic tradition in present-day America? Do the great prophetic figures and social movements no longer resonate in the depth of our souls? Have we forgotten how beautiful it is to be on fire for justice? These are some of the questions I wrestle with in this book.

> Since the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., it is clear that something has died in Black America. The last great efforts for Black collective triumph were inspired by the massive rebellions in response to Dr. King’s murder. Yet these gallant actions were met with increasing repression and clever strategies of co-optation by the powers that be. The fundamental shift from a we-consciousness to an I-consciousness reflected not only a growing sense of Black collective defeat but also a Black embrace of the seductive myth of individualism in American culture. Black people once put a premium on serving the community, lifting others, and finding joy in empowering others. Today, most Black people have succumbed to individualistic projects in pursuit of wealth, health, and status. Black people once had a strong prophetic tradition of lifting every voice. Today,
most Black people engage in the petty practice of chasing dollars. American society is ruled by big money, and American culture is a way of life obsessed with money. This is true for capitalist societies and cultures around the world. The Black prophetic tradition—as along with the prophetic traditions of other groups—is a strong counter-force to these tendencies of our times. Integrity cannot be reduced to cupidity, decency cannot be reduced to chicanery, and justice cannot be reduced to market price. The fundamental motivation for this book is to resurrect Black prophetic fire in our day—especially among the younger generation. I want to reinvigorate the Black prophetic tradition and to keep alive the memory of Black prophetic figures and movements. I consider the Black prophetic tradition one of the greatest treasures in the modern world. It has been the leaven in the American democratic loaf. Without the Black prophetic tradition, much of the best of America would be lost and some of the best of the modern world would be forgotten.

All the great figures in this book courageously raised their voices in order to bear witness to people’s suffering. These Black prophetic figures are connected to collective efforts to overcome injustice and make the world a better place for everyone. Even as distinct individuals, they are driven by a we-consciousness that is concerned with the needs of others. More importantly, they are willing to renounce petty pleasures and accept awesome burdens. Tremendous sacrifice and painful loneliness sit at the center of who they are and what they do. Yet we are deeply indebted to who they were and what they did.

Unfortunately, their mainstream reception is shaped according to the cultural icon of the self-made man or the individual charismatic leader. This is especially true for the male figures. This is not to say that they did not fulfill the function of leaders and speakers of their organizations. But I want to point out that any conception of the charismatic leader severed from social movements is false. I consider leaders and movements to be inseparable. There is no Frederick Douglass without the Abolitionist movement. There is no W. E. B. Du Bois without the Pan-Africanist, international workers’, and Black freedom movements. There is no Martin Luther King Jr. without the anti-imperialist, workers’, and civil rights movements. There is no Ella Baker without the anti-US-apartheid and Puerto Rican independence movements. There is no Malcolm X without the Black Nationalist and human rights movements. And there is no Ida B. Wells without the anti-US-terrorist and Black women’s movements.

We face the threat that all the energy and materiality invested into the inverted totalitarian system will triumph, and philosophy departments don’t seem to be helping. Yet, West is optimistic that we can get in touch with the Prophetic of the Black tradition and other traditions. Prophecy is one of the madnesses Plato mentions in the Phaedrus, and in our inquiry we would interpret these madnesses as ways of knowing, ways of entering the epistemic space of
liberation, ways of self-liberating into larger ecologies of mind. We can, at this point, sense rather well the repressed interwovenness of wisdom and compassion, epistemology and ethics, knowing and loving—and this goes together with a duality between “individual” and “collective,” “organism” and “environment,” “civilized” and “wild” that our inquiry suggests we need to challenge. West challenges some of this as well, when he clearly declares the interwovenness of the great figures he will discuss and their ecologies of liberation. These are ecologies of practice-and-realization, ecologies of knowing. And this knowing demands a selflessness, the presencing of “forgetting the self,” which can at times appear as a sacred madness. Of the divine or sacred madnesses, Plato has Socrates say,

... in fact the best things we have come from madness, when it is given as a gift of the god.

The prophetess of Delphi and the priestesses at Dodona are out of their minds when they perform that fine work of theirs for all of Greece, either for an individual person or for a whole city, but they accomplish little or nothing when they are in control of themselves. We will not mention the Sybil or the others who foretell many things by means of god-inspired prophetic trances and give sound guidance to many people—that would take too much time for a point that’s obvious to everyone. But here’s some evidence worth adding to our case: The people who designed our language in the old days never thought of madness as something to be ashamed of or worthy of blame; otherwise they would not have used the word ‘manic’ for the finest experts of all—the ones who tell the future—thereby weaving insanity into prophecy. They thought it was wonderful when it came as a gift of the god, and that’s why they gave its name to prophecy; but nowadays people don’t know the fine points, so they stick in a ‘t’ and call it ‘mantic.’ Similarly, the clear-headed study of the future, which uses birds and other signs, was originally called oïonoïstik, since it uses reasoning to bring intelligence (nous) and learning (historia) into human thought; but now modern speakers call it oïōnistik, putting on airs with their long ‘ō’. d To the extent, then, that prophecy, mantic, is more perfect and more admirable than sign-based prediction, oïōnistik, in both name and achievement, madness (mania) from a god is finer than self-control of human origin, according to the testimony of the ancient language givers.

Next, madness can provide relief from the greatest plagues of trouble that beset certain families because of their guilt for ancient crimes: it turns up among those who need a way out; it gives prophecies and takes refuge in prayers to the gods and in worship, discovering mystic rites and purifications that bring the man
it touches through to safety for this and all time to come. So it is that the right sort of madness finds relief from present hardships for a man it has possessed.

Third comes the kind of madness that is possession by the Muses, which takes a tender virgin soul and awakens it to a Bacchic frenzy of songs and poetry that glorifies the achievements of the past and teaches them to future generations. If anyone comes to the gates of poetry and expects to become an adequate poet by acquiring expert knowledge of the subject without the Muses’ madness, he will fail, and his self-controlled verses will be eclipsed by the poetry of men who have been driven out of their minds.

There you have some of the fine achievements—and I could tell you even more—that are due to god-sent madness. We must not have any fear on this particular point, then, and we must not let anyone disturb us or frighten us with the claim that you should prefer a friend who is in control of himself to one who is disturbed. (244a-245b, translation by Cooper)

The reader will surely notice the slight strangeness of a passage like this in the midst of contemplations related to politics, addiction, economics, justice. Our labyrinth walking has possibly begun to give a sense of why it belongs here (as well as anywhere), why we come back to not only Plato’s Phaedrus, but why we should have the Republic in mind too, including its suggestion that we must, in some sense, look “outside” ourselves to fully realize the soul.

Receiving these words from Plato in light of Cornel West’s reflections, and in light of our whole inquiry thus far, we can sense how knowing goes together with the social, the ethical, the living context, the ecology of thinking, and how only sacred madness can heal what is broken in the World and in the dominant culture.

Because of the inconceivability of the larger ecologies, because the ego remains trapped in its little box, we must liberate ourselves into the larger ecologies, and this can look like madness.

We must note that, it is not just any madness, but a sacred madness that will give us the best things we have, and that Prophecy so inspired would be . . . well, prophecy—a sensing “ahead” by means we are not at all used to in our ego-based functioning. The Black prophetic tradition and other prophetic traditions, involve this sacred madness that is a sacred sanity. And it
depends, crucially, on the interwovenness of knowing and loving—thus deepening our understanding of why hatred is the near-enemy of knowledge, and why political (or any) aggression is a variety of ignorance, healed by LoveWisdom.

We thus have increasingly sophisticated philosophical reasons for experimenting with practices that properly decenter the ego. Even from the standpoint of evolutionary psychology, we could side with Darwin and an ecological view, and suggest that we basically feel a calling to take care of each other, and to establish a healthy ecology, an ecology rooted in wisdom, love, and beauty.

But we can get distracted—and we live in an ecology of deliberate distraction and control. From the perspective of LoveWisdom, we willingly engage in an astonishing array of distractions, and swallow a remarkable measure of rationalizations handed to us from the very forces that control us. Since the dominant culture’s ecology has to do with materialism, one of our main sources of distraction, and the major arena of rationalization, has to do with materiality. As beings of soul, as ensouled adventurers, we can only feel deeply fulfilled by means of a spiritual satisfaction—one which transcends the duality between mind-body, spirit-soul, heaven-earth, and so on. But, we get hooked into seeking spiritual satisfaction in material things, and the culture encourages this with verve, seducing us into thinking we can solve both the material and spiritual problems we face by material means, by the same means that actively create material inequalities and spiritual/emotional/physical unwellness. We get indoctrinated to think that wealth can solve the problems of wealth and the problems of illth that go altogether with the problems of wealth. In the activity of dualistic consciousness, there is no such thing as wealth, but only wealth-illth,
which, as we work to control it, and control the world on its basis, is the very activity of suffering. Nothing aside from transcendence of the dualistic way of knowing ourselves, each other, and our World will allow us to fully realize a World of fundamental abundance. Meanwhile, we live as if always in privation; we practice and realize ecologies of suffering.

When we experience suffering, we naturally want to feel better. If we can perceive any material object as a viable way to feel better, we will certainly try it, again and again, which means we can easily become inclined to know ourselves and our world in certain limited and limiting ways. And thus one thing that has happened over the past couple hundred years in particular is a kind of material bribe: We willingly distract ourselves away from the soul (which means putting up with increasing inequality and various forms of injustice, including ecological degradation) in exchange for material consumption, which is offered (encouraged) to us (by means of powerful seductions and clever manipulations) as a substitute for our spiritual hunger, a process facilitated by the kind of duality Locke encouraged. Lewis Mumford captures this bribe rather well:

> The bargain we are being asked to ratify takes the form of a magnificent bribe. Under the democratic-authoritarian social contract, each member of the community may claim every material advantage, every intellectual and emotional stimulus he may desire, in quantities hardly available hitherto even for a restricted minority: food, housing, swift transportation, instantaneous communication, medical care, entertainment, education. But on one condition: that one must not merely ask for nothing that the system does not provide, but likewise agree to take everything offered, duly processed and fabricated, homogenized and equalized, in the precise quantities that the system, rather than the person, requires. Once one opts for the system no further choice remains. In a word, if one surrenders one’s life at source, authoritarian technics will give back as much of it as can be mechanically graded, quantitatively multiplied, collectively manipulated and magnified.\(^{148}\)

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\(^{148}\) Available at http://www.primitivism.com/mumford.htm

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“Magnificent bribe” is a perfect phrase, and also an imperfect phrase. It’s a magnificent *swindle* and a magnificent *coup*—and more than anything else, a magnificent domination of the soul. But the soul cannot really be dominated or controlled. There are always consequences for going against our own Soul and going against Life. We now face some of the more severe of those consequences, and we must do all we can to minimize the appearance of further, still more intense consequences, which are inevitable if we keep going as we are. We need LoveWisdom more than ever just to be able to navigate the consequences we already have coming and cannot escape, and even more than that to avoid something worse.

Mumford says “we are being asked to ratify” this bribe because we have to *constantly* ratify it. Recall Hume’s observation that the real power is on the side of the governed. We must continually assent, in a kind of “inverted totalitarianism,” to use Wolin’s term.

Of necessity, we ratify this swindle by forfeiting our freedom—by which we must mean something beyond our ordinary sense of being an “autonomous individual” or a “sovereign individual,” instead meaning something along the lines of what most of the great spiritual, religious, and philosophical traditions have promised us regarding our potential. The liberation into which these traditions invite us differs from the “liberty” of the dominant culture, and thus stands in tension with Locke’s notion in the sense that this spiritual liberty has no dependence on property and possession, and it comes with an abiding peace and joy. In our secular, desacralized world, we tend to chase comfort and “happiness” in place of peace, love, joy, and true liberation—in part because liberation in the sense intended by these traditions seems so daunting at first glance (daunting to the ego), and so we get hooked by the swindle Mumford discusses. In
his delightful book, *Without Guilt and Justice: From Decidophobia to Autonomy* (1973), the philosopher Walter Kaufmann writes about the swindle this way:

> Cloudless contentment is not open to man, and if he trades his freedom and integrity for it, the time will come when he feels cheated. This does not mean that he will openly regret the bargain. Most people have failed to cultivate their critical perception of their own present position and of the alternatives they might have chosen; precisely this is the trade they made; this is what they gave up for comfort and contentment. Now they feel cheated without knowing how and when and why. What they feel is a diffuse and free-floating resentment in search of an object. Having given up autonomy for happiness, they have missed out on both. (213)

The very philosophical writer Kurt Vonnegut framed the swindle much more humorously, in a graduation speech that everyone in the dominant culture should read in full:

> I look back on all the taboos that I was taught, that everybody was taught, and I see now that they were parts of a great swindle. Their purpose was to make Americans afraid to get close to one another—to organize.

> It was even taboo to discuss the American economic system and its bizarre methods of distributing wealth. I learned that at my mother’s knee. God rest her soul. God rest her knee. She taught me never to say anything impolite about the neighborhood millionaire. She didn’t even want me to wonder out loud how the hell he ever got to control that much wealth.\(^{149}\)

Vonnegut, who was perhaps as affected by Nietzsche as Walter Kaufmann was, does one better than the venerable Princeton professor: He intimates that the swindle must compromise *intimacy*, thus pointing the same way as those beautiful traditions of liberation, which always seem to invite us to verify the interwovenness of liberation and intimacy.

Ultimately, the assent to this swindle happens by means of a drugging or even a poisoning of the soul (cutting ourselves off from intimacy and interwovenness is the poisoning of the soul, and

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\(^{149}\) The full speech is available online: https://www.truthdig.com/articles/kurt-vonneguts-call-to-save-the-planet-is-just-as-timely-now-as-it-was-four-decades-ago/
since we must include Nature in this intimacy and interwovenness, we must see all philosophies as toxic which endorse a duality between human and Nature). In one way or another the soul must be controlled by structures of power, or else it will overthrow them. We may consider in this regard a painful description of how elephants are controlled by humans who have lost touch with their own soul:

Circus elephants—walking in single file down a stress. Why don’t they run away? It’s simple. It’s because they’re dead. They are dead souls in circuses and zoos. The only way to get elephants who are so powerful to do what a human wants with just a flick of their hand, is to beat the soul out of them. I saw it in Peach, when I beat her, I saw her soul leave. (Bradshaw 2009: 213)

Those are the words of Ray Ryan, a former zookeeper. The keepers of our human zoo cannot use too much force (at least within their borders) if they want to appear “civilized”. So our souls are degraded and our assent is manufactured in other ways (the loss of intimacy means a loss of our true power). Mumford’s analysis misses some key details of that.

For instance, we do not have “every material advantage.” Some of us have far more material advantage than others—a fact that (according to the studies above) we may not really see, or may not want to see. Even basic things like clean air and clean water are becoming luxuries (again, we may not see this, or may not want to see it). There is also a huge gap between the accessibility of quality food for the rich and for the poor. We have “food deserts” throughout the U.S., usually in poor neighborhoods. In such places, one is hard pressed to find an organic vegetable, but junk-food (and junk-ease) abounds—as do junk ways of knowing oneself and the world, even though all the people living in these areas have as much potential for wisdom, love, and beauty as anyone else. And we can note that ongoing lack of total health and vigor works in favor of our current structures of power. From the standpoint of current structures of power and
domination, the weaker we are, the more unhappy, docile, overworked, overloaded, and so on, the better. Physical strength must be confined to sports and sanctioned forms of violence, and must not be allowed to show up as the sheer physical capacity to non-violently rebel against power, inequality, and degradation.

Mumford, in the formulation above, also leaves out the way fear and misery function to keep us going. Fear and misery (misery of all kinds, including self-doubt, self-hatred, doubt of others, hatred of others) keep us deeply rooted in Sorrowville, hooked on its hopes and dreams, its delusions and pathologies. As we experience fear and pain, two things happen, both of which arising from a habit of reacting to pain by focusing on ourselves, becoming, in one way or another, more self-centered: We attempt to escape the situation (which can include blocking our perception of the facts), and to the degree we cannot escape we will medicate.

To medicate is not to heal. Medication is not Medicine. We use things like junk-food, junk-ease, alcohol, cigarettes, sex, violence, gambling, fantasies of wealth and success, and of course all those opioids to medicate ourselves so that we can keep the engines of “progress” moving along. It is like a great wheel. The engine of Sorrowville, the engine of samsara thinking, is a wheel, a merry-go-round of insanity we get trapped on, and right now it’s spinning faster and faster. The sheer pace of it encourages further medicating and unplugging. But we are not unplugging from the wheel itself, and we are not healing anything.

Since food is essential, medicating and unplugging by means of food happens pervasively. A tremendous amount of the processed insanity we call “food,” the rationally formulated poison
referred to as “food,” functions largely as a mechanism of distraction and profit: We are distracted from the real ills we experience, and in exchange we increase the wealth of corporations and a very small portion of the population. Research shows that when we are in pain or exposed to things that get us to see life as harsh and fearful, we eat more junk food, even if we don’t particularly like it or want to eat it (see Laran et al. 2011, Laran and Salerno 2013, Swaffield and Roberts 2015). \(^{150}\)

We are all familiar with the insane offerings of the food-as-medication approach. The presence of extreme eating competitions is a strange symptom of our culture, as is the fact that we deep fry sticks of butter, eat pizza with cheese-stuffed crust, and try to put bacon in and on everything. It is widely known that processed foods come out of a scientific production process that seeks to achieve a “bliss point” of flavor that maximizes the addicting quality of the food, usually by optimizing the hit of fat, sugar, and salt we take in with each bite—using ingredients that are typically produced via the wheel of suffering that makes us seek food-as-medication in the first place—samsara is incredibly well-put-together. The ingredients tend to be unhealthy for humans and for large-scale ecologies, and both the production of the ingredients as well as the consequences of using and consuming them create tremendous suffering—which leads us to crave more medication, including food-as-medication.

\(^{150}\) That much of our food is garbage is both widely known and widely denied. Many people in, say, little mining towns in Appalachia might become angry at the suggestion that they shouldn’t eat fast food. The propaganda machine that keeps Sorrowville going has an uncanny effectiveness when it comes to distorting reality.
Our politicians constantly try to scare us and keep us scared, thus keeping us in a state of craving for medication and unplugging of all kinds. The U.S. is quite a fearful society, even though, in terms of hard facts and statistics, we are relatively safe, and even though many of us (perhaps most) do not experience any ongoing threat of overt violence from the state or even from criminal activity (although, significant portions of the population do have to deal with this, both within the dominant culture and, especially, outside its borders, where it carries on, orchestrates, or otherwise supports violence, domination, aggression, atrocities).

Yet the propaganda machine constantly tells us “the Muslims” are out to get us (various plots are even engineered by law enforcement to entrap would-be terrorists), that “Mexicans” are taking our jobs and engaging in criminal violence, that “blacks” and “immigrants” are dangerous, and so on. And we are a society of the gun, in which we see significant levels of weaponized violence. In various ways, fear is provoked in us, and this sense of fear in turn provokes us to think less wisely, compassionately, and beautifully. We get materialistic and greedy, and increasingly self-obsessed. We have to stuff our faces because the world might end, and we have to get ours before others get theirs, because there isn’t enough to go around. This is not a conscious thought. It’s a matter of seeing destruction around us and feeling like something has to be done. Not knowing what to do, we focus on ourselves, and deep intelligences in us react as if there might be starvation around the corner, so they command us to feed—particularly on high calorie foods, even if they aren’t nourishing. Eating or even binging (including binge-watching, which is “poor eating for the mind,” a variety of junk-food for the soul) distracts us from our suffering, and gives us a feeling that we have done something. We get some temporary relief.
We are in pain, fearful, anxious, weary from working long hours and lacking proper practices of rejuvenation. We need a cigarette—or a pack, or more—to get through the day. We need alcohol and pills to wind down at night. We need pain killers and other medications because the whole organization of society is unwise and unhealthy. *This “civilization” depends on ill-being*, and health may look like wildness, madness to those who have been “civilized”. We have learned how to know living this way, learned how to live knowing this way.

But, we cannot really evade knowing that this knowing is stupidity. Thus we can say the bargain Mumford speaks of has changed. Though we might have agreed to play along, it has begun to break down, and the epistemic errors have caught up with us. We seem to sense it, know it in our bones even if the ego will not allow a full confrontation with it. It may be part of why we seem to be pushing so hard to collapse the conditions of life. But it is a general crisis of meaning, because we don’t know the meaning of the game anymore, and the game has stolen deeper sources of meaning from us, because meaning tied to the soul and the sacred, meaning rooted in living ecologies and loving virtues will always oppose the false meanings of the bribe Mumford refers to, the “nothing but” life Jung described. But, we remain under the thrall of centuries, even millennia of error. Wolin veers directly into Bateson’s ecological thinking when he describes the error as arising from lack of skill with large-scale patterns:

> Unlike the classic forms of totalitarianism, which openly boasted of their intentions to force their societies into a preconceived totality, inverted totalitarianism is not expressly conceptualized as an ideology or objectified in public policy. Typically it is furthered by power-holders and citizens who often seem unaware of the deeper consequences of their actions or inactions. There is a certain heedlessness, an inability to take seriously the extent to which a pattern of consequences may take shape without having been preconceived.

The fundamental reason for this deep-seated carelessness is related to the well-known American zest for change and, equally remarkable, the good fortune of Americans in having at their disposal a vast continent rich in natural resources,
inviting exploitation. Although it is a cliché that the history of American society has been one of unceasing change, the consequences of today’s increased tempos are, less obvious.

Change works to displace existing beliefs, practices, and expectations. Although societies throughout history have experienced change, it is only over the past four centuries that promoting innovation became a major focus of public policy. Today, thanks to the highly organized pursuit of technological innovation and the culture it encourages, change is more rapid, more encompassing, more welcomed than ever before—which means that institutions, values, and expectations share with technology a limited shelf life. We are experiencing the triumph of contemporaneity and of its accomplice, forgetting or collective amnesia. Stated somewhat differently, in early modern times change displaced traditions; today change succeeds change.

The effect of unending change is to undercut consolidation. Consider, for example, that more than a century after the Civil War the consequences of slavery still linger; that close to a century after women won the vote, their equality remains contested; or that after nearly two centuries during which public schools became a reality, education is now being increasingly privatized. In order to gain a handle on the problem of change we might recall that among political and intellectual circles, beginning in the last half of the seventeenth century and especially during the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, there was a growing conviction that, for the first time in recorded history, it was possible for human beings to deliberately shape their future. Thanks to advances in science and invention it was possible to conceive change as “progress,” an advancement benefiting all members of society. Progress stood for change that was constructive, that would bring something new into the world and to the advantage of all. The champions of progress believed that while change might result in the disappearance or destruction of established beliefs, customs, and interests, the vast majority of these deserved to go because they mostly served the Few while keeping the Many in ignorance, poverty, and sickness.

An important element in this early modern conception of progress was that change was crucially a matter for political determination by those who could be held accountable for their decisions. That understanding of change was pretty much overwhelmed by the emergence of concentrations of economic power that took place during the latter half the nineteenth century. Change became a private enterprise inseparable from exploitation and opportunism, thereby constituting a major, if not the major, element in the dynamic of capitalism. Opportunism involved an unceasing search for what might be exploitable, and soon that meant virtually anything, from religion, to politics, to human wellbeing. Very little, if anything, was taboo, as before long change became the object of premeditated strategies for maximizing profits.

It is often noted that today change is more rapid, more encompassing than ever before. In later pages I shall suggest that American democracy has never been truly consolidated. Some of its key elements remain unrealized or vulnerable; others have been exploited for antidemocratic ends. Political institutions have typically been described as the means by which a society tries to
order change. The assumption was that political institutions would themselves remain stable, as exemplified in the ideal of a constitution as a relatively unchanging structure for defining the uses and limits of public power and the accountability of officeholders.

Today, however, some of the political changes are revolutionary; others are counterrevolutionary. Some chart new directions for the nation and introduce new techniques for extending American power, both internally (surveillance of citizens) and externally (seven hundred bases abroad), beyond any point even imagined by previous administrations. Other changes are counterrevolutionary in the sense of reversing social policies originally aimed at improving the lot of the middle and poorer classes.

How to persuade the reader that the actual direction of contemporary politics is toward a political system the very opposite of what the political leadership, the mass media, and think tank oracles claim that it is, the world’s foremost exemplar of democracy? (2017: x-xii)

We can sense here the way the aesthetic (beauty), ethical (love), and in general a dimension of wisdom come together. In balance, in a mode of health, these dimensions work together to empower our experience of sacredness. Sacredness is a making sacred (not mere projection, but participatory activity, a co-discovery-creation), and when our epistemology becomes compromised by a loss of certain aesthetic and ethical factors (again, Bateson’s sense that the “loss of the sense of aesthetic unity was, quite simply, an epistemological mistake” (MN:18)), when we cannot find skillful, spiritual ways of liberating into the larger ecologies of mind that allow us to know ourselves and our World in healthy, healing, holistic, and holy ways, and thus arrive at insights, arrive at an Original Thinking that can cultivate life forward, then instead we will desacralize the world and perpetuate a process, a pattern of degradation.

Wolin properly relates our inability to think ecologically or systemically with an abundance of Nature to absorb the burden of our stupidity. Nevertheless, as Bateson points out, the lack of wisdom and the concomitant employment of magical thinking (in the form of science and technology) never goes “unpunished,” which simply means it comes with karma or negative
side-effects which we carry with us like Jacob Marley’s chains. All of this then give rise to a need for ongoing entertainment, because we have forsaken meaningful activity. Things stop happening in a sense meaningful enough to help us transcend our suffering, and we get sucked into limited thinking. Let us recall a little bit of how Jung put it,

    Everything is banal; everything is “nothing but,” and that is the reason why people are neurotic. They are simply sick of the whole thing, sick of that banal life, and therefore they want sensation. They even want a war; they all want a war; they are all glad when there is a war; they say, “Thank heaven, now something is going to happen—something bigger than ourselves!” (CW 18, para. 628)

“Something bigger than ourselves” means a decentering of the ego, on one level or another something spiritual, and something ethical, a we-consciousness. We precisely lack this. To put it more clearly, the culture encourages the opposite of meaningfulness, sacredness, wisdom, love, beauty. It encourages an impossibility: To find meaning in “individualism” or “individuality,” in fragmentation, competition, materiality, property, distraction, degradation, medication, nihilism. Patriotism and religious dogmatism become medications, synthetic substitutions offered to placate the soul’s need for sacredness (in the case of the atheist, scientific materialism holds the place of religious dogma, and patriotism becomes defense of the territory of reason—for reason is the encumbered “strict father”—against the ignorance and magical thinking of the masses).

In such a situation, work becomes a rather intense symptom, since the soul hungers for meaningful work, work connected with life and with love. We cannot have deeply meaningful work in the ecologies of suffering cultivated by the dominant culture—and, as Wolin puts it, the “inability to take seriously the extent to which a pattern of consequences may take shape without having been preconceived” locks us into a pattern of insanity that can only be healed by madness. Our ability to sense this pattern of insanity, or at least our sense of the loss of the
meaningfulness of our work (if not the larger consequences of that loss of meaning—i.e. its intimate relation to the living World), explains why roughly 70% of workers are not engaged with their work, including over 17% who are “actively disengaged”.\textsuperscript{151}

The psychological/spiritual need for meaningful work—and how to establish meaningful work—has been little discussed in most of our university philosophy courses. We really don’t understand it, don’t understand how to talk to our students about the need to establish meaningful work, and what that would entail given our understanding of ecology and spirituality, and this ignorance fuels a great deal of violence and confusion. For instance, it fuels a perpetuation of poverty, in part because the propaganda of the dominant culture has taught us not to trust poor people or out-of-work people. They will take advantage of us all if we help them! Cultivation of compassion must be avoided at every opportunity in a culture that depends on ill-being, fragmentation, a denial of the interwovenness of things, an encouragement of mistrust, misknowing, and an obsession with pain and pleasure, material gain and loss, praise and blame, and celebrity and social invisibility.

As a general rule, in this kind of culture, we \textit{must} lack truly meaningful work (and what meaningful work we find may come with significant rationalizations, because the culture as a whole is so out of congruence with the conditions of life), and our repression of this, our refusal to confront the anger, depression, and despair over how meaningless our jobs are, or how once meaningful jobs or potentially meaningful jobs have become compromised and degraded . . . all

\textsuperscript{151} http://www.gallup.com/poll/181289/majority-employees-not-engaged-despite-gains-2014.aspx
of this makes us unwell—and we look in all the wrong places for a cure. As James Hillman puts it:

The thing that therapy pushes is relationship, yet work may matter just as much as relationship. You think you’re going to die if you’re not in a good relationship. You feel that not being in a significant, long-lasting, deep relationship is going to cripple you or that you’re crazy or neurotic or something. You feel intense bouts of longing and loneliness. But those feelings are not only due to poor relationship; they come also because you’re not in any kind of political community that makes sense, that matters. Therapy pushes the relationship issues, but what intensifies those issues is that (a) we don’t have satisfactory work, or (b) . . . we don’t have a satisfactory political community.

You just can’t make up for the loss of passion and purpose in your daily work by intensifying your personal relationships. I think we talk so much about inner growth and development because we are so boxed in to petty, private concerns on our jobs. (Hillman and Ventura 1993: 13)

This disengagement, this being trapped in petty, meaningless, and terribly authoritarian activity, along with our general level of pain and suffering—and the general collapse of meaning that goes altogether with the rise of nihilism and the degradation of ecologies that forms the context (and ironically the aim) of all our thinking—drives us into addictive behaviors—including, as we have suggested, the addiction to abstractions, intellectualism, knowledge, control, writing, analyzing, and all the other means of escape we try—even if it takes a confrontation with our own spiritual materialism to see this, to be able to honestly admit it.

We can say there is always going to be a cycle or set of cycles in life. But what does the cycle reinforce? What powers will live us in any given cycle? Because we have become so materialistic and deluded, disconnected, fragmented, our cycles reinforce suffering, to a degree that has become basically traumatizing—and, oddly perhaps, because we have tended to reinforce suffering in general, for a long time now we have become increasingly materialistic, or at least increasingly prone to seek a kind of material escape through numbing medication and
degrading consumption (rather than healing medicine and vitalizing consummation). The main
thing to realize about our materialism, particularly with respect to the magnificent bribe, is that
materialism of any variety cannot make us happy. It is an attempt to eat shadows. It is not that
we are “immaterial” beings, but that we aren’t “material” beings.

The work of Tim Kasser is particularly interesting in terms of the scientific establishment of the
ills of materialism (the illth that comes hand-in-hand with “wealth”). Kasser’s 2002 book, *The
High Price of Materialism*, summarizes some of the key findings. His work indicates that the
actual *pursuit* of materialism leads to ill-being (i.e. the pursuit of “happiness” and “property” in
this context), and, perhaps surprisingly to some, even the *aspiration* to materialism does so. The
ill-being we are speaking of is not just unhappiness, but also more physical pain and possibly
more physical illness. His work shows that materialism seems to cause unhappiness, and that
unhappiness itself can drive materialism, thus showing the well-put-togetherness of our
suffering, and the feedback loop that it entails. These are findings that most spiritual traditions
have reasoned through in some detail, and some spiritual traditions have already done a scientific
verification of the unhealthiness of materialism by means of a science of mind. By carefully
observing the effects of materialistic thoughts, aspirations, and actions, some traditions have
made an empirical, experimental case for the *total unworkability* of a materialistic orientation to
life.

This contrast may be a little confusing. If we say that a spiritual life is the only realistic chance
we have for true fulfillment, and a materialistic life leads inevitably to ill-being (for ourselves
and others), what are we saying? Some people, in the west especially, tend to think of the
contrast between the material and the spiritual as something like a contrast between “reality” and something airy-fairy (we sometime make this contrast through the dualities of science and spirituality, or the natural and the supernatural, or the rational and the mystical). But the sense of spirituality we have touched upon in our inquiry makes it clear that we should have something else in mind—indeed, close to the “opposite” in mind. The basic idea goes something like this: Spirituality refers to a commitment to bring something to realization for oneself and all beings (not merely to “believe” or to “know,” but to taste—Sophia as Sapienza), and to participate in life, to participate something meaningful that transcends the ego (a forgetting or decentering of the “self” as ego).

The transcendence we need demands a better way of knowing—a more skillful way of life. Spirituality fundamentally involves insight and intimacy—the presencing of wisdom, love, and beauty—and these are not “physical” “things”. They are not objects and are not material in any reasonable sense. Moreover, we have no indication that anything material can provide these experiences.152 Thus, to think of the world in material terms, to pursue material objects or material gain, to exploit material resources, to do objective and materialist science, all of this will lead us into difficulty, because these gestures lead us away from our basic spiritual hunger, the

152 It is also worth noting that, from the standpoint of a real commitment to not merely believe, the assumption that the Cosmos is made only of something called “matter” is nothing more than a belief, and in any case we are still not sure what that “matter” is. It was only a split-second ago, so to speak, that we discovered everything we can see in the visible universe is but 5% of the “stuff” that exists. We still don’t know what that other 95% is, and we do not know the full story of the 5%—or if indeed the new 100% is itself not merely another fraction of a still larger whole (in other words, the 5% “visible matter” plus the 95% “dark matter and dark energy” might not add up to 100% of what exists, but that “100%” might itself be a mere 2% or 10% or 50% of another Whole that western science has not even vaguely scried). Moreover, we have never found some “thing” that itself, for certain, does not break down when the right kinds of energy and analysis are applied to it.
hunger to know ourselves, to know the nature of reality, and to enjoy true peace and happiness, to enjoy wisdom, love, and beauty, and to practice-realize a meaningful existence. This basic hunger should make philosophy courses the most popular courses at any modern university, and make philosophy among the most common majors. What we have now should stand out as symptomatic of a most serious illness, a conditions-of-life-threatening illness.

We do not seem to have any way of making ourselves happy and healthy with a materialistic approach to life. But the basic dynamics of our culture rely on a materialistic approach to everything, and so we are encouraged into materialism and away from anything spiritual—and, to help the bondage function, the “spiritual” is placed at odds with the material, the scientific, the economic. The scientist and the engineer must feel like sell-outs if they pursue anything that sounds like “woo,” or like superstition, faith, weakness, some kind of affront to reason and rationality. The result is a spectrum of trauma and addiction from which all of us suffer, even if we are lucky enough to be at the less intense end of that spectrum. The addiction researcher Bruce Alexander sums up the situation rather nicely:

Global society is drowning in addiction to drug use and a thousand other habits. This is because people around the world, rich and poor alike, are being torn from the close ties to family, culture, and traditional spirituality that constituted the normal fabric of life in pre-modern times. This kind of global society subjects people to unrelenting pressures towards individualism and competition, dislocating them from social life.\footnote{Recall the Antifederalist prediction that U.S. culture would cultivate “a groveling, distinct species, uninterested in the general welfare.”}

People adapt to this dislocation by concocting the best substitutes that they can for a sustaining social, cultural and spiritual wholeness, and addiction provides this substitute for more and more of us.
History shows that addiction can be rare in a society for many centuries, but can become nearly universal when circumstances change—for example, when a cohesive tribal culture is crushed or an advanced civilisation collapses.\textsuperscript{154}

Alexander is famous for his work on Rat Park.\textsuperscript{155} As a young researcher, it suddenly dawned on him that the addiction research done with rats had them living alone in bare metal cages. That’s not a life for any being. In these terrible conditions, in which the rats were sometimes starved for 24 hours so that they would perform experiments in exchange for “food pellets,” they were also rigged up for addiction research. This involved surgically implanting a needle that would inject a drug into the rat every time they pressed a little lever. The rats quickly developed strong symptoms of addiction, and many concluded that drugs like heroin and cocaine are so addictive that, if we take them, we automatically want more. Alexander wondered if there might be more to the story.

Alexander and his team built “Rat Park” for the rats to live together in. They had plenty of rat friends to play with, as well as some toys and other sources of stimulation and exercise. It was not as exciting as life outside the lab, but it was way better than the standard setup. When the researchers made drugs available in the park, they found far lower levels of addiction than in the standard studies. Eventually, they came to the realization that human beings are more likely to take drugs and become addicted to them when they are, at one level or another, experiencing a “caged life”. Recall here what Ayahuasca offered Michael Pollan as a koan: Only an animal can be caged. He realized he had to \textit{sit} with that, not to grasp after an “answer”. We do too. Our

\textsuperscript{154} http://www.brucekalexander.com/
\textsuperscript{155} http://www.brucekalexander.com/articles-speeches/rat-park/148-addiction-the-view-from-rat-park
trauma, anxiety, and addiction are *Ecological* problems in a very broad sense, not issues of “individual” “psychology” or even “social” or “economic” maladies.

It’s important to see the ways in which our society isolates us and essentially creates a caged life for us all—a bare and barren Ecology, a degraded Landscape of the Soul that arises altogether with a degraded Landscape of the World.

In this culture of fear, stress, and trauma, we are taught to be suspicious of and competitive with each other—in other words, we are inducted into conquest consciousness. Writing about the troubling rise of loneliness (a disease of those who have made themselves “a distinct species,” those who lack a Nature-Culture that helps them practice-realize a sociosensual and hypersensual or ecosensual awareness, a Liminal Awareness engaged in intimate relationality), George Monbiot notes that,

> Ebola is unlikely ever to kill as many people as this disease strikes down. Social isolation is as potent a cause of early death as smoking 15 cigarettes a day; loneliness, research suggests, is twice as deadly as obesity. Dementia, high blood pressure, alcoholism and accidents – all these, like depression, paranoia, anxiety and suicide, become more prevalent when connections are cut. We cannot cope alone.

Yes, factories have closed, people travel by car instead of buses, use YouTube rather than the cinema. But these shifts alone fail to explain the speed of our social collapse. These structural changes have been accompanied by a life-denying ideology, which enforces and celebrates our social isolation. The war of every man against every man – competition and individualism, in other words – is the religion of our time, justified by a mythology of lone rangers, sole traders, self-starters, self-made men and women, going it alone. For the most social of creatures, who cannot prosper without love, there is no such thing as society, only heroic individualism. What counts is to win. The rest is collateral damage.\(^{156}\)

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\(^{156}\) [https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/oct/14/age-of-loneliness-killing-us](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/oct/14/age-of-loneliness-killing-us)
When “social” creatures (creatures of Interbeing) are isolated, they cannot function at their best, which means they cannot as easily see into the ills of their society and envision alternatives. Nor are they enmeshed in loving connection with one another. We long for love and connection (from the core of what we call our biology and psychology, and also from a spiritual center), but a materialistic approach must drive us apart—apart from ourselves, apart from each other, apart from other sentient beings (including countless Wild beings and the Wildness of Nature), apart from Landscape and Nature, apart from Heaven and Earth, apart from Wisdom, Love, and Beauty—lest we discover that we have no abiding interest in material things.

Perhaps the finest example of the atomization of society comes in the form of the slot machine. In her study of machine gambling, Natasha Dow Schüll points out that the vast majority of gambling addictions relate to machine gambling (2012: 14). We have roughly twice the number of slot machines as we do ATMs.\(^{157}\) The slot machines are designed to put us in a kind of trance.\(^{158}\) When Schüll was reading posting sites on gambling addiction, she came across a post by a woman who was astounded by the way the machine had hypnotized her so deeply that she “didn’t even have the strength to go to the bathroom” (103). Many respondents to the post had similar experiences. Caught in samsara, caught in the cycle of fear, stress, trauma, and confusion, it is this trance that people seek, even though they may do so as an attempt to seek happiness (it makes the gambler exactly like the rest of us).

\(^{158}\) The role of trance in the dominant culture and in samsara thinking in general can hardly be overstated. We will have to save a fuller discussion of it for the third book in this series, an Inquiry into Beauty and Wakefulness.
That may seem odd. We may imagine that people gamble because they want to win. But the craving for a gambling win is just a trance of hope, a samsaric trance in which we try to fulfill the hunger of the soul by eating shadows instead of real food. Caught in samsara, what we want is always more trance. It’s important to recall here that Socrates claimed that his fellow Athenians wanted to execute him because they were asleep in their own lives, and they hated his attempts to awaken them. They wanted to remain in their trance, just as so many of us do today, from the broken-bodied warehouse worker to the greedy investor who becomes careless about risk.

Perhaps we can understand the psyche of the gambler, and our own psyche too, if we consider their experience with care. One of the people Schüll interviewed said the following:

Most people define gambling as pure chance, where you don’t know the outcome. But at the machines I do know: either I’m going to win, or I’m going to lose. I don’t care if it takes coins, or pays coins: the contract is that when I put a new coin in, get five new cards, and press those buttons, I am allowed to continue.

So it isn’t really a gamble at all—in fact, it’s one of the few places I’m certain about anything. If I had ever believed that it was about chance, about variables that could make anything go in any given way at any time, then I would’ve been scared to death to gamble. If you can’t rely on the machine, then you might as well be in the human world where you have no predictability either. (12)

Another gambling addict said this:

The thing people never understand is that I’m not playing to win . . . [I play to] keep playing—to stay in that machine zone where nothing else matters . . . It’s like being in the eye of a storm, is how I’d describe it. Your vision is clear on the machine in front of you but the whole world is spinning around you, and you can’t really hear anything. You aren’t really there—you’re with the machine and that’s all you’re with. (2)

It seems we are not quite sure that we can work with our lives. This is what would ordinarily draw someone to philosophy or religion in a society that had begun to lose a vitalizing Nature-
Culture, a society manifesting conquest consciousness to some degree, a consciousness hungry for “control,” a consciousness dependent on mindlessness, distraction, fragmentation. People would line up for philosophy courses if those courses taught them the wholeness, holiness, and fundamental workability of life, and the practices for bringing that wholeness, holiness, and workability to fruitful, mutually nourishing, mutually illuminating realization.

We hunger for vision, and have no idea how to release it in ourselves, so we’ll take the clear vision of a gambling screen, the clear vision of sports statistics, the clear vision of writing code or designing psychotic buildings, the clear vision of writing academic articles, the clear vision of a figure dressed in leather, the clear vision of anything at all that will keep us in a trance, keep us feeling like we’re in control, in the eye of the storm, allowing us to forget our pain (while, ironically, creating more for ourselves with each moment). Since we don’t live in a culture rooted in Wisdom, Love, and Beauty, we are not educated to truly know ourselves and our capacity to work with whatever arises, to skillfully handle suffering, to gracefully realize reality. Moreover, it is particularly interesting that we are seeking a kind of wondrous and blissful tranquility of mind and a genuine joyfulfulness and health, and there too our culture fails us.

Also significant is how the culture misdirects us about our true needs. We are told that we want to win and that what we want to win is something worldly, like money, fame, property, time. But in fact we seek a kind of contentment and connectedness. We want connection we can rely on. If the only version of connection we can get is the tragically limited connection with a gambling machine, cell phone, book, or research project then we can actually become addicted to the
machines and the technical research. We don’t have to find a slot machine to get this addictive substitute for real connection.

Tristan Harris, a former employee at Google, refers to his smartphone as “a slot machine in my pocket.” From his experience being trained in the psychology of tech development, and his experience actually working in the industry, he came to sense that tech design involves a practice of “exposing people’s psychological vulnerabilities.” It was a journey into the desert that helped Harris to enter into an experience of “waking up and questioning [his] own beliefs.” He ended up preparing a slide presentation (144 slides) called, “A Call to Minimize Distraction & Respect Users’ Attention.” Sadly, he reports that, “It was one of those things where there’s a lot of head nods, and then people go back to work.” He notes that, “All of us are jacked into this system. All of our minds can be hijacked. Our choices are not as free as we think they are.”

How much do our pocket slot machines really distract us? How unfree are we? How highjacked are we? I ask these questions having been startled by the way some academics have clearly been captured by their phone. I have watched people check their phones during colloquia and other contexts in which it stands out as philosophically uncouth. But the question about cell phone addiction is just an exemplar of the broader question: How unfree are we? And we cannot so easily answer such a question. We face a general issue that few of us will admit that “external” and “internal” forces might manipulate us on an ongoing basis. We think that other people are obviously susceptible to manipulation, but we see ourselves as a little too wise, a little too sharp

160 https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/oct/05/smartphone-addiction-silicon-valley-dystopia

610
to fall for such manipulation in any significant way. And how strange would we feel if we were
to say, “I think I am a victim of large-scale, sophisticated manipulation”? Would we think
ourselves crazy? Would it feel crazy? What if insanity were the norm? We might guess, for a
variety of reasons, that a majority of people will think themselves beyond manipulation. I would
bet a good number of academics think themselves beyond these sorts of manipulation—maybe
even the ones I see checking their cell phones during colloquia (they surely have good reason to
feel bored).

Even in the seemingly more simple case of cell phone usage (more simple than the large-scale
manipulation we might not feel ready to face), the majority of people think they check their
phone (and likely Facebook and so on too) less often than others.\textsuperscript{161} Depending on which studies
we consult, we will find that Americans check their phone up to 150 times a day on average.\textsuperscript{162}
More than half of us check our phones a few times an hour,\textsuperscript{163} and one lower-end survey result
puts us at 47 checks per day—a collective 9 billion phone checks per day in the U.S.\textsuperscript{164} We touch
our phones 2,617 times a day.\textsuperscript{165}

Do we collectively check in with Sophia 9 billion times a day? That is to say: Do we check in
with Wisdom, Love, and Beauty, do we check in with the sacred, do we check in with our

\textsuperscript{161} http://www.gallup.com/poll/184046/smartphone-owners-check-phone-least-hourly.aspx
\textsuperscript{162} http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/technology/2013/05/cellphone-users-check-phones-150xday-
and-other-internet-fun-facts/
\textsuperscript{163} http://www.gallup.com/poll/184046/smartphone-owners-check-phone-least-hourly.aspx
\textsuperscript{164} https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/us/Documents/technology-media-
\textsuperscript{165} http://www.networkworld.com/article/3092446/smartphones/we-touch-our-phones-2617-
times-a-day-says-study.html
highest intentions 9 billion times a day? Do we caress our loved ones 2600 times a day? Do we ourselves receive 2600 loving touches each day? Perhaps that’s too much touching. But is it still fair to say that many of us may be starved for loving touch and genuine connection? Is it fair to say we remember to check our phone more often than we remember to check our soul? Vonnegut comes to mind here too:

We must learn to deal with one another more frankly and openly, even humorously. But, more important than that, we must learn to touch. If we are to become a strong and decent people, we must become cousins now—eccentric cousins maybe, but cousins all the same. Blood is thicker than water. Let us learn from the Mafia. It is time, incidentally, that the white people in this country acknowledged that the so-called black people are actually blood relatives of theirs. This is easily proved.

But this is no time to marvel and cackle over family trees. This is a time for us to become excited about being members of the family of man.

Does anyone have nerve enough to touch a stranger near him or her now? Even an old person? Ambulances are waiting outside. First aid stations have been set up in white nylon tents, in case you need oxygen or want to want to wash your hands in Lysol.

If an American people is to be born during the tragedy of the war in Vietnam, it is going to have to be a personal, visceral adventure.

I do not apologize for making this suggestion.

We must become a family in order to take care of one another the way families do. Now, nearly 200 years after the signing of the Declaration of Independence, written by a man who owned human slaves, I think we understand that our politicians and millionaires can do very little for us, except to take our money. There are sound reasons for this, I’m sure. I mean to study economics some day. Meanwhile, we must love one another and care for one another as best we can, and we must organize. You, our new generation of adults, must organize us. And if our government persists in being as wrong-headed as it is today, you must threaten it with the only effective weapon the Earthlings have against the Plutonians, which is a general strike.166

166 https://www.truthdig.com/articles/kurt-vonneguts-call-to-save-the-planet-is-just-as-timely-now-as-it-was-four-decades-ago/
The reference to Plutonians is the “big news” in Vonnegut’s speech. He reveals to his audience that, “flying saucer creatures from Pluto have invaded us.” He says,

Pluto is a suspicious and prideful and secretive and warlike planet, with a technology far in advance of our own. My guess is that Plutonians began to arrive and reproduce and hold jobs in our government just as the Second World War was ending. Our last three presidents may have been Plutonians. Most of them, however, are in the Pentagon. We would perhaps welcome them, if it weren’t for their humorlessness and pitilessness, and their blather about national honor—and for their love of war.

The Plutonians seem like an image of conquest consciousness (a kind of archetypal image). A general strike, a general refusal to perpetuate this consciousness is in order. How else do we break the cycle of trauma-stress-addiction? George Monbiot recently penned (well, probably typed and emailed out) a piece called, “Only rebellion will prevent an ecological apocalypse”:

Had we put as much effort into preventing environmental catastrophe as we’ve spent on making excuses for inaction, we would have solved it by now. Everywhere I look, I see people engaged in furious attempts to fend off the moral challenge it presents. . . .

The political class, as anyone who has followed its progress over the past three years can surely now see, is chaotic, unwilling and, in isolation, strategically incapable of addressing even short-term crises, let alone a vast existential predicament. Yet a widespread and willful naïveté prevails: the belief that voting is the only political action required to change a system. Unless it is accompanied by the concentrated power of protest – articulating precise demands and creating space in which new political factions can grow – voting, while essential, remains a blunt and feeble instrument.

The media, with a few exceptions, is actively hostile. Even when broadcasters cover these issues, they carefully avoid any mention of power. . . .

Those who govern the nation and shape public discourse cannot be trusted with the preservation of life on Earth. There is no benign authority preserving us from harm. No one is coming to save us. None of us can justifiably avoid the call to come together to save ourselves.

I see despair as another variety of disavowal. By throwing up our hands about the calamities that could one day afflict us, we disguise and distance them, converting concrete choices into indecipherable dread. We might relieve ourselves of moral agency by claiming that it’s already too late to act, but in doing so we condemn others to destitution or death. Catastrophe afflicts people now and, unlike those in the rich world who can still afford to wallow in despair, they are forced to respond in practical ways. In Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Malawi, devastated by Cyclone Idai, in Syria, Libya and Yemen, where climate chaos has
contributed to civil war, in Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador, where crop failure, drought and the collapse of fisheries have driven people from their homes, despair is not an option. Our inaction has forced them into action, as they respond to terrifying circumstances caused primarily by the rich world’s consumption. The Christians are right: despair is a sin. . .

Every nonlinear transformation in history has taken people by surprise. As Alexei Yurchak explains in his book about the collapse of the Soviet Union – *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More* – systems look immutable until they suddenly disintegrate. As soon as they do, the disintegration retrospectively looks inevitable. Our system – characterised by perpetual economic growth on a planet that is not growing – will inevitably implode. The only question is whether the transformation is planned or unplanned. . .

This is less daunting than we might imagine. As Erica Chenoweth’s historical research reveals, for a peaceful mass movement to succeed, a maximum of 3.5% of the population needs to mobilise. Humans are ultra-social mammals, constantly if subliminally aware of shifting social currents. Once we perceive that the status quo has changed, we flip suddenly from support for one state of being to support for another. When a committed and vocal 3.5% unites behind the demand for a new system, the social avalanche that follows becomes irresistible. Giving up before we have reached this threshold is worse than despair: it is defeatism. . .

The success of this mobilisation depends on us. It will reach the critical threshold only if enough of us cast aside denial and despair, and join this exuberant, proliferating movement. The time for excuses is over. The struggle to overthrow our life-denying system has begun.167

It’s strange how common this sort of language is: a “life-denying system”. How is it that philosophers do not turn this into a chorus, or maybe a verse, as they sing forth a call to liberation? And Monbiot makes a good point: It takes a lot of energy to maintain inactivity in the face of this level of degradation, especially given the intentional nature of a good measure of that degradation.

It can feel shocking to realize how much of the suffering in our world is intentional, and among the high-tech conquistadors, Harris is not the only one to admit it, or to feel ethical compunction

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167 https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/apr/15/rebellion-prevent-ecological-apocalypse-civil-disobedience
about it. The founding president of Facebook, Sean Parker, had this to say about the mind-hacking approach of Facebook:

> It literally changes your relationship with society, with each other. It probably interferes with productivity in weird ways. God only knows what it’s doing to our children’s brains . . .
> . . . the thought process that went into building these applications, Facebook being the first of them . . . was all about, “How do we consume as much of your time and conscious attention as possible?”

We should linger over that question for a moment. Shouldn’t that shock us? One of the most powerful, pervasive, and wealthy corporations on the planet, a hungry and violent apex predator, meditated on, focused on, obsessed over how to **consume** our time and our consciousness, our time and our attention. **We are not the consumer; we are the consumed.** Forgive the bold type, but these thoughts send shivers into the soul, and the repercussions of this kind of large-scale activity send shockwaves into the soul of the World. Why would we let ourselves be eaten up—physically even, and certainly spiritually, psychically.

Our souls are being mined for the ore of attention, sucked dry by vampires who seek the lifeblood of the heart, eaten up by zombies who hunger for the magic of our minds. What is attention? In all traditions of LoveWisdom, attention means care, attending to the soul, attending to the sacred, attending to wisdom, love, and beauty. We are here to attend to **life,** not to likes on Facebook. Pulling us away from our soul purpose involves turning **us** into zombies roaming the degraded landscape of Sorrowville (starving for the lost magic of mind), self-domesticated, self-dominated slaves to a system of greed, addicts in a trance, hungry for the next hit, the next fake happening. I think my colleagues in the university get frustrated when they see the effects of all

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of this in their students, but they tend to seek a bag of tricks to deal with it: How to craft better learning outcomes, how to get students to seek outside support, how to make lectures more interesting, how to increase online engagement, and a long list of useless interventions that turn education into “educational science,” where we instead need wisdom, love, and beauty.

Since all of this happens in such a high-tech way—in the culture at large as well as in the university—since it’s all very sophisticated and appears quite civilized, the violence goes unnoticed, and the victims of any of the harsher forms or consequences of this violence tend to be marginalized. In other words, much of the violence is slow and at some level soft, in physical terms (for instance, we often don’t feel the risk of cancer going up, or the tumor beginning to grow). In spiritual terms, the logic of this violence is the same as the more overt kind with which we are familiar, just as the logic of “inverted totalitarianism” still leads to the same conclusion: subjugation. We want to buy into it this logic. We seem to be getting all sorts of benefits.

Technology makes life better—doesn’t it? Corporations are working for us—are they? Unless they are the apex predator in our ecology, and, as seems rather obvious, we are their prey—we in the university too. Again, we are not the consumer, but the consumed; not the educated, but the indoctrinated; not the educators, but the colluders. We have an inverted consumerism to go with our inverted totalitarianism. We are taught, and thus know how to know, that corporatized medical care is the best way to go, along with corporatized justice, corporatized education, corporatized entertainment, corporatized technology (and thus science), corporatized government staffed all the way to the top with former and future corporate executives.

Let’s return to the quote from above:
the thought process that went into building these applications, Facebook being the first of them . . . was all about, “How do we consume as much of your time and conscious attention as possible?” And that means that we need to sort of give you a little dopamine hit every once in a while, because someone liked or commented on a photo or a post or whatever. And that’s going to get you to contribute more content, and that’s going to get you . . . more likes and comments.

It’s a social-validation feedback loop . . . it’s exactly the kind of thing that a hacker like myself would come up with, because you’re exploiting a vulnerability in human psychology . . . the inventors, creators— it’s me, it’s Mark [Zuckerberg], it’s Kevin Systrom on Instagram, it’s all of these people— understood this consciously. And we did it anyway.169

They did it anyway because it fulfills the logic of the system: To prey on, to consume the consumer—and whether we use Facebook or not, this is our ecology of mind. Former Facebook executive Chamath Palihapitiya made similar comments, including this one: “The short-term, dopamine-driven feedback loops we’ve created are destroying how society works.” But this gets things wrong, because what they do is reveal how badly the society of the dominant culture functions. The dominant culture is a culture of conquest consciousness, and this already carries with it the conquest of consciousness itself. The part somehow occludes the whole. With no possibility for decentering the ego, for transcendence into sociosensual or ecosensual awareness and interbeing, we remain stuck in the ego, we practice and realize fragmentation, and it is only a matter of time before Nature reveals our epistemological errors. Palihapitiya claims to feel a lot of guilt for developing the platform that helped reveal our stupidity, and he won’t allow his own children to use it. He notes the large-scale social implications of social media: “No civil discourse, no cooperation; misinformation, mistruth . . . This is a global problem.”170

The misinformation is a problem we have all become familiar with. We refer to the “post-truth landscape,” an incredibly degraded ecology that we let loose on ourselves... why? In a recent piece on Wired, Paris Martineau wrote,

A couple of hours after the Christchurch massacre, I was on the phone with Whitney Phillips, a Syracuse professor whose research focuses on online extremists and media manipulators. Toward the end of the call, our conversation took an unexpected turn.

Phillips said she was exhausted and distressed, and that she felt overwhelmed by the nature of her work. She described a “soul sucking” feeling stemming in part from an ethical conundrum tied to researching the ills of online extremism and amplification.

In a connected, searchable world, it’s hard to share information about extremists and their tactics without also sharing their toxic views. Too often, actions intended to stem the spread of false and dangerous ideologies only make things worse.

Other researchers in the field describe similar experiences. Feelings of helplessness and symptoms associated with post-traumatic stress disorder—like anxiety, guilt, and anhedonia—are on the rise, they said, as warnings go unheeded and their hopes for constructive change are dashed time and time again.

“We are in a time where a lot of things feel futile,” says Alice Marwick, a media and technology researcher and professor at the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill. “We’re up against a set of bad things that just keep getting worse.” Marwick co-authored Data & Society’s 2017 flagship report, Media Manipulation and Disinformation Online with researcher Rebecca Lewis.

In a way, their angst reflects that of the tech world at large. Many researchers in the field cut their teeth as techno-optimists, studying the positive aspects of the internet—like bringing people together to enhance creativity or further democratic protest, à la the Arab Spring—says Marwick. But it didn’t last.

The past decade has been an exercise in dystopian comeuppance to the utopian discourse of the ‘90s and ‘00s. Consider Gamergate, the Internet Research Agency, fake news, the internet-fueled rise of the so-called alt-right, Pizzagate, QAnon, Elsagate and the ongoing horrors of kids YouTube, Facebook’s role in fanning the flames of genocide, Cambridge Analytica, and so much more.

“In many ways, I think it [the malaise] is a bit about us being let down by something that many of us really truly believed in,” says Marwick. Even those who were more realistic about tech—and foresaw its misuse—are stunned by the extent of the problem, she says. “You have to come to terms with the fact that not only were you wrong, but even the bad consequences that many of us did foretell were nowhere near as bad as the actual consequences that either happened or are going to happen.”

Worst of all, there don’t appear to be any solutions. The spread of disinformation and rise of online extremism stem from a complex mix of many
factors. And the most common suggestions seem to underestimate the scope of the problem, researchers said.

“It’s not that one of our systems is broken; it’s not even that all of our systems are broken,” says Phillips. “It’s that all of our systems are working ... toward the spread of polluted information and the undermining of democratic participation.”

We don’t understand living ecologies, and we thought it would turn out alright if we unleashed artificial ones. The magical thinking seems evident in a variety of ways. But, at least we were clever enough to invent a system that works—to further the degradation of the soul, yes, but it works, thus verifying what we “know”.

We have said it again and again: The dominant culture functions as a culture of distraction (an anti-Culture), a culture that does everything it can to point away from the soul, because the soul wants nothing to do with the basic activities of the culture. We repeat it because it takes awhile to register that our not wanting to participate in the culture goes together with a longing to participate in Nature and Cosmos (and thus in a healthy, healing, holy Culture), and this sets us up for unwellness. It is not as if we can note that there is a lot of distraction in the culture and simply move on. The whole thing is set up, mostly inadvertently, as a system of suffering. We can see the tragic aspects of this not only in overt forms of violence, but in the equally tragic manifestations that appear simultaneously comical.

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171 https://www.wired.com/story/existential-crisis-plaguing-online-extremism-researchers/
172 An anti-Culture functions like a parallel to an anti-Christ: It is evil, and seeks the destruction of the Soul. The dominant culture is an anti-Culture, and it survives only by means of a vast array of violence within and outside of its borders. It is essential to realize that distraction is Sorrowville. If we never, ever got distracted, we would not suffer. There would be pain, but there would be no suffering. LoveWisdom simply means an end to distraction, an end to self-deception.
One of the funnier tragic symptoms to me is the number of amusement parks that have grown in the soil of the dominant culture. I feel a certain sensitivity to this because I lived near one—which, as a monument to our dysfunction, is situated on a beach. It is comic and heartbreaking to sense how we are not supposed to realize, that we must be kept from, cut off from the realization that the beach itself—that the ocean itself, and the beauty of the natural world, and the beauty of our connections, our connectedness and interwovenness with Nature and each other—we are not supposed to practice-realize these relationships as exactly what the soul needs for basic nourishment, not supposed to practice-realize the truth that we can touch joy immediately, intimately as we touch these relationships and make them real. The amusement park I lived close to even had a very large video arcade and casino, so that people would go to the beach in order to go inside a large building and be distracted and entranced. Again, our cleverness functions, our delusion of control creates evidence for its success. But though we know how to build amusement parks on the beach, we lack the wisdom to have never thought of such a thing to begin with.

We can read “amusement” as “a/musement”. The Muses are the sources of inspiration in us and in the World. The prefix “a-” often signals “not” or “away,” as in the word atypical. So, an amusement park is a place we go to be away from the Muses, away from true inspiration, away from sacred madness. We have 400 amusement parks in the U.S. In Europe there are 300, but Europe has twice the population of the U.S. The U.S. appears to be the capital of amusement.

http://www.iaapa.org/resources/by-park-type/amusement-parks-and-attractions/industry-statistics
In a letter to William Wilson, founder of the famous 12-step program, Alcoholics Anonymous, Jung offered suggestions about alcohol that apply to our general crisis of attention, our seduction away from care, attending, and spiritual practice, and into amusement, medication, and distraction:

His craving for alcohol was the equivalent, on a low level, of the spiritual thirst of our being for wholeness, expressed in medieval language: the union with God.

How could one formulate such an insight in a language that is not misunderstood in our days?

The only right and legitimate way to such an experience is that it happens to you in reality and it can only happen to you when you walk on a path which leads you to higher understanding. You might be led to that goal by an act of grace or through a personal and honest contact with friends, or through a higher education of the mind beyond the confines of mere rationalism...

I am strongly convinced that the evil principle prevailing in this world leads the unrecognized spiritual need into perdition, if it is not counteracted either by real religious insight or by the protective wall of human community. An ordinary man, not protected by an action from above and isolated in society, cannot resist the power of evil, which is called very aptly the Devil. But the use of such words arouses so many mistakes that one can only keep aloof from them as much as possible.

... You see, “alcohol” in Latin is “spiritus” and you use the same word for the highest religious experience as well as for the most depraving poison. The helpful formula therefore is: spiritus contra spiritum. (1976: 623-5)

We all know that our cell phones distract us. But we don’t seem to fully appreciate the situation. And many of us know that we have various forms of addiction other than our phones. Whether it’s music, movies, fast food, alcohol, shopping, or even an addiction to being right, to reading books and making arguments, we don’t live our lives with as much skill and poise as we could. Instead of medicalizing this basic, widespread problem of addiction (and the widespread trauma that goes along with it), it may prove far more helpful to contemplate the spiritual nature of these issues. This would not even be to “spiritualize” them (as opposed to “medicalizing” them), but to
sense their fuller reality and to work with it in a more skillful Way (Dao, path of life, holistic philosophy/spirituality).

But let us make no mistake here: The corporations, the apex predators who prey on our energy and attention, feed on our suffering, biting and sucking the soul dry—both our human soul and the soul of the World—they want every last drop from us, and resisting addiction and distraction (perhaps one and the same thing), resisting manipulation and control (being controlled and giving in to the mindset of control)—resisting being put together, being lived by energies of fear and craving, self-doubt and general nihilism—such resistance does not come easy in a culture of addiction and distraction, a culture of craving, a culture of magical thinking (including our scientific and technological thinking), a culture of degradation and fragmentation. To suggest we are the consumed in this consumer anti-Culture means our energy, creativity, intelligence, and physical health all get eaten up. For instance, companies like Netflix have encouraged us to binge-watch, and their business model admittedly sees our good night’s sleep as an enemy—an enemy to profit and plunder, an enemy to conquest consciousness itself, and its ways of knowing self and world. It seems we need to think about that, to sit with it: Our rest, our time (as moment, as being-time, as life-rhythm), goes against the dictates of capitalism—as does our liberation, our education, and in general our well-being, in the broadest and most meaningful sense.

If we look with care, we can see Netflix continuing the violence of colonialism and conquest—but in its slow and more “civilized” guise (the slowness is relative . . . there is plenty of high-speed violence). And it works on a schedule, on a calendar, with agendas. We can’t wait for the next series, the next episode. The calendar of entertainment goes together with the calendar of work. Philosophers may not watch Netflix, but they of necessity participate in these calendars, and they deal with the energy flows thus created and tapped in the hearts, minds, bodies, worlds of their students.

Netflix, with its corporate “vision”—and let us recall that vision has a cosmic dimension, having to do with a basic sense of what humans are and are for, what sentient beings are and are for, what the World is and is for—Netflix looks around the world and does not see human beings as spiritual traditions see them, but rather untapped profits, untapped hearts, minds, bodies, ecologies. For instance, craving to begin draining the minds of Brazilians, the company sent a scout who reported back that the internet infrastructure in Brazil needed significant development before the company would have a chance to lock onto people’s minds as they do in more “developed” ecologies. So Netflix donated internet servers.\(^\text{175}\) This seems like a nice thing if we listen only to the propaganda about how the internet will give us information and opportunity (we just read about the existential crises of former techno-optimists). When we get more realistic and honest about the forces dominating the internet, we see that companies like Netflix know very well that education and opportunity are not the main functions of the internet. The internet is about distraction, addiction, isolation, extraction. To control how we attend, what we attend to,

and why we attend amounts to takeover of the Soul. The Soul itself is awareness, and the
constriction and control of our attention and awareness constrains and controls the whole of our
Psyche. The Psyche is both the greatest goldmine for, and the greatest threat to, capitalist
enterprise.

Raiding that goldmine has two dimensions: The sheer consumption of time, energy, and
attention, and then, on top of that, a process of turning that consumption into data about how the
mind works—for the purposes of further manipulation and control. When Time-Warner took
over HBO, John Stankey (the new person in charge of HBO as a result of that merger) made it
clear that the company wants every last drop of our attention: “We need hours a day. It’s not
hours a week, and it’s not hours a month. We need hours a day. You are competing with devices
that sit in people’s hands that capture their attention every 15 minutes.” Stankey also made it
clear why:

I want more hours of engagement. Why are more hours of engagement important?
Because you get more data and information about a customer that then allows you
to do things like monetize through alternate models of advertising as well as
subscriptions, which I think is very important to play in tomorrow’s world.\footnote{https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/08/business/media/hbo-att-
merger.html?partner=rss&emc=rss&smid=tw-nytimes&smtyp=cur}

Here we see a more overt statement of “surveillance capitalism,” a force we all need to recon
with. This form of capitalism emerges as a highly sophisticated process of consuming the
consumer and perpetuating an inverted totalitarianism—with a great deal of economic inequality.

As consumers, we have our agendas, we have our conscious purposes, and to whatever degree
we see them as our own, not as manipulated into existence by a pattern of insanity. We have an
agenda, and we have limited time. We go to Amazon and we think we are just buying books, we go to Google and think we are just searching for information, we go to Facebook and think we are just connecting with people, we go to Netflix and think we are just entertaining ourselves, we use an app on our phone and think we are just saving some time and getting this or that benefit. In reality, by means of these activities we collude in our own consumption, we participate in the processes that drain our heart, our mind, our soul, our body, our World. Why? Not only do these companies dominate our attention, but they also record every keystroke on a timeline, thus learning more and more about how to manipulate the mind of Sorrowville, how to deepen Sorrowville and keep us trapped in it, and even how to develop better and better artificial “intelligence” that would further amplify the bondage of Sorrowville. Sorrowville is just conquest consciousness under the guise of cities, civilization, a polis. It is in such a consciousness that “information” becomes so important. “Information” replaces true inspiration, and “knowledge” replaces wisdom.

Amazon.com recently received hundreds of millions of dollars in government contracts, for things like the development of rockets and spy satellites (while they compete for a coveted $10 billion dollar Pentagon contract for cloud services). Thus, we not only pay them to surveil and manipulate us as we make purchases, but through our taxes we will fund their research and development of better ways to do so, better schemes for knowing us, for “developing” us. Of course, part of the logic of Sorrowville leads us to a state of affairs in which Amazon.com itself, while making $11 billion in profit in 2018, paid 0 taxes. In fact, they received a rebate of $129 million (they had a rebate in 2017 as well, and from 2009-2018 they had an effective tax rate of
Meanwhile, “Google is using machine learning to find more oil reserves both above and below the seas, its data services are streamlining and automating extant oilfield operations, and it is helping oil companies find ways to trim costs and compete with clean energy upstarts.” Google helps oil companies extract more oil and compete with renewable energy—at a historical moment when we must do everything we can to keep oil (and many other “resources”) in the ground. Amazon.com has an oil and gas division too, which has the same aims, the same conscious purposes.

When we search for things on Google (or search and purchase on Amazon.com, from academic books to herbal remedies to fair-trade goods), not only do they monetize that search process by surveilling us—so goes our way of knowing—but they use the information they gather about us to develop AI that will more efficiently wreck the planet. We thus collude in our own degradation on multiple levels. Google could focus its resources, which includes a vast reservoir of human creativity and intelligence, on resolving the problems of the world. So could we. Instead, we all engage in a pattern of insanity that becomes increasingly sophisticated. And the insanity comes home very clearly in such incoherences as Google’s dropping “don’t be evil” from its code of conduct, to the schizophrenia of Bill Gate’s heading up a $1 billion climate action fund while Microsoft took up “Empowering Oil & Gas with AI” as their 2018 theme for one of the largest oil and gas events in the world.

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177 On Amazon’s taxes, see https://www.washingtonpost.com/us-policy/2019/02/16/amazon-paid-no-federal-taxes-billion-profits-last-year/?utm_term=.8e8578a83c8e

178 On surveillance capitalism, see Zuboff 2015 and 2018. On Amazon’s government contracts and some commentary on the surveillance state, see: https://www.democracynow.org/2019/2/11/glenn_greenwald_as_bezos_protests_invasion

179 https://gizmodo.com/how-google-microsoft-and-big-tech-are-automating-the-1832790799

179 https://gizmodo.com/google-removes-nearly-all-mentions-of-dont-be-evil-from-1826153393

180 https://gizmodo.com/how-google-microsoft-and-big-tech-are-automating-the-1832790799
Let us keep in mind: *All of the above is quite rational*, all of it a matter of acquiring and applying knowledge, engaging in typical ways of knowing, and behaving in a logical manner given the premises active in our context. Everyone working in the oil and gas divisions at Microsoft, Google, and Amazon.com would likely *ace* a course in logic or critical thinking, as would the executives and engineers at Facebook, Netflix, the corporations that run casinos, and so on.

Let us also keep in mind the fact that we all participate in this pattern of insanity. I do too. Perhaps certain advanced beings do nothing but work to dispel it, but somehow it seems most of us perpetuate it to at least some degree (in academia that includes every moment of teaching that maintains the current model of the university . . . at the very least, we would either have to revolutionize our syllabi or teach maybe an hour of non-traditional content, perhaps outside the university context, for every half hour of standard content). As part of the pattern, corporations have colonized our minds, our hearts, our bodies, our souls, our World—including institutions of higher education. We cannot become well, we cannot fulfill our potential, we cannot enter WisdomLoveBeauty until we decolonize, decolonialize, and enter a time of healing—a healing time, a healing rhythm not confined to clocks and calendars, a cycle of renewal and rejuvenation. But, we do need to understand a little more about our spiritual sickness. If we cannot recognize the signs and symptoms, we may fail to make a proper diagnosis. We may not even recognize the ways in which we have become so unwell.

We have again and again gestured toward spirituality, toward WisdomLoveBeauty as the only realistic way to dispel our illness. Spirituality to dispel the “spirits,” daemon (eudaemonia) to
dispel the demons. We encounter with genuine spirituality the most realistic possibility for psychological health and healing. We can see recent attempts at a “positive psychology” that seeks to offer us information, data about psychological health, but it remains nascent, and it needs deeper spiritual roots.

The great psychologist Abraham Maslow understood that a spiritual psychology, a genuinely scientific psychology, would have to confront transcendence. He said, “I am Freudian and I am behavioristic and I am humanistic, and as a matter of fact I am developing what might be called a fourth psychology of transcendence as well” (1993: 4). We could take up our own fourth way, or a fifth way, or a boundless Way, and call it a philosophical or spiritual psychology, a philosophy of transcendence, an epistemology of the sacred that demands a revolution in all sciences (at the very least because all science arises as mind—no scientist practices science except by means of their soul, their psyche, and hence all science is psychological in a significant sense—including the strange sense revealed by quantum science: that what we call “mind” and what we call “matter” seem in some way to co-arise). As Maslow put it: “In the light of such facts [as spontaneity and self-regulation] can we seriously continue to define the goals of science as prediction and control? Almost one could say the exact opposite—at any rate for human beings. Do we ourselves want to be predicted and predictable? Controlled and controllable?” (12)

We draw close to a subtle point. Maslow asks, “What if the organism is seen as having “biological wisdom”?” (14) He asks this about human beings, just as he does in the previous quote. But, he gives no justification for such a narrowing and limited view. He seems to stumble in the presence of the greater challenge.
Let us pause a moment. We do not want to live irrationally, living as unreliable, flakey children upon whom life could not rely, and for whom life could not be relied upon. We need to acknowledge our total dependence, on each other, on all beings, on life, on the sacred, on the mystery that we cannot control. We cannot control it, and in a basic sense it does not control us either. How do we walk the middle way between living in an out-of-control manner on the one hand, and living in a manipulated and controlled manner on the other?

Our inquiry suggests that structures of power and domination do indeed manipulate and control us. We cannot simply wish that away, or stomp our foot like tempestuous children and “rebel”. We will merely make, as Maslow puts it, “stupid. ineffective clumsy gropings toward health” (15). How can we make wise movements? How can we make graceful movements that our cerebellum and other aspects of the larger ecology of mind will view with enjoyment, appreciate as artistic and poised? How can we begin to dance a better world? How can we know better?

Maslow’s question matters here: “What if the organism is seen as having “biological wisdom”? But it needs reframing. In the first iteration: What if we ourselves “have” wisdom? But, wisdom is not an object, and if someone asked, “Do human beings really have wisdom?” or, “Do dogs really have wisdom?” to either question we might skillfully reply, “No!” Instead, we can better ask Maslow’s question this way: What if we ourselves already are WisdomLoveBeauty? What if all of sentient being is WisdomLoveBeauty? We orient there toward the larger ecologies of mind in which Bateson locates wisdom. We don’t need the fragmentation of “the organism” (as Dewey tried to show us), and we don’t need the caveat of “biological wisdom”. Just Wisdom,
presenced in, through, as life, presenced in, through, as each of us in, through, as our activity of interwovenness.

We can then consider what Maslow says about the limited case he tried to present and make it real without the fragmentation and borders. We need only make one small change: We can read the following passage as if the “it” he refers to means life, Sophia, sacredness, and not “the organism,” and we can capitalize that word to make it easier:

If we learn to give It greater trust as autonomous, self-governing, and self-choosing, then clearly we as scientists, not to mention physicians, teachers, or even parents, must shift our image over to a more Taoistic one. This is the one word that I can think of that summarizes succinctly the many elements of the image of the more humanistic scientist. Taoistic means asking rather than telling. It means nonintruding, noncontrolling . . . It is like saying that if you want to learn about ducks, then you had better ask the ducks instead of telling them. (14)

The meaning of all of this demands extensive contemplation. We may receive this as one way of expressing the nature of a sacred epistemology, a more rigorous practice of LoveWisdom. How can we learn to ask the ducks?

On the one hand, we can suggest the following: A nondualistic, nonlocal epistemology, an epistemology of the sacred, a more rigorous and scientific epistemology must somehow transcend the ego-centrism and anthropocentrism of thinking “knowledge” can be evaluated from a human perspective alone. In one way or another, humans often appear self-congratulatory about what they think they know. Again, we may think we know how to make microwave ovens, lasers, fast cars, rockets that fly to the moon. But all these knowledge claims, and most of the skepticism about them, tend to remain confined to the human realm. We never seem to ask, “What would the ducks say we know? What would the mountains say we know? How do we
presence ourselves for all the other beings here?” Consider what The Others of the San Francisco Bay Area might say about us, based on the following artefact:

Modern residents would hardly recognize the Bay Area as it was in the days of the Ohlones. Tall, sometimes shoulder-high stands of native bunchgrasses (now almost entirely replaced by the shorter European annuals) covered the vast meadowlands and the tree-dotted savannahs. Marshes that spread out for thousands of acres fringed the shores of the Bay. Thick oakbay forests and redwood forests covered much of the hills.

The intermingling of grasslands, savannahs, salt- and freshwater marshes, and forests created wildlife habitats of almost unimaginable richness and variety. The early explorers and adventurers, no matter how well-travelled in other parts of the globe, were invariably struck by the plentiful animal life here. “There is not any country in the world which more abound[s] in fish and game of every description,” noted the French sea captain la Perouse. Flocks of geese, ducks, and seabirds were so enormous that when alarmed by a rifle shot they were said to rise “in a dense cloud with a noise like that of a hurricane.” Herds of elk—“monsters with tremendous horns,” as one of the early missionaries described them—grazed the meadowlands in such numbers that they were often compared with great herds of cattle. Pronghorn antelopes, in herds of one or two hundred, or even more, dotted the grassy slopes.

Packs of wolves hunted the elk, antelope, deer, rabbits, and other game. Bald eagles and giant condors glided through the air. Mountain lions, bobcats, and coyotes—now seen only rarely—were a common sight. And of course there was the grizzly bear. “He was horrible, fierce, large, and fat,” wrote Father Pedro Font, an early missionary, and a most apt description it was. These enormous bears were everywhere, feeding on berries, lumbering along the beaches, congregating beneath oak trees during the acorn season, and stationed along nearly every stream and creek during the annual runs of salmon and steelhead.

It is impossible to estimate how many thousands of bears might have lived in the Bay Area at the time of the Ohlones. Early Spanish settlers captured them readily for their famous bear-and-bull fights, ranchers shot them by the dozen to protect their herds of cattle and sheep, and the early Californians chose the grizzly as the emblem for their flag and their statehood. The histories of many California townships tell how bears collected in troops around the slaughterhouses and sometimes wandered out onto the main streets of towns to terrorize the inhabitants. To the Ohlones the grizzly bear must have been omnipresent, yet today there is not a single wild grizzly bear left in all of California.

Life in the ocean and in the unspoiled bays of San Francisco and Monterey was likewise plentiful beyond modern conception. There were mussels, clams, oysters, abalones, seabirds, and sea otters in profusion. Sea lions blackened the rocks at the entrance to San Francisco Bay and in Monterey Bay they were so abundant that to one missionary they seemed to cover the entire surface of the water “like a pavement.”
Long, wavering lines of pelicans threaded the air. Clouds of gulls, cormorants, and other shore birds rose, wheeled, and screeched at the approach of a human. Rocky islands like Alcatraz (which means pelican in Spanish) were white from the droppings of great colonies of birds.

In the days before the nineteenth-century whaling fleets, whales were commonly sighted within the bays and along the ocean coast. An early visitor to Monterey Bay wrote: “It is impossible to conceive of the number of whales with which we were surrounded, or their familiarity; they every half minute spouted within half a pistol shot of the ships and made a prodigious stench in the air.” Along the bays and ocean beaches whales were often seen washed up on shore, with grizzly bears in “countless troops”—or in many cases Indians—streaming down the beach to feast on their remains.

Nowadays, especially during the summer months, we consider most of the Bay Area to be a semi-arid country. But from the diaries of the early explorers the picture we get is of a moist, even swampy land. In the days of the Ohlones the water table was much closer to the surface, and indeed the first settlers who dug wells here regularly struck clear, fresh water within a few feet.

Water was virtually everywhere, especially where the land was flat. The explorers suffered far more from mosquitoes, spongy earth, and hard-to-ford rivers than they did from thirst—even in the heat of summer. Places that are now dry were then described as having springs, brooks, ponds—even fairly large lakes. In the days before channelizations, all the major rivers—the Carmel, Salinas, Pajaro, Coyote Creek, and Alameda Creek—as well as many minor streams, spread out each winter and spring to form wide, marshy valleys.

The San Francisco Bay, in the days before landfill, was much larger than it is today. Rivers and streams emptying into it often fanned out into estuaries which supported extensive tule marshes. The low, salty margins of the Bay held vast pickleweed and cordgrass swamps. Cordgrass provided what many biologists now consider to be the richest wildlife habitat in all North America.

Today only Suisun Marsh and a few other smaller areas give a hint of the extraordinary bird and animal life that the fresh- and saltwater swamps of the Bay Area once supported. Ducks were so thick that an early European hunter told how “several were frequently killed with one shot.” Channels crisscrossed the Bayshore swamps—channels so labyrinthian that the Russian explorer Otto von Kotzebue got lost in them and longed for a good pilot to help him thread his way through. The channels were alive with beavers and river otters in fresh water, sea otters in salt water. And everywhere there were thousands and thousands of herons, curlews, sandpipers, dowitchers, and other shore birds.

The geese that wintered in the Bay Area were “uncountable,” according to Father Juan Crespi. An English visitor claimed that their numbers “would hardly be credited by anyone who had not seen them covering whole acres of ground, or rising in myriads with a clang that may be heard a considerable distance.”

The environment of the Bay Area has changed drastically in the last 200 years. Some of the birds and animals are no longer to be found here, and many others have vastly diminished in number. Even those that have survived have
(surprisingly enough) altered their habits and characters. The animals of today do not behave the same way they did two centuries ago; for when the Europeans first arrived they found, much to their amazement, that the animals of the Bay Area were relatively unafraid of people.

Foxes, which are now very secretive, were virtually underfoot. Mountain lions and bobcats were prominent and visible. Sea otters, which now spend almost their entire lives in the water, were then readily captured on land. The coyote, according to one visitor, was “so daring and dexterous, that it makes no scruple of entering human habitation in the night, and rarely fails to appropriate whatever happens to suit it.”

“Animals seem to have lost their fear and become familiar with man,” noted Captain Beechey. As one reads the old journals and diaries, one finds the same observation repeated by one visitor after another. Quail, said Beechey, were “so tame that they would often not start from a stone directed at them.” Rabbits “can sometimes be caught with the hand,” claimed a Spanish ship captain. Geese, according to another visitor, were “so impudent that they can scarcely be frightened away by firing upon them.”

Likewise, Otto von Kotzebue, an avid hunter, found that “geese, ducks, and snipes were so tame that we might have killed great numbers with our sticks.” When he and his men acquired horses from the missionaries they chased “herds of small stags, so fearless that they suffered us to ride into the midst of them.”

Von Kotzebue delighted in what he called the “superfluity of game.” But one of his hunting expeditions nearly ended in disaster. He had brought with him a crew of Aleutian Eskimos to help hunt sea otters for the fur trade. “They had never seen game in such abundance,” he wrote, “and being passionately fond of the chase they fired away without ceasing.” Then one man made the mistake of hurling a javelin at a pelican. “The rest of the flock took this so ill, that they attacked the murderer and beat him severely with their wings before other hunters could come to his assistance.”

It is obvious from these early reports that in the days of the Ohlones the animal world must have been a far more immediate presence than it is today. But this closeness was not without drawbacks. Grizzly bears, for example, who in our own time have learned to keep their distance from humans, were a serious threat to a people armed only with bows and arrows. During his short stay in California in 1792, Jose Longinos Martinez saw the bodies of two men who had been killed by bears. Father Font also noticed several Indians on both sides of the San Francisco Bay who were “badly scarred by the bites and scratches of these animals.”

Suddenly everything changed. Into this land of plenty, this land of “inexpressible fertility” as Captain la Perouse called it, arrived the European and the rifle. For a few years the hunting was easy—so easy (in the words of Frederick Beechey) “as soon to lessen the desire of pursuit.” But the advantages of the gun were short-lived. Within a few generations some birds and animals had been totally exterminated, while others survived by greatly increasing the distance between themselves and people.
Today we are the heirs of that distance, and we take it entirely for granted that animals are naturally secretive and afraid of our presence. But for the Indians who lived here before us this was simply not the case. Animals and humans inhabited the very same world, and the distance between them was not very great.

The Ohlones depended upon animals for food and skins. As hunters they had an intense interest in animals and an intimate knowledge of their behavior. A large part of a man’s life was spent learning the ways of animals.

But their intimate knowledge of animals did not lead to conquest, nor did their familiarity breed contempt. The Ohlones lived in a world where people were few and animals were many, where the bow and arrow were the height of technology, where a deer who was not approached in the proper manner could easily escape and a bear might conceivably attack—indeed, they lived in a world where the animal kingdom had not yet fallen under the domination of the human race and where (how difficult it is for us to fully grasp the implications of this!) people did not yet see themselves as the undisputed lords of all creation. The Ohlones, like hunting people everywhere, worshipped animal spirits as gods, imitated animal motions in their dances, sought animal powers in their dreams, and even saw themselves as belonging to clans with animals as their ancestors. The powerful, graceful animal life of the Bay Area not only filled their world, but filled their minds as well. (Margolin 1978: 7-12)

Among other things, this passage touches on some of the insights Paul Shepard tried to invite us to sense and make sense of. We find much to contemplate. One of course senses a resonance with Levi-Strauss, and that infamous passage from Totemism:

Radcliffe-Brown’s demonstration ends decisively the dilemma in which the adversaries as well as the proponents of totemism have been trapped because they could assign only two roles to living species, viz., that of a natural stimulus or that of an arbitrary pretext. The animals in totemism cease to be solely or principally creatures which are feared, admired, or envied: their perceptible reality permits the embodiment of ideas and relations conceived by speculative thought on the basis of empirical observations. We can understand, too, that natural species are chosen not because they are “good to eat” but because they are “good to think.” (1971: 89)

Not “good to think with,” in the manner of a “tool,” but “good to think,” in the manner of a power that lives us, a factor in the soul that makes the mind what it is—mind of ecology and ecology of mind. We can think Redwood, think Raven, think Wolf—and thereby let them think us, empowering our thinking and liberating us into larger ecologies of thought, speech, and action. We think them into being, and let them think us into being, in mutual illumination,
mutual nourishment, mutual care and responsiveness. We can properly call this mystical participation, an epistemology of the sacred.

Shepard invites us to see that Raven, Wolf, and all The Others taught us how to think, speak, move. The awakeness we find in the Natural world is the awakeness that we ourselves are, and we thus lived entwined with The Others, interwoven in, through, as Nature. But interwovenness was perhaps always an achievement, a consummatory experience—one that even arose in some cultures by means of consumption of a very different kind than ours. Consuming Buffalo, in the altogether way of a Nature-Culture, may have facilitated Consummatory Insight. The Others participated with us in the life-death-life activity of the World. We did not merely eat them. We lived with them, through them. We dreamed them, and they dreamed us. When we dream today, if that dreaming will heal us and the World, we will need to dream again like this. The Others, these interwoven ecologies, are good to live, good to dream, and they require our dreaming for their vitalized being.

Though Levi-Strauss does write, “good to think,” we should not cut this off from thinking with. We need only understand, practice, and realize “good to think” as always in mutuality. But, we also lost participation as we lost diversity of ecologies. We substituted “knowing” for “being,” for “being together,” for “thinking together,” which means co-discovery-creation, the living activity of WisdomLoveBeauty in, through, as interwovenness, relational openness. Let us consider the following artefact from C.L. Martin:

Words. I have grown suspicious of them. The irony is that I am paid handsomely to use them. And use them I do, mostly in delivering windy lectures to hundreds of university students every year, trying to convey an understanding of the history of the North American continent both before and after the European
arrival. I have been holding forth on the subject for years and am growing increasingly distrustful of what I myself have been saying. Partly because I use the language of the Anglo-American; they are the words of a Western-trained, Western-oriented intellect as it seeks to wrap itself around this place, this landscape, and to convey what has transpired here in the affairs of humankind. Yet all the while I am mocked by the knowledge that my words are not the words of the people whom my European ancestors encountered on this continent. Those earlier residents pronounced the place, and described the affairs of people, very differently from the way I do now or my Maryland forebears did centuries ago. Our differing sets of words have yielded profoundly variant stories. One of them I flatter myself I know well. The other, the aboriginal, is the problem. The people native to North America spoke (and many still speak) of a world, a place, and a way of living and being, all alien to my Western cast of mind. And yet both stories seek to describe and communicate the inherent truths of the same place and man and woman’s role in all of that.

Words reflect the way our minds touch the world about us. In this sense they are a kind of sonar: they orient us. Among the Navajo, the Diné, femaleness is referred to in terms of certain cardinal points (south and west), specific colors (blue and yellow), times of day (daylight and twilight) and life (maturation and old age), seasons (summer and fall), and a precise, highly complex state of being, the closest word for it being active. Maleness invokes a different, complementary, and seemingly opposed constellation of references. Navajos define themselves through a language that makes connections between what seem to me curiously arranged categories of perception and knowledge. So, too, are other beings—animal beings, plant beings—inserted into this wheeling landscape of potentiality, where the “I” knows how essential it is to “become part of it”—all of the dimensions and categories of place. Thus do these people plug themselves into the powers of place: through carefully chosen words and speech. We, too, are forever being admonished to choose our words carefully. But what do we have to choose from? Scan the dictionary in your brain, or take down such a volume from the shelf and realize that our speech is loaded; the words resonate with a distinctive imagination of the world—an observation one might of course make for any culture, past or present. (What is the fundamental imagination of my language for the earth, I ask myself—afraid of the answer. Hence my anxiety with words.) “As soon as mankind ceases to ‘reverberate’ to the world, the sickness penetrates language.” Language becomes “the victim of illusions produced by words.”

Words, says Scott Momaday, are names. Yes, possibly. I like to think of them more as forces that mold the space around me, into which I then pour my sense of reality and my energies, after the fashion of the amoeba. As the engineer of space, language does more than establish the terms of discourse between people; it may also do much the same thing between people and the myriad other life forms about us. The idea is aboriginal, not mine, and I readily admit I am perplexed by it. Yet it seems to be there when I try to read between the lines as native peoples so matter-of-factly tell Europeans what went wrong: “With the coming of the whites and Christianity the demons of the bush have been pushed
back to the north where there is no Christianity. And the conjuror does not exist any more with us, for there is no need of one. Nor is there need for the drum.”

Another: “Since prayer has come into our cabins, our former customs are no longer of any service; . . . our dreams and our prophecies are no longer true,—prayer has spoiled everything for us.” And a third: “The spirits do not come to help us now. The white men have driven them away.” Behold the strange, incantatory powers of a speech that can silence the elemental powers around it. How can anyone who wields such words ever hope to become “a part of it?”

(1993: 1-2)

That is a good question, and it relates to our question our earlier question: What do The Others think about what humans seem to know, The Others with whom we no longer live-and-know?

Putting any romantic notions aside, we can certainly say that millions of people lived on Turtle Island before conquest consciousness arrived. However we tell the story, the ecological diversity here seems astonishing—including the human ecological diversity, consisting of possibly hundreds of unique languages to go with hundreds of unique nations, unique Nature-Cultures.

Given the state of things prior to the arrival of conquest consciousness and what we find today, would the redwoods, ravens, bears, wolves, whales be wrong to say that what humans in the dominant culture know all too well is how to degrade, how to exterminate, how to spread fear and fragmentation?

It seems that a proper epistemology should always invite us to evaluate our claims to knowledge from a decentered perspective, but not merely a decentering of the ego (even that we largely fail to understand). We should evaluate our claims to knowledge from the perspective of the more-than-human. And this is part of why we need arts of awareness that allow us to self-liberate into larger ecologies of mind, ecologies that would include Oak, Salmon, Eagle, and Bear.
We must therefore keep in mind that we ourselves are the ducks in question when we consider Maslow’s invitation to “ask the ducks”. What we think of as ourselves, the ego, has to learn to ask the rest of the ecology, to ask the birds and butterflies of the soul, “What do you know?” Imagine doing that with yourself, sitting quietly and asking, “What knowing is there, here, that this consciousness, this ego does not yet understand?” And we would have to sense this, practice it and realize it, not merely as something “internal,” but as liberation into larger ecologies. We would have to inquire with great care, attention, reverence, and humility into such a relationship with life—and with ourselves and all our relations—ducks and dolphins and mountains and rivers included. Some of the issues involved come out in Maslow’s suggestion that we have a preliminary model for relating to people in the way he suggests above:

In point of fact. we already have such a model in the good psychotherapist. This is about the way he functions. His conscious effort is not to impose his will upon the patient, but rather to help the patient—inarticulate, unconscious, semiconscious—to discover what is inside him, the patient. The psychotherapist helps him to discover what he himself wants what is good for him. the patient, rather than what is good for the therapist. This is the opposite of controlling, propagandizing, molding, teaching in the old sense. (14-15)

The psychology of transcendence, the soul study of transcendence, the spiritual approach to life and love demands this revolution, a revolution in which we all become philosophers, which means therapists, attendants of the soul, most especially, we might say, the Soul of the World, in its nonduality with our own soul. We are here to care and attend, not to impose our will. Our life is, in some important sense, not “about” us. “My life” is not “about” “me,” and “your life” is not “about” “you”. That would narrow us so very much. Somehow, our life is about the World, about the Sacred, about the Mystery. Even more: Your life, my life, all life is the very presencing of the mystery. This may help us to clarify the meaning of spirituality: Intimate participation, mystical participation in what transcends the ego (a pleonasm, but maybe it’s necessary).
This participation is care, caring, careful. It means attending. Spirituality means attending to life.

We need to get at a subtle interwovenness of suffering here, and some of it will only become clear after more practice. Nevertheless, we can say now that we want to inquire into our being domesticated, manipulated, controlled, swindled, hooked (in the sense of addiction, and also in the sense of shenpa, the Tibetan Buddhist notion that relates to the way the energy of ignorance captures us), and how that pulls us out of healing, health, wholeness, holiness, and the spiritual inspiration of the soul.

Again, we can return to the model Maslow offers: A psychotherapist, which means one who attends the soul, cares for the soul. In a spiritual path, a spiritual practice, we serve and attend. Our patient, right now, is the World; and our patient is also our own Soul. Seeing the interwovenness of these may prove challenging. James Hillman offers some helpful preliminary suggestions, which bear on our general contemplations on thinking and knowing. If our context of knowing is a world we have known as and by means of suffering, bondage, control, and degradation, what do we think this implies about our way of knowing? What does it say about what we need to do in order to practice-and-realize a better way of knowing? What does our practice of LoveWisdom tell us when we throw out everything we think we know and listen—with the most painful humility?

My practice tells me I can no longer distinguish clearly between neurosis of self and neurosis of world, psychopathology of self and psychopathology of world. Moreover, it tells me that to place neurosis and psychopathology solely in personal reality is a delusional repression of what is actually, realistically, being experienced. This further implies that my theories of neurosis and categories of
psychopathology must be radically extended if they are not to foster the very pathologies my job is to ameliorate.

Not so long ago the patient’s complaint was inside the patient. A psychological problem was considered to be intrasubjective; therapy consisted in readjusting inner psychodynamics. Complexes, functions, structures, memories, emotions— the interior person needed realigning, releasing, developing. Then, more recently, owing to group and family therapies, the patient’s complaint was located in the patient’s social relations. A psychological problem was considered to be intersubjective; therapy consisted in readjusting interpersonal psychodynamics within relationships, between partners, among members of families. In both modes psychic reality was confined to the subjective. In both modes the world remained external, material, and dead, merely a backdrop in and around which subjectivity appeared. The world was therefore not the province of therapeutic focus. Therapists who did focus there were of a lower, more superficial order: social workers, counselors, advisors. The deep work was inside the person’s subjectivity.

Of course, social psychiatry, whether behaviorist Marxist, or more broadly conceived, strongly emphasizes external realities and locates the origins of psychopathology in objective determinants. The “out there” largely determines the “in here,” according to this view. This was especially the American dream, an immigrant’s dream: change the world and you change the subject. However, these societal determinants remain external conditions, economic, cultural, or social; they are not themselves psychic or subjective. The external may cause suffering, but it does not itself suffer. For all its concern with the outer world, social psychiatry too works within the idea of the external world passed to us by Aquinas, Descartes, Locke, and Kant.

Precisely this external, nonsubjective view of the world now needs to be reworked.

Before we can proceed with it, we have first to recollect the idea of reality that generally operates throughout depth psychology. Psychological dictionaries and schools of all orientations agree that reality is of two kinds. First, the word means the totality of existing material objects or the sum of conditions of the external world. Reality is public, objective, social, and usually physical. Second, there is a psychic reality, not extended in space, the realm of private experience that is interior, wishful, imaginative. Having divided psychic reality from hard or external reality, psychology elaborates various theories to connect the two orders together, since the division is worrisome indeed. It means that psychic reality is conceived to be neither public, objective, nor physical, while external reality, the sum of existing material objects and conditions, is conceived to be utterly devoid of soul. As the soul is without world, so the world is without soul.

Therefore, when something goes wrong in a life, depth psychology still looks to intra- and intersubjectivity for the cause and the therapy. The public, objective, physical world of things—buildings and bureaucratic forms, mattresses and road signs, milk cartons and buses—is by definition excluded from psychological etiology and therapy. Things lie outside the soul.
Psychotherapy has been working successfully within its province of psychic reality conceived as subjectivity, but it has not revisioned the notion of subjectivity itself. And now, even its success there comes in question as the patients’ complaints bespeak problems that are no longer merely subjective in the former sense. For all the while that psychotherapy has succeeded in raising the consciousness of human subjectivity, the world in which all subjectivities are set has fallen apart. Breakdown is in a new place—Vietnam and Watergate, bank scandals with government collusion, pollution and street crime, the loss of literacy and the growth of junk, deceit, and show. We now encounter pathology in the psyche of politics and medicine, in language and design, in the food we eat. Sickness is now “out there.”

The contemporary use of the word “breakdown” shows what I mean. Nuclear power plants like Three Mile Island and Chernobyl provide vivid examples of possibly incurable, chronic breakdowns. The traffic system, the school systems, the courts and criminal justice system, giant industries, municipal governments, finance and banking—all undergo crises, suffer breakdowns, or must be shored up against the threat of collapse. The terms “collapse,” “functional disorder,” “stagnation,” “lowered productivity” “depression,” and “breakdown” are equally valid for human persons and for objective public systems and the things within the systems. Breakdown extends to every component of civic life because civic life is now a constructed life: we no longer live in a biological world where decay, fermentation, metamorphosis, catabolism are equivalents for the dysfunction of constructed things. Robert Sardello, my colleague and friend in Dallas, writes:

The individual presented himself in the therapy room of the nineteenth century, and during the twentieth the patient suffering breakdown is the world itself... The new symptoms are fragmentation, specialization, expertise, depression, inflation, loss of energy, jargoneze, and violence. Our buildings are anorexic, our business paranoid, our technology manic.

Wherever the language of psychopathology occurs (crisis, breakdown, collapse), the psyche is speaking of itself in pathologized terms, attesting to itself as subject of the pathos. As breakdown appears in all these symptoms of Sardello’s list, so then does psyche or psychic reality. The world, because of its breakdown, is entering a new moment of consciousness: by drawing attention to itself by means of its symptoms, it is becoming aware of itself as a psychic reality. The world is now the subject of immense suffering, exhibiting acute and crass symptoms by means of which it defends itself against collapse. So it becomes the task of psychotherapy and its practitioners to take up that line initiated first by Freud: the examination of culture with a pathological eye. At the conclusion to Civilization and Its Discontents Freud wrote:

. . . there is one question I can hardly evade. If the development of civilization has such . . . similarity to the development of the
individual... may we not be justified in reaching the diagnosis that . . some epochs of civilizations—possibly the whole of mankind have become neurotic? An analytic dissection of such neuroses might lead to therapeutic recommendations that could lay claim to great practical interest.

Let us carry Freud’s notion of neurosis and the therapeutic analysis of it beyond the community of individuals to the communal environment.

This examination, as well as the therapeutic eros that draws the practitioner into the world as patient, has been vitiated at the very start by tracing dysfunction in the world back to individual subjectivity. Depth psychology has argued that architecture, politics, or medicine cannot change until architects, politicians, and doctors go into analysis. Depth psychology has insisted that the pathology of the world out there results simply from the pathology of the world in here. The world’s disorders are man-made, enactments and projections of human subjectivity.

Is this view not depth psychology’s denial of things as they are so as to maintain its view of the world? Cannot psychology itself be unconscious of its own ego-defenses? If depth psychology is wrong on this count, then another of its defenses also needs reversing. Not only my pathology is projected onto the world; the world is inundating me with its unalleviated suffering. After one hundred years of the solitude of psychoanalysis, I am more conscious of what I project outward than what is projected onto me by the unconsciousness of the world.

(Hillman 1998: 62-5)

Hillman elaborates some of these ideas in his conversation with Michael Ventura. The conversation seems particularly apt for our inquiry since we have tried to ask why—after 2500 years of philosophizing in the west—why have things gotten worse in so many crucial ways? Many of those most responsible for the collapse of the conditions of life had exposure to philosophy in some of the finest institutions of higher education in the most “advanced” societies in the world. How did we get ourselves into such a mess? Hillman brings out the same problem Dewey and Bentley tried to bring out: We keep hiding behind our own skin, and we have practiced dualities that arise from a very basic epistemological mistake, the error of a localized, dualistic epistemology. Hillman gets at the fact that this has to do with a whole way of life, and cannot be fixed by merely “going inside,” the way philosophers do or the way most people in therapy do.
Hillman: We’ve had a hundred years of analysis, and people are getting more and more sensitive, and the world is getting worse and worse. Maybe it’s time to look at that. We still locate the psyche inside the skin. You go inside to locate the psyche, you examine your feelings and your dreams, they belong to you. Or it’s interrelations, interpsyche, between your psyche and mine. That’s been extended a little bit into family systems and office groups — but the psyche, the soul, is still only within and between people. We’re working on our relationships constantly, and our feelings and reflections, but look what’s left out of that.

Hillman makes a wide gesture that includes the oil tanker on the horizon, the gang graffiti on a park sign, and the fat homeless woman with swollen ankles and cracked skin asleep on the grass about fifteen yards away.

What’s left out is a deteriorating world.
So why hasn’t therapy noticed that? Because psychotherapy is only working on that “inside” soul. By removing the soul from the world and not recognizing that the soul is also in the world, psychotherapy can’t do its job anymore. The buildings are sick, the institutions are sick, the banking system’s sick, the schools, the streets — the sickness is out there.

You know, the soul is always being rediscovered through pathology. In the nineteenth century people didn’t talk about psyche, until Freud came along and discovered psychopathology. Now we’re beginning to say, “The furniture has stuff in it that’s poisoning us, the microwave gives off dangerous rays.” The world has become toxic.

Both men, watching the sun flash on the sea, seem to be thinking the same thing.

Michael Ventura: That sea out there is diseased. We can’t eat the fish.
Hillman: The world has become full of symptoms. Isn’t that the beginning of recognizing what used to be called animism? The world’s alive—my god! It’s having effects on us. “I’ve got to get rid of those fluorocarbon cans.” “I’ve got to get rid of the furniture because underneath it’s formaldehyde.” “I’ve got to watch out for this and that and that.” So there’s pathology in the world, and through that we’re beginning to treat the world with more respect.

Ventura: As though having denied the spirit in things, the spirit—offended—comes back as a threat. Having denied the soul in things, having said to things, with Descartes, “You don’t have souls,” things have turned around and said, “Just you watch what kind of a soul I have, muthafucka.”

Hillman: “Just watch what I can do, man! You’re gonna have that ugly lamp in your room, that lamp is going to make you suffer every single day you look at it. It’s going to produce fluorescent light, and it’s going to drive you slowly crazy sitting in your office. And then you’re going to see a psychotherapist, and you’re going to try to work it out in your relationships, but you don’t know I’m really the one that’s got you. It’s that fluorescent tube over your head all day long, coming
right down on your skull like a KGB man putting a light on you, straight down on you—shadowless, ruthless, cruel.”

**Ventura:** And yet we sense this in all we do and say now, all of us, but we’re caught in a double bind: on the one hand this is “progress,” a value that’s been ingrained in us—and if you think it’s not ingrained in you, take a drive down to Mexico and see if even poor Americans would want to live the way most of those people have to live (the life of the American poor seems rich to them, that’s why they keep coming); but on the other hand, we know that the things of our lives are increasingly harmful, but we haven’t got Idea One about what to do. Our sense of politics has atrophied into the sort of nonsense that goes on in presidential elections. (Hillman and Ventura: 4-5)

This sense of animism . . . Hillman takes it very seriously, and he relates it to the anima mundi, the World Soul:

> In place of the familiar notion of psychic reality based on a system of private experiencing subjects and dead public objects, I want to advance a view prevalent in many cultures (called primitive and animistic by Western cultural anthropologists), which also returned for a short while in ours at its glory through Florence and Marsilio Ficino. I am referring to the world soul of Platonism, which means nothing less than the world ensouled.

Let us imagine the *anima mundi* neither above the world encircling it as a divine and remote emanation of spirit, a world of powers, archetypes, and principles transcendent to things, nor within the material world as its unifying panpsychic life principle. Rather let us imagine the *amma mundi* as that particular soul spark, that seminal image, which offers itself through each thing in its visible form. Then *amma mundi* indicates the animated possibilities presented by each event as it is, its sensuous presentation as a face bespeaking its interior image—in short, its availability to imagination, its presence as a *psychic* reality. Not only animals and plants ensouled as in the Romantic vision, but soul given with each thing, God-given things of nature and manmade things of the street.

The world comes with shapes, colors, atmospheres, textures - a display of self-presenting forms. All things show faces, the world not only a coded signature to be read for meaning but a physiognomy to be faced. As expressive forms, things speak; they show the shape they are in. They announce themselves, bear witness to their presence: “Look, here we are.” They regard us beyond how we may regard them, our perspectives, what intend with them, and how we dispose of them. This imaginative claim on attention bespeaks a world ensouled. More our imaginative recognition, the childlike act of imagining the world, animates the world and returns it to soul.

Then we realize that what psychology has had to call “projection” is simply animation, as this thing or that spontaneously comes alive, arrests our attention, draws us to it. This sudden illumination of the thing does not, depend on its formal, aesthetic proportion that makes it “beautiful”; it depends rather upon the movements of the *anima mundi* animating her images and affecting our
imagination. The soul of the thing corresponds or coalesces with ours. This insight that psychic reality appears in the expressive form or physiognomic quality of images allows psychology to escape from its entrapment in “experience.” Ficino releases psychology from the self-enclosures of Augustine, Descartes, and Kant, and their successors, often Freud and sometimes Jung. For centuries we have identified interiority with reflexive experience. Of course, things are dead, said the old psychology, because they do not experience (feelings, memories, intentions). They may be animated by our projections, but to imagine their projecting upon us and each other their ideas and demands, to regard them as storing memories or presenting their feeling characters in their sensate qualities—this is magical thinking. Because things do not experience, they have no subjectivity, no interiority, no depth. Depth psychology could go only to the intra- and inter-in search of the interiority of soul.

Not only does this view kill things by viewing them as dead; it imprisons us in that tight little cell of ego. When psychic reality is equated with experience, then ego becomes necessary to psychological logic. We have to invent an interior witness, an experiencer at the center of subjectivity—and we cannot imagine otherwise.

With things returned again to soul, their psychic reality given with the anima mundi, then their interiority and depth—and depth psychology too—depend not on their experiencing themselves or on their self-motivation but upon self-witness of another sort. An object bears witness to itself in the image it offers, and its depth lies in the complexities of this image. Its intentionality is substantive, given with its psychic reality, claiming but not requiring our witness. Each particular event, including individual humans with our invisible thoughts, feelings, and intentions, reveals a soul in its imaginative display. Our human subjectivity too appears in our display. Subjectivity here is freed from literalization in reflexive experience and its fictive subject, the ego. Instead, each object is a subject, and its self-reflection is its self-display, its radiance. Interiority, subjectivity, psychic depth—all out there, and so, too, psychopathology. (Hillman: 67-8)

An epistemology of the sacred is an epistemology of the World Soul, an epistemology of the World Ensouled. It would not surprise anyone to suggest such an orientation will feel exceedingly strange in the contemporary academy. We are back to, “Stand up straight!” Worse yet, the imperative here is, “Experience the sacredness of the World!” And yet, somehow, it seems to me at least (and maybe the reader senses it too), our inquiry suggests we have to do this. Every “going inward” will only enact the Cartesian, conquest style of consciousness, if we don’t dispel that form of consciousness by means of practice. And the dispelment of, the
disenchantment from that consciousness is itself a re-enchantment with the World, and an entrance into a kind of mystical participation. We would exchange mechanism for Magic—not the “magical thinking” of some sort of “primitive” worldview (or, the much less wise magical thinking of our techno-fantasy life), but the skillful and realistic Magic proper to the World. We confront inconceivability here. We of course want all of this explained, but that is like trying to talk Sleeping Beauty into waking up. She remains asleep, and in her sleep she cannot understand what we say. Waking up is what she needs.

Hillman gets at this difficulty of re-enacting conquest consciousness every time we try to “reflect” on our problems, and it’s interesting how Eros makes an appearance here, in light of Sorensen’s suggestion that Eros gets cut off or ontogenetically crippled in the development of conquest consciousness:

Hillman: Put this in italics so that nobody can just pass over it: This is not to deny that you do need to go inside—but we have to see what we’re doing when we do that. By going inside we’re maintaining the Cartesian view that the world out there is dead matter and the world inside is living.

Ventura: A therapist told me that my grief at seeing a homeless man my age was really a feeling of sorrow for myself.

Hillman: And dealing with it means going home and working on it in reflection. That’s what dealing with it has come to mean. And by that time you’ve walked past the homeless man in the street.

Ventura: It’s also, in part, a way to cut off what you would call Eros, the part of my heart that seeks to touch others. Theoretically this is something therapy tries to liberate, but here’s a person on the street that I’m feeling for and I’m supposed to deal with that feeling as though it has nothing to do with another person.

Hillman: Could the thing that we all believe in most—that psychology is the one good thing left in a hypocritical world—be not true? Psychology, working with yourself, could that be part of the disease, not part of the cure? I think therapy has made a philosophical mistake, which is that cognition precedes conation—that knowing precedes doing or action. I don’t think that’s the case. I think reflection has always been after the event. (12)
It is no small thing that Hillman arrives at Dewey’s insight, by means of contemplating the way psychology has functioned in practice, as a therapy for the soul. Recall Dewey’s words:

Only when a man can already perform an act of standing straight does he know what it is like to have a right posture and only then can he summon the idea required for proper execution. The act must come before the thought, and a habit before an ability to evoke the thought at will. Ordinary psychology reverses the actual state of affairs.

This seems a wondrous resonance in insight. And it says something about us that in practice we try to think first as part of controlling ourselves and the environment in order to realize our agendas. Our very style of thinking thus enacts the duality between organism and environment. Each thought, each instance of speaking, each activity in which we engage reinforces a style of consciousness, a habit of conscious purposes. This makes everything an ecological problem, including our intimate relationships:

**Hillman:** Descartes makes our love for the world into a perversion: it’s necrophilia because the world is just a dead body.

**Ventura:** To love the world, the planet, is necrophilia—because to the Cartesian and scientific way of thinking anything not human is dead. This helps explain the real disgust some people on the far right have for ecologists and ecological issues—they’re disgusted by our love of the planet because unconsciously they feel it’s necrophilia!

**Hillman:** And what about this? Romantic love keeps the world dead. It insists, “Only you, only you, only you—you are my heart’s desire. Forsaking all others.” And here the “others” doesn’t mean just other people, it means all others. No significant others can be had anywhere. Your car is out.

**Ventura:** If romantic love keeps the world dead, then romantic love is an ecology problem?

**Hillman:** Right. It never asks, “What are the people saying?”—and by “the people” I don’t mean just the tribe, I mean the banana tree and your Chevy and the sea. They will get jealous, and you know you can die from jealousy. Jealousy plots revenge. The world is taking revenge. Or maybe the world is dying from jealousy, jealous that humans with their huge heart capacity for love and their genital juices only give this to each other. How insanely selfish.

**Ventura:** And what about this? Technological man treats the earth kind of like a wife beater or rapist treats women: his Eros is so twisted that the only physical relationship he can have with the planet is violence. That would go a long way toward explaining his insistence on violating the planet. But you were about to say—
Hillman: If romantic love is an ecology problem, it’s also a political problem. It’s antisocial. It doesn’t let my love into the community.
Ventura: Are we now promoting free love, like the communes of the sixties or the old free sects and religions?
Hillman: No, I’m not setting out rules for a new practice. I’m not saying, “Let’s construct a new society based on loving old cars and banana trees. Follow your fetish!”
Ventura: I don’t know—in the context of all this, “Follow your fetish” might not be the worst thing in the world to say.
Hillman: I’m still being a psychologist, I’m still saying, “Look at your personal love feelings, your romantic hang-up, your obsessive desire, not as something particularly wrong with you—or as something right with you either that shows what a powerful child of Eros you are—but look at it as a function of a Cartesian society. There will never be a solution to your pangs by just setting up a commune or preaching free love. The only solution can come when the world is reanimated, when we recognize how alive everything is, and how desirable.” Maybe that’s what consumerism and advertising are really all about, unconsciously, compulsively: a way to rekindle our desire for the world. (183-4)

To say our relationships are ecological means that when we go on dates, for instance, we use up resources, in an act of taking without the traditional gifting in mutuality that characterizes healthy Nature-Culture. Consider the enormous ecological impact of romances and weddings. Let me preface this by saying I feel like a terribly romantic person, and I would like to be able to express the passion of romance without degrading ecologies. Why is it so hard for us to co-discover-create an elegant yet simple, graceful, passionate way of relating to each other? What we do now seems gratuitous, as if we have to consume in excess to convince ourselves that love is happening. Since nothing happens in the dominant culture, we have to put on a great show, a great distraction, to mimic the feeling of real happening. We cannot simply be with each other, and we have no time for a community to truly come together and make a celebration. So we industrialize it, and we manufacture our romance. People will spend tens of thousands of dollars on a wedding, and have dozens or even hundreds of guests fly thousands of miles to attend. We should perhaps feel incredible shame for consuming the scale of resources we do in the name of “love”.
An altogether thinking arises as we pursue the conscious purpose, the ego-centric purpose of “being together”. We are already in the activity, lived by it, lived by archetypes that we pretend to understand, however we may reflect on it after the fact with rational and rationalizing notions. Our conquest consciousness arrives in our relationships before we do, and all we can manage in many cases is rationalization. The ecological dimension of romance is not merely a matter of extraction, consumption, and degradation in the name of “love,” but the practice-realization of a way of knowing and living, a pattern of thinking, a style of awareness that involves mindlessness—it is a way of knowing ourselves, our beloved, and our world, a way not rooted in wisdom, love, and beauty, but always trying to grasp after them. In an increasingly desperate attempt to feel good, to restore wholeness, we go further and further into the pattern of insanity, such that if we aren’t consuming more resources than we need to, something feels off, and we think we need to “go out” more, “go on vacation together,” and so on—anything but revolt against the system that keeps us tired, fragmented, lonely in the midst of others, too distracted to be truly together except in fleeting moments. This seems to have a positive feedback loop in it: The more we degrade ecologies, the more we need to degrade ecologies.

And we must keep in mind that this holds for what we call science too. In the name of “knowledge” or “love of knowledge” or even “love of wisdom” we degrade ecologies. Our science is a function of a way of life, a style of consciousness. It may seem to arrive at insights (perhaps in spite of itself), just as we may arrive at seeming happiness (often in spite of ourselves) when we fall in love. But, since all of this activity takes place “in the Matrix,” so to speak, in the cave of conquest consciousness, or however we want to designate our delusion,
then everything we see becomes part of the practice-realization of delusion, with degrading effects on ecologies that manifest as suffering in countless sentient beings. Our bad epistemology carries a tremendous moral burden.

How could we change things? This question comes up again and again, because only by means of a new way of knowing can we get anywhere. The demand for “answers” comes altogether with the disease, with the pattern of insanity. It is an insane demand.

Hillman gets at the need to shift our way of life:

**Hillman**: Part of the treatment of these difficulties is to look at a person’s schedule, his notebook, her calendar. Because your schedule is one of your biggest defenses.

**Ventura**: Treat my schedule?

**Hillman**: Treat your schedule. And I’ll tell you, I have had more resistance in trying to treat people’s schedules and change their schedules than you can ever imagine.

**Ventura**: You’d get a shitload of resistance out of me.

**Hillman**: Do you ever ask your soul questions when you make your schedule?

**Ventura**: [Groans.] My soul just went, *He fucking-a doesn’t!*

**Hillman**: The job then becomes how the soul finds accommodations within your day. Regarding dreams, regarding persons, regarding time off. Because the manic defense against depression is to keep extremely busy — and to be very irritated when interrupted. That’s part of the sign of the manic condition.

**Ventura**: Me and many of the people I know are often too busy to be anything but busy. Yes, it’s manic, and we sort of know that. You’re saying it’s a defense against depression. If we go back to what we were talking about before and assume that the source of our depression is in the present rather than twenty or thirty years ago, then the question is: What chronic depression are we — as individuals, as a city, as a culture — trying to avoid by being so chronically manic?

**Hillman**: The depression we’re all trying to avoid could very well be a prolonged chronic reaction to what we’ve been doing to the world, a mourning and grieving for what we’re doing to nature and to cities and to whole peoples — the destruction of a lot of our world. We may be depressed partly because this is the soul’s reaction to the mourning and grieving that we’re not consciously doing. The grief over neighborhoods destroyed where I grew up, the loss of agricultural
land that I knew as a kid... all those things that are lost and gone. Because that’s what depression feels like.

We paint our national history rosy and white and paint our personal history gray. We’re so willing to admit that we’re trapped in our personal history, but we never hear that said of our national history...

I think we’ve also lost shame. We talk about our parents’ having shamed us when we were little, but we’ve lost our shame in relation to the world and to the oppressed, the shame of being wrong, of messing up the world. We’ve mutated this shame into personal guilt. Perhaps the way to begin the revolution is to stand up for your depression. (44-5)

In other words, we would have to listen—to that wisdom “within” us, the wisdom already in the World. We would have to feel. It’s not easy, because what we must hear may seem strange—perhaps even irrational at first. And, of course, we would have to face the shame and humiliation we might be repressing or avoiding—the melancholia and mourning that our busyness keeps us from touching.

We need to return to these considerations, but first, in light of them, let us return to Jung’s discussion of alchemy, for among the strange things we may want to seriously consider is this one: We may yet need to become alchemists—professional philosophers and scientists most of all—but maybe the philosopher/scientist in everyone of us needs to take inspiration from those Servants of Sophia who sought the mysterious Philosopher’s Stone and its miraculous powers of healing. And we must avoid their error. We must not think some miraculous piece of technology will save us, when the real work is spiritual. We stand in the same relation to ourselves and our world that the alchemists did, and our delusion of “real gold” from the lead of our ignorance is the delusion of technology. Science today seeks to “produce” technology the way alchemy sought to “produce” gold. Can we face the possibility that the insanity has become even worse in our case? Can we inspire ourselves to turn toward the care of the soul that Socrates, the original Servant of Sophia in the west, implored us to give ourselves to?
The arcanum of alchemy is one of these archetypal ideas that fills a gap in the Christian view of the world, namely, the un-bridged gulf between the opposites, in particular between good and evil. Only logic knows a tertium non datur; nature consists entirely of such “thirds,” since she is represented by effects which resolve an opposition—just as a waterfall mediates between “above” and “below.” The alchemists sought for that effect which would heal not only the disharmonies of the physical world but the inner psychic conflict as well, the “affliction of the soul”; and they called this effect the Lapis Philosophorum [Philosopher’s Stone]. In order to obtain it, they had to loosen the age-old attachment of the soul to the body and thus make conscious the conflict between the purely natural and the spiritual man. In so doing they rediscovered the old truth that every operation of this kind is a figurative death—which explains the violent aversion everybody feels when he has to see through his projections and recognize the nature of his anima. It requires indeed an unusual degree of self-abnegation to question the fictitious picture of one’s own personality. This, nevertheless, is the requirement of any psychotherapy that goes at all deep, and one realizes how oversimplified its procedures are only when the analyst has to try out his own medicine on himself. One can, as experience has often shown, relieve oneself of the difficult act of self-knowledge by shutting out the moral criterion with so-called scientific objectivity or unvarnished cynicism. But this simply means buying a certain amount of insight at the cost of artificially repressing an ethical value. The result of this deception is that the insight is robbed of its efficacy, since the moral reaction is missing. Thus the foundations for a neurotic dissociation are laid, and this in no way corresponds to the psychotherapist’s intention. The goal of the procedure is the unio mentalis, the attainment of full knowledge of the heights and depths of one’s own character.

If the demand for self-knowledge is willed by fate and is refused, this negative attitude may end in real death. The demand would not have come to this person had he still been able to strike out on some promising by-path. But he is caught in a blind alley from which only self-knowledge can extricate him. If he refuses this then no other way is open to him. Usually he is not conscious of his situation, either, and the more unconscious he is the more he is at the mercy of unforeseen dangers: he cannot get out of the way of a car quickly enough, in climbing a mountain he misses his foothold somewhere, out skiing he thinks he can just negotiate a tricky slope, and in an illness he suddenly loses the courage to live. The unconscious has a thousand ways of snuffing out a meaningless existence with surprising swiftness. The connection of the unio mentalis with the death-motif is therefore obvious, even when death consists only in the cessation of spiritual progress.

The alchemists rightly regarded “mental union in the overcoming of the body” as only the first stage of conjunction or individuation, in the same way that Khunrath understood Christ as the “Saviour of the Microcosm” but not of the Macrocosm, whose saviour was the lapis. In general, the alchemists strove for a total union of opposites in symbolic form, and this they regarded as the indispensable condition for the healing of all ills. Hence they sought to find ways and means to produce that substance in which all opposites were united. It had to
be material as well as spiritual, living as well as inert, masculine as well as feminine, old as well as young, and—presumably—morally neutral. It had to be created by man, and at the same time, since it was an “increatum,” by God himself, the *Deus terrestris*.

The second step on the way to the production of this substance was the reunion of the spirit with the body. For this procedure there were many symbols. One of the most important was the chymical marriage, which took place in the retort. The older alchemists were still so unconscious of the psychological implications of the opus that they understood their own symbols as mere allegories or—semiotically—as secret names for chemical combinations, thus stripping mythology, of which they made such copious use, of its true meaning and using only its terminology. Later this was to change, and already in the fourteenth century it began to dawn on them that the lapis was more than a chemical compound. This realization expressed itself mainly in the Christ-parallel. Dorn [Gerhard Dorn, Belgian philosopher of the 16th century—n.k.] was probably the first to recognize the psychological implications for what they were, so far as this was intellectually possible for a man of that age. Proof of this is his demand that the pupil must have a good physical and, more particularly, a good moral constitution. A religious attitude was essential. For in the individual was hidden that “substance of celestial nature known to very few,” the “incorrupt medicament” which “can be freed from its fetters, not by its contrary but by its like.” The “spagyric medicine” [alchemical medicine] whereby it is freed must be “conformable to this substance.” The medicine “prepares” the body so that the separation can be undertaken. For, when the body is “prepared,” it can be separated more easily from “the other parts.”

Like all alchemists, Dorn naturally did not reveal what the spagyric medicine was. One can only suppose that it was thought of as physical, more or less. At the same time he says that a certain asceticism is desirable, and this may be a reference to the moral nature of the mysterious panacea. At any rate he hastens to add that the “assiduous reader” will thenceforth advance from the meditative philosophy to the spagyric and thence to the true and perfect wisdom. It sounds as if the assiduous reader had been engaged at the outset in reading and meditating, and as if the medicine and the preparation of the body consisted precisely in that. Just as for Paracelsus the right “theōria” was part of the panacea, so for the alchemists was the symbol, which expresses the unconscious projections. Indeed, it is these that make the substance magically effective, and for this reason they cannot be separated from the alchemical procedure whose integral components they are.

The second stage of conjunction, the re-uniting of the *unio mentalis* with the body, is particularly important, as only from here can the complete conjunction be attained—union with the * unus mundus*. The reuniting of the spiritual position with the body obviously means that the insights gained should be made real. An insight might just as well remain in abeyance if it is simply not used. The second stage of conjunction therefore consists in making a reality of the man who has acquired some knowledge of his paradoxical wholeness.
The great difficulty here, however, is that no one knows how the paradoxical wholeness of man can ever be realized. That is the crux of individuation, though it becomes a problem only when the loophole of “scientific” or other kinds of cynicism is not used. Because the realization of the wholeness that has been made conscious is an apparently insoluble task and faces the psychologist with questions which he can answer only with hesitation and uncertainty, it is of the greatest interest to see how the more unencumbered symbolical thinking of a medieval “philosopher” tackled this problem. The texts that have come down to us do not encourage the supposition that Dorn was conscious of the full range of his undertaking. Although in general he had a clear grasp of the role the adept played in the alchemical process, the problem did not present itself to him in all its acuteness, because only a part of it was enacted in the moral and psychological sphere, while for the rest it was hypostatized in the form of certain magical properties of the living body, or as a magical substance hidden within it. This projection spread over the problem a kind of mist which obscured its sharp edges. The alchemists still believed that metaphysical assertions could be proved (even today we have still not entirely freed ourselves from this somewhat childish assumption), and they could therefore entrench themselves behind seemingly secure positions in the Beyond, which they were confident would not be shaken by any doubts. In this way they were able to procure for themselves considerable alleviations. One has only to think what it means if in the misery and incertitude of a moral or philosophical dilemma one has a *quinta essentia*, a lapis or a panacea so to say in one’s pocket! We can understand this *deus ex machina* the more easily when we remember with what passion people today believe that psychological complications can be made magically to disappear by means of hormones, narcotics, insulin shocks, and convulsion therapy. The alchemists were as little able to perceive the symbolical nature of their ideas of the arcanum as we to recognize that the belief in hormones and shocks is a symbol. We would indignantly dismiss such an interpretation as a nonsensical suggestion. (CW14: para. 674-80)

By the end of the passage, Jung seems to miss something, for all true traditions of LoveWisdom tell us very precisely that, in the midst of our most painful poverty, we have a jewel of incomparable value sewn into our shirt, placed there by a loving Sophia. Jung surely knows this, but he forgets to note the problem of spiritual materialism: Knowing there is nothing for us to “do,” we remain in denial regarding right or skillful effort, and we long for junk-ease, easy-medicine, medication in place of healing.
We can hardly process the distance that separates us from the alchemists, and most philosophers today do not think of them as part of a renaissance that took philosophy as a way of life for its icon, rather than the kind of philosophy that became the archetype for the so-called age of enlightenment and the science we have today. The union of opposites they sought (or its spiritual equivalent) does not even appear on the menu in most philosophy courses (perhaps it appears in none), and it seems that our culture has only gone further into darkness since the age of enlightenment began. Consider Gieser’s discussion of Pauli’s sentiments regarding the western relationship to matter:

For such a symmetrical union of opposites to be achievable, according to Jung, an elevation of the feminine principle was required – and on this Pauli could only agree.

However I am, like Jung, of the opinion that the production of balance between the spirit and physical matter necessitates an elevation of the feminine principle or symbol and that this at the same time has to correct the one-sidedness of a purely patriarchal age. This seems to be the mood of our time (of which it may perhaps also be said that it has no chivalry).

Insofar as science is a product of masculine consciousness, the ‘eternal feminine’ in terms of natural philosophy means the consciousness-transcending unity beyond the opposing pair. Classical science from Galileo-Kepler-Newton right down to Einstein stands on the other hand for the trinitarian-patriarchal view. Only modern physics has again recognized that in this world actual phenomena of necessity form and remain complementary opposing pairs and that they at the same time allow the observer freedom. It has not yet been officially admitted that the psychic state of an involved observer may also have an influence on the natural process.

I should like to attempt here to make a comparison with the ancient Chinese way of thinking (communicated to me by R. Wilhelm), in order to express what I cannot yet grasp in exact concepts: the two signs of the I Ching, Yang (male) and Yin (female), originally signify a mountain in the sun (south side) and a mountain in the shade (north side). We must learn to realize in our occidental manner and with the aid of our mathematics (which the ancient Chinese did not know) that there is only one X (one ‘mountain’, one ‘content’, one ‘real’, one ‘essence’, or whatever
one may call the element of a still unknown and invisible reality) that according to the ‘illumination’ for us mortals i.e. according to how it appears in our human consciousness (this divides and distinguishes), appears either spiritual or material.

On behalf of his profession Pauli felt guilt towards the great mother, mater, mother earth. She demands rehabilitation. He writes: “Suddenly I had a remarkable feeling experience. The ›observation‹ of microphysics appeared to me to be a kind of black mass and I felt remorse. Remorse with regard to matter, which appeared to me to be a maltreated living thing. (Biological implication.) – The practice of this black ›mass of measuring‹ in the external world transforms only its condition, not that of the observer.” Pauli saw here the alchemical position as the ideal and symmetrical one; the transmutation of matter is a process which must include the transformation of man – if he remains outside and only uses matter the whole thing will turn into a black mass. Western man has created a razor-sharp demarcation between himself and matter. Matter is treated as an inanimate object which lies at his disposal for exploitation. The attitude of the alchemist is more humble. He knows that every manipulation of matter reflects and has repercussions on his own condition. The transformation of matter stands in direct relation to his own transformation and redemption. (Gieser: 323-4)

Aren’t things even worse than this, in that we treat living beings as disposable, as simply available for exploitation? We do this not only through industrialized agriculture and Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations, but in every aspect of the culture. Consider the fights over something as stupid as getting cruise ships to slow down enough so that wildlife can get out of their way. A certain number of whales will be murdered by humans every year simply because we have to keep our leisure agendas. Why do we even have cruise ships? Think of the wonder of this symptom: To go out in the ocean, eat and drink ourselves to extremes, and fill the ocean with our waste. It’s astonishing. So many aspects of the dominant culture come to using the world as meaningless and exploitable—everything submitted to our agendas. Even the above discussion of “the transformation of matter” runs aground, because we might think we can still do whatever we want, but snap our fingers in a gesture of magical thinking and say, “This affects us too.” On the contrary, it demands a revolution in science and technology, a transformation in our very
understanding of the “transformation of matter”. We must learn from the alchemists that our primary function is spiritual, not “scientific” in the sense we now have of “science”.

We should note that the alchemists too may have felt guilt at how they treated Nature, how they treated Sophia. They faced the same problems of spiritual materialism we all face, the very ones we could say have become the dominant ideology of our time. We may find this aptly expressed in an old alchemical illustration that shows Sophia in a tree, with an alchemist before her, one who seems to have come out of his closed up study.

However the original artist may have intended the image, we can read it as a warning to the philosopher: While the philosopher locks themselves up in a room with the books of abstract philosophy and the toys of science, Sophia awaits in Nature, in the Tree of Life, and She will begin to feel scorned—something we provoke at our peril, not Hers. As Dewey suggests, “The so-called separation of theory and practice means in fact the separation of two kinds of practice, one taking place in the outdoor world, the other in the study” (1922: 71). But such a duality will not hold, as we clearly see in its consequences—we live in a one-practice World, where the nonduality of unity and diversity allows for many versions of “one-practice,” as long as they each remain attuned to Nature.

However we describe it, the shift from a passion for Wisdom to a fevered pursuit of “knowledge” marks the fall of humanity, and it goes altogether with the development of western culture. Nasr remarks that this fall of the west may help us to understand the strangeness of western culture:
it was here [in the west] that a rebellion took place against traditional philosophy, which had remained inalienably linked to religion everywhere and in all stages of premodern history save for a brief period in Greco-Roman antiquity. This rebellion resulted in a new chapter in the history of Western philosophy wherein much of philosophy set itself against the very principles of religion and even wisdom. Only in the West did a philosophy develop that was not only no longer the love of wisdom but went so far as to deny the very category of wisdom as a legitimate form of knowledge. The result was a hatred of wisdom that should more appropriately be called “misosophy” (literally hatred of sophia, wisdom) rather than philosophy. (Nasr 1996: 80)

That seems to invite a full stop. In the image above, one could imagine Sophia accusing the philosopher of neglecting Her—of behaving, for all intents and purposes, as if he hates Her. Nasr continues:

In both Greek antiquity and the European Middle Ages, Western philosophy possessed schools that could be compared with the great intellectual traditions of China and India, not to speak of the Islamic world, which shared much of the heritage of antiquity with the West. It is only in the post-medieval period that the mainstream of Western philosophy turned against both revelation and noesis or intellection as sources of knowledge, and limited itself to empiricism or rationalism, with results that were catastrophic for the unity of Western civilization as far as the relation between faith and reason was concerned. Other religions, whose views concerning the order of nature were discussed in the previous chapter, created civilizations in which schools of philosophy were cultivated in the traditional sense of the term; however, none of them paralleled the development of post-medieval Western philosophy, at least not until the nineteenth century. That is why a number of scholars with some justification have refused to apply the very term “philosophy” to Oriental doctrines because one cannot call, let us say, the Samkhya [the philosophical traditions of India that include what we now, perhaps somewhat tragically, refer to as “yoga”] and Kantianism, philosophy unless philosophy is taken to possess a distinct meaning in each of the cases in question. However, one could quite legitimately call Pythagoreanism and ishraqi doctrines or neo-Confucianism philosophy and have a clear understanding, based upon principles, of what is meant by philosophy, which must, nevertheless, be endowed with a definition universal enough to embrace expressions of traditional philosophy as different as Pythagoreanism and neo-Confucianism. (80-1)

Nasr suggests that “The full grasp of the current religious and also antireligious understanding of the order of nature and its consequences for the environmental crisis . . . cannot be achieved
without dealing, in addition to religion, with both Western philosophy and science,” and that understanding that requires us to

examine how Western philosophy from its inception in Greece to its transformation during the Renaissance and finally up to the contemporary period has dealt with the order of nature and how changes came about in the philosophical understanding of that order, which were both affected by the religious understanding of the natural order and later combatted, opposed, and influenced that understanding. (81)

Nasr does this by means of a scholarly historical study, and his insights are valuable. They have not sunk into the larger culture. We have tried here to illuminate certain aspects of the problems Nasr examines by means of a different kind of inquiry. A change in style of inquiry—indeed to demand that inquiry can no longer be restricted to textual practices—arises in part from sheer astonishment of how much worse things have gotten since Nasr began writing about them—as early as the late 1960’s—and how much worse they have gotten even in the past decade, or the past half-decade. We have tried to touch on a variety of things scholars like Nasr don’t always touch on. Nevertheless, again and again, we seem to come back to the need for things scholars like Nasr note we have forsaken and need to recover, like the power of dreams, revelations, intuitions, initiations—really, the Sacred Madnesses that Plato taught us about. In some sense, perhaps we really do need to make our way back to Madness and Magic, a process obstructed by our addiction to rationality and its illusions of control and ease: It’s easy to read a book, easy to turn on an air conditioner or a microwave, and these things give us a feeling of control and sovereignty, but we thereby give up dignity and true empowerment for this delusion of sovereignty, just as we give up wisdom and love for the delusions of knowledge and civilization.

It seems that we intellectuals in particular, and also the broader society, have no idea what we lost when we lost philosophy as a way of life, including a sense of the religious life that would appear less like dogma and more like skillful doctrine, skillful teachings, healings, doctorings for
the care of the soul and the World, for the cultivation of vitalizing Nature-Culture. Our ancestors might have echoed the sentiments of the Pueblo Elder Jung quoted, the one who said that he and his people help the Sun to rise, for the sake of all humanity. Indeed, our ancestors seem to have thought something very much like this. Consider this passage from the great philologist Károly Kerényi:

A later witness very clearly expresses the knowledge, bordering on certainty, of the Greeks that their own existence was bound up inseparably with the Eleusinian Mysteries. He was not himself a Greek, but he was a devout worshipper of the gods; he was initiated at Eleusis and even held the rank of a hierophant, though not of Eleusis. His name was Vettius Agorius Praetextatus. His religious offices—as well as his high political honors—are recorded in an inscription in Rome. In the year A.D. 364 the Catholic Emperor Valentinian prohibited all nocturnal celebrations with a view to abolishing, among other rites, the Mysteries of Eleusis. . . . “But” [according to the report of the Greek historian Zosimos], “after Praetextatus, who held the office of proconsul in Greece, declared that this law would make the life of the Greeks unlivable, if they were prevented from properly observing the most sacred Mysteries, which hold the whole human race together, he permitted the entire rite to be performed in the manner inherited from the ancestors as if the edict were not valid.”

This late testimony throws a highly significant light on the meaning of the Mysteries of Eleusis. They were thought to “hold the entire human race together” [we may suggest, they held the whole World together—n.k.], not only because people continued, no doubt, to come from every corner of the earth to be initiated, as they had in the days of the Emperor Hadrian, but also because the Mysteries touched on something that was common to all men. They were connected not only with the Athenian and Greek existence but with human existence in general. And Praetextatus clearly stated just this: bios, life, he declared, would become “unlivable” (abiotos) for the Greeks if the celebration were to cease. (Kerényi 1991: 11-12)

We can sense into this with an ecological vision, not constrained by either ordinary time or the literalness of pure rationality. Symbolically speaking, life became unlivable. The world becomes unlivable. The Greek world died. Our world may die. The Sun no longer comes up as it used to, because conquest consciousness did so much to interrupt the rites, rituals, ceremonies, celebrations, and sacraments of genuine Nature-Culture. We must see the non-“symbolic” aspect of symbolism, the more-than-merely-“psychological” dimension of archetype. The whole point
of Synchronicity comes to the dispelment, the *rupture* of barriers, including the barriers that tell us that participation in mysteries, that mystical participation in life does not affect the World—even when we may sense in our bones that the World is a constellation of participatory activity, interwoven in nonlinear “causality”. Synchronicity offers us a moment of touching this. Sacrament refers to Synchronicity in relation to Sacredness, to the Making Sacred of the World.

The Eleusinian Mysteries were themselves likely degraded, maybe even by the time of Plato, but they could still offer passage to barrier-rupturing insight, an opening to the sacred. Perhaps part of Plato’s vision for philosophy included a sense of rejuvenating the initiatory tradition—a sense of the deep need for *rupture* and revolution—because Socrates had predicted the fall of his culture, because the Ancient Greeks were already deeply entangled in the pernicious effects of “civilization”. Any philosophy of civilization, any philosophy of Culture must be handled not like a poisonous snake, but like a dozen of them. So, we would need to do much better than Plato did, and we would have to have something that worked better than the Eleusinian Mysteries in their likely degraded form. No simple “return” to dreaming, to mysteries, to plant teachers, to Sacred Madness of any kind will really do what we need it to do. We should make no mistake here: Spiritual practice can be healing for individuals, families, whole communities. Somehow, we have everything we need, already, and it makes sense to recommend things like meditation and even Ayahuasca as part of the healing process. But we run foolish risks when we fail to see how these practices must arise as part of an altogether practice-realization of a philosophical/spiritual/religious way of life.

Perhaps a more “sober” diagnosis from Bateson will help here:
Let me offer you a myth.

There was once a Garden. It contained many hundreds of species—probably in the subtropics—living in great fertility and balance, with plenty of humus, and so on. In that garden, there were two anthropoids who were more intelligent than the other animals.

On one of the trees there was a fruit, very high up, which the two apes were unable to reach. So they began to think. That was the mistake. They began to think purposively.

By and by, the he ape, whose name was Adam, went and got an empty box and put it under the tree and stepped on it, but he found he still couldn’t reach the fruit. So he got another box and put it on top of the first. Then he climbed up on the two boxes and finally he got that apple.

Adam and Eve then became almost drunk with excitement. This was the way to do things. Make a plan, ABC and you get D.

They then began to specialize in doing things the planned way. In effect, they cast out from the Garden the concept of their own total systemic nature and of its total systemic nature.

After they had cast God out of the Garden, they really went to work on this purposive business, and pretty soon the topsoil disappeared. After that, several species of plants became “weeds” and some of the animals became “pests”; and Adam found that gardening was much harder work. He had to get his bread by the sweat of his brow and he said, “It’s a vengeful God. I should never have eaten that apple.”

Moreover, there occurred a qualitative change in the relationship between Adam and Eve, after they had discarded God from the Garden... . . .

The biblical version of this story, from which I have borrowed extensively, does not explain the extraordinary perversion of values, whereby the woman’s capacity for love comes to seem a curse inflicted by the deity.

Be that as it may. Adam went on pursuing his purposes and finally invented the free-enterprise system. Eve was not, for a long time, allowed to participate in this because she was a woman... . .

A parable, of course, is not data about human behavior. It is only an explanatory device. But I have built into it a phenomenon which seems to be almost universal when man commits the error of purposive thinking and disregards the systemic nature of the world with which he must deal. This phenomenon is called by the psychologists “projection.” The man, after all, has acted according to what he thought was common sense and now he finds himself in a mess. He does not quite know what caused the mess and he feels that what has happened is somehow unfair. He still does not see himself as part of the system in which the mess exists, and he either blames the rest of the system or he blames himself. In my parable Adam combines two sorts of nonsense: the notion “I have sinned” and the notion “God is vengeful.”

If you look at the real situations in our world where the systemic nature of the world has been ignored in favor of purpose or common sense, you will find a rather similar reaction. (Steps: 442-4)
Here he lays out the problem rather plainly. We have considered it from many angles. Let us put it in an apparent tension with Jung’s reading of the myth:

Problems thus draw us into an orphaned and isolated state where we are abandoned by nature and are driven to consciousness. There is no other way open to us; we are forced to resort to conscious decisions and solutions where formerly we trusted ourselves to natural happenings. Every problem, therefore, brings the possibility of a widening of consciousness, but also the necessity of saying goodbye to childlike unconsciousness and trust in nature. This necessity is a psychic fact of such importance that it constitutes one of the most essential symbolic teachings of the Christian religion. It is the sacrifice of the merely natural man, of the unconscious, ingenuous being whose tragic career began with the eating of the apple in Paradise. The biblical fall of man presents the dawn of consciousness as a curse. And as a matter of fact it is in this light that we first look upon every problem that forces us to greater consciousness and separates us even further from the paradise of unconscious childhood. Every one of us gladly turns away from his problems; if possible, they must not be mentioned, or, better still, their existence is denied. We wish to make our lives simple, certain, and smooth, and for that reason problems are taboo. We want to have certainties and no doubts—results and no experiments—without even seeing that certainties can arise only through doubt and results only through experiment. The artful denial of a problem will not produce conviction; on the contrary, a wider and higher consciousness is required to give us the certainty and clarity we need. (CW8: para. 751)

It seems exceedingly wise to read this in light of Kate Hillman’s letter. Jung began to think of this “consciousness” very differently. He seems to be trying to say we can expand the little box of ego, but instead we could say we self-liberate beyond the ego, beyond the “consciousness” that seems stuck with not trusting Nature—though we may think of the ongoing practice of this as an opening of awareness, a waking up that is like becoming conscious though in some way transcending ego-centric “consciousness”. Naïve trust in Nature is not the same as the sage’s trust in Nature (a consummatory experience, an ongoing practice-realization), though there is a reason why Sophia has a childlike dimension, the beginner’s mind, timeless wisdom, embodied for instance in the image of Manjushri, the youth who wields the life-giving Sword of Wisdom—it cuts through delusion.
This feeling orphaned that Jung mentions means a lot. We may, consciously or not, hate Nature the way we would hate a “bad mother.” It relates to what Bateson mentioned, and we benefit from understanding that Sophia (the Divine, the Sacred) may appear “vengeful” if we behave ignorantly, and we can skillfully “look inward” for ways we have fallen off the razor’s edge, and begin to engage in practices (or renew practices) that will put us back in attunement.

What about that? What about atoning (for something reasonably seen as sin—the exploitation and abuse of the sacred, and of countless sentient beings) and attuning (becoming resonant again with that sacredness and those beings)? What about resolution for the problem Bateson outlines? Vain is the word of the philosopher that heals no suffering. What will begin to heal the suffering of this mistake of common sense? Bateson’s own answer does not really function. It’s a bit . . . too sketchy, and in some ways we might respectfully suggest that he reveals the limits of his vision:

But we are met here not only for diagnosis of some of the world’s ills but also to think about remedies. . . . The problem is systemic and the solution must surely depend upon realizing this fact.

First, there is humility, and I propose this not as a moral principle, distasteful to a large number of people, but simply as an item of a scientific philosophy. In the period of the Industrial Revolution, perhaps the most important disaster was the enormous increase of scientific arrogance. We had discovered how to make trains and other machines. We knew how to put one box on top of the other to get that apple, and Occidental man saw himself as an autocrat with complete power over a universe which was made of physics and chemistry. And the biological phenomena were in the end to be controlled like processes in a test tube. Evolution was the history of how organisms learned more tricks for controlling the environment; and man had better tricks than any other creature.

But that arrogant scientific philosophy is now obsolete, and in its place there is the discovery that man is only a part of larger systems and that the part can never control the whole. . . .
Even within the individual human being, control is limited. We can in some degree set ourselves to learn even such abstract characteristics as arrogance or humility, but we are not by any means the captains of our souls.

It is, however, possible that the remedy for ills of conscious purpose lies with the individual. There is what Freud called the royal road to the unconscious. He was referring to dreams, but I think we should lump together dreams and the creativity of art, or the perception of art, and poetry and such things. And I would include with these the best of religion. These are all activities in which the whole individual is involved. The artist may have a conscious purpose to sell his picture, even perhaps a conscious purpose to make it. But in the making he must necessarily relax that arrogance in favor of a creative experience in which his conscious mind plays only a small part.

We might say that in creative art man must experience himself—his total self—as a cybernetic model.

It is characteristic of the 1960s that a large number of people are looking to the psychedelic drugs for some sort of wisdom or some sort of enlargement of consciousness, and I think this symptom of our epoch probably arises as an attempt to compensate for our excessive purposiveness. But I am not sure that wisdom can be got that way. What is required is not simply a relaxation of consciousness to let the unconscious material gush out. To do this is merely to exchange one partial view of the self for the other partial view. I suspect that what is needed is the synthesis of the two views and this is more difficult.

My own slight experience of LSD led me to believe that Prospero was wrong when he said, “We are such stuff as dreams are made on.” It seemed to me that pure dream was, like pure purpose, rather trivial. It was not the stuff of which we are made, but only bits and pieces of that stuff. Our conscious purposes, similarly, are only bits and pieces.

The systemic view is something else again. (Steps 444-6)

We consider in particular these comments about LSD for how they contrast with the other passages we have considered about holotropic medicines. We could cite a large literature on the healing power of these medicines, and Stan Grof is among the Elders in psychology to consult in these matters. One of the things I will always remember about meeting Grof is the frankness of his view on these medicines: Given his experience with them (including guiding many patients in working with them), and given the state of the world, he found it hard to believe we could effectively heal our situation without them—that is to say, if we want to heal things in a manner that will spare a great number of sentient beings (human and non-human) who are currently headed for gratuitous suffering because of our failure to take skillful and realistic action.
Given a forced choice between what we call art and experiences inspired by these medicines, one would be tempted to side with the plant teachers—because the plants are our Elders, and in the best case art is done by a spiritual teacher. Outside of a fuller spiritual life, the artist can only hope for inspiration from the divine (or perhaps has developed limited practices for access, an artistic bag of tricks), but with these medicines we open ourselves to speak directly with the divine, which is the heart of LoveWisdom, the purpose of a spiritual life. Given a hundred people engaged with art in the typical manner, and a hundred people properly taking plant medicines, we would expect a more intense and potentially useful experience constellating wisdom, love, and beauty in the case of the holotropic medicines. I would be willing to bet that few aesthetic experiences can so combine these three, and that far fewer aesthetic experiences bring healing of the soul, of HeartMindBodyWorldCosmos with the consistency of these medicines. Nothing is a panacea, and everything, including art, including these medicines, depends on practice and a holistic way of life. But art at its best does not exceed these medicines at their best—and we can admit that, ultimately (once we truly understand the aesthetic), the reverse holds true as well.

Bateson, we may suggest, lacked the proper context to practice with LSD—lacked the art McKenna warned us these medicines demand. It seems that a great many people lack that context, lack genuine art in their practice, and that they achieve seemingly beneficial results in spite of themselves. Without LoveWisdom as an ethical-ontological-aesthetic-epistemological context, we not only limit these Arts of Awareness—meditation and the creative arts included—but we can turn them into powerful forces of spiritual materialism. Bateson does not seem to address this. The suggestion that, “in creative art man must experience himself—his total self—as a cybernetic model” feels true yet insufficient, almost empty in some ways. Generally
speaking, especially in the dominant culture, this simply cannot happen except by accident, an accident that will always remain limited until it self-liberates. In the case of psychedelic experiences, they seem to increase the likelihood of the accident, and they often lead to mystical experiences that are rare in our engagement with art. Again, we should emphasize that spiritual context is the best way to take full advantage of this potential in the medicines. The medicine makes the experience likely, even though Bateson himself did not seem to take enough of the medicine, or take it in the right way, to realize this potential for himself.

*Mystical experiences tend to give us precisely the corrective for the epistemological error Bateson himself identifies:* A loss of the sense of the aesthetic unity of the World (and the experience of art is not always an experience of the aesthetic unity of the World). We can recall again Bateson’s words: “I hold to the presupposition that our loss of the sense of aesthetic unity was, quite simply, an epistemological mistake. I believe that that mistake may be more serious that all the minor insanities that characterize those older epistemologies which agreed upon the fundamental unity” (MN:18). In light of this suggestion, let us recall that Griffiths et al. studied 4285 cases of mystical experience, with 3476 of those facilitated by holotropic medicines. They found that more than two thirds of those who had identified as atheists prior to their experience gave up that label afterward. This seems surprising. What is it about an atheistic attitude that it cannot handle the rupture facilitated by these medicines? It is as if liberation into a larger ecology of mind decenters an essentially ego-centric attitude. That might be hard to sense. Maybe we could put it this way: An atheistic attitude cannot participate in a Cosmos that is meaningful all the way down, but liberation into a larger ecology of mind puts us in touch with meaningfulness all the way down, and this dispels whatever it is that maintains the atheistic
stance. Atheism is just a variety of keeping intimacy at bay, and even the theist can get caught up
in it. Such a theist is nearly what the atheist thinks of them: Someone who wants to believe. But
a theist who allows the self-liberation, the forgetting of self that at least momentarily dispels the
illusion of ego, no longer needs “belief,” for they have verified something. I find these
suggestions strange, for I do not consider myself a theist per se, and I used to think of myself as
an atheist. Now, however, after years of practicing philosophy, and with no dependence upon
holotropic medicines, I can comfortably say that atheism seems a more limited and limiting view
than any healthy theism, and once we let sacredness in or acknowledge it (in whatever form),
things unthinkable from a typical atheistic perspective suddenly become possible. It is as if
atheism tries to keep a tight rein on reality, but the Windhorse of the Soul will never be
bridled.\footnote{We could perhaps distinguish between a non-theistic religious impulse and a more theistic
one. The former remains religious or spiritual, but does not, let us say, imagine “actual”
deities”. But Buddhist philosophy, perhaps from the beginning, accepted the existence of
deities. One might consider it non-theistic in the sense that it does not see deities as in control of
the Cosmos, or as the highest realization of awareness. The sage actually ranks above the deity,
so to speak, and the deities go to the sages to receive teachings. It is difficult to know how to
think about deities who appear in other Cultures, since we in the west have been so influenced by
the dominant views of the most dominant religions here. At the other end of the spectrum, one
can perhaps imagine a sort of highly spiritual atheism that does endorse or encourage the
experience of genuine sacredness. But then it is not clear how it still maintains the impossibility
of anything theistic, for the sacredness of the Cosmos might be what the theist means by “God”.
After all, I read somewhere about a Buddhist monk who, when asked by a Christian monk why
he did not believe in God, explained to the Christian monk the basic teaching of sunyata, or
openness. The Christian monk replied, “How do you know that is not what I mean by ‘God’?”}

Let us set these suggestions aside for a moment and consider some of the overall results
uncovered by Griffiths et al., which seem rather astonishing. The vast majority of people
received these consummatory experiences as among the most meaningful and significant of their
lives. Among “spontaneous” experiencers, 74% rated it among the top five most significant experiences of their lives, and 28% rated it as number one—the most important experience of their lives. Among the medicinally facilitated group, 78% ranked the experience in the top five of a lifetime, and 27% thought it was the single most significant experience. These experiences frequently involved communication with an intelligence—a benevolent, knowing, and sacred presence—and this yielded, in the case of psychedelic-facilitated experiences, psychological insights that 67% of people found among the top five most significant of their lives, and 27% found the single most significant. How remarkable, from a philosophical standpoint: A medicine with a high degree of reliability for bringing us to one of the most important experiences of “Know thyself” of our lives.

We might dare go so far as to tease that perhaps 1 in 4 philosophers are missing out on the most significant experience of their lives, and perhaps 3 in 4 are missing out on one of the most significant experiences—one that might grant them valuable insight into Self and World. Of course we have caveats: Perhaps philosophers are a special crowd (perhaps all their best insights come from reading texts, and maybe few philosophers would find holotropic medicines helpful in bringing insight, healing, wholeness, a sense of aesthetic unity, etc.), and perhaps those who are open to taking such medicines are somehow foolish, likely to accept rather silly things as matters of great insight, but all of that seems like intellectual hopefulness, and it goes against too much evidence and reasonableness. Even if 1 in 10 philosophers might be missing out on one of the most significant experiences of “Know thyself” of their lives, the matter becomes worthy of serious contemplation. It’s essential to note that such experiences and insights need not come from holotropic medicines, but the dictum to “Know Thyself” does lead one to wonder about the
ethical obligation of taking up some form of practice that might invite such consummatory experiences by means of entrance into a Bardo, the crossing of the threshold of the gateless gate.

This “Know thyself” happens by means of the rupture Hadot mentions and involves the ineffability Socrates tells us about in Republic: 73% of the participants said the experience transcended space and time (what we have called the rupture of space and time, a rupture of the habitual, a rupture of conquest consciousness, a taste of the atopos), and 85% called the experience ineffable. Furthermore, 69% claimed that what they encountered existed, as least in part, in some “other dimension” or “other reality,” as if they had to leave they cave of delusion, as if they had to enter a Bardo to experience it. And 76% of the psychedelic-assisted experiencers found the experience more real than “everyday normal consciousness.”

If today’s university student enrolls in a philosophy course to know themselves and the nature of reality, they might be better off taking an 8-week course in compassion practice and then attending an Ayahuasca ceremony. And given that Forstmann and Sagioglou (2017) found, in a fairly large-scale general population study (1487 participants), a positive correlation between experience with “classic” holotropic medicines (e.g. LSD, psilocybin, mescaline), and both nature relatedness and ethical ecological behavior (e.g. conserving resources, recycling), we might suspect the World would be better off as well. We might, in light of our suggestions about nonlocal epistemology, suggest that the World would recommend it, that the ducks, geese, lakes, rivers, fishes would recommend that we try to know better by taking up some sort of practice (with or without the integration of holotropic medicines) that might begin to liberate us out of ego-centric ways of knowing.
Lyons and Carhart-Harris (2018) gave psilocybin to patients with treatment resistant depression. Prior to treatment, these patients tested higher than the control group in authoritarian views. After treatment, nature relatedness increased and authoritarian viewpoint decreased. One might contemplate that with care, given the suggestions that we are experiencing some level of mass melancholia and mourning, and that authoritarian threats seem on the rise, perhaps because our egos are desperate for simple solutions.

As for Forstmann and Sagioglou (2017), the authors report that,

Using structural equation modeling we found that experience with classic psychedelics uniquely predicted self-reported engagement in pro-environmental behaviors, and that this relationship was statistically explained by people’s degree of self-identification with nature. Our model controlled for experiences with other classes of psychoactive substances (cannabis, dissociatives, empathogens, popular legal drugs) as well as common personality traits that usually predict drug consumption and/or nature relatedness (openness to experience, conscientiousness, conservatism). Although correlational in nature, results suggest that lifetime experience with psychedelics in particular may indeed contribute to people’s pro-environmental behavior by changing their self-construal in terms of an incorporation of the natural world, regardless of core personality traits or general propensity to consume mind-altering substances. Thereby, the present research adds to the contemporary literature on the beneficial effects of psychedelic substance use on mental wellbeing, hinting at a novel area for future research investigating their potentially positive effects on a societal level. (957)

Again we see the central role of “forgetting the self,” which means forgetting that part of us we identify with, the part we call “consciousness” but should call “ego”. As Bateson argues, “consciousness is, almost of necessity, blinded to the systemic nature of the man himself. Purposive consciousness pulls out, from the total mind, sequences which do not have the loop structure which is characteristic of the whole systemic structure. If you follow the ‘common-sense’ dictates of consciousness you become, effectively, greedy and unwise” (Steps, 442). He is
talking about this “less real” ordinary, everyday consciousness. Philosophy means liberation into the larger loops, the fuller ecologies, the more real dimensions of Mind. The Arts of Awareness are the means by which we make that liberation real, practice and bring it to fruition, and thus accomplish true understanding. Prior to this, we cannot be said to know, but only to believe, perhaps on the basis of decent lines of reasoning, common sense, and scientific evidence.

That art, the range of fine arts, offers no better access to wisdom than any other art of awareness—at least on its own—seems obvious, otherwise we would be putting artists in brain scanners because we wanted to understand how they got so wise and compassionate, how they developed peace and true joy, how they arrived at healing insights that changed their whole lives for the better. Such points merit repetition and extension, because one sees so much spiritual materialism around the arts, and so many attempts by young artists to satisfy themselves with an artistic life ungrounded in a broader and deeper spiritual life. We may examine artists because we want to understand artistic creativity, but creativity is not limited to the arts, and we cannot simply paint our way to wisdom. It takes context, and the art of Hakuin, Rumi, Ikkyu, Milarepa, Rengetsu, and Hildegard differs in deeply significant ways from the art produced by artists lacking the kind of way of life they engaged. We should see holotropic medicines the same way. These medicines seem to consistently bring insights and healing, and they seem to work in a manner that allows for an integrated experience of wisdom, love, and beauty, but they too demand context, and there is a tremendous amount of spiritual materialism with them. Still, they carry a significance that almost demands the attention of a greater number of philosophers and academics—indeed, a greater level of care and attention in the whole culture, as part of the
process of healing conquest consciousness and its karmic wounds. I would propose Ayahuasca circles and other medicine circles that include a mix of academics and non-academics.

Because it is a complex topic, we can consider here only a little of the technical side of how these medicines might work, from a “scientific” perspective, such that we can perhaps understand how arts of awareness in general might work—for, though there will be differences of course, there may be shared features, and these may be key or core dimensions of the relevant experiences. A few caveats are in order though. First, our overall inquiry critiques “science”. What we in the dominant culture call science arises altogether with the degradation of Nature. It comes out of conquest consciousness. It goes altogether with the marginalization of philosophy as a way of life. Moreover, science as we know it includes findings that the mainstream currents of that science reject, or seem hostile to or uncomfortable with—either way, they are not easily explained. All of these things go together to make for a feeling that paradigm change seems in order. That paradigm shift may include some of the tools of complexity theory. Any shift will have to explain the results of complexity research, but we cannot be sure whether or not even this newer, non-linear mathematics will become foundational to a new science. All that we can be sure of is that this new science—if it will be rigorous, sustainable, and philosophically coherent—will have to be in service to the conditions of life, and that may mean a difference we cannot yet imagine in practice, especially if the world becomes catastrophically degraded, or if we simply wise up and decide that the degradation of the world that happens in the name of science must stop. In either case (the World’s choice in one way or another), we may see a very different kind of science emerge.
Complexity theory offers us ways of understanding why we get caught up in stupidity, and what wisdom in Bateson’s sense might mean. If we think of wisdom as self-liberation into larger loops or ecologies of mind, how does that happen, and what usually prevents it? A general answer based on a variety of neuroscientific research might be this: Wisdom, love, and beauty depend on decentering the ego and walking a razor’s edge between chaos and order, something like the razor’s edge that combines a beginner’s mind and an experienced mind, wildness and gentleness, Nature-Culture; usually our ego imposes an order on experience and on the World (an agenda), and this habitual use of ourselves and the World tends to involve a self-organizing stability, a resistance to perturbation, but it results in access to a relatively narrow repertoire of states, insights, activities, perceptions, and it seems to involve fragmentation and duality; certain practices can facilitate a letting go of the ego-centric default mode of the heart-mind-body-world complex (including the brain, of course, which is so often the focus of research), and this goes together with increased criticality in the system, which means a capacity to stay open, not foreclosing on any states (think of settling habitually into opinions, conclusions, ways of thinking), but allowing a fuller available repertoire of states to become possible (a wilding of mind, in which an increase, relatively speaking, in chaos or even madness emerges), and remaining open as various relative stabilities manifest (as insight, for instance); repeated exposure to such states of increased criticality result in long-term development of vertical and horizontal integration (in the brain, but also in the heart-mind-body-World-Cosmos). In other words, the research does seem to indicate that practices such as meditation or proper work with holotropic medicines lets us out of the little box of the ego and into larger ecologies of mind which the activity we call ego usually keeps us cut off from. Such ecologies have a wildness, but they bring us peace, and their joyful functioning in, through, as us arises as wisdom, love, and
beauty. We access them, or let them access us (or let them become us, manifest as us) in just the way Dogen and countless other philosophers suggested: By forgetting the self, and allowing these ecologies to verify us as we verify them.

A fuller meta-analysis would explore this in more detail than we can offer here. But let us at least consider a few small artefacts. Carhart-Harris et al. (2014) report the following summary of their work inquiring into “a theory of conscious states” facilitated by complexity theory and the holotropic medicine psilocybin:

Entropy is a dimensionless quantity that is used for measuring uncertainty about the state of a system but it can also imply physical qualities, where high entropy is synonymous with high disorder. Entropy is applied here in the context of states of consciousness and their associated neurodynamics, with a particular focus on the psychedelic state. The psychedelic state is considered an exemplar of a primitive or primary state of consciousness that preceded the development of modern, adult, human, normal waking consciousness. Based on neuroimaging data with psilocybin, a classic psychedelic drug, it is argued that the defining feature of “primary states” is elevated entropy in certain aspects of brain function, such as the repertoire of functional connectivity motifs that form and fragment across time. Indeed, since there is a greater repertoire of connectivity motifs in the psychedelic state than in normal waking consciousness, this implies that primary states may exhibit “criticality,” i.e., the property of being poised at a “critical” point in a transition zone between order and disorder where certain phenomena such as power-law scaling appear. Moreover, if primary states are critical, then this suggests that entropy is suppressed in normal waking consciousness, meaning that the brain operates just below criticality. It is argued that this entropy suppression furnishes normal waking consciousness with a constrained quality and associated metacognitive functions, including reality-testing and self-awareness. It is also proposed that entry into primary states depends on a collapse of the normally highly organized activity within the default-mode network (DMN) and a decoupling between the DMN and the medial temporal lobes (which are normally significantly coupled). (1)

The characterization of “primitivity” does not really help. We now have research indicating that so-called higher-order functions of mind depend on so-called primitive brain structures. We will likely see more research of this kind. But, as one example, Marek et al. 2018 found that the
cerebellum, a “primitive” brain structure, is involved in an intimate relationship with higher thought. Conventionally, the cerebellum has to do with the basic task of movement, and damage to the cerebellum results in movement that lacks smoothness. But the researchers found that only about 20% of the cerebellum deals with movement in the literal sense, while 80% of its activity relates to the movement of thought. Here we find a kind of proprioception of thinking, for the cerebellum has both a 2-fold overrepresentation of higher-order networks (the language of representation is limiting), but it demonstrates a consistent temporal appearance—it’s one of the final stops of a wave or dance of thinking, one that may evaluate the thinking for smoothness: Does this thinking seem to move skillfully? Here we find even more sense in Nietzsche’s suggestion in *Twilight of the Idols* that, “thinking wants to be learned like dancing, as a kind of dancing” (“What the Germans Lack,” 7). And, in light of the relation of skillfully danced thinking and criticality, as discussed by Carhart-Harris et al., we may come to make more sense of Zarathustra’s statement, “Now I am light, now I fly, now I see myself beneath myself, now a god dances through me,” (I.5), as well as his statement, “I say unto you: one must still have chaos in oneself to be able to give birth to a dancing star. I say unto you: you still have chaos in yourselves” (I.7, translations by Kaufmann). We are lived by powers we pretend to understand; we can choose whether the powers that live us lurch or dance, whether they move with profanity or sacredness, whether they make the world dimmer or bring luminosity, presencing the luminous-and-knowing?182 We can be lived by a kind of divine madness, a sacred sanity that dances on the razor’s edge of chaos.

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182 We might recall Dewey here: “a first-rate test of the value of any philosophy which is offered us: Does it end in conclusions which, when they are referred back to ordinary life-experiences and their predicaments, render them more significant, more luminous to us, and make our dealings with them more fruitful? Or does it terminate in rendering the things of ordinary experience more opaque than they were before, and in depriving them of having in “reality” even
These findings resonate with Pauli’s understanding of the Synchronicity phenomenon. As Gieser explains, Pauli thought that Synchronicity, or “the \( \Sigma \) phenomena” (again, \( \Sigma \) is used as abbreviation for synchronicity),

often arises in conjunction with a transition from an unstable state of consciousness into a new stable state, when consciousness has expanded and an equilibrium with the unconscious has been established. During the unstable state, i.e. during the transition, it seems as if the new insight has to be reinforced by the appearance of physical marginal phenomena. When the new conscious position is attained and has stabilized, the marginal phenomena disappear. Pauli took this from his personal experience. He emphasized that with him the synchronistic phenomena always occurred in connection with certain states of consciousness and in relation to certain stages in life, especially when the ‘opposites keep in balance as much as possible’. On one occasion he even states that the synchronistic phenomena disappear when consciousness cannot ‘keep pace’ with the ‘required’ development of consciousness. It seems like an effect from a ‘higher’ plane: something that demands widening of consciousness. This ‘something higher’ corresponds to Jung’s concept of the Self, which is the self-organizing principle of the psyche. There is therefore a direct relationship between the state of consciousness of the subject and the \( \Sigma \) phenomena. (284)

The chaos of a dancing star is not mere chaos, but comes altogether with a union of opposites. It is a dance of criticality, a dance of openness, a dance of liminality in which we touch something that transcends the ego.

In an unwise culture, we practice a habitual mind that suppresses the relative chaos in us that could arise altogether as a dancing star, as the sacred-creative-cosmic-patterning that is the

the significance they had previously seemed to have?” (LW1: 18) We might add: The union of past and future with the present manifest in every awareness of meanings is a mystery only when consciousness is gratuitously divided from nature, and when nature is denied temporal and historic quality. When consciousness is connected with nature, the mystery becomes a luminous revelation of the operative interpenetration in nature of the efficient and the fulfilling” (LW1: 265).
nonduality of what we ordinarily refer to as “chaos” and “order”. But we have access to it. It’s still there. We can enter the Bardo of star dancing, participate in the dance of life by means of the Arts of Awareness, including meditation and holotropic medicines. When we take these medicines, we increase criticality altogether with increasing global connectivity—i.e. a rupture of barriers between ecologies of mind. Tagliazucchi et al. (2014) found that, “The psilocybin state is also characterized by a larger repertoire of states: i.e. novel motifs that are exclusive to the psychedelic state . . . These motifs are among the most interconnected states possible” (5450). In language that evokes the sense of the Liminal, the Bardo, the authors note that,

A key feature of spontaneous brain activity is its dynamical nature. In analogy to other self-organized systems in nature, the brain has been described as a system residing in (or at least near to) a critical point or transition zone between states of order and disorder [Chialvo, 2010; Haimovici et al., 2013; Tagliazucchi and Chialvo, 2011; Tagliazucchi et al., 2012a]. In this critical zone, it is hypothesized that the brain can explore a maximal repertoire of its possible dynamical states, a feature which could confer obvious evolutionary advantages in terms of cognitive and behavioral flexibility. It has even been proposed that this cognitive flexibility and range may be a key property of adult human consciousness itself [Tononi, 2012]. An interesting research question therefore is whether changes in spontaneous brain activity produced by psilocybin are consistent with a displacement from this critical point—perhaps towards a more entropic or super-critical state (i.e. one closer to the extreme of disorder than normal waking consciousness) [Carhart-Harris et al., 2014]. (5444)

Our ordinary thinking, our habitual mindlessness, keeps us away from the Threshold, keeps us out of the Bardo of insight and inspiration that comes with forgetting the self and giving up ordinary notions of control and conscious purpose. We obviously enjoy relative insights all the time, and our inquiry suggests that these come, in some sense, in spite of ourselves, and that perhaps only unthreatening insights can arise in most cases, even when we may find ourselves in serious need of just those kinds of insights. The authors conclude as follows:

It has long been claimed that the psychedelic (translated “mind-revealing” [Huxley et al., 1977]) state is an expanded state of consciousness in which latent psycho-logical material can emerge into consciousness [Cohen,1967] and novel
associations can form. Indeed, this was the original rationale for the use of LSD in psychotherapy [Busch and Johnson, 1950]. It has also been claimed that psychedelics may be able to assist the creative process, for example, by promoting divergent thinking and remote association [Fadiman, 2011]. Thus, the increased repertoire of metastable states observed here with psilocybin may be a mechanism by which these phenomena occur [see also Carhart-Harris et al., 2014]. It was also interesting that under psilocybin, more inter-hemispheric dynamical correlations were detected in the hippocampal/ACC network (Fig. 5C). Recent electrophysiological work in mice has shown that layer five pyramidal neurons (the primary cellular units implicated in the action of psychedelic drugs [Muthukumaraswamy et al., 2013]) that are sensitive to serotonin 2A receptor mediated excitation (the primary pharmacological process implicated in the action of psychedelics [Muthukumaraswamy et al., 2013]) are disproportionately those pyramidal neurons that project interhemispherically [Avesar and Gulledge, 2012]. Thus, altered interhemispheric communication may be an important component of the mechanism of action of psychedelics. Concerning the low frequency fluctuations results, these were consistent with our earlier work with MEG in which we observed decreased oscillatory power in neural fields in high-level cortical regions in the 1 to 100 Hz frequency range [Muthukumaraswamy et al., 2013]. In the present analysis, decreased low frequency power in the 0.01 to 0.1Hz range was found and again, these effects were localized to consistent high-level cortical regions. Low frequency fluctuations in BOLD are known to correlate with neuronal parameters such as fluctuating gamma power and infraslow fluctuations in local field potentials [Pan et al., 2013]. The slower beta band also shows positive correlations with fMRI fluctuations in key DMN regions [Laufs et al., 2003], whereas both alpha and beta apparently inhibit large-scale cortical BOLD coherence [Tagliazucchi et al., 2012b]. Thus, it seems that a primary action of psilocybin, and likely other psychedelics [Riba et al., 2002], is to cause a generalized desynchrony and loss of oscillatory power in higher level cortical regions—likely via serotonin 2A receptor mediated excitation of deep-layer pyramidal neurons in these regions [Muthukumaraswamy et al., 2013]. However, the high amplitude activity detected in the hippocampi and ACC (Fig. 1) suggests that this desynchronizing effect does not generalize to these deeper structures. The frequency domain result was further examined by a separate analysis of the point-process rate and interval distributions (see Fig. 3). The RSNs which exhibited the most significant changes correspond to higher brain systems such as the DMN, executive control and attention net-works and not primary sensory and motor networks. This outcome is consistent with the regional distribution of serotonin 2A receptors [Erritzoe et al., 2009], the receptors implicated in psilocybin’s psychedelic action [Vollen-weider et al., 1998]. These receptors are concentrated in higher level cortical regions (e.g. the highest distribution in humans is in the PCC [Carhart-Harris et al., 2013; Errit-zoe et al., 2009] and are relatively less prevalent in the sensori-motor cortex. That the default mode network has consistently been implicated in the action of psilocybin is also intriguing given its association with self-reflection [Gusnard et al., 2001] and selfhood more generally [Carhart-Harris and Friston, 2010]. It is likely to be
relevant therefore that one of the most commonly reported features of an intense psychedelic experience is a compromised sense of selfhood typically described as “ego dissolution” or “ego disintegration” [Carhart-Harris et al., 2014; Klee, 1963; Savage, 1955].

These findings in turn relate to later work by Tagliazucchi et al. (2016), which the authors summarize as follows:

Lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD) is a non-selective serotonin-receptor agonist that was first synthesized in 1938 and identified as (potently) psychoactive in 1943. psychedelics have been used by indigenous cultures for millennia [1]; however, because of LSD’s unique potency and the timing of its discovery (coinciding with a period of major discovery in psychopharmacology), it is generally regarded as the quintessential contemporary psychedelic [2]. LSD has profound modulatory effects on consciousness and was used extensively in psychological research and psychiatric practice in the 1950s and 1960s [3]. In spite of this, however, there have been no modern human imaging studies of its acute effects on the brain. Here we studied the effects of LSD on intrinsic functional connectivity within the human brain using fMRI. High-level association cortices (partially overlapping with the default-mode, salience, and frontoparietal attention networks) and the thalamus showed increased global connectivity under the drug. The cortical areas showing increased global connectivity overlapped significantly with a map of serotonin 2A (5-HT2A) receptor densities (the key site of action of psychedelic drugs [4]). LSD also increased global integration by inflating the level of communication between normally distinct brain networks. The increase in global connectivity observed under LSD correlated with subjective reports of “ego dissolution.” The present results provide the first evidence that LSD selectively expands global connectivity in the brain, compromising the brain’s modular and “rich-club” organization and, simultaneously, the perceptual boundaries between the self and the environment.

Carhart-Harris et al. (2016a) found a similar breakdown of the default mode network (DMN), the little box of the ego:

The present data also inform on another fundamental question; namely, how do psychedelics alter brain function to (so profoundly) alter consciousness? Interestingly, although the effects of LSD on the visual system were pronounced, they did not significantly correlate with its more fundamental effects on consciousness. Instead, a specific relationship was found between DMN disintegration and ego-dissolution, supporting prior findings with psilocybin (17). Also consistent with previous psilocybin research (9), a significant relationship was found between decreased PCC alpha power and ego-dissolution. Moreover, an especially strong relationship was found between PH-RSC decoupling and ego-dissolution (see also ref. 10). Thus, in the same way the neurobiology of
psychedelic-induced visual hallucinations can inform on the neurobiology of visual processing, so the neurobiology of psychedelic-induced ego-dissolution can inform on the neurobiology of the “self” or “ego” (37), and the present results extend our understanding in this regard, implying that the preservation of DMN integrity, PH-RSC communication, and regular oscillatory rhythms within the PCC may be important for the maintenance of one’s sense of self or ego.

Linking these results to pathology, an especially strong relationship was found between PH-RSC decoupling and the “altered meaning” factor on the ASC. Interestingly, altered activity within the PH-RSC circuit under psilocybin has previously been found to correlate with the spiritual experience and insightfulness dimensions of the 11-factor ASC (10), and altered RSC/PCC activity has been found to correlate with ego-dissolution (9), suggesting modulation of this particular circuit may be an important feature of especially profound psychedelic experiences. The altered meaning factor of the ASC is composed of items such as “some unimportant things acquired a special meaning” and “things in my surroundings had a new or alien meaning” that are phenomenologically resonant with the notion of “aberrant salience” in schizophrenia research (38). Impaired reality testing as a corollary of impaired ego functioning may explain an association between ego-dissolution and altered meaning. Similarities between aspects of psychosis and the psychedelic state have long been debated, and one of the most influential hypotheses on the neurobiology of schizophrenia proposes a functional disconnect between certain brain structures in the disorder (39). In this context, it is intriguing to consider whether the PH-RSC circuit is involved in certain psychosis-related experiences (e.g., refs. 40 and 41). More specifically, it would be interesting to examine the integrity of the PH-RSC connection in cases of endogenous psychoses in which phenomena such as altered meaning, ego-dissolution, and/or impaired reality-testing are observed. To our knowledge, these specific phenomena have never been formally investigated in imaging studies involving patients exhibiting endogenous psychoses, but studies on early psychosis and the at-risk mental state may be informative in this regard (e.g., ref. 40).

When the present results are considered in relation to previous human neuroimaging studies with psychedelics, some general principles emerge. It seems increasingly evident that psychedelics reduce the stability and integrity of well-established brain networks (e.g., ref. 16) and simultaneously reduce the degree of separateness or segregation between them (e.g., ref. 42); that is, they induce network disintegration and desegregation. Importantly, these effects are consistent with the more general principle that cortical brain activity becomes more “entropic” under psychedelics (17). Furthermore, with the benefit of the present study’s multimodal imaging design, we can extend on these generic insights to postulate some more specific physiological properties of the psychedelic state and how these relate to some of its key psychological properties; namely, expanded V1 RSFC relates to the magnitude of visual hallucinations and decoupling of the PH-RSC circuit relates to the level of ego-dissolution, and perhaps also the profundity of a psychedelic experience more generally (also see refs. 9 and 10 in this regard). (4857)
This team, like Tagliazucchi et al. (2014), found that a certain rhythm keeps the ego-centric mind in place, and that dispelling that rhythm allows for liberation into larger ecologies of mind and meaning, for the habitual meanings inhibit our access to broader and deeper meanings, meanings more in attunement with wisdom, love, beauty. In another study, Carhart-Harris et al. (2016b) found that this activity does indeed look like madness in a certain sense, giving a quasi-scientific “validation” to Plato’s suggestions in Phaedrus:

LSD produced robust psychological effects; including heightened mood but also high scores on the PSI, an index of psychosis-like symptoms. Increased optimism and trait openness were observed 2 weeks after LSD (and not placebo) and there were no changes in delusional thinking . . . The present findings reinforce the view that psychedelics elicit psychosis-like symptoms acutely yet improve psychological wellbeing in the mid to long term. It is proposed that acute alterations in mood are secondary to a more fundamental modulation in the quality of cognition, and that increased cognitive flexibility subsequent to serotonin 2A receptor (5-HT2AR) stimulation promotes emotional lability during intoxication and leaves a residue of ‘loosened cognition’ in the mid to long term that is conducive to improved psychological wellbeing. (1)

Thus a healthy experience of madness—not insanity, but a sacred madness—can loosen the bondage of thought. The authors found a basic openness and positivity that came as concessionary or consummatory with the holotropic or psychedelic experience:

The findings that optimism and openness are increased 2 weeks after LSD are consistent with previous findings (Griffiths et al. 2006, 2008; MacLean et al. 2011), suggesting that improved psychological wellbeing and increased openness are relatively reliable mid- to long-term effects of psychedelics. That there were no increases in psychotic symptomatology at the 2 week end point is also consistent with reports of preserved or even improved mental health among populations of people that have used psychedelic drugs (Bousso et al. 2012; Krebs & Johansen, 2013; Hendricks et al. 2015). These results are also consistent with previous findings that psychedelics can be useful in treating certain psychiatric disorders (Moreno et al. 2006; Grob et al. 2011; Gasser et al. 2014; Johnson et al. 2014; Bogenschutz et al. 2015) as well as the notion that they may have therapeutic potential in the treatment of mood disorders such as depression (Carhart-Harris et al. 2014b). High dispositional optimism is associated with a range of positive health and socio-economic outcomes (Carver & Scheier, 2014);
thus, the increases in optimism observed here may be treated as further evidence of the therapeutic potential of psychedelic drugs. (7)

In speaking to the press about the findings of Carhart-Harris (2016a), David Nutt, one of the study’s co-authors, said, “This is to neuroscience what the Higgs boson was to particle physics.” He seems to want to convey the relatively long time people have been waiting for findings like this to come out, and how much energy and technological investment had to go into it, and thus the analogy. But, could there be something especially “profound” in these findings? In a sense, though they are preliminary and do not answer all our questions, they are more momentous than the Higgs boson, and carry a more radical import, because the findings we have discussed support a view that encourages us to sense the vital importance of dispelling the enchantment of ego, of rupturing our ego-centrism and self-liberating into larger ecologies of mind, characterized by openness and a kind of wildness. These findings support the suggestion that a more skillful way of knowing places forgetting the self (but not losing it) at the center of its practice. We will increasingly come to sense how this means compassion, nonlocality, and nonduality are central to a skillful way of knowing. We see here an intimate link between wisdom, love, and beauty. The epistemological depends inextricably on the ethical, and on the aesthetic. That basic insight needs much more cultivation, and in the end it becomes a life of practice, but our inquiry has at least brought it to our attention in a number of ways, of varying cogency depending on each reader’s own history of practice. We can return to some of these considerations later.

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For now, let us note that the evidence for positive effects of holotropic medicines seems quite compelling, especially when we include case studies and various records of experience. But, since we have it available, we can incorporate the kinds of technical study and analysis we see above into our understanding of how these practices could become part of a new epistemology. One of the greatest dangers, though, remains the need to cultivate these practices altogether with the cultivation of healthy ecologies.

Art, as much as holotropic medicines or any other Art of Awareness, can lure us into all sorts of spiritual materialisms that will only perpetuate the pattern of insanity (in various ways, including by direct co-opting, as in the case of the use of meditation and psychedelics in tech and other industrial contexts), or will at least become highly limited in their potentially therapeutic effects. Among other things, we must confront our tendency to seek junk-ease and to avoid the demands of spiritual work. We may specifically engage our practice of life in ways that allow us to bypass real contact with philosophical/spiritual/religious work and insights that seem to troublesome (demanding) and/or threatening.

Consider, for instance, the difference between the art of tragedy on the one hand and the art of a full-blown ceremony on the other. We can all acknowledge the power of art. Art can be medicine for the soul. But why did Plato criticize the arts? Among other reasons, he did so because they can lull us into thinking we know something we don’t, perhaps after a couple hours at the theater or a few minutes of reading a poem. Here is Kerényi on the differences between tragedy and the Mysteries:

Aristotle investigated both what happened in the minds of the audience at a tragedy and the experience offered by the annually recurring venture of Eleusis.
The spectator at the tragedy had no need to build up a state of concentration by ritual preparations; he had no need to fast, to drink the kykeon [what we might call the communion drink] and to march in a procession. He did not attain a state of epopteia, of “having seen” by his own inner resources. The poet, the chorus, the actors created a vision, the theama [the spectacle or mise en scene], for him at the place designed for it, the teatron [theater]. Without effort on his part, the spectator was transported into what he saw. What he saw and heard was made easy for him and became irresistibly his. He came to believe in it, but this belief was very different from that aroused by the epopteia [the vision inspired by the Mysteries]. He [the spectator at the theater] entered into other people’s sufferings, forgot himself [we should better say, forgot themselves] and—as Aristotle stressed—was purified. In in the Mysteries, a purification—katharmos—had to take effect long before the epopteia. (113)

Aristotle seems to have thought the audience at a theater can achieve a kind of purification, a catharsis by means of pity and terror. Now, these are not the proper emotions of philosophy, and we see here how off-the-mark Aristotle gets us from the outset. The proper emotions of LoveWisdom here would be Compassion and Wonder, especially if we understand by these the definitions Joyce gave for “pity” and “terror” in Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man:

Aristotle has not defined pity and terror. I have. I say . . . —
Lynch halted and said bluntly:
— Stop! I won’t listen! I am sick. I was out last night on a yellow drunk with Horan and Goggins.
Stephen went on:
— Pity is the feeling which arrests the mind in the presence of whatsoever is grave and constant in human sufferings and unites it with the human sufferer.
Terror is the feeling which arrests the mind in the presence of whatsoever is grave and constant in human sufferings and unites it with the secret cause.

Cocky little Joyce, eh? He goes beyond Aristotle. But his definitions are not so bad. And they get at this limitation in Aristotle’s notions. We would do better to say something vaguely along the lines of this: Compassion is the activity of the sacred powers and inconceivable causes of the World, activity which, if we practice-and-realize it, arrests the habitual mind in the presence of whatsoever is grave and constant in human sufferings and presences the mystery of not-two-not-one in relation with the one who sufferers (not “united” but not “fragmented” or at a distance—a
not-two-not-one); Wonder is the feeling of Bliss and the ongoing not-knowing (openness) of Wisdom which arises when the habitual mind is dropped away in the presence of the luminous-and-knowing constant in all experience, that in, through, as which the sacred powers and inconceivable causes take action in, through, as Self and World.

But let us go back to Aristotle. Isn’t it easier to go to the theater than it is to practice philosophy? An Ayahuasca ceremony, for instance, might involve several weeks of rather dedicated spiritual practice, with changes in diet, possible fasting, an increased awareness of heart-mind-body-world-cosmos, increased attention to activity and experience, then a potentially multi-day experience of the ceremony “itself,” involving spiritual work fully engaged “with the medicine” for perhaps 6 or more hours each day, and then days and weeks of integration and further contemplation carried back into the daily practice of one’s life. All of this seems more demanding that just going to see a play, and even if we incorporated philosophy as a way of life into the process of preparing for and then viewing a play at the theater, the overt happening of the play compared to the initiatory ordeal of the ceremony could still leave many a theater experience feeling lacking. And things seem much worse when we compare theater today with theater of millennia past. In Ancient Greece, for instance, one might loosely say everyone went to see the latest play by Sophocles, and one perhaps knew a large number of people with whom one experienced the tragedy, and one could process the art and what it brought up with a relatively extensive community of people who had shared the experience of seeing the play. In one way or another, it might have felt far more intimate than the theater experiences of today. Not being numbed by an overload of stimulation, one could go to the theater fresh in mind, and highly sensitive to what might appear, quite open and able to feel, with time to contemplate for
days afterward since another “blockbuster” was not already being released. Today, we may have no idea who most of the people are in the theater, and, more than likely, we don’t bother going to the theater anyway. Instead, we binge-watch at home after a long or full day of busyness, having suffered a barrage of stimuli that would likely throw our ancient ancestors into shock if they suddenly had to face them. We can barely think straight, and what we want from entertainment is in part relative quiet. By binge-watching we get all the medication we can from it, and even less experience of possible opening to wisdom. The fact that most of the media of our time is produced in such a degraded context, including degraded philosophical education at all levels, only makes things worse.

Plato saw the contrast developing between art and rigorous spirituality as problematic. Going to the Academy and going to the theater were certainly different. We can imagine the Academy as far more demanding than the theater. But a poet could nevertheless write things that might enthrall the public, without teaching them how to work with the experiences that unfolded, to teaching them to what degree the art was potentially misleading.

Art, like anything, must be handled as we would handle a poisonous snake. Plato perhaps felt that a philosopher bears the responsibility to teach people how to handle poisonous snakes. If we don’t know how to work with our compassion, we will experience empathic distress and begin to turn away—and we will soon turn away pre-emptively, as we now do with respect to the collapse of the conditions of life. A tragic play does not teach us how to work with compassion or what compassion even is. It may evoke empathy in us, but that actually becomes unhelpful in more cases than we might imagine. Empathy is our basic capacity for resonance, upon which the
theater relies. If someone yawns, others around them may yawn, without any practice-realization of wisdom. Compassion, on the other hand, is like skillful and realistic resonance—the realization of Wisdom. We could loosely think of it as the difference between the basic capacity to move our body that infants display versus the capacity for movement cultivated by an experienced dancer. Few people realize the difference between empathy and compassion, and few realize that compassion requires training. Certainly the dominant culture never teaches that we should cultivate compassion before attending the theater (instead, because of the revolutionary power and import of compassion, we give trigger warnings, and people self-select out of experiences that threaten their ego and worldview, as well as allowing the ego and the culture to co-opt anything too revolutionary). The dominant culture has no mainstream tools for the cultivation of compassion, and so any advice about doing so is largely platitudinous. The Buddhist philosophical traditions, on the other hand, have worked with this training for over two millennia, and now even contemporary science has verified the findings. But the most important verification arises in our own experience of the practice-realization of compassion.184

We engaged in these reflections to both agree and disagree with Bateson’s suggestions about holotrophic medicine based on his limited experience with one of them, while simultaneously clarifying what it would mean to think, speak, and act more wisely by the standards of wisdom Bateson himself endorses. In looking for ways we might practice and realize more wisdom, Bateson does well to recommend the Royal Road of Dreams—seeing that healing begins

184 Thupten Jinpa’s Fearless Heart is a good place to begin learning about compassion practice. A variety of work has been done on compassion and similar forms of mind training. The reader is advised to consult research by Tania Singer, Richard Davidson, Kristen Neff, Joan Halifax, Zoran Josipovic, Barbara Fredrickson, and others. The reader will find an appendix on compassion training in the present text.
“within,” while we must keep an eye on the larger ecologies as well. In other words, the “within” is the “without,” and we touch the World “right here,” in the Heart.

We can see Bateson as cautioning that everything of Dream, from the “ordinary” dreams of an “ordinary” night to the potentially more powerful dreams of the enriched context of, say, an Ayahuasca ceremony, remains in “pieces”:

My own slight experience of LSD led me to believe that Prospero was wrong when he said, “We are such stuff as dreams are made on.” It seemed to me that pure dream was, like pure purpose, rather trivial. It was not the stuff of which we are made, but only bits and pieces of that stuff. Our conscious purposes, similarly, are only bits and pieces. The systemic view is something else again. (Steps 446)

Somehow we have to get in touch with the wholeness of our activity. But dreams can in fact put us in touch with it. We err in treating our “ordinary” dreams as merely ordinary, just as we err in making too much of holotropic medicines, trying to turn them into junk-ease or some other variety of spiritual materialism. This too is a matter of context, shifting the context of thinking-dreaming-being into something more holistic. Contrary to Bateson’s suggestion, with proper practice (or by sheer luck), holotropic medicines can indeed provide an experience of system, of relationship, of interwovenness. Indeed, both these medicines and our dream work can become integrated into a proper science and a spiritual way of life.

Interestingly, Wolfgang Pauli had many dreams that shaped his waking life and inspired both his scientific inquiry and his spiritual growth. All of us have had dreams we may remember years and years afterward. Some dreams become touchstones for our lives. But every single night’s dreaming could serve as a guide for every single day’s activity—if we could begin to work with
them, which itself may entail mutiny against Captain Clock. We can sense the catch-22 here, and the pattern of insanity holds us fast.

Pauli relates in a letter to Jung that a dream at the end of October 1946 had such a strong effect on him that he had to turn to Kepler again. Here we again find the central motifs of rotation and cosmic rays. In the first dream of October 25, he receives a casket through the post. Inside there is an apparatus for the experimental investigation of cosmic rays. Next to it stands a tall, blond man of between 30 and 40. He says that Pauli must force the water up higher than the houses in the city so that the city dwellers will believe him. Behind the apparatus in the box he then sees a bunch of keys, eight in all, arranged in a circle with the key bits pointing downwards. As a comment on the dream he remarks that he has had earlier dreams where a dark, male figure – called the ‘Persian’ – occurs who is not accepted as a student at the ETH. Pauli interprets him as a contrast to the prevailing scientific collective attitude. He thinks that ‘the blond’ and ‘the Persian’ may be two aspects of one and the same figure, like the Mercurius duplex of the alchemists. They both have an extremely ‘psychopompos’ character, i.e. that of a spiritual guide. He calls this figure ‘the stranger’.

The next dream, of October 28, reads:

The ‘Blond’ is standing next to me. In an ancient book I am reading about the Inquisition trials of the disciples of the teachings of Copernicus (Galileo, Giordano Bruno) as well as about Kepler’s image of the Trinity. Then the Blond says: ‘The men whose wives have objectified rotation are being tried.’ These words upset me greatly: The Blond disappears and to my consternation the book also becomes a dream image: I find myself in a courtroom with the other accused men. I want to send my wife a message and I write a note: ‘Come at once, I am on trial.’ It is getting dark, and for a long time I cannot find anyone to give the note to. But finally a Negro comes along and says in a friendly way that he will deliver the note to my wife. Soon after the Negro has left with the note, my wife turns up in fact and says to me: ‘You forgot to say good night to me.’ Now it starts to get lighter, and the situation is as it was at the beginning (except that my wife is now present, too): The ‘Blond’ is standing next to me once more, and I am reading the ancient book again. Then the Blond says to me sadly (apparently referring to the book): ‘The judges do not know what rotation or revolution is, and that is why they cannot understand the men.’ With the insistent voice of a teacher, he goes on to say: ‘But you know what rotation is!’ ‘Of course’ is my immediate reply, ‘The revolution and the circulation of light – all that is part of the basic rudiments.’ (This seemed to be a reference to psychology, but the word is never mentioned.) Where upon the Blond says: ‘Now you understand the men whose wives have objectified their rotation for them.’ Then I
kiss my wife and say to her: ‘Good night! It is terrible what these poor people who have been charged are going through!’ I grow very sad and start crying. But the Blond says with a smile: ‘Now you’ve got the first key in your hand.’ At this point I woke up and was quite shaken. The dream was an experience of a numinous character and has deeply influenced my conscious attitude.

Pauli connects this dream with the anima problem, not only his own but the one in sciences in general. In the seventeenth century something decisive happens in the transition from the hermetic to the classical, mechanical worldview. It concerns the exclusion of the feminine and the soul from matter. Rotation is a typical symbol of the mandala: it is associated with the centring processes that lead to wholeness. To understand ‘rotation’ means to understand the function of the soul (anima) in science. In the seventeenth century the mandala ceases to belong to the inner world, where its function was to integrate the different aspects of existence (body, soul, God and Cosmos). Now the mandala with its ‘rotation’ is instead projected into outer space in Kepler’s vision of the solar system. The soul has begun its exodus from nature, which is doomed to turn into dead matter. The soul is cast into the shackles of subjectivity and the scientist becomes unaware of her (the soul being seen as feminine) function in the cognitive process. When Pauli cries compassionately for the accused he receives the first key. Feeling is the first key to the new understanding of nature and science. (180-1)

We include this dream in our inquiry for a variety of reasons. First of all, it touches upon the mandala principle, and, as our inquiry comes to a close, it is worth emphasizing that a fuller version of it would go into the mandala principle at length. It is one of the most important ways or practices for beginning to enter a better way of knowing.

But it also matters a great deal that Pauli here somehow comes to the importance of compassion and feeling. We can take note of two things in particular. First of all, this revelation of feeling shatters that barrier between science and religion. We have several times noted how Pauli comes to such insights, as for instance the basic insight that how we are with matter will either liberate or bind our very souls. In a general way, as Gieser summarizes it,

Pauli was convinced, this time wholly in agreement with the alchemists, that the ‘knowledge of salvation’ of modern times must presuppose work which leads to
knowledge and thus to deliverance. This applies to work with both matter and psyche. Work with matter has the aim both of gaining knowledge and of improving man’s concrete living conditions. In the same way psychology gives man knowledge of himself, which is a precondition of achieving a meaningful life. What is important to recognize is that religious search and the scientific quest for knowledge have the same incentive. (258)

We only need to keep some clarity about what this “knowledge” is, and what this “improving” of conditions is. As Laozi says,

Do you want to improve the world?
I don’t think it can be done. The world is sacred.
It can’t be improved.
If you tamper with it, you’ll ruin it.
If you treat it like an object, you’ll lose it. There is a time for being ahead,
a time for being behind;
a time for being in motion,
a time for being at rest;
a time for being vigorous,
a time for being exhausted;
a time for being safe,
a time for being in danger. The Master sees things as they are,
without trying to control them.
She lets them go their own way,
and resides at the center of the circle. (Ch. 29)

This controlling . . . it seems to arise on the basis of epistemological error. Recall Dewey’s sense of an aspect of that error: “Plato may have erred. But at least for well over a millennium of years Europe trod the path he marked out. A corrupt and fallen world could be organized and ruled only by principles drawn from a supernatural realm of Being” (UPMP 43). Don’t we try to “organize and rule” this “corrupt and fallen world,” by means of the supernatural principles of science? Don’t we use the runes of mathematics and the enchantments of physics and chemistry to command and “improve” the world? Aren’t scientists and engineers the clerics of the cult of reason and control? If we saw the World as perfect, what would it look like? If the World is perfect, why move millions of people to desert areas, diverting rivers, running air conditioners,
burning fossil fuels? Similarly, if we are so open-minded, why do the default networks of ego control our experience so thoroughly?

It seems to me that Dewey never quite overcame this fundamental problem of control. For instance, in his introduction to a book by F.M. Alexander (the “friend” who “remarked” to Dewey “that there was one superstition current among even cultivated persons. They suppose that if one is told what to do, if the right end is pointed to them, all that is required in order to bring about the right act is will or wish on the part of the one who is to act,” and who provided the example of standing up straight), Dewey writes, “It is a commonplace that scientific technique has for its consequence control of the energies to which it refers.” This is not a strange thing to suggest—90 readers out of 100, if they exhibit the signs and symptoms of conquest consciousness, will not skip a beat on reading such a sentence, and those who do will not likely question it in a way that liberates the mind in the manner our inquiry invites us to attempt.

Though we might reject “control” as a measure of epistemic success, there is much else to recommend itself in Dewey’s introduction to this book, and I would include Alexander’s work, when properly approached, near the top of the list of recommended arts of awareness that might help us know in better ways:

In writing some introductory words to Mr. Alexander’s previous book, *Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual*, I stated that his procedure and conclusions meet all the requirements of the strictest scientific method, and that he had applied the method in a field in which it had never been used before—that of our judgments and beliefs concerning ourselves and our activities. In so doing, he has, I said in effect, rounded out the results of the sciences in the physical field, accomplishing this end in such a way that they become capable of use for human benefit. It is a commonplace that scientific technique has for its consequence
control of the energies to which it refers. Physical science has for its fruit an astounding degree of new physical energies. Yet we are faced with a situation which is serious, perhaps tragically so. There is everywhere increasing doubt as to whether this physical mastery of physical energies is going to further human welfare, or whether human happiness is going to be wrecked by it. Ultimately there is but one sure way of answering this question in the hopeful and constructive sense. If there can be developed a technique which will enable individuals really to secure the right use of themselves, then the factor upon which depends the final use of all other forms of energy will be brought under control. Mr. Alexander has evolved this technique.

In repeating these statements, I do so fully aware of their sweeping nature. Were not our eyes and ears so accustomed to irresponsible statements that we cease to ask for either meaning or proof, they might well raise a question as to the complete intellectual responsibility and competency of the author. In repeating them after the lapse of intervening years, I appeal to the account which Mr. Alexander has given of the origin of his discovery of the principle of central and conscious control. Those who do not identify science with a parade of technical vocabulary will find in this account the essentials of scientific method in any field of inquiry. They will find a record of long continued, patient, unwearied experimentation and observation in which every inference is extended, tested, corrected by more further searching experiments; they will find a series of such observations in which the mind is carried from observation of comparatively coarse, gross, superficial connections of causes and effect to those causal conditions which are fundamental and central in the use which we make of ourselves.

Personally, I cannot speak with too much admiration—in the original sense of wonder as well as the sense of respect—of the persistence and thoroughness with which these extremely difficult observations and experiments were carried out. In consequence, Mr. Alexander created what may be truly called a physiology of the living organism. His observations and experiments have to do with the actual functioning of the body, with the organism in operation, and in operation under the ordinary conditions of living—rising, sitting, walking, standing, using arms, hands, voice, tools, instruments of all kinds. The contrast between sustained and accurate observations of the living and the usual activities of man and those made upon dead things under unusual and artificial conditions marks the difference between true and pseudo-science. And yet so used have we become to associating “science” with the latter sort of thing that its contrast with the genuinely scientific character of Mr. Alexander’s observations has been one great reason for the failure of many to appreciate his technique and conclusions.

As might be anticipated, the conclusions of Mr. Alexander’s experimental inquiries are in harmony with what physiologists know about the muscular and nervous structure. But they give a new significance to that knowledge; indeed, they make evident what knowledge itself really is. The anatomist may “know” the exact function of each muscle, and conversely know what muscles come into play in the execution of any specific act. But if he is himself unable to co-ordinate all the muscular structures involved in, say, sitting down or rising from a sitting
position in a way which achieves the optimum and efficient performance of that act; if, in other words, he misuses himself in what he does, how can he be said to know in the full and vital sense of that word? Magnus proved by means of what may be called external evidence the existence of the central control in the organism. But Mr. Alexander’s technique gave a direct and intimate confirmation in personal experience of the fact of central control long before Magnus carried on his investigations. And one who has had experience of the technique knows it through the series of experiences which he himself has. The genuinely scientific character of Mr. Alexander’s teaching and discoveries can be safely rested upon this fact alone.

The vitality of a scientific discovery is revealed and tested in its power to project and direct new further operations which not only harmonize with prior results but which lead on to new observed materials, suggesting in turn further experimentally controlled acts, and so on in a continued series of new developments. Speaking as a pupil, it was because of this fact as demonstrated in personal experience that I first became convinced of the scientific quality of Mr. Alexander’s work. Each lesson is a laboratory experimental demonstration. Statements made in advance of consequences to follow and the means by which they would be reached were met with implicit skepticism—a fact which is practically inevitable, since, as Mr. Alexander points out, one uses the very conditions that need re-education as one’s standard for judgment. Each lesson carries the process somewhat further and confirms in the most intimate and convincing fashion the claims that are made. As one goes on, new areas are opened, new possibilities are seen and then realized; one finds himself continually growing, and realizes that there is an endless process of growth initiated.

From one standpoint, I had an unusual opportunity for making an intellectual study of the technique and its results. I was, from the practical standpoint, an inept, awkward slow pupil. There were no speedy and seemingly miraculous changes to evoke gratitude emotionally, while they misled me intellectually. I was forced to observe carefully at every step of the process, and to interest myself in the theory of the operations. I did this partly from my previous interest in psychology and philosophy, and partly as a compensation for my practical backwardness. In bringing to bear whatever knowledge I already possessed—or thought I did—and whatever powers of discipline in mental application I had acquired in the pursuit of these studies, I had the most humiliating experience of my life, intellectually speaking. For to find that one is unable to execute directions, including inhibitory ones, in doing such a seemingly simple act as to sit down, when one is using all the mental capacity which one prides himself upon possessing, is not an experience congenial to one’s vanity. But it may be conducive to analytic study of causal conditions, obstructive and positive. And so I verified in personal experience all that Mr. Alexander says about the unity of the physical and psychical in the psycho-physical; about our habitually wrong use of ourselves and the part this wrong use plays in generating all kinds of unnecessary tensions and wastes of energy, about vitiation of our sensory appreciations which form the material of our judgments of ourselves; about the unconditional necessity of inhibition of customary acts, and the
tremendous difficulty found in not “doing” something as soon as an habitual act is suggested, together with the great change in moral and mental attitude that takes place as proper coordinations are established. In re-affirming my conviction as to the scientific character of Mr. Alexander’s discoveries and technique, I do so then not as one who has experienced a “cure” but as one who has brought whatever intellectual capacity he has to the study of a problem. In the study, I found the things I had “known” — in the sense of theoretical belief — in philosophy and psychology, changed into vital experiences which gave a new meaning to knowledge of them.

In the present state of the world, it is evident that the control we have gained of physical energies, heat, light, electricity, etc., without having first secured control of our use of ourselves is a perilous affair. Without the control of our use of ourselves, our use of other things is blind; it may lead to anything.

Moreover, if our habitual judgments of ourselves are warped because they are based on vitiated sense material — as they must be if our habits of managing ourselves are already wrong — then the more complex the social conditions under which we live, the more disastrous must be the outcome. Every additional complication of outward instrumentalities is likely to be a step nearer destruction: a fact which the present state of the world tragically exemplifies.

The school of Pavlov has made current the idea of conditioned reflexes. Mr. Alexander’s work extends and corrects the idea. It proves that there are certain basic, central organic habits and attitudes which condition every act we perform, every use we make of ourselves. Hence a conditioned reflex is not just a matter of an arbitrarily established connection, such as that between the sound of a bell and the eating-reaction in a dog, but goes back to central conditions within the organism itself. This discovery corrects the ordinary conception of the conditioned reflex. The latter as usually understood renders an individual a passive puppet to be played upon by external manipulations. The discovery of a central control which conditions all other reactions brings the conditioning factor under conscious direction and enables the individual through his own coordinated activities to take possession of his own potentialities. It converts the fact of conditioned reflexes from a principle of external enslavement into a means of vital freedom.

Education is the only sure method which mankind possesses for directing its own course. But we have been involved in a vicious circle. Without knowledge of what constitutes a truly normal and healthy psychophysical life, our professed education is likely to be mis-education. Every serious student of the formation of disposition and character which takes place in the family and school knows — speaking without the slightest exaggeration — how often and how deplorably this possibility is realized. The technique of Mr. Alexander gives to the educator a standard of psycho-physical health — in which what we call morality is included. It supplies also the “means whereby” this standard may be progressively and endlessly achieved, becoming a conscious possession of the one educated. It provides therefore the conditions for the central direction of all special educational processes. It bears the same relationship to education that education itself bears to all other human activities.
I cannot therefore state too strongly the hopes that are aroused in me by the information contained in the Appendix that Mr. Alexander has, with his coadjutors, opened a training class, nor my sense of the importance that this work secures adequate support. It contains in my judgment the promise and potentiality of the new direction that is needed in all education. (from Alexander 1955: xvii-xxi)

It’s nice to hear about the humiliation of a great philosopher—not because of schadenfreude, but because it indicates a movement from the “known” to something much more interesting. Reading this passage, one may understand why a philosopher could find it tempting to enroll in such a training course, as I did. The training is something like getting a master’s degree: Three years on roughly a semester system, with 20 hours per week in class, and as much study and practice outside of class as one can manage. Then comes many years of cultivation, for one cannot do this sort of work with skill except by means of ceaseless practice.

Having succeeded only modestly, I can at least say that the emphasis on “control” one sees both in Dewey and Alexander does make a certain amount of sense. But it seems to also get people confused about what they really need to practice and realize in order to function skillfully and realistically. The more rational procedures Alexander could successfully capture in language do not suffice. In Alexander’s preface to the same book (in a spirit that could serve as a preface to our inquiry here), he warns that the reader should not be surprised if they find that they are unsuccessful in learning to apply my technique, particularly since in attempting to change and improve the use of themselves they are called upon to work to a new principle, and, further, that in this process they must inevitably come into contact with hitherto unknown experiences, because the carrying-out of the necessary procedures calls for a manner of use of the self that is new and unfamiliar, and when first experienced “feels wrong.” In any attempt therefore to apply my technique to changing and improving the use of the self, it is courting failure to continue to depend on the “feeling” which has been the familiar guide in the old habitual “doing” which “felt right,” but which was obviously wrong since it led us into error.
May it not be that some of those who have complained of difficulty in trying to teach themselves may have overlooked this point, and to that extent be responsible for their own failure? And here I would like to add a word of warning to those I am trying to help, for a study of the letters in which the writers tell of experiencing difficulty in understanding shows signs of having been written after a quick reading rather than a close and careful study of the subject-matter. I read recently an article suggesting that people should practise reading quickly, although the habit of too-quick reading in which understanding becomes dominated by speed—that royal road to the physical and mental derangement of mankind—is an only too common failing to-day. This is only one example of the habit of too-quick reaction to stimuli in general, and to its prevalence may be traced most of the misunderstandings, misconception, and misdirection of effort manifested by the great majority of people to-day in conducting matters relating to the body politic.

Again, those who have written asking for help in teaching themselves are obviously almost wholly occupied with the idea of learning “to do it right.” In reply I would refer them to the first chapter of this book, where I put down as exactly as possible what I did and (what was still more important in the end) what I did NOT do in teaching myself. If they will look at page seven, they will see that at the beginning of my experimentation I found that I must not concern myself primarily with “doing,” as I then understood “doing,” but with preventing myself from doing—preventing myself, that is, from giving consent to gaining an end by means of that habitual “doing” which resulted in my repeating the wrong use of myself that I wished to change. My record shows that the farther I progressed in my search for a way to free myself from the slavery to habitual reaction in “doing” (which I had created for myself by trusting to the guidance of my unreliable sense of feeling), the more clearly I was forced to see that my only chance of freeing myself was, as a primary step, to refuse to give consent to my ordinary doing” in carrying out any procedure. (vii-viii)

Thus one needs to enter some semblance of nondoing, which gives entrance to nonlocalized knowing, thinking, speaking, moving. It does not feel like “control,” and we can return to Plato’s suggestion, when he wrote of madness and its many “fine achievements,” that, “We must not have any fear on this particular point, then, and we must not let anyone disturb us or frighten us with the claim that you should prefer a friend who is in control of himself to one who is disturbed” (245b).
Perhaps ironically, cybernetics, the science Bateson helped develop, was in part about control (as its name suggests). How can a missile control itself? How can a machine, computer, or robot control itself? How does an organism control itself? Loosely speaking, these are some of the questions that inspired the cybernetic revolution. Bateson’s skepticism about conscious purposes is effectively skepticism about conscious control—or skepticism about control as we understand it.

How does spider do what she does? How does fly do what he does?

Is there a control center? Is there a controller in your skull? Is what we call the “self,” is what we refer to as I-me-mine the controller of our life?

We cannot locate a controller. We only find interwovenness. Ultimately we find the interwovenness of our soul and the Cosmic soul (people still freak out at the sight of “Cosmic soul,” but such people often live as if they can control their lives). At least some people influenced by cybernetics began to see that “control” is not strictly speaking a localizable process. We live in a nonlocal World, a nonlocal Cosmos, embedded in nonlocal Ecologies (ecologies of practice-realization). Such an insight is perhaps the origin of Bateson’s concerns about “conscious human purposes”. He saw that we do not “control” our lives, and that (all the more so, in some sense) we cannot possibly control “the world,” cannot “improve” the World.

When we try to live in a mode of control, a mindset of control—part of the style of conquest consciousness—we create negative side-effects. Under the right circumstances, those negative
side-effects become deadly, catastrophic, even at a planetary scale. For Bateson, the nuclear arms race stood out as an excellent symptom of this disorder of the Soul (though, it is not hard to find countless excellent examples, and Bateson discusses others, such as “ecological” harms created by the western way of living).

It is important to understand the scientific basis of this insight that ordinary “control” is a delusion. After all, we not only have the original finding from Libet et al. (1985) of a delay of a few hundred milliseconds between our experience of conscious choice on the one hand, and a prior, unconscious spike in neural potential on the other. Most people have heard of this: A few hundred milliseconds before we think we make a decision, “something” apparently already decided. However, Soon et al. (2008) used more refined methods to go far beyond milliseconds to establish a ten second delay. In other words, Soon et al. could look at what was going on in a participant’s brain, and the reliably predict ten seconds before the participant claimed to make a conscious choice that they would make a conscious choice. Imagine that. Imagine that I ask you to make a choice, to choose for yourself under your own control of when the choosing would happen, and at the moment you decide, “Now,” ten seconds have passed since I said to someone observing with me in another room, “The choice has been made, and shortly this little ego will try and take credit for it. Watch as the little ego says, ‘Now.’” Ten seconds later, ‘you’ say, “Now.”

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185 To clarify, our fMRI machines cannot operate in real time like this, so the researchers had to look at a recording of the brain activity and then predict on the basis of that recording when the also recorded choice would come. They could predict it, and if we had equipment that could display real-time activity with sufficient resolution, we could make the prediction in real time.
But even this sort of work makes the error of looking for the choice “inside” of the “organism,” and we lack the sophistication in our technical science to see, perhaps hours or days in advance, perhaps weeks or months in advance, how a choice of the larger ecology will emerge apparently in relation to a localized part of it, for instance in a “choice” a human person makes in relation to other humans—and we would poke fun at anyone who claimed to have access to such larger patterns, especially if they, for instance, called that access “astrology,” “tarot card reading,” “Yijing reading,” “remote viewing,” or any of a number of other names. Yet this doesn’t mean anything more than saying, “Do you see the difference between Libet et al. (1985) and Soon et al. (2008)? Well, an even greater leap can be made, and we have access to the larger patterning in which choices always participate, because we ourselves participate in them already. We are these larger patternings, and they come to awareness in various ways.”

Any “choice” will always be relational, and the larger ecologies will always contextualize and constitute that “choice”. Standing far from the Earth and pointing at “where” “my” decision was made, we would say, “There.” We thus come to Eliot’s, “I can only say, there we have been: but I cannot say where.” Indeed, Eliot invites us into the Moment, into the Bardo:

At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor fleshless; Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance is, But neither arrest nor movement. And do not call it fixity, Where past and future are gathered. Neither movement from nor towards, Neither ascent nor decline. Except for the point, the still point, There would be no dance, and there is only the dance. I can only say, there we have been: but I cannot say where. And I cannot say, how long, for that is to place it in time. The inner freedom from the practical desire, The release from action and suffering, release from the inner And the outer compulsion, yet surrounded By a grace of sense, a white light still and moving, Erhebung without motion, concentration Without elimination, both a new world
And the old made explicit, understood
In the completion of its partial ecstasy,
The resolution of its partial horror. (1968: 15-16)

Here we see the paradoxes of the Bardo, and the paradoxes of doing. We cannot “do,” and so we cannot “control”. Here too we can keep in mind how both Nietzsche and Jung challenged our ordinary notions of “control”. In the case of Jung, it shows up, for instance, in his insights into the powers and factors in the soul that live in, through, and as us, and also his insights into Synchronicity and the boundlessness of the soul—the rupture of space and time, and thus Eliot’s refusal to place The Dance in space and time, just as the mystic refuses to place Sophia or the Divine in space and time, even though they also manifest in, through, as what we call space and time. In the case of Nietzsche it shows up, for instance, in his critique of the “sovereign individual,” his deep question about whether we can truly embody reality, and his insight that western culture, including its politics and morality, would be gravely threatened by what the embodiment of reality might entail—and thus western culture is organized to keep us oriented away from reality while we nevertheless take our experience as reality.

Again in a more “scientific” mode of speaking, if we study tuna separate from water, we cannot explain the swimming of tuna. The “body” of a tuna fish does not explain how it can swim so fast, for that body cannot produce enough “force” to swim as fast as tuna fish do in fact swim. We need to study fluid dynamics and the interplay (we might say InterPlay, or interrelationship and interwovenness) of tuna and water in order to explain the swimming of a tuna fish. The water directed the discovery-creation of tuna, and the water directs the swimming of tuna (see Barrett 2012). Of course, this is all a process of mutuality. We must see tuna-ocean-grey whale-kelp-krill-orca-otter - - - - - - - all in mutuality.
This is the irony of trying to control Sophia: We become controlled, controllable, manipulated, hooked, possessed by karma, lived by powers of delusion we pretend to understand, rather than being lived by powers of liberation. Liberation means an end to controller and controlled, and only such a way of life can be called a way of knowing, a way of wisdom, that earns those names. Self-liberating into the patterning of things self-liberates us into wisdom, love, and beauty. This activity is the activity of love and compassion. The feeling of this activity is beauty, wonder, bliss.

Compassion for the accused, the condemned, the damned . . . Can we manage it? Pauli’s dream seems to invite us to feel again, to feel for the ignorance of the accused as well as their accusers. Feeling is very much an issue here. A thread of suffering runs through our inquiry, suffering brought about by how we have known ourselves and our world, how we have known how to do science and technology, how we have known how to love and hate, how we have known how to live. Wrong living is suffering. Thus, Buddha said to his students,

Now it is for one who feels that I proclaim: ‘This is suffering,’ and ‘This is the origin of suffering,’ and ‘This is the cessation of suffering,’ and ‘This is the way leading to the cessation of suffering.’ (Numerical Discourses, Book of Threes, II. (Great Chapter), Sutta 61, translation in Bodhi 2012: 269)

A highly regarded Thai philosopher Luangpor Teean wrote a text inspired by these words. In the preface he writes,

This book is not concerned with words, but with the practice at yourself: the fruit that is received, you receive it at yourself. This method is therefore the most direct and easiest. It is to watch the mind at the moment it thinks, to know the deception in the actual moment, and to resolve it there. It isn’t that knowing the thought we
evaluate it, because doing so is delusion (anger and greed as well). When we can
cut here, there is sati-samadhi-panna complete at this moment.\textsuperscript{186}

This sati-samadhi-panna is in one sense Wisdom (panna)-Love-and Beauty (sati-samadhi). More
literally, panna is wisdom. Samadhi indicates the well-put-togetherness of life, and in particular
the achievement of a well-put-togetherness in our own experience. Sati indicates re-membering,
a remembering in, through, as which we embody and presence what we conventionally refer to
as mindfulness. All of this depends on love, on an ethic of care and compassion, an ethic of
virtue and skillful thinking.

In our lack of wisdom, love, and beauty, we seek after fruit, as in Bateson’s myth. This style of
mind, this grasping, is the essence of conquest consciousness.

In terms of grasping and grasping, we must recognize that we grasp after concepts for
satisfaction as much as we grasp after chocolate and even ordinary objects. We can speak of
“grasped-grasping,” which means that we do not grasp something outside of our own grasping.

When we reach for the cup, we don’t reach for the cup, and we never get hold of the cup. We
instead grasp our own grasping. It’s part of the Cosmic Joke. Hilarity ensues—though often in
the form of suffering that sometimes takes tragic turns. It’s when we can get free of it that we can
laugh, even at the parts that seem really awful when we are caught in the midst of them.

When we look at an action carefully, we may see the following: We think a lot, and then we
suddenly find ourselves taking action. William James noticed this. The idea is that action does

\textsuperscript{186} http://www.mahasati.org/oneWhoFeels.html
not happen due to “conscious choice,” but at moments of lapsed consciousness. Why? Because we cannot consciously control our mind, body, heart, world. There is no place to stand, no way to get leverage. It’s comical to think otherwise, and yet we do. One can try this. Sit in a chair. Just sit with a loose intention to stand. Notice how a lapse in awareness usually occurs in the process.

We can instead do the following: We can watch with great clarity and natural stability as things happen all by themselves. This is the proper function of what we call consciousness. It is only a facet of what we can call a primordial awareness which already does just this, as the womb of all action. Everything arises in, through, and as this primordial awareness. If we begin to just look at our action, we can get in touch with this deeper and broader awareness, cutting through our dualistic mind. The dualistic mind cannot “do” things, and this is why choice is experienced as a lapse of mind when we look at it carefully. Then, looking at it fluidly, we can allow action to arise.

Nietzsche gets at some of the important issues here. He notes, as we often have along with him, that will and “justice” get bound up completely in weird culture. Free will means freedom to judge and to punish. An obsession with will is the hallmark of a culture that wants its egos on steroids. He also notes the importance of our inconceivability: That we cannot say anything about ourselves really, because that would be to say something about the whole of life, the whole Cosmos, the multiverse. One cannot do such a thing. To see this inconceivable beauty is paramount. Of course, where one gets started with this vision will vary. Anything I might write is not necessarily the best place to begin practicing for any given reader. This is why there are so
many “secret teachings” in Buddhist traditions. Such a way of working with things is most honest: In interbeing there is no teaching without a teacher and a student, and any given bucket of words is as likely to drown someone as to quench their thirst.

We also need to practice some awareness of the interbeing of what we call willing with other things. Freeman’s idea that will crucially involves the limbic system is just about on the nose (ha ha—he did work on the olfactory system) with the Buddhist philosopher Hui-neng’s notion that “the passions themselves are enlightenment.” Freeman tries to summarize the altogetherness this way:

> Our intentional actions continually flow into the world, changing the world and the relations of our bodies to it. This dynamic system is the self in each of us, it is the agency in charge, not our awareness, which is constantly trying to keep up with what we do. (2000: 139).

He seems to still miss a deeper awareness. He means here the ego, not the awareness Jung entered in the dying process, the nondualistic awareness.\(^\text{187}\) Once we transform habitual action and intention, transform the heart-mind-body-world-cosmos, letting go of all our doing, then immediately the passions themselves function in their profoundest aspect, and nothing can stop the flow of love and compassion. It is gnosis as know-how, wisdom as skill, compassion as creativity.

\(^{187}\) Study of this nondual consciousness is far more recent and exceptionally limited in comparison to the study of “consciousness,” which itself is a relatively new area of scientific research. The work of Zoran Josepovic is a good place to start, though other researchers are definitely in the game, such as Richard Davidson and company, John Dunne, Adam Hanley, and others.
The nonlinearity of free will is also inconceivable. We think we live in a universe of straight lines and right angles, paved over, shingled, covered in plastic. The Cosmos is more interesting than that. What we call will emerges in an altogether way. For there to be will in the way we narrowly conceive of it, there would have to be a willer, one who could stand outside of things, stopping the sun in the sky. These things have been noted in fragmented form by countless scientists and philosophers. Nevertheless, there is skillful effort, compassionate intention, realistic renunciation. We can say Yes and we can say No, beyond the “picking and choosing” grasping of conquest consciousness. It is so important to see why “the Great Way” means giving up picking and choosing without giving up life, without collapsing into nihilism or shallow self-effacement. As Trungpa put it:

In the ordinary sense, renunciation is often connected with asceticism. You give up the sense pleasures of the world and embrace an austere spiritual life in order to understand the higher meaning of existence. In the Shambhala [spiritual] context, renunciation is quite different. What the [spiritual] warrior renounces is anything in his experience that is a barrier between himself and others. Any hesitation about opening yourself to others is removed . . . The idea of renunciation arises when you begin to feel that basic goodness belongs to you. Of course, you cannot make a possession out of basic goodness . . . It is a greater vision, much greater than your personal territory or schemes. (2003: 59)

We should return here to Dogen as well:

When you realize [the teaching of the Buddha], you do not think, ‘This is realization just as I expected it.’ Even if you think so, realization inevitably differs from your expectation. Realization is not like your conception of it. Accordingly, realization cannot take place as previously conceived . . . Reflect on this: What you think one way or another before realization is not a help for realization. (Tanahashi, 876, with slight modification)

Further on Dogen tells us, “Understand now that there is only a single buddha’s eye, which is itself the entire earth . . . Also, learn that the entire earth is itself the dharma body” (879). And then he makes clear an ecological vision, a nonlocal vision, a nonlocal epistemology:
To seek to know the self is always the wish of living beings. However, those who see the true self are rare. Only buddhas know the true self. People outside the way regard what is not the self as the self. On the other hand, what buddhas call the self is the entire earth. (879)

The interwovenness of these things is easy to underestimate, as is the strangeness they may invite us into from the standpoint of practicing-and-realizing a better way of knowing, a better way of living. If we don’t bring to fruition a better way of living, we are left with platitudes. “What the buddhas call the self is the entire earth” amounts to another load of junk, and meanwhile that Earth continues to degrade as we continue to “regard what is not the self as the self.”

We are talking about an end to grasping, including the grasping after answers to our problems. We do need insight. We need Wisdom, Love, and Beauty. We need to rejuvenate our ecologies. And we cannot wait until all our grasping is gone, because that might only happen when the conditions of life, which allow any grasping at all to exist, shift catastrophically. Nevertheless, if we want to find out to what degree truth can endure incorporation, if we want to run the experiment as Nietzsche invited, we have to open up to much more than our current forms of discourse and ways of life tend to allow. I know how hard this may seem, or how strange, because much of it still seems strange and challenging to me.

It seems important to keep emphasizing the need for something revolutionary. We have touched on this in many ways. We are getting to the point at which we have little choice but to start mobilizing. We have gotten to the point at which we should, if we want to keep a clear conscience, make sure our students understand the insanity of our situation, and help them understand the divine madness that may help them transform it. We considered George Monbiot’s view, and it comes from years of writing about climate issues. It has struck me
personally as quite remarkable that we have arrived at a point at which we have no serious, vocal, and consistent philosophical calls for revolution—but we do have scientific ones.

We have by now contemplated enough artefacts to sense an image. But I still see a few obstacles to sensing that image. Perhaps they all boil down to something like this: I am not sure how to get a typical intellectual to genuinely receive the suggestions I think we need to receive. There are two aspects of this—we might call it two kinds of anomalous data that indicate our culture is an in-the-cave culture, a society of Platonic troglodytes who think themselves highly sophisticated. Our delusion has put us into a tragic-catastrophic situation. At times I am not even sure if enough of my colleagues in academia realize the apparent gravity of our situation. That gravity prompts people like George Monbiot to write the words we considered above—he has made ecological issues a central part of his career as a responsible journalist, just as I think any responsible philosopher must do the same. The situation has prompted Chris Hedges to write words I have never heard in a philosophy course:

We must sever ourselves from reliance on corporations in order to build independent, sustainable communities and alternative forms of power. The less we need corporations the freer we will become. This will be true in every aspect of our lives, including food production, education, journalism, artistic expression and work . . .

The longer we pretend [a] dystopian world is not imminent, the more unprepared and disempowered we will be. The ruling elite’s goal is to keep us entertained, frightened and passive while they build draconian structures of oppression grounded in this dark reality . . . Even if we cannot alter the larger culture, we can at least create self-sustaining enclaves where we can approximate freedom. We can keep alive the burning embers of a world based on mutual aid rather than mutual exploitation. And this, given what lies in front of us, will be a victory.188

188 https://www.truthdig.com/articles/the-world-to-come/
In reflecting on the quote above, we may see some rather positive things in what Chris Hedges has to say. No matter how on or off track we find his suggestions, we may need to see that we need something else, something that will allow us to realize a way out of this mess. Hedges’ suggestions, at least in this brief passage, won’t really do that. I think he’s right that we must sever our reliance on corporations, and we must also see what we can actually rely on. Where is our true refuge? Philosophy has always sought to put us in touch with our true refuge. We need this now more than ever. Where are the philosophers who will help?

Writing this book has involved an ongoing witnessing of destruction and degradation. News about the state of our ecologies has gotten worse and worse. Hedges has witnessed the same unravelling as he has done his best to challenge the structures of power responsible for it, and rally the rest of us into much needed revolution. Not long after writing the passage above, he wrote this one:

There is one desperate chance left to thwart the impending ecocide and extinction of the human species. We must, in wave after wave, carry out nonviolent acts of civil disobedience to shut down the capitals of the major industrial countries, crippling commerce and transportation, until the ruling elites are forced to publicly state the truth about climate catastrophe, implement radical measures to halt carbon emissions by 2025 and empower an independent citizens committee to oversee the termination of our 150-year binge on fossil fuels. If we do not do this, we will face mass death.\(^{189}\)

Even over the past few years, an incredibly thin slice of geological time, the future has become grimmer in prospect—which really says something. Already in December of 2012, at a conference of the American Geophysical Union, Brad Werner, of the Complex Systems Lab at UC San Diego, delivered a paper titled, “Is Earth F**ked?” Such language does not occur often
in science—not only the expletive, but also the urgency it conveys. Consider the full title of his paper: “Is Earth F*#ked? Dynamical Futility of Global Environmental Management and Possibilities for Sustainability via Direct Action Activism.”\(^{190}\) In other words, Dr. Werner attempted to argue, by means of dynamical systems theory, that the time has come for revolt. We could therefore characterized his paper as *a scientific argument for political/ ecological revolution*, based on the simple premise that we might like to avoid the situation in which our planet is “f*#ked,” as well as the evidence of how things stand right now, and how well we seem to be doing at resolving the matter within the political, economic, and philosophical frameworks currently dominating the discourse around climate collapse.

Lest we imagine this kind of thinking an isolated case, let’s consider a blog post from 2013 by Kevin Anderson, professor of energy and climate change and Deputy Director of the UK’s Tyndall Centre for Climate Change. In this post, Anderson argues that a price on carbon cannot keep us within the 2 degrees centigrade target which some scientists put forth as the (possibly dangerous) upper bound for *relatively* manageable climate shift. He writes the following:

> Our ongoing and collective carbon profligacy has squandered any opportunity for the ‘evolutionary change’ afforded by our earlier (and larger) 2°C carbon budget. Today, after two decades of bluff and lies, the remaining 2°C budget demands *revolutionary change to the political and economic hegemony*. And if that’s too challenging to countenance we should be honest and reject 2°C as either too onerous an endeavour, or acknowledge that we lack the courage to try.\(^{191}\)

Such apparently science-based arguments (whether we accept them or not) hint at why we might want to characterize this as a crisis in *philosophy*. We might suggest that for at least three reasons: Philosophers need to address the situation (and it is a crisis situation), philosophers must

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\(^{190}\) Abstract available at http://adsabs.harvard.edu/abs/2012AGUFMEP32B..04W  
\(^{191}\) Available at: http://kevinanderson.info/blog/why-carbon-prices-cant-deliver-the-2c-target/
see the ways in which the discipline has contributed to it (a crisis in the way philosophy has been practiced), and philosophers must wake up to the new context, a context that has never existed before. The latter issue has appeared in various ways in our inquiry, and it has to do with an almost invisible crisis of the context of philosophy.

To say it another way, in speaking of a crisis in philosophy we speak about nothing fancy, intellectual, or abstract. We have a crisis in our way of life, a crisis in how-we-do-things. It seems hardly radical to suggest that a healthy culture dedicated to nurturing healthy souls would look very different from the dominant culture, would do things very differently, would see things, would sense the World differently. For instance, we would spend much, much more time in Nature, and that Nature would still have a lot of wildness in it. That means, among other things, we would see the stars radiant in the dark of night, a night filled with the music of nocturnal beings. We would walk in forests and swim in rivers, lakes, oceans. We would think a living thinking, thinking with Raven and Wren, with Horse and Whale, with Mountains and Rivers. We would live in a context of dream, listening to dreams and treating them not only as a personal possession, but relating to them socially, as if your dream has something to offer the World, guidance and insight for me and others, and my dream has something to offer you in return, in mutuality. We would live in a context of ceremony and celebration, a context of gift and gratitude, a context of circle gatherings, a culture of the campfire, a culture of conversation, a salon culture in the finest sense. It would be the context of our living bodies and the Body of the Earth, the living hearts, minds, bodies, and worlds that constitute our precious ecological niche of the Cosmos. It would be the context of rich diversity, which means ecological diversity in the broadest sense, and ecological health and resilience in the broadest sense. It would be the
context of a nonlocal, nonlinear Cosmos, alive and alove, and brimming with meaningfulness, open, holding us all in place, in purpose. As the philosopher Erazim Kohák (1984) notes, this is not our context. Rather our context looks degraded, because of its “development”:

In the global city of our civilization, girded by the high tension of our power lines, we have abolished the night. There glare of electric light extends the unforgiving day far into a night restless with the eerie glow of neon. We walk on asphalt, not on the good earth; we look up at neon, not at the marvel of the starry heavens. Seldom do we have a chance to see virgin darkness, unmarred by electric light, seldom can we recall the ageless rhythm of nature and of the moral law which our bodies and spirits yet echo beneath the heavy laughter of forgetting. The world of artifacts and constructs with which we have surrounded ourselves knows neither a law nor a rhythm: in its context, even rising and resting come to seem arbitrary. We ourselves have constructed that world for our dwelling place, replacing rude nature with the artifices of techne, yet increasingly we confess ourselves bewildered strangers within it, ‘alienated,’ ‘contingently thrown’ into its anonymous machinery, and tempted to abolish the conflict between our meaningful humanity and our mechanical life-world by convincing ourselves, with Descartes, that we, too, are but machines. (ix-x)

Perhaps because of the age of this book, the passage understates the situation. Almost no one will experience night as our ancient ancestors did, or even our ancestors of just a few hundred years ago. Gone from our context: the awesome sight of the Milky Way, the planets, the constellations and stars glowing as they did when the Mind of our current (perhaps barely hanging on) potential gazed up at them, related with them, so many millennia ago. Gone that profound impact, the mysterious in-forming and transforming of Cosmic darkness and light. That thinking has been, to some degree, abolished—and now damned.

To have abolished night . . . to have poisoned entire ecosystems . . . to have constructed a world of bewildered strangers, atomized nihilists, alienated sleepwalkers living in landscapes empty of the exuberance of wild bird song and the flying symbolism they carry to us—gift to us—and thus missing the meaningfulness that once filled the air (gifting inspiration), filled all things (gifting
the palpability of sacredness), and now a world of “nothing but,” a universe of nothing but matter, nothing but consumption and trash . . . What a context! It seems impossible. Our ancestors of just a few hundred years ago would have thought it impossible that human beings could, for instance, decimate thousands of species, drive our oceans to near collapse of life that has sustained us for so many millennia, or cut down or indirectly kill 3 trillion Trees. Thomas Huxley famously declared the supply of cod inexhaustible, and yet we have lost perhaps 90 percent of the cod population, as we simultaneously wreck the coral reefs of the World and keep a dizzying record of ocean species going and gone.

Kohák wrote his delightful book while living in a relatively wild and secluded place—an admirable attempt to return to Wisdom, Love, and Beauty, to return to Sophia and Her Wildness, and to learn from Her, to let Her transform his soul. Though someone like Charles Fisher might chide Kohák for living too civilized a life, Kohák could nevertheless still write, “A mile beyond the powerline, the night still comes to restore the soul, the deep virgin darkness between the embers of the dying fire and the star-scattered vastness of the sky” (30). We could pause a moment here, between the Embers and the Stars, in the darkness that no longer exists in our artificial world. What is LoveWisdom beyond the power line? How can we arrive at it? Why is it important? Is it important? Have we really transcended all our old context, such that we can presence wisdom, love, and beauty without a healthy relationship to Nature, to Natural ecologies?

Our ego has its own immune system, its own defense mechanisms (in more “scientific” terms, the ego is a dynamic system, a self-stabilizing process or event . . . it is no more a “thing” than
anything else we label with a noun, but it has the apparent “persistence” in “time” that we associate with that which we label with nouns). We don’t really see the ego, and, in a way more significant, we do not see the unconscious and we do not see the sacred powers and inconceivable causes that live themselves in, through, as us.

One of the things we have been asking in this inquiry goes like this: Is the state of the world enough for us to really put aside our preconceived notions (including the ones we repress) with enough skill and poise that we could think differently? I am not sure what we are waiting for. It seems as though we have this story that “some people” are behaving irrationally, but we have entertained suggestions in this inquiry that the problem is not well-put that way, because we all participate, because all of this comes from a style of consciousness we share, and that it all proceeds quite rationally given premises philosophy has done little to vigorously challenge and offer alternatives for. We must mean by “vigorously challenge” an effective activity, for most of the world does not read academic philosophy, and most of the world does not think in the dry, non-religious, technical manner. Even our notion of validity strikes me as anemic and cut off from the fuller activity of thinking we have tried to draw close to in our inquiry. But perhaps we can only open to it after facing the anomalous data and its potential implications.

Let’s return to that first level of data again, the ecological. Not long ago, Paul Ehrlich of the Department of Biology at Stanford, and John Harte at the Energy and Resources Group at UC Berkeley, published a paper called, “Food security requires a new revolution.” They headline the paper as follows:

A central responsibility of societies should be supplying adequate nourishment to all. For roughly a third of the global human population, that goal is not met today.
More ominously, that population is projected to increase some 30% by 2050. A central responsibility of societies should be supplying adequate nourishment to all. For roughly a third of the global human population, that goal is not met today. More ominously, that population is projected to increase some 30% by 2050. The intertwined natural and social systems, that must meet the challenge of producing and equitably distributing much more food without wrecking humanity’s life-support systems, face a daunting array of challenges and uncertainties. These have roots in the agricultural revolution that transformed our species and created civilization. Profound and multifaceted changes, revising closely-held cultural traditions and penetrating most of civilization will be required, if an unprecedented famine is to be avoided.

And they encourage a Revolutionary Spirit:

But events like the civil rights revolution in the United States in the 1950s and 1960s and collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989 show that, when the time is ripe, sudden change is possible even when seemingly very unlikely [73]. You can be sure complex adaptive systems will produce emergent properties, and they are not necessarily all bad. What is obvious to us is, however, that if humanity is to avoid a calamitous loss of food security, a fast, society-pervading sea change as dramatic as the first agricultural revolution will be required – and one where the consequences will be carefully considered. Will change be sufficiently great not just in food getting, but in human demographics, consumption patterns, especially in the energy sector, and in norms? For the new revolution to succeed the changes will both require, and help promote synergistically, new forms of governance and of economic relationships. And only then might the resulting nutritional bounty be equitably shared over the planet.192

In spite of the call for “new forms of governance and of economic relationships,” we may think the crux of this challenge relates more to the global south than to those of us in the seemingly comfortable north. But Nature’s necessities may force us to think again. Jason E. Smerdon of the Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory, co-author of a recent paper on upcoming droughts in the U.S. Central Plains and Southwest, had this to say about the work done in producing that paper: “Even when selecting for the worst megadrought-dominated period [of the past], the 21st century projections make [those] megadroughts seem like quaint walks through the Garden of

Eden.” Quaint walks through the Garden of Eden. Startling language. And we must add to this the fact that what water we do have to drink has become dangerous. Allaire, Wu, and Lall (2018) found that millions of people in the U.S. drink unsafe water each year, with the range of threat verging up to 28% of the population in any given year. But, this marks a conservative estimate of danger, because we have not regulated all the chemicals that make their way into our water and into our bodies, our HeartMindBodyWorldCosmos. Nor have we determined the interwoven activity of these chemicals—perhaps on our capacity to think and know with skill, to dream, to conjure forth viable solutions to our problems. The Environmental Working Group found that the water in 42 states contains 141 unregulated chemicals and another 119 regulated chemicals. Even if the glass of water you drink violates no established safety standard, that may only be due to the fact that what’s in the glass has no established standard, and furthermore that, while the many chemicals in your glass might be at a level declared safe by this or that standard, we have no idea how all of them together will affect you, today and over the course of many years. A more recent report by the Environmental Integrity Group and Earthjustice (with data available only after the range of the study by Allaire, Wu, and Lall) found that ground water in 39 states contains unsafe levels of toxins from the burning of coal. The study found that 91% of coal-fired power plants have made the drinking water in their environs toxic. Isn’t this a kind of violence, injustice, immorality that our culture inflicts on us and on all sentient beings? It seems like a cultural and structural violence, and it often unfolds in such a way that we cannot sense the pattern of insanity very easily.

193 http://www.earth.columbia.edu/articles/view/3232
195 https://www.environmentalintegrity.org/reports/coals-poisonous-legacy/
Things look equally challenging if not more so with respect to food. Currently, food availability remains chronically uncertain in many parts of the world, affecting billions of people, and drought will persist and intensify in areas of the U.S., the Middle East, Africa, and elsewhere for the foreseeable future. A recent scientific model puts us at a permanent disjunction between supply and demand for food by 2040, which does not take into account possible tipping points we might cross, or ones might have already, unwittingly crossed. To quote Dr. Aled Jones, Director of the Global Sustainability Institute at Anglia Ruskin University, where the model was developed:

We ran the model forward to the year 2040, along a business-as-usual trajectory. . . The results show that based on plausible climate trends . . . the global food supply system would face catastrophic losses, and an unprecedented epidemic of food riots. In this scenario, global society essentially collapses as food production falls permanently short of consumption.196

In a committee meeting Jones was quoted as saying, “The financial and economic system is exposed to catastrophic short-term risks that the system cannot address in its current form.”197

Are we really preparing our students to deal with this, philosophically speaking?

A paper by James Hansen and others should intensify our concerns. Our global conversation about climate collapse has typically taken 2 degrees centigrade as an upper bound, long disputed as a dangerous one. We are currently on track for 5 or 6, which has been called a “science fiction” scenario in terms of its dystopian effects. Even getting to 2 degrees will take critical insights and seemingly impossible action.198 Thus the title of Hansen’s paper gives a clear

196 http://www.informationclearinghouse.info/article42191.htm
197 Ibid.
198 See, for instance, Bill McKibben’s, “Global Warming’s Terrifying New Math,” Rolling Stone, July 19, 2012. It is McKibben who rightly calls 5 degrees a “science fiction” scenario.
indication of the seriousness of our situation: “Ice melt, sea level rise and superstorms: evidence from paleoclimate data, climate modeling, and modern observations that 2 degrees C global warming is highly dangerous.”\textsuperscript{199} In light of all this data, we can understand why the British economist Nicholas Stern titled a recent article, “The Next Two Decades Will Make or Break Humanity—Why Are We Waiting to Fight Climate Change?”\textsuperscript{200} Stern has said that, “Whatever way we look at it, the action we need to take is immense.”\textsuperscript{201} And we should note again that we are not talking about avoiding far-off events. The World Bank, not known as a bastion of radical or alarmist suggestions, recently released a report projecting that, on our present course, we will see 100 million people thrust into “extreme poverty” in just 15 years (Hallegatte et al. 2015).\textsuperscript{202} It behooves us to take that figure as conservative. Even setting aside everything else we know, consider the ethical implications of allowing such a thing to happen, and consider the political ramifications when that number of people decide they will not go gently. Indeed, we should pay attention to the findings indicating that we can link 40% of all deaths to pollution and environmental degradation.\textsuperscript{203}

These \textit{contextual} elements constitute an altered state of philosophy. No one has ever philosophized under these circumstances. Let’s not mistake that for the trivial notion that no one

\textsuperscript{200} http://www.alternet.org/books/next-two-decades-will-make-or-break-humanity-why-are-we-waiting-fight-climate-change
\textsuperscript{201} http://climatenewsnetwork.net/stern-warns-that-humanity-is-at-climate-crossroads/
\textsuperscript{202} https://openknowledge-worldbank.org.oca.ucsc.edu/bitstream/handle/10986/22787/9781464806735.pdf?sequence=13
has ever philosophized under “precisely” these circumstances, or that no one ever philosophized in conditions of crisis. Instead, we come upon the more disturbing perception that no one has philosophized with scientific evidence that the collapse of the conditions of life on the planet could occur before their very eyes—and because of their actions, including the failure to navigate the crisis with greater Wisdom, Love, and Beauty. We can reasonably see this as an indictment of our way of knowing ourselves, each other, and the World. We may think here of Solzhenitsyn’s *Gulag Archipelago*:

> If only it were all so simple! If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?

> During the life of any heart this line keeps changing place; sometimes it is squeezed one way by exuberant evil and sometimes it shifts to allow enough space for good to flourish. One and the same human being is, at various ages, under various circumstances, a totally different human being. At times he is close to being a devil, at times to sainthood. But his name doesn’t change, and to that name we ascribe the whole lot, good and evil.

> Socrates taught us: *Know thyself*

> Confronted by the pit into which we are about to toss those who have done us harm, we halt, stricken dumb: it is after all only because of the way things worked out that they were the executioners and we weren’t. If Malyuta Skuratov had summoned us, we, too, probably would have done our work well!

> From good to evil is one quaver, says the proverb. And correspondingly, from evil to good. (2007: 168)

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204 As environmental philosopher Dale Jamieson put it: “The core problem is that this is a completely unprecedented problem.” (http://www.climatecentral.org/news/fifty-years-after-warning-climate-talks-19637) It does not seem that philosophers in the academy have grappled or wrangled or turned to face this with any degree of sufficiency. Though some may do so, we need a mass movement of Love Wisdom . . . professors of philosophy must come together to become Philosophers—and we need each other for this.
We may also think of this powerful line from the same work: “Every man always has handy a dozen glib little reasons why he is right not to sacrifice himself.”

As a note to fellow professional philosophers, let me say that, it seems to me—and I am continually willing and almost hoping to be wrong about this—but it seems to me that we as a discipline need to recognize and genuinely confront the apparent fact that we are, according to the latest science, in the midst of a serious if not a mass extinction and a potentially dreadful and catastrophic shift of the conditions of life as we have known them. The last mass extinction took an asteroid to accomplish. We are accomplishing this one—whether a true “mass extinction” or just an incredible and morally horrific less-than-mass extinction—just by living our lives, which includes virtually every aspect of how we philosophize: The way we think, the way we teach and research, the coffee we drink, the cars we drive, the books we purchase and publish, the food we eat, the phones we use, the many trips we take, the sheets we sleep in, and on, and on, and on. We are all seized by a life-threatening case of soul scurvy, and a principal symptom seems to be our incredible incompetence at educating our students about this crisis. They need revolutionary suggestions—not desperate suggestions, but suggestions that may go so far outside the bounds of comfort for many people in many philosophy departments that I harbor significant doubts anything sufficient will appear in them.

205 I wouldn’t go so far as to “hope,” since philosophy begins at the end of hope, and at the end of fear.
If I thought the way we teach LoveWisdom could heal the soul, heal the World, then I would endorse it whole-heartedly. As things stand, we seem to need a radical transformation in our way of knowing, including our way of knowing what LoveWisdom is. We have a few as 60 harvests left. 60. And it takes 1000 years to cultivate an inch of topsoil.\footnote{https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/only-60-years-of-farming-left-if-soil-degradation-continues/ and https://www.monbiot.com/2015/03/25/3703/} We face a collapse of the insect populations—and these are some of the most successful species ever to appear, so let us think how this might bode for humanity.\footnote{https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/feb/10/plummeting-insect-numbers-threaten-collapse-of-nature and https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/oct/20/insectageddon-farming-catastrophe-climate-breakdown-insect-populations} Horseshoe crabs, part of the miraculous 5% of beings who survived the traumatic end-Permian mass extinction, have seen a 90% population collapse.\footnote{https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/nov/03/horseshoe-crab-population-at-risk-blood-big-pharma} A recent U.N. report (and these reports tend to be conservative in the wrong direction) gives us, gives the world, a 12-year ultimatum.\footnote{https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/} We have just over a decade to avert catastrophe, but actually to still leave ourselves with serious consequences from our long history of incoherence, unskillfulness, and ignorance—our long history of not embodying our own highest values. An even more recent report informs us that \textit{one million} animal and plant species are threatened with extinction.\footnote{https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2019/05/nature-decline-unprecedented-report/} I am not sure we have any idea what that really means, as the scale boggles the mind and the heart, such that we can take it in neither with compassion nor with wisdom unless
we give ourselves to it whole-heartedly. Tipping points and nonlinear dynamics make mass extinction a process that, once triggered, will likely move with unstoppable and traumatizing force. We could be in the midst of one, or maybe it’s just a horrific, immoral non-mass-extinction event. Even if we aren’t in the early stages of a genuine mass extinction, the current level of “biological annihilation” (see Ceballos et al. 2017) is still wreaking havoc on the hearts, minds, bodies, souls of those undergoing it—including those individuals and species who may survive. Even if human beings are not among the species going extinct, human beings will feel that loss, not only psychologically, but physically too. We will suffer greatly for it.

It can feel both heartbreaking and morally horrific to condemn so much of the human and more-than-human world to painful and irrevocable destruction. Consequently, it can feel impossible to philosophize without acknowledging the level of suffering in the human and more-than-human world arising as a result of our current way of life, our current “forms of life and forms of discourse.” Moreover, it seems we should see ourselves realistically as just another species. We have some wonderful technology, and we have proven relatively adaptable and innovative. Nevertheless, at the end of the day, we must see ourselves as a very recent (youthfully ignorant), soft-bellied, hard-headed creature who may not fare any better than the millions of other species we eliminate. Even if that seems too strange to contemplate, we can easily understand, based on the science we have, that millions of people already suffer needlessly because of climate collapse, and that we will likely see hundreds of millions or even billions more people suffering, many even dying, in the lifetime of almost anyone reading these words.
We might agree to see this as a serious moral issue, worthy of the consideration of our ethicists.

Or, we may think this discussion has verged into “politics” or something philosophically inappropriate. But one of the most important questions we can consider together is whether such assessments hold in the altered states of philosophy we now face, and those we may face in the future.212 In any case, we find ourselves back with Socrates. A recent report from the World Economic Forum asks, “Is the world sleepwalking into a crisis? Global risks are intensifying but the collective will to tackle them appears to be lacking. Instead, divisions are hardening” (9).

Sleepwalking was the problem Socrates identified. The report is titled, “2019 Global Risks Out of Control,” and it claims that, “Of all risks, it is in relation to the environment that the world is most clearly sleepwalking into catastrophe” (15).

In this altered state of philosophizing, in the incredible situation we face today in which many philosophers are sleepwalking into catastrophe (and, we might say, sleepwalking their students into catastrophe), our political, economic, and basic philosophical views may need serious reconsideration. In some sense, political parties and economic theories no longer matter, and our “scientific” metaphysics and epistemology are up for grabs. What we “know” must become doubted. We now face, a “sacred duty to rebel in order to protect our homes, our future, and the future of all life on Earth.”214 Any genuinely viable and vitalizing way forward will only come from Original Thinking, and this thinking we do not wonderstand. As things continue to fall

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212 “Altered state” indicates that the context of philosophy has altered or changed significantly, and it carries the same connotation in our present context to say, “We are philosophizing in an altered state” as it would to say that when we had gotten drunk or taken a strong dose of sleeping pills.


apart, we may join our fellow citizens in thinking, perhaps to our own chagrin, that a certain intellectual tradition had some valid points which we should have incorporated into the way we have organized society, nothing in neoliberalism, Marxism, or other political or economic views will save us for two reasons.

First of all, to say it again, the nature and scale of the crises we face are unprecedented. No already-existing intellectual tradition has a ready-made answer—and “science” alone cannot manufacture one. We find ourselves in uncharted waters. Most of us experience the daunting nature of this, how it all feels unfixable, how we need to just keep living from day to day, and how we secretly hope that, surely, someone will figure something out.

But who will figure it out? On what basis? On what will they rely? Anyone trying to solve the problems we face will very likely do so on the basis of the same kind of thinking that got us into them. Instead of joining our fellow citizens in thinking someone will figure things out, we should perhaps just begin to join our fellow citizens—in thinking, thinking-in-activity. As Hedges puts it:

If we do not shake off our lethargy, our anomie, and resist, our misery, despondency and feelings of helplessness will mount. We will become paralyzed. Resistance, especially given the bleakness before us, is about more than winning. It is about a life of meaning. It is about empowerment. It is a public declaration that we will no longer live according to the dominant lie. It is a message to the elites: YOU DO NOT OWN US. It is about defending our dignity, agency and self-respect. The more we free ourselves from the bondage of fear to throw up barriers along the forced march toward ecocide the more we will be enveloped by a strange kind of euphoria, one I often felt as a war correspondent documenting horrific suffering and atrocities to shame the killers. We obliterate despair in our acts of defiance, even if our victories are Pyrrhic. We reach out to those around us. Courage is contagious. It is the spark that ignites mass revolt. And we should, even if we fail, at least choose how we will die. Resistance is the only action left that will allow us to remain psychologically whole. And it is the only action left
that has any hope of halting the wholesale extinction of the human race, not to mention most other species.\textsuperscript{215}

Even though we may agree with much of what Hedges invites us to consider, we should keep our mind of LoveWisdom, our heart of WisdomLoveBeauty, and move with great care, so that we do not allow the old thinking to perpetuate itself. That is the second problem: Any gesture we make right now will be shaped by the style of consciousness we have practiced and realized.

This is the second level of frustration for me. I have been vexed and saddened by the ongoing collapse of the conditions of life as I have pursued this work. But I have also felt keen frustration with the deeper dimensions of how we seem to have gotten into this mess and what we may need to do to get out of it. It has seemed strange to find out how many people have inquired carefully into the space our epistemology seeks to delineate. It’s there, and yet it remains at the margins, with many aspects of it dismissed.

We could have approached our inquiry in many ways, and could have emphasized quite different border territories of this Bardo Awareness. For instance, there is a large literature on the other kind of anomalous data, relating to what we call the “supernatural” or “paranormal”. Why do we write it off? Why does it not even show up as salient? We use the phrase, “Not on my radar.” Why not? We have suggested that the collapse of the conditions of life should be considered as evidence that our way of knowing, our way of living requires a paradigm shift. The scientists making a scientific case for revolution should thus consider making a scientific case for a new way of knowing, not just a new political-economic system. What do we really expect from

\textsuperscript{215} https://www.truthdig.com/articles/extinction-rebellion/
conquest consciousness? Its style of relating manifests in its politics, its economics, its ecologies, and its sciences. Similarly, the development of science depends on the development of scientists, and we can see that the philosophical context of that development is suspect. So why don’t we all feel more open to other ways of knowing?

I have felt deep gratitude, for instance, that Sophia brought to me my first taste of the ufology literature—a major literature of anomalous data—and I felt equal gratitude for the people engaged with these matters. Admittedly, some of it does seem “airy-fairy,” but that is the worst possible reason for writing something off, because that is just another face of the general problem of spiritual materialism that affects academia as much as it affects so-called “new age” thought and literature.

What I personally experience when I read this, or even peer-reviewed scientific literature on the anomalous data available to us, is a mix of astonishment tinged with distress. I find it incredible that we seem so unable to open ourselves and do the work necessary to meet this data. We seem unable to sense the Superness of Nature, but just this kind of rejuvenated sense of things marks the essence of a better way of knowing. It’s as if we need—above all else—a new attitude of knowing in order to know better, and that attitude involves a living loving sense of sacredness and magic that our style of consciousness has removed from the world—made unknowable, whether or not it can actually exist. If something is not allowed in our ontology, it is not knowable, and must be explained on the basis of what we will allow (in our great wisdom, our great insight into the nature of reality), and this amounts to metaphysical policing, which is part of how conquest consciousness maintains its conquered territory.
We think ourselves very sophisticated, very rational when we insist on “naturalistic”
explanations. These explanations only allow “naturalistic” phenomena. This sounds reasonable,
but it reveals the intensity of entanglement in dualistic thinking: We do not see how this kind of
dualistic thinking creates problems and limits our capacity to be responsive to ourselves, each
other, and the World. There is an analogy here in van Fraassen’s (2002) critique of
“empiricism”: We decide we are going to live in a box (“the empirical”) and we must wait to
find out what is allowed in the box (whatever “science” allows). We decide ahead of time, with
great confidence, that we cannot experience anything that doesn’t belong in the box. If someone
claims to have experienced something that doesn’t belong in the box, they have mis-seen or
misunderstood—or they want to deceive us.

We do need to discern the difference between illusion and perception, and at the same time we
must not reify that discernment, or we then fail to sense how we imagine the World forth—not in
an airy-fairy way, but in the concrete way we all engage, as our way of life, our practice-and-
realization, our way of knowing (the one we must stop “doing,” and start nondoing). Our
dualizing obscures this, and it obscures ourselves, obscures reality. Instead of leaping into
aliveness and aloveness, we decide we will live in a box (or a cage), and we cannot experience
what doesn’t belong in that box. If someone claims to have experienced such a thing, they must
somehow be deluded or deceitful. How do we let go of this duality?

We could turn, for instance, to Strieber and Kripal (2016)—not for an answer, but to further
enter the inquiry, to wander further into the darkness. Kripal is a serious scholar, and this shines
through with his opening words for the book he co-wrote with Strieber, a book called *The Super Natural*: “I am afraid of this book.” Why? Because it seems to evoke a bit of fear and trembling to turn toward the possibility that the world is already a Super Natural World. To call it “supernatural” merely repeats the duality of our limiting thinking: We put the “natural” on one side, and “supernatural” on the other; the “rational” on one side, the “irrational” on the other. But Nature is already wonderous, exceeding all our concepts. The Cosmos can become *intelligible* without being *conceivable*. I think of Yeats here. In a letter he wrote to Elizabeth Pelham in 1939, he says,

> When I try to put all into a phrase I say, ‘Man can embody truth but he cannot know it.’ I must embody it in the completion of my life. The abstract is not life and everywhere draws out its contradictions. You can refute Hegel but not the Saint or the Song of Sixpence. (from Ellman 1999: 289)

It’s as if he accepted Nietzsche’s challenge, Nietzsche’s experiment of incorporation. By means of intimate experience, we can wonderstand the living Cosmos without “knowing” it, in the manner of ordinary understanding. This wondering is knowing as gnosis, by which term I mean to stipulate that it is not a dualistic “knowing”. The Cosmos is not an object, but a celebration, a sacred love affair we co-create and co-discover. To *enter* life engages a sensitivity and responsiveness in mutuality, and this arises as intelligible and inconceivable at the same time. As the cosmos evolves and develops, there will always be more to discover-create, in total mutuality.

The World is Super. The World is Natural. To touch the Superness of Nature, all we need to do is change the way we sense, think, move, touch, commune and communicate (comical: “all we need to do” . . . funny because it demands a total revolution, and also because we cannot “do” it). We can *enter* the wonder that already is this World—by which we can mean a mystical
participation, in a sophisticated and positive sense. It is an already-World, an altogether-World, a Magical World in a non-woo sense of “magic”. This challenges our ego and our narrow paradigm. Kripal speaks of “an apocalypse of thought”: “I am afraid of this book. There is something about it, something explosive and new. It is not a neutral book. It is an apocalypse of thought waiting for you, the reader, to actualize” (1). It would be wonderful if we could experience an apocalypse of thought, and I only wish to someday write such a book. The present one is not enough.

Kripal goes on with words that could serve as a preface to our considerations here: “The world will not really end as you turn these pages of course.” The world, in some literal sense, will not end. But the world of delusion we have entangled ourselves in could end, as could the conditions of life upon which we all depend. The Sun depends on us to help it across the sky. We have to come out of our cave to do that work.

Continuing with his preface to our inquiry here, Kripal says that his and Strieber’s book explores “the proposal that we are all embedded in a much larger, fiercely alive and richly conscious reality that is only, at best, indirectly addressed by everything that the human species has ever thought or believed” (1-2). He says the book is an attempt “to understand, to really understand that we are already and always have been living in a super natural world, that we ourselves are highly evolved prisms or mediums of this super nature coming into consciousness, and that many of the things that we are constantly told are impossible are in fact not only possible but also the whispered secrets of what we are, where we are, and why we are here” (2).
I quote Kripal specifically because of his collaboration with Whitley Strieber, one of the most well-known authors in the ufology literature. How would the typical philosopher read an “abduction” account? How does the typical philosopher read any anomalous data?

We could think of at least some of this anomalous data as advantageous data . . . we could consider Visions, Synchronicities, Prophetic Dreams, and so on as “advantageous data,” or perhaps “advantaged data,” “prerogative data” or “concessionary data,” or even, with a nod to Dewey, “consummatory data”—the exact opposite of consumption, and thus a rebellion against the dominant culture and its way of doing science—or, with a nod to Aldrich, “data of achievement”—which in our inquiry references the sacred epistemology of practice-realization. We could then replace “data” with Experience. Experiences arising during, or in one way or another due to, practices of meditation are an example of advantaged or consummatory “data”.

Why? Because they come from having advanced along a Way, from having practiced until Sophia has granted us concessions, gifts, graces, insights and inspirations that come in, through, as, with our immediate intimacy with the perfect-and-complete (consummate) nature of ourselves and reality. That doesn’t quite get at it, but it’s not the worst kind of metaphorical formulation.

In the limited scientific domain, we could call the much of the data “privileged data”. There, we would note how “privileged” one must be to acquire such data. It takes tremendous resources to build, power, and operate a particle accelerator, and to go through the necessary education to understand what to do with one, how to use it with some effectiveness, how to interpret the data it generates. In the broadest sense, we could also call such data advantaged and even, in some
cases, consummatory, but it is more privileged than advantaged in the most ethical sense. True consummatory data, data worthy of that name, can only emerge in a proper spiritual context. Discovery of the Higgs boson is hardly consummatory in any proper philosophical sense—a consummation of “knowledge” perhaps, and perhaps even a consummation of elegance theorizing, and thus a certain kind of beauty, but certainly lacking wisdom and love, and bereft of any rich sacredness.

The etymologies of all of the terms come into play. For instance, “privileged” relates to “private,” and today we must sense how it associates with the duality between public and private in general, as well as with particular dualities such as private wealth and public illth, organism and environment, culture and nature. Today we can speak of “priv lit,” which signifies literature written by authors of privilege, authors (often with white skin) who have the income and leisure to pursue certain kinds of experiences, and to write about them in particular ways. We don’t want a science of privilege, a science of wealth and illth, of private against public.

But we can also recognize the advantages of a good education. We can see that, with proper education, Nature will grant us certain concessions and prerogatives. The root of “prerogative” goes back to words signifying “going straight” and “reaching out one’s hand.” What hand reaches out in the prerogative we speak of here? The hand of Nature, the hand of Sophia reaches out to us the moment we go straight, the moment we reach out in nonreaching, the moment we reach out in nonaggression, the moment we reach out in sacredness and wonder, the moment we reach out in nongrasping, without trying to “get” anything or “do” anything. The getting and
doing put us on a crooked road instead of the straight Path (Way, Dao), with all its nonlinearity, its spirals and curves, its astonishment and inconceivability.

We could suggest a general need for advantaged or consummatory experience. Calling some of these experiences “non-ordinary” functions in one sense, if we understand “ordinary” to mean “asleep,” like someone sleepwalking into catastrophe. Non-ordinary then means awakening (in the extreme, awakened), or non-habitual, non-fettered, non-domesticated, non-aggressive, non-fragmented. But people often refer to “non-ordinary” states as if they are not to be trusted. This shows a rather silly bias. It is like calling the practice of Aikido “non-ordinary falling.” Anyone who reflects with care would rather fall in such a “non-ordinary” way than in the typical, unskillful, reactive way. Moreover, we need to admit that our science depends on a wide array of non-ordinary thoughts, practices, and experiences. We foolishly subject the natural world to incredible interventions in order, for instance, to make “particles” and advance our notion of physics, chemistry, and science in general. We do this for all sorts of sciences. We extract, process, heat, burn, bang, smash, dissect, inject, damage in very non-ordinary ways (we do these things even with sentient beings). We go to extremes in order to “know”. How extreme is spiritual life in comparison to what we do in the name of science? We must ethically evaluate both the ordinary and the non-ordinary.

Ironically, the most advantaged experience is the most humble: Just to be what we are, how we are, why we are. Just to accept ourselves in genuine modesty takes us to a greater extreme than the strangest scientific experiment, to arrive at the place we stand takes us on a greater journey than the wildest scientific expedition. The transcendence of all theories demands and reveals a
greater genius than any theoretical genius humanity has ever seen. Being together, living as an act of love, demands more courageous insight and gentleness than any ordinary scientist has ever had to muster in the name of knowledge, more beauty than any artist has ever produced, more wisdom than any sage has ever been able to express in words. To touch someone, to touch the World, truthfully, authentically . . . this is everything.

Such truly nonaggressive, non-ego-centric experience also arises from seemingly “extreme” practices, such as Shamanic drumming, ecstatic dance, remote viewing, psychic experiences, near-death experiences, dream work, ingestion of certain kinds of Medicine, a wide variety of rituals, rites, and ceremonies, and many kinds of meditation. These practices help to liberate us from the ordinary forms of bondage we subject ourselves to, the forms of bondage we practice in an ongoing way. We are, most of us, stuck. We have stuck ourselves inside a bag of skin. Mind is “in here”. We are “in here”. Practices of advantaged or artful, graceful experience help us to leap beyond what our limited notions tell us and condition us to see. Even our most serious science can turn us toward the soul’s calling, the calling beyond our opinions and ideas, a call to leap beyond atomism and aggression, suffering and stagnation, a call to enter the darkness, to enter the wildness of the Cosmos. But, oddly enough, many scientists and philosophers try to limit science itself, declaring that any invitation to leap beyond our limited and limiting notions is a leap beyond the world, a leap beyond rationality or reasonableness, a leap into superstition, and so on.

Even experiences related to “aliens” may invite us into the kind of leap we need. Whitley Strieber says of these experiences, “Instead of shunning the darkness, we can face straight into it
with an open mind. When we do that, the unknown changes. Fearful things become understandable and a truth is suggested: the enigmatic presence of the human mind winks back from the dark” (from Strieber and Kripal, 111). He writes,

I don’t mean to say that it’s entirely in the mind, but that the mind might not be entirely in us. In other words, mind might not be entirely confined to the brain. Since the moment I began to apprehend the actual dimensions of the experience in all its wonderful improbability and confusing physicality, I have been dogged by that improbability. I can’t get away from it though. My intellect says that it cannot be true. My life bears witness to its truth. (34)

Can we transcend the divide between the “rational” and the seemingly irrational potentials of our own experience? Our most serious science tells us we live in a connected Cosmos, an interwoven and entangled Cosmos, a nonlocal Cosmos—which includes what we call mind. But our “intellect” tells us this cannot be so, and we struggle against it. Militant scientists and politicians make war on it.

To be quite clear, Strieber does not really write about “alien abduction” but about non-ordinary experience. He writes,

Having been the object of their visitations over a period of years, and the recipient of hundreds of thousands of narratives from others who had similar experiences, I wish to suggest from the outset that this phenomenon is much larger than any of the usual explanations, including alien visitation and such interpretations as brain seizure. It is far richer, more complex, and more ambiguous than we commonly suppose . . . (23)

Gradually, superstitions about everything from seasonal changes to the appearance of diseases and natural disasters and much else gave way to logic and scientific understanding. However, there is one area that remains outside of understanding, and which is by far the most culturally potent of them all. . . . it is what we now call the supernatural. It has reemerged in the form of the alien and UFO stories that abound in our time, and threatens to degenerate into a new superstition if it does not receive the study necessary to determine what it actually is. (21-2)
Should we ever come into more general contact with what I encountered . . . they will not be offering us plans for a starship or a trade in exotic electronics. What will be on offer . . . is a journey into a whole new understanding of reality and the part we play in it. The “alien” is as much a herald from the dark of the universe as it is a signal from the depths of our own minds. The discovery of the reality behind UFO and alien apparitions and the discovery of our own truth will prove to be profoundly intertwined. When this discovery is finally made, we will at that moment become immeasurably larger. Free at last from the constricted vision that now so limits us we will begin the journey toward which we have been struggling from time immemorial into a new relationship with the universe and a new understanding of mind and the natural world. (24)

In working with this advantaged data, Strieber and Kripal take a middle way: Not hallucination, and also not literally “space men”. Strieber writes,

Despite the fact that I can’t explain them, I frequently see and interact with nonphysical and quasi-physical beings. They seem to be part of nature just like we are, but . . . in some “super” way for which we have neither an adequate religious model nor present science. . . .

They also have, at least in my life, what has come to seem a rather clear aim. They want to challenge me with questions too provocative to be left unanswered, but which I cannot, in all frankness, answer in anything approaching an objective manner. (29)

Why would I bother reading this literature for the purposes of an inquiry into a space of knowing that I suggest we need to learn how to enter? Because, whatever is going on here, it involves a way of knowing, and more importantly it seems an awesome invitation to know—to know differently, rather than follow the conquest impulse of explaining it all away. Strieber is not some lone lunatic. When he made his experiences public, he started receiving letters from others who reported similar experiences. For a time, he was getting 10,000 letters a month (31). He estimates that between 1987-2000 he received half a million letters (32). I shouldn’t have to note how astonishing that is. When he tried to gather up all this material and offer it for study to neurologists, psychologists, and so on, “There was not just no scientific interest, but the reaction was often hostile” (33). Perhaps we need to consider how unsurprising that is, and how
unfortunate. Strieber claims that, “Most members of the academic, scientific, and intellectual communities, let alone our serious media, have to this day no idea how extensive the experience actually is” (33). Our interest could change, says Strieber, only if “the most interesting aspect of the phenomenon, which is its ambiguity, is to replace the either/or debate” (33).

The either/or is the, “either it’s aliens or it’s delusion or deceit.” But this only expresses the narrowness of our context, our perception, and our imagination. What might be here that most of us don’t perceive? In Beyond Words, Carl Safina shows us that we are surrounded by minds—surrounded by Mind, by the Mindedness, Mindfulness (sati), and Sacredness of Nature. But we have cut ourselves off from it, and we don’t walk around experiencing ourselves as alive and alone in a womb of sentience, presencing the mystery of a primordial awareness. Thus, there is a sad irony in all of the projected techno-fantasies we see both in the ufology literature (and its dismissals and/or elaborations in popular media) and in our society in general. We are so closed off to the magic all around us that the Soul can only get some of us to listen by means of these techno-fantasies, which we then take literally—that “tech” can save the world, that aliens have “tech” that may destroy us or help us, that deluded people think they have been taken into alien spacecraft. It is obviously possible that there are “alien” “visitors,” but even then we must realize that each case of seeing lights in the sky or seeing various beings may be unique. Some of these experiences might be the soul speaking, while others may even be “aliens” speaking (or some Other, every bit as natural as dolphins and jaguars, and perhaps living “here” with us, as alien as they may seem). Ultimately they are, all of them, both.
The Soul Speaks in whatever way it can, and our job is to listen, sense, touch, taste—open, opening even to apparent madness. There was a time when the Soul made use of fairies and sprites. There was a time when the Soul spoke by means of Wolf, and even the Spirit of Wolf or Wolf Medicine. We could go out and commune and communicate with Wolf, Bear, Mountain. Coyote could speak. The right kind of soul attunement allows for advantaged experiences, artful, graceful experiences, consummations of our lives. Being “abducted” by “aliens” is, in some sense, the same basic kind of spiritual experience as a Shamanic Journey—only we lack the proper context, the proper Culture, and so the experiences remain virtually wasted. As Strieber wisely puts it, “There is a big mystery here. But the first place to look is not to the skies—it’s to us. We must look into ourselves . . .” 216

But this does not mean Coyote cannot “actually” speak. There, we lurch back into our skin-bag. If we want a new way of knowing, I would humbly suggest we should really consider how we could hear Coyote and know with him. Black Elk relates an example of the kind of knowing our inquiry seeks to help us co-discover-create:

We stayed on Clay Creek in Grandmother’s Land all that summer and the next winter when I was sixteen years old. That was a very cold winter. There were many blizzards, game was hard to find, and afterwhile the papa (dried meat) that we had made in the summer was all eaten. It looked as though we might starve to death if we did not find some game soon, and everybody was downhearted. Little hunting parties went out in different directions, but it is bad hunting in blizzard weather. My father and I started out alone leading our horses in the deep snow. When we got to Little River Creek we made a shelter with our bison robes against a bank of the stream and started a fire. That evening I saw a rabbit in a hollow tree, and when I chopped the tree down there were four rabbits in there. I killed them all, because the snow was so deep they could not get away. My father and I roasted them and we ate all four of them before we went to sleep, because it was hard walking in the snow and we had been empty a good while.

216 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qAdlV8icOGc
The wind went down that night and it was still and very cold. While I was lying there in a bison robe, a coyote began to howl not far off, and suddenly I knew it was saying something. It was not making words, but it said something plainer than words, and this was it: “Two-legged one, on the big ridge west of you there are bison; but first you shall see two more two-leggeds over there.”

My father had dozed off, so I wakened him and said: “Father, I have heard a coyote say that there are bison on the big ridge west of us, and that we shall first see two people over there. Let us get up early.”

By this time my father had noticed that I had some kind of queer power, and he believed me. The wind came up again with the daylight, and we could see only a little way ahead when we started west in the morning. Before we came to the ridge, we saw two horses, dim in the blowing snow beside some bushes. They were huddled up with their tails to the wind and their heads hanging low. When we came closer, there was a bison robe shelter in the brush, and in it were an old man and a boy, very cold and hungry and discouraged. They were Lakotas and were glad to see us, but they were feeling weak, because they had been out two days and had seen nothing but snow. We camped there with them in the brush, and then we went up on the ridge afoot. There was much timber up there. We got behind the hill in a sheltered place and waited, but we could see nothing. While we were waiting, we talked about the people starving at home, and we were all sad. Now and then the snow haze would open up for a little bit and you could see quite a distance, then it would close again. While we were talking about our hungry people, suddenly the snow haze opened a little, and we saw a shaggy bull’s head coming out of the blowing snow up the draw that led past us below. Then seven more appeared, and the snow haze came back and shut us in there. They could not see us, and they were drifting with the wind so that they could not smell us.

We four stood up and made vows to the four quarters of the world, saying: “Haho! haho!” Then we got our horses from the brush on the other side of the ridge and came around to the mouth of the draw where the bison would pass as they drifted with the wind. (93-5)

Can we hear Coyote today? I am not sure we can, though I am quite confident that Coyote speaks, and that we could hear if we learn how to listen better, how to know better.

We have to be led to listening, led to it by means of our humiliation. That may sound strong. It only means that, at the very least, we require humbleness, or even humbition (Walter Kaufmann’s term for a perfect balance of humility and ambition or high intention). At the same time, there can be a need to sense our own stupidity in ways that may feel uncomfortable. In the
study of LoveWisdom, sensing our stupidity often arises in our varied attempts to cover over our stupidity. We try to not appear stupid. We either sense our ignorance and try to avoid it, or we actually miss our ignorance. In either case, there are questions we need to ask but fail to ask. We fail to open ourselves to Wisdom, that openness of mind that scares us away at the outset because of its resemblance to madness, because the frightened ego does not want to give up its central status, and we cannot transcend the patterns of control that go along with its presence.

It is not knowledge that dispels stupidity (not knowledge as we have conceived it) but Wisdom alone (a gnosis, a knowing that remains in touch with the sacred mystery, a knowing that is loving, a knowing that is beauty). We require a sincere willingness, even if it’s shaky and tender at first, to be wrong, foolish, to make a fool of ourselves, to say, “I really don’t know.” Socrates could honestly say, “I don’t know,” even if he wondered that knowledge will not solve our problems. In other words, Socrates might have been Wise indeed, and he might have found it impossibly strange that we think we can run our lives on the basis of “knowing”. Wisdom arrives at the aporia—the threshold, the Bardo, the entrance to Mystery—and not at the place we think we know.

Perhaps we can find many academics who think, “If everybody would just be more rational,” or, “If everybody would just read Kant,” or something like that, “then we’d have a better world.” Humorously, I often think the issue has to do with studying, practicing, and realizing LoveWisdom in a more realistic and skillful way. Of course, my colleagues likely think the same
thing, in their own way. Hillman too thought that psychology could actually help us, if we could more skillfully and realistically orient ourselves. He shared this sense of things with Jung, who in turn shared a sense of psychology as a practice of LoveWisdom, a practice of philosophy.

We return again and again to the central importance of LoveWisdom, which it seems to me the culture and the profession do not honor as they could. Hillman, as we noted, might also have said something like this, “We have had years and years of academic philosophy, the dissemination of ‘reason,’ the repeated analysis of passages by Kant and other intellectuals. Almost every student who gets a college degree will have some exposure to philosophy—probably much more exposure to philosophy, relatively speaking, than their exposure to psychological theories and practices for overcoming their maladies of soul. Some people probably consider this a golden age of philosophy, and there are more people today calling themselves philosophers than perhaps the total of all the people who so called themselves in the previous 2500 years. And yet the world is getting worse in very crucial and tragic ways.” We have contemplated how this constitutes a crisis in philosophy and in our culture. We can turn to Jung for a nice suggestion in relation to this point as well:

As the most complex of psychic structures, a man’s philosophy of life forms the counterpole to the physiologically conditioned psyche, and, as the highest psychic

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217 Although, not many of my colleagues would include in that more skillful and realistic way practices that go beyond reading and analyzing texts, and, when we do read texts, to make sure we read texts that come from non-western traditions, and also non-male philosophers. Not only do few philosophers think meditation and art belong in philosophy classes, but they may find it odd to suggest serious study of Indigenous and other non-western traditions. Even Buddhist philosophies have barely a toe hold in western universities. Nor do very many male philosophers have a serious dedication to presenting non-male perspectives. Good philosophers deserve our attention, whatever their gender, whatever their culture. But, we may have to contemplate dropping from the syllabus certain figures the contemporary academy continues to adore—or at least changing the manner that understanding is practiced and realized. Something has to give. Will it be the syllabi or the conditions of life?
dominant, it ultimately determines the latter’s fate. It guides the life of the therapist and shapes the spirit of his therapy. Since it is an essentially subjective system despite the most rigorous objectivity, it may and very likely will be shattered time after time on colliding with the truth of the patient, but it rises again, rejuvenated by the experience. Conviction easily turns into self-defence and is seduced into rigidity, and this is inimical to life. The test of a firm conviction is its elasticity and flexibility; like every other exalted truth it thrives best on the admission of its errors. (CW16, para. 180)

Our philosophy is complex, and it determines our fate. As we have suggested, it is our whole way of life, so intimate that we cannot see it. It guides the life of each of us, and it guides the life of the World. The World is lived by our LoveWisdom—or it is lived by our ignorance. And we are that World. Our philosophy, all the philosophy of the dominant culture, has collided with the truth of the World and the truth of our soul and the souls of all beings. What are our errors? Can we properly identify and admit them? Can we really have an open mind (aside from taking LSD)? This is a practice, not a belief about ourselves. As Luangpor Teean writes,

When we talk about a method to end dukkha [suffering], the words are one thing and the practice is quite another. The method of practice is a method of developing sati (awareness) in all positions: standing, walking, sitting and lying. This practice has frequently been called satipatthana (the grounds of awareness), but whatever you call it the point is to be aware of yourself. If you are aware of yourself, then moha (delusion) will disappear. You should develop awareness of yourself by being aware of all your bodily movements, such as turning your hands, raising and lowering your forearms, walking forward and back, turning and nodding your head, blinking your eyes, opening your mouth, inhaling, exhaling, swallowing saliva, and so on. You must be aware of all of these movements, and this awareness is called sati [often translated as mindfulness, here as awareness, but, for us, with the proper etymological connotation of re-membering]. When you have awareness of yourself, the unawareness, which is called moha, or delusion, will disappear.

To be aware of the movements of the body is to develop sati. You should try to develop this awareness in every movement. When you are fully aware of yourself, there arises a certain kind of panna (knowing) in the mind that knows reality as it is. To see yourself as you are, to see Dhamma (actuality; the way things are; the truth of nature, of existence). To see Dhamma isn’t to see deities, hell or heaven, but to see oneself turning the hands, raising and lowering the forearms, walking forwards and back, turning and nodding the head, blinking the eyes, opening the mouth, inhaling, exhaling, swallowing saliva, and so on. This roop-nahm. Roop is body, nahm is mind. Body and mind are dependent upon each
other. What we can see is roop, and the mind that thinks is nahm. When we know roop-nahm, we know reality as it is. When you see with the eyes, you should be aware of it. When you see with the mind, you should also be aware of it.\(^{218}\)

It seems we cannot avoid the basic teachings of philosophy: That we must train the mind, and remain exquisitely aware in our ongoing activity, in order for Sophia to grant us the concessions of gnosis, the consummations of Wisdom, Love, and Beauty. And such a practice, to speak loosely, takes place in a context.

Jung admits that our context may present a grave challenge, that what seems like the most vitalizing context for a better way of knowing in some sense feels like a relic to us:

What I have spoken of is, alas, to a great extent the past. We cannot turn the wheel backwards; we cannot go back to the symbolism that is gone. No sooner do you know that this thing is symbolic than you say, “Oh, well, it presumably means something else.” Doubt has killed it, has devoured it. So you cannot go back. I cannot go back to the Catholic Church, I cannot experience the miracle of the Mass; I know too much about it. I know it is the truth, but it is the truth in a form in which I cannot accept it any more. I cannot say, “This is the sacrifice of Christ,” and see him any more. I cannot. It is no more true to me; it does not express my psychological condition. My psychological condition wants something else. I must have a situation in which that thing becomes true once more. I need a new form. When one has had the misfortune to be fired out of a church, or to say, “This is all nonsense,” and to quit it—that has no merit at all. But to be in it and to be forced, say, by God, to leave it—well then you are legitimately extra ecclesiam [outside the church]. But extra ecclesiam nulla salus [outside the church there is no salvation]: then things really become terrible, because you are no more protected, you are no more in the consensus gentium, you are no more in the lap of the All-compassionate Mother. You are alone and you are confronted with all the demons of hell. That is what people don’t know. Then they say you have an anxiety neurosis, nocturnal fears, compulsions—I don’t know what. Your soul has become lonely; it is extra ecclesiam and in a state of no-salvation, and people don’t know it. They think your condition is pathological, and every doctor helps them to believe it. And, of course, when they say, and when everybody holds, that this is neurotic and pathological, then we have to talk that language. I talk the language of my patients. When I talk with lunatics, I talk the lunatic language, otherwise they don’t understand me. And when I talk with neurotic, I talk neurotic with them. But it is neurotic talk when

\(^{218}\) [http://www.mahasati.org/oneWhoFeels.html](http://www.mahasati.org/oneWhoFeels.html)
one says that this is a neurosis. As a matter of fact it is something quite different: it is the terrific fear of loneliness. It is the hallucination of loneliness, and it is a loneliness that cannot be quenched by anything else. You can be a member of a society with a thousand members, and you are still alone. That thing in you which should live is alone; nobody touched it, nobody knows it. You yourself don’t know it; but it keeps on stirring, it disturbs you, it makes you restless, and it gives you no peace.

So, you see, I was forced simply through my patients to try to find out what we could do about such a condition. I am not going to found a religion, and I know nothing about a future religion. I only know that in certain cases such and such things develop. For instance, take any case you want: if I go far enough, if the case demands it, or if certain conditions are favourable, then I shall observe certain unmistakable things, namely, that the unconscious facts are coming up and becoming threateningly clear. That is very disagreeable. And therefore Freud had to invent a system to protect people, and himself, against the reality of the unconscious, by putting a most depreciatory explanation upon these things, an explanation that always begins with “nothing but.” The explanation of every neurotic symptom was known long ago. We have a theory about it: it is all due to a father fixation, or to a mother fixation; it is all nonsense, so you can dismiss it. And so we dismiss our souls—“Oh, I am bound by a fixation to my mother, and if I see that I have all kinds of impossible fancies about my mother, I am liberated from that fixation.” If the patient succeeds, he has lost his soul. Every time you accept that explanation you lose your soul. You have not helped your soul; you have replaced your soul by an explanation, a theory. (CW18, para. 632-3)

This seems about where we stand with our current way of knowing. After all of our work together, we may want to pause to take this in: If we succeed here, we will lose our soul. Because, “success” is still judged on the basis of the old way of knowing. Any typical reader of our time reads these words in a style of consciousness still under the influence, still intoxicated from conquest and degradation. We have been thrown out of the Garden, and we now insist there never was a Garden. At least prior to his experience in the Bardo of dying, Jung seems to have felt, at least somehow, extra ecclesiam. We philosophers have been thrown from the lap of Sophia, and so we may have effectively become what Nasr suggests: misosophers.

But Jung also had his own experiences of other ways of knowing. He seems to have struggled profoundly with what the Soul wanted to reveal to him on the one hand, and what science
demanded of him on the other. He is already looked upon as a fringe figure I think, but things would have fared far worse for Jung had he gone further into the Soul—which he may have done in the dying process. In any case, Jung elsewhere writes,

We believe that we can make assertions about God, define him, form an opinion about him, differentiate him as the only true one amongst other gods. The realization might by this time be dawning that when we talk of God or gods we are speaking of debatable images from the psychoid realm. The existence of a transcendent reality is indeed evident in itself, but it is uncommonly difficult for our consciousness to construct intellectual models which would give a graphic description of the reality we have perceived. Our hypotheses are uncertain and groping, and nothing offers us the assurance that they may ultimately prove correct. That the world inside and outside ourselves rests on a transcendent background is as certain as our own existence, but it is equally certain that the direct perception of the archetypal world inside us is just as doubtfully correct as that of the physical world outside us. If we are convinced that we know the ultimate truth concerning metaphysical things, this means nothing more than that archetypal images have taken possession of our powers of thought and feeling, so that these lose their quality as functions at our disposal. The loss shows itself in the fact that the object of perception then becomes absolute and indisputable and surrounds itself with such an emotional taboo that anyone who presumes to reflect on it is automatically branded a heretic and blasphemer. In all other matters everyone would think it reasonable to submit to objective criticism the subjective image he has devised for himself of some object. But in the face of possession or violent emotion reason is abrogated; the numinous archetype proves on occasion to be the stronger because it can appeal to a vital necessity. This is regularly the case when it compensates a situation of distress which no amount of reasoning can abolish. We know that an archetype can break with shattering force into an individual human life and into the life of a nation. It is therefore not surprising that it is called “God.” But as men do not always find themselves in immediate situations of distress, or do not always feel them to be such, there are also calmer moments in which reflection is possible. If one then examines a state of possession or an emotional seizure without prejudice, one will have to admit that the possession in itself yields nothing that would clearly and reliably characterize the nature of the “possessing” factor, although it is an essential part of the phenomenon that the “possessed” always feels compelled to make definite assertions. Truth and error lie so close together and often look so confusingly alike that nobody in his right senses could afford not to doubt the things that happen to him in the possessed state. John 4: 1 admonishes us: “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world.” This warning was uttered at a time when there was plenty of opportunity to observe exceptional psychic states. Although, as then, we think we possess sure criteria of distinction, the rightness of this
conviction must nevertheless be called in question, for no human judgment can
claim to be infallible. (CW14, para. 787)

We include this passage in our considerations to ask if we in the west are not under the influence
of an archetype. Which would it be? What could explain our apparent stuckness, which we
rationalize so well? There is the general consideration Nietzsche raised, which is that “every
drive wants to be master—and it attempts to philosophize in that spirit” (BGE 6). Maybe that
can only happen if we cover it over with “reason”. But maybe there is something more
archetypal at work.

There are at least two ways to think along such lines. On the one hand, we can maybe follow
Jung in a more limited manner and suggest that conquest consciousness arises as a mind under
the influence of the god of war. We are Martians living on Earth—children of Mars rather than
children of Sophia/Gaia/Eros/Cosmos. We may further contemplate that by considering the fact
that Mars rules the constellation of Aries, the ram. The focus on the head, on banging one’s head
into things, even with the clever tactics of war, is not the same as the presencing of our total
intelligence. To localize our intelligence in the head may be part of an enactment of the Martian
archetype (Vonnegut’s Plutonians were possibly Mars-Pluto hybrids, in the sense that Pluto is
the god of money in a certain sense, but in a deeper sense the archetype of unconscious or
underworld energies, while Mars is volition and, in the encumbered form, certainly aggression).

But we may also explicitly discern the difference between an encumbered and an unencumbered
archetype. In that sense, we could say Apollo has us enraptured, but this is Apollo in an
encumbered form, for the unencumbered Apollo was the patron of the famous Oracle of Delphi,
the one who proclaimed the wisdom of Socrates—a feat she would have performed on the basis of *enthusiamos*, inspiration from the divine.

We can think of this encumbered relationship as the threat Apollo feels from another energy of the psyche or the soul. We can think of Psyche and Soul as basically synonymous. Our word “psychology” comes from the Greek word *psyche*. But, for the Greeks, Psyche was Soul. There is an old story about Psyche, who is depicted as an incredibly beautiful woman. The Oracle of Apollo—again, the *Oracle* of the god of “reason,” a paradoxical manifestation of Reason and Madness—tells her father the king that his daughter is destined to marry a monster whom no human or even a god could resist. That’s an important detail.

Who is this “monster” that the oracle of “reason” spoke of? It is Love. Love is the “monster” no human or god can ultimately resist, and Love is a monster because Love will devour our ego and its limited and limiting “reason”. A monster is a terrifying unknown, and we must lean into the unknown—and, finally, the inconceivable—in order to fully open ourselves to Love. “Reason” has to do with what we “know,” and what we “know” is very often what creates suffering for ourselves and others. We return here to the Eros of Sorenson, the LUV of McKenna, and the problem of hatred as the near enemy of knowledge. An encumbered archetype of “reason” and “rationality” may develop unconscious hatreds—unconscious perhaps because it is not “rational” to hate, and/or because “reason” must repress “the body”—but, in any case, *unconscious*, and therefore not available for rational reflection, which would drive toward rationalization in any case. These are archetypal energies at work. We are lived by powers we pretend to understand.
In the myth, Psyche falls in love with Eros, the god of Love, and Eros falls in love with Psyche, the Soul. She has to go through a big ordeal—including accomplishing impossible tasks with the help of sentient beings such as ants, an eagle, and a river and his reeds; among other things she must journey into the underworld—in order to properly establish her love with Eros. This is why she may be depicted with Butterfly wings, and associated in general with the Butterfly, symbol of transformation.

The importance of this myth cannot be overstated: Our Soul longs for Love—which means it longs for Beauty and Wonder too, for the god of Love is both beautiful and wondrous. In order for the Soul to relate skillfully with Love, in order for the Soul to realize Love, the Soul must establish a relationship with Nature, with “the natural world” and its “beings,” for the Soul of the World is not separate from our own Soul. Moreover, the Soul must enter the underworld, the unknown, and finally the inconceivable. A transformation must occur, in which we die to what

\[219\] Again, we can consider Dewey’s suggestion: “The so-called separation of theory and practice means in fact the separation of two kinds of practice, one taking place in the outdoor world, the other in the study” (1922: 71). We live in an “outdoor” World, and trying to live “indoors,” “in the study,” amounts to an attempt to force a human agenda onto life. It cannot succeed. If we do not establish right relation with Nature, and practice-realize the nonduality of Nature and Culture, Nature and Experience, then we will not only bring the degradation of our World to tragic fruition, but we will never realize the fullest attunement with WisdomLoveBeauty, with the divine, with our true Nature.
we have been, in order to become what we truly are.\textsuperscript{220} Thus we can see why the Butterfly is one of the true “spirit beings” of LoveWisdom, one of Sophia’s “Sacred Totem Animals”.\textsuperscript{221}

Today we speak rather commonly about “psychology,” and it’s still an important subject, but in many of its manifestations it seems to have forgotten about the Soul, or covered it over, or minimized its meaning and significance. And we have not honored as we should the lesson that the Soul longs for Love first and foremost (longs for be-longing), that the Soul longs for Beauty and Wonder, that the Soul must achieve intimacy with Nature and the beings of Nature, and that the feeling of Love flowing through us, and the feeling of wonder and appreciation of Beauty in the here and now, is itself the heart of true joy and true well-being. It is what we most earnestly seek.

Soul doesn’t drive a capitalist economy. Soul is what brings us beyond capitalism, beyond consumerism, beyond crooked politics, beyond war, beyond racism, beyond violence of every kind, beyond money and materialism—in short: beyond all our beliefs.

\textsuperscript{220} This matter of transformation and the death that must happen to make way for it had long been central to LoveWisdom, and has become almost entirely excluded from philosophy in the modern university. The fact that Socrates and Plato saw LoveWisdom as “training for death,” and as a kind of “practice of dying”—dying to what doesn’t work, what doesn’t accord with reality—and the fact that they invite us into radical transformation, gets almost no serious care and attention, and thus students (who become citizens, and who become aging juveniles, never to realize adulthood and become Elders of a real Culture) are left adrift, and the structures of power and domination co-opt us all into a pattern of insanity which only the transformations of the Soul can dispel.

\textsuperscript{221} “Animal” comes from “Anima,” the Latin word for Soul, which in turn comes from a root word for Breath and Breathing, including associations with Wildness and Wild Beings of Breath, and with a special lineage that gives us our word “deer,” the “being that breathes”—which makes sense if we have heard a panting buck chasing after a potential mate during the “Season of Love” for deer . . . and significant if we know the story of Saint Hubert and the Deer, a myth created more recently than the myth of Psyche and Love, but with many beautiful and wise elements.
Thus our inquiry suggests that something we could call soul presents us with new options for living our lives together. We can think of it as the source of all creativity, and it has creativity enough to give us a better vision of ourselves than the one we currently live—if we will hear it speak, and trust its voice, trust the process of entering the chrysalis, entering the underworld, entering the unknown, and finally realizing the inconceivable. LoveWisdom puts us in touch with the soul. That’s all a book like this can try to do: facilitate the practice-and-realization of the soul. The realization of our soul is not something anyone can do for us, but there are many things that can help us along our way, ideas, images, practices that can provide nourishment and aid.

One thing that might help is to think of Soul as the Nature of Mind. We have mind on the one hand, and the Nature of Mind on the other. Mind is samsara, and the Nature of Mind is Sophia. Sophia is the Soul. Mind is all the thinking we do, all the stories we tell ourselves, all the worries and cravings, all the self-criticism, all the reactions, all the things that hook us, distracting us from what we are and what life is, what reality is, what the divine is, what Wisdom, Love, and Beauty are.

Soul is like a beautiful spaciousness. It is not a container but the exuberant openness that allows the Cosmos to arise. Things can actually happen through the soul and “in” the soul. Things only happen in and through the soul. We can notice, for instance, how various things arise in our awareness. A cup of coffee arises in awareness. We sip it. We taste it. We taste various aspects of it. Then it’s gone. Cups of coffee don’t stay around. Nothing does. There is a fluidity in life.
You see these words now, because the other words have gone. Your eyes keep moving, and everything continues to arise in our awareness, without any stuckness.

Imagine if you kept seeing only the first page of this book. Nothing but the first page. No matter where you looked, you just saw the first page of this book. Then imagine everything else became like that: You could only hear one sound, your body was frozen in one pose, your mind stuck on one thought. Your life would fall apart—and many of us experience various forms of falling apart because of holding onto things, of experiencing an old mental formation instead of what could be actually opening up in, through, and as us.

Life depends on an unstuckness that is the essence of soul (an openness that, as we saw with Carhart-Harris et al. (2016b), LSD can put us in touch with, and which all philosophical/spiritual traditions seek to help us practice and realize). Soul is the flowing relationality of all things. If we relax and allow ourselves to calm down and see more clearly, we begin to attune with this fluidity and relationality. We begin to think, speak, and move in a more elegant and effective way. It takes time, but we can get a taste of it in short order.

For this to happen, we have to rebel a bit, or a lot, against Captain Clock and the anxious pace of fake living, the post-truth, post-sacred, post-Nature-Culture landscape. It may seem that life has become very fast-paced, and there is always something happening. But, again, our inquiry questions these happenings. In the world of false happenings, things happen so fast that by the time we register them, they are already irrelevant. But what if this fast pace, what if this obsession with the latest trend is all a cover for the fact that nothing is really happening? We’re
on a treadmill that goes faster and faster in a confected, post-happening landscape: nothing actually happens, and we are only pretending to get somewhere. Jung tried to get at this in the passage we considered about the symbolic life. Nothing seems to really happen. What has \textit{happened} in philosophy in the past hundred years or more—what has happened that matters to us all?

This is how it is in samsara thinking: Nothing actually happens. Worse yet, anything that appears to happen hinges totally on a set of precarious assumptions about what is real. Only in Sophia Thinking (which is Original Thinking, what we can call thinking in the fullness of our being) can things actually happen, because only then do we \textit{participate} in reality, which means participating in something genuine that transcends us, rather than something superficial that hooks us.

Superficial things can seem “bigger” than we are, and so that gives them a semblance of meaningfulness. The university as an institution seems bigger than all the philosophers in it. But, like any institution, it rests on practices that invest meaning into it, that cathect into it. We can invest meaning in anything at all, and as we do that, it becomes bigger than us in a way. But if we \textit{invest} meaning in something (an apt \textit{economic} metaphor), rather than allowing meaning to arise in a simultaneous co-discovery-creation that offers genuine refuge in reality, we are setting ourselves up for suffering—and everyone else too. Real meaning is a matter of soul, our real values and our real purpose in this life.

Soul is a difficult word. It can make certain people freak out—including professional philosophers, even though Socrates was always telling people to Care for their Soul, like it was
his only message. Many non-professional philosophers (by which I mean, all the other human beings) have some feeling for it, some appreciation of the word or affinity for the concept, but they may not be able to say exactly what they mean by it (is it just “me” minus the body?).

I don’t think we should “know” exactly what we mean by it—especially if it is crucial to a better way of knowing. Like all the most important words in philosophy, religion, and spirituality, we should keep an attitude of not-knowing. We often use words like Wisdom, Love, Beauty, Compassion, Sacred, Soul, Knowledge, and so on as if we really “know” what we mean—or demand that others tell us what they mean, because of our assumption that it can be told. If we keep a more open heart and mind, we can allow greater intimacy to arise, and we can make these words much more real. An epistemology of practice-realization invites us to discover and create their meaning, in and through our flesh and bones life, a life that transcends all intellectual concepts. In order to make it real, we would approach soul with a heart and mind of not-knowing. It’s a very intimate thing.

Since soul participates in the symbolic life Jung referred to, it is a good way for us to enjoy life, since life is so much more enjoyable when things are really happening. With stupid jobs, fake news, bogus democracy, rising inequality, boring committee meetings, and ongoing degradation of the World, nothing happens for us but more medicating, repression, denial, unwellness, unhappiness, feeling adrift, feeling a sense of meaninglessness.

In a way, we might suggest that soul is the realization that nothing needs to “happen” at all—that is, nothing in the current sense of “happening” that our culture emphasizes. All of this busyness,
all of these trends, all of the headlines, all of the noise is all nothing-really-happening. It seems like something is happening when we get that new car, that new job title, that new piece of jewelry, that new publication acceptance, that new level of tenure or pay scale, that new romantic partner. There is a merger of spectacle, politics, economics, science and technology, epistemology, ethics, and more that makes it seem like fascinating things are happening.

But we may also feel—gradually or suddenly—that these things are not real events. Our team won. Our candidate got elected. Our book finally came out. Are these real happenings? They may have real consequences, and our investment in them has consequences. We do invest in them. In fact, we buy them. These events are products, which is part of why we try to make them real—to get our money’s worth, to get our energy’s worth, and because we so desperately want something real to happen, and because we are suffering, and we worry that we might not be able to buy a happening, which makes us try all the harder. We can put a lot of energy into that team, that title, that candidate, that event.

If we look with a lot of tenderness for ourselves, a lot of tenderness for what really matters to us, tenderness for what we love and for the people we love, we may see that most of these happenings amount to very little. It’s all a distraction from the real happening of life that we long to get in touch with, the happening of life that is itself inherently free, such that our engagement with it is already liberation—already a better way of knowing. This is the essence of our inquiry. We don’t have to put our liberation off. We don’t have to postpone joy, love, gnosis.

WisdomLoveBeauty is just this happening of the Cosmos—with, through, as our awakening to it. Soul can help us enter it and bring it to fruition. So, as we talk about soul, knowing, wisdom,
and all the rest in order to orient us in a positive way for practice, we have to keep in touch with a spirit of not-knowing that allows that practice to bring something wondrous to realization.

Our inquiry may suggest to us that the soul itself is our context, the context of philosophy, and we have denuded and degraded the soul. Validity, knowledge, and science all have roots in the soul, and sensing this could reorient our practices. Jung has some important reflections that bear on this context of soul:

The epithet “psychologism” applies only to a fool who thinks he has his soul in his pocket. There are certainly more than enough such fools, for although we know how to talk big about the “soul,” the depreciation of everything psychic is a typically Western prejudice. If I make use of the concept “autonomous psychic complex,” my reader immediately comes up with the ready-made prejudice that it is “nothing but a psychic complex.” How can we be so sure that the soul is “nothing but”? It is as if we did not know, or else continually forgot, that everything of which we are conscious is an image, and that image is psyche. The same people who think that God is depreciated if he is understood as something moved in the psyche, as well as the moving force of the psyche—i.e., as an autonomous complex—can be so plagued by uncontrollable affects and

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222 A philosopher might raise the objection of “psychologism” with reference to someone they think has a certain breed of bad idea about knowledge. The term refers to any suggestion that “knowledge” depends on the psychology of the knower. In a strong form, it might put us in a situation in which someone would ask, “Is that true?” and another would answer, “Well, if you have the typical psychology of a human being, you would definitely find that true.” But it seems uncomfortable or even absurd to say that the truth of “2 + 2 = 4” depends on human psychology. We think of some things as true independently of our psyche or psychology. However, we usually point to rather boring examples, like “2 + 2 = 4.” As Nietzsche suggested out, having contemplated some of the apparent implications of evolutionary theory, evolution doesn’t care if our beliefs or perceptions are “true”. Rather, evolutionary theory suggests our beliefs need only function—well enough for us to survive. Mark, Marion, and Hoffman (2010) ran mathematical simulations showing, as Nietzsche suggested, that nonveridical perception can have a higher survival value than veridical (i.e. “true” or “accurate”) perception. Nietzsche may strike some readers as outrageous when he says we have evolved on a condition of untruth or falsity. Yet many have come to see this as a commonplace. One psychologist writing on a general audience platform declared that, “Nietzsche expressed the idea that people need their illusions, and that when all is considered, they live in a lie. He couldn’t have been more correct. Besides the defense mechanisms employed with frightening regularity, we have grown into a culture that, despite proclaiming a desire for the truth, would actually prefer to be lied to.”

neurotic states that their wills and their whole philosophy of life fail them miserably. Is that a proof of the impotence of the psyche? Should Meister Eckhart be accused of “psychologism” when he says, “God must be born in the soul again and again”? I think the accusation of “psychologism” can be levelled only at an intellect that denies the genuine nature of the autonomous complex and seeks to explain it rationalistically as the consequence of known causes, i.e., as something secondary and unreal. This is just as arrogant as the metaphysical assertion that seeks to make a God outside the range of our experience responsible for our psychic states. Psychologism is simply the counterpart of this metaphysical presumption, and is just as childish. Therefore it seems to me far more reasonable to accord the psyche the same validity as the empirical world, and to admit that the former has just as much “reality” as the latter. As I see it, the psyche is a world in which the ego is contained. Maybe there are fishes who believe that they contain the sea. We must rid ourselves of this habitual illusion of ours if we wish to consider metaphysical assertions from the standpoint of psychology.

A metaphysical assertion of this kind is the idea of the “diamond body,” the incorruptible breath-body which grows in the golden flower or in the “field of the square inch.” This body is a symbol for a remarkable psychological fact which, precisely because it is objective, first appears in forms dictated by the experience of biological life—that is, as fruit, embryo, child, living body, and so on. This fact could be best expressed by the words “It is not I who live, it lives me.” The illusion of the supremacy of consciousness makes us say, “I live.” Once this illusion is shattered by a recognition of the unconscious, the unconscious will appear as something objective in which the ego is included.

It is, in fact, a change of feeling similar to that experienced by a father to whom a son has been born, a change known to us from the testimony of St. Paul: “Yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.” The symbol “Christ” as “son of man” is an analogous psychic experience of a higher spiritual being who is invisibly born in the individual, a pneumatic body which is to serve us as a future dwelling, a body which, as Paul says, is put on like a garment (“For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ”). It is always a difficult thing to express, in intellectual terms, subtle feelings that are nevertheless infinitely important for the individual’s life and wellbeing. It is, in a sense, the feeling that we have been “replaced,” but without the connotation of having been “deposed.” It is as if the guidance of life had passed over to an invisible centre. Nietzsche’s metaphor, “in most loving bondage, free,” would be appropriate here. Religious language is full of imagery depicting this feeling of free dependence, of calm acceptance.

This remarkable experience seems to me a consequence of the detachment of consciousness, thanks to which the subjective “I live” becomes the objective “It lives me.” This state is felt to be higher than the previous one; it is really like a sort of release from the compulsion and impossible responsibility that are the inevitable results of participation mystique. This feeling of liberation fills Paul completely; the consciousness of being a child of God delivers one from the bondage of the blood. It is also a feeling of reconciliation with all that happens, for which reason, according to the Hui Ming Ching, the gaze of one who has attained fulfilment turns back to the beauty of nature.
In the Pauline Christ symbol the supreme religious experiences of West and East confront one another: Christ the sorrow-laden hero, and the Golden Flower that blooms in the purple hall of the city of jade. What a contrast, what an unfathomable difference, what an abyss of history! A problem fit for the crowning work of a future psychologist!

Among the great religious problems of the present is one which has received scant attention, but which is in fact the main problem of our day: the evolution of the religious spirit. If we are to discuss it, we must emphasize the difference between East and West in their treatment of the “jewel,” the central symbol. The West lays stress on the human incarnation, and even on the personality and historicity of Christ, whereas the East says: “Without beginning, without end, without past, without future.” The Christian subordinates himself to the superior divine person in expectation of his grace; but the Oriental knows that redemption depends on the work he does on himself. The Tao grows out of the individual. The *imitatio Christi* has this disadvantage: in the long run we worship as a divine example a man who embodied the deepest meaning of life, and then, out of sheer imitation, we forget to make real our own deepest meaning—self-realization. As a matter of fact, it is not altogether inconvenient to renounce one’s own meaning. Had Jesus done so, he would probably have become a respectable carpenter and not a religious rebel to whom the same thing would naturally happen today as happened then.

The imitation of Christ might well be understood in a deeper sense. It could be taken as the duty to realize one’s deepest conviction with the same courage and the same self-sacrifice shown by Jesus. Happily not everyone has the task of being a leader of humanity, or a great rebel; and so, after all, it might be possible for each to realize himself in his own way. This honesty might even become an ideal.

All this is a step in the evolution of a higher consciousness on its way to unknown goals, and is not metaphysics as ordinarily understood. To that extent it is only “psychology,” but to that extent, too, it is experienceable, understandable and—thank God—real, a reality we can do something with, a living reality full of possibilities. The fact that I am content with what can be experienced psychically, and reject the metaphysical, does not amount, as any intelligent person can see, to a gesture of scepticism or agnosticism aimed at faith and trust in higher powers, but means approximately the same as what Kant meant when he called the thing-in-itself a “merely negative borderline concept.” Every statement about the transcendental is to be avoided because it is only a laughable presumption on the part of a human mind unconscious of its limitations. Therefore, when God or the Tao is named an impulse of the soul, or a psychic state, something has been said about the knowable only, but nothing about the unknowable, about which nothing can be determined. (CW13, para. 75-82)

There is some sort of razor’s edge here, some way to say we live in the soul, but that doesn’t make everything a “nothing but” sort of experience. How can we get at it?
Recall that Jung expressed some degree of concern for our situation. A lot of academics may feel _extra Ecclesiam_, and then intuitively sense or fear, _extra Ecclesiam nulla salus_. Philosophers might, as Jung did, feel a certain _obligation_, on behalf of their students and their fellow citizens, to look into the matter, to find out what we can do. Our inquiry suggests we can enter into mystery. If anyone reading thinks they know what to do, they should by all means do it. If someone has answers, let them speak up. Otherwise, perhaps we can quiet down and open up to something strange, something befitting the strangeness of our context, and the superness of the Cosmos.

Jung suggests that, if we feel we cannot return to these old symbols—because they have been degraded, conquered and exploited, ruined like a mountain top minding site—then we can go on the Quest. He wrote in a letter, “You must go in quest of yourself, and you will find yourself again only in the simple and forgotten things. Why not go into the forest for a time, literally? Sometimes a tree tells you more than can be read in books” (1973: 479). Elsewhere he says that, if a person cannot find a home in the old symbols,

then he has to go on the Quest; then he has to find out what his soul says; then he has to go through the solitude of a land that is not created. I have published such an example in my lectures—that of a great scientist, a very famous man, who lives today. He set out to see what the unconscious said to him, and it gave him a wonderful lead. That man got into order again because he gradually accepted the symbolic data, and now he leads the religious life, the life of the careful observer. Religion is careful observation of the data. He now observes all the things that are brought him by his dreams; that is his only guidance.

We are in a new world with that; we are exactly like primitives. When I went to East Africa, I went to a small tribe in Mount Elgon and I asked the medicine-man about dreams. He said, “I know what you mean; my father still had dreams.” I said, “You have no dreams?” And then he wept and answered, “No, I have no dreams anymore.” (CW18: 673)
We know how the rest of the story went: No more dreams because the District Commissioner knows all that will “happen,” just as our politicians, economists, scientists, techno-capitalists, and academics know what will “happen”.

Recall that Jung said, “When you are in the darkness you take the next thing, and that is a dream. . . . the one who is going alone and has no guidance, he has the somnia a Deo missa . . .” (674). In other words, we ourselves are the Oracle. The inspiration sent by the divine is open to anyone, either because of fate or because of practice. Tragedy here is conscious purpose that cuts us off from divine inspiration. We ignore the Oracle because we never open up to receiving guidance in the first place—ironically, because the unencumbered archetype of Apollo becomes a patron for the Oracle. Reason then becomes Sacred, because it participates in Sacredness, participates in the Mystery rather than trying to explain mysteries away.

We are in the dark—filled as it is with artificial light. Nevertheless, it is time to dream.

To enter the dream means entering the Bardo. Dreaming is only one set of arts, arts of awareness. There are many ways of working with dreams, and it behooves the contemporary philosopher to find one and begin working. Doing nothing more than beginning to share dreams, and to record them if necessary, is a good first step. But here, “It is time to dream” really means, “It is time to step into the darkness—to confront, to embrace, to enter the darkness we are already in. It is time to enter the Bardo, to enter the experience of meditation and mystery.” This is not mystery in the sense of “making obscure” or the “woo-ification” of all things. It means participation, co-creating the happening of life.

A psychotherapist whom I supervise opened our supervisory session with the following: “So what’s with the animals out there? Everyone in my practice is coming in and talking about animals. What’s going on?” I replied that I think that what’s going on is that the western psyche is being reconnected to nature, and that nature themes in general, and animal themes in particular, reflect what I have called “Borderland consciousness,” a phenomenon that is emergent in the culture and becoming increasingly prevalent in clinical settings. (xv)

Here, too, we find a phenomenon prevalent but likely unfamiliar to philosophers. Entering into it, inquiring into it, we may have to accept something that seems irrational, but which Bernstein, like others, prefers to call “transrational”:

> By transrational reality I mean objective nonpersonal, nonrational phenomena occurring in the natural universe, information and experience that does not readily fit into standard cause and effect logical structure. These are the kinds of experience that typically are labeled and dismissed as superstition, irrational, and, in the extreme, abnormal or crazy. A major theme of this book is that there is an increasing number of people who have transrational experiences that are real – not real seeming, not “as if” experiences, but real. One problem that these individuals experience in our very left-brain, ratio-centrically, cogni-centrically biased culture, is that there is no construct, no frame for receiving and integrating such experience. That bias – culturally and psychologically – does not allow for the possibility of transrational reality. Thus people who claim to have such experience often are ostracized, dismissed out of hand, or worse, branded as pathological or crazy.

> There are thousands of people in our culture – people I refer to as “Borderland personalities” – whose transrational experience is nothing short of sacred. There are many who would not be able to function in our society without their deep personal connection to that domain. And most of them feel forced to
conceal that dimension of their experience, even from their loved ones, out of fear of being ostracized and branded as abnormal. There are still others who suffer psychological wounding and who pursue psychotherapy in an attempt to heal and to find ways of coping and living in a wounded and wounding world. A number of these people have a Borderland connection that sustains them. Even so, they fear revealing this dimension even in their therapy, lest it be labeled, profaned, and spoiled. Still others are confused by their own Borderland experience and wonder themselves whether what they experience and cherish is not an extension of pathology and somehow must be given up in the name of something they do not understand. And worse, some are wounded by the therapy itself if the therapist, because of his rational bias and lack of receptivity to transrational experience (and perhaps his own discomfort with the very notion of the transrational), labels as pathology what for the patient is experienced as authentic and deeply meaningful. Many testimonials in this regard follow in this book.

Moreover, the western ego construct is the organ of rationality. The exclusion of transrational reality from consideration leaves it unchecked by any power outside itself and prone to profound and dangerous inflation . . . I suggest . . . such inflation threatens the very survival of our species. The western ego construct buttresses its stance of omnipotence and omniscience with a claim to superior and absolute knowledge through its scientific construct. The phrase “its scientific construct” is used advisedly. For science is a construct of the mind, and not, as some would assert, an independent system determining objective knowledge and truth. For all of its correctness and the benefits that flow from it – modern medicine for one – science remains, nonetheless a construct of the mind, in the context of other constructs, which, if received, could add to the general well-being of all of life. Alan Lightman, in a review of Einstein’s Miraculous Year: Five Papers that Changed the Face of Physics, observes, “Modern textbooks on science give no sense that scientific ideas come out of the minds of human beings. Instead, science is portrayed as a set of current laws and results inscribed like the Ten Commandments by some immediate but disembodied authority.” (xv-xvii)

Bernstein does as we have tried to do: resist attempts to close down on the transrational, resist the commands of an encumbered rational archetype to shoot these experiences full of the arrows of “reason” and “outrageous fortune”:

To insist on a rational response to transrational experience, i.e. “It is or it isn’t . . .,” aborts the possibility of recognizing a different metaphor of reality. When, for example, my patient Hannah reports “feeling” the sadness of the cows, I consciously avoid the question of what she “really” did experience. That word “really” puts the discourse into a left-brain cause and effect linear metaphor and denies the validity of the truth she was struggling to claim. Truth is what it is – whether it makes sense to us or not. Our discomfort with what is alluded to in the
moment does not justify denying the other’s reality. Whatever Hannah’s experience, it was not *that* metaphor. We may not be able to put into words what her metaphor was, but we can share that she experienced something beyond what such questions imply. So in some passages of the book, the reader is thrown back on himself to struggle with what is alluded to and what is conjured up in the reader, both on a mental and on a body level. (xviii)

Among other things, Bernstein’s study of the Borderland,

incorporates the Navajo medical model as a paradigm for bridging the mind–body duality in western medicine. It explores a clinical model that might result from a joining of Navajo and allopathic approaches to medicine and healing. It demonstrates, through multiple case presentations, how modern medicine could benefit from transrational data in the diagnosis and treatment of serious illness. (xix)

Similarly, we have suggested in our inquiry that we might heal by means of a better way of knowing, one that we can properly call transrational, in something like Bernstein’s sense, and that we might find valuable guidance in Indigenous Cultures, and that in any case our better way of knowing is a kind of re-Indigenizing. We can see Bernstein’s study as another critical data point. Let us consider a longer artefact, having to do with a patient referred to as Hannah, who, prior to working with Bernstein, had been in therapy for 12 years, and still suffered greatly. Bernstein initially resisted entrance into the Borderland, but his eventual humility allowed him to take Hannah’s Liminal Experience more seriously, and to begin a real journey to health, wholeness, holiness:

Given Hannah’s history, I began our work with a traditional approach. I explored her family experiences and pursued in depth the issues of substance abuse, sexual abuse, and parental neglect. I employed the whole repertoire of techniques involved in a good psychoanalytic-psychotherapeutic approach, as we call it. This was helpful to some extent. But always during our sessions, I had the feeling that something was missing, something was not happening – some part of her was absent.

When Hannah brought her paintings into the sessions, things livened up considerably. I wasn’t sure if this was because her painting offered her a way of dealing with her depression, isolation, and despair, or if it was more than that. Yet, noticeably, we both sensed relief.
One day, a year or so into the work, she arrived at my office very distressed. Driving home from our previous session, she had found herself behind a truck carrying two cows. Her feeling was that the cows were being taken to slaughter. I pursued the standard approach of suggesting that she was projecting onto the cows, i.e. how she saw her life circumstance in the plight of these cows. She went along with me for a time. But then she protested in frustration: “But it’s the cows!” I pointed out to her that her response was an identification with animals she experienced as abused. She acknowledged the truth of my interpretations. She began to talk about all the animals in the world that exist only as domesticated beings, and their sadness. And again she burst out: “But it’s the cows!” After that last protest – by now at the end of the session – I became aware in myself of Hannah’s distress and her identification with the plight of these cows. And I also became aware of a different feeling in the room. The feeling was attached to Hannah, yet it was separate from her. It seemed of a different dimension. It was a new experience for me.

Some weeks later, Hannah recounted how she had gone for a long walk in the country and was followed by some stray dogs. As she described the experience, the room filled with pain and remorse. I asked her what she was feeling. Again we had a go-round like the one with the cows. And again she acknowledged her projection onto the dogs. But this time, out of character for her, she became angry – so angry that she took her shoe in her hand and hit the floor with it. “You just don’t get it!” she shouted, and slammed the floor again with her shoe. “It’s the dogs!” It was as if she were saying the dogs were projecting something onto her. The urgency of her tone and her uncharacteristic anger jolted me into the realization that my standard interpretations were not enough and somehow off the mark. Something other was happening in the room.

The next week Hannah came to our session with a dream suggesting the threat of sexual violation by me. The dream jarred me, and I knew I had better hear her. I began to listen to her more closely and tried diligently to shut off my mind and training. I tried to listen as I sensed the medicine man listens.

Over the next months Hannah struggled to wrench out of her unconscious the words to talk to me. Clearly she was extremely intelligent, yet at times it seemed she was groping for a vocabulary that was beyond her reach – a vocabulary that perhaps didn’t yet exist. Gradually, however, she did begin to communicate her feelings to me. And as she did, I was startled to realize that the things she was telling me I had heard once before.

During my analytical training I had also been learning from native elders and healers, particularly from my Navajo friend, Carl Gorman, from a Hopi elder whom I called Grandpa, and from a Hopi medicine man, Homer. These men were teaching me a new way of looking at life. I realized that here were people whose involvement with nature was completely different from the utilitarian, often adversarial if sometimes sentimental, attitude toward nature that had characterized the western mind for thousands of years. For the Navajo, religion and healing are the same. The psychic connection with nature is the source of – and at the same
time is inseparable from – spiritual and physical health. Illness is a “disconnection” with one’s psychic roots.

As I listened to Hannah struggle to articulate her emotions, I did “get it.” It was indeed the cows. I realized that what Hannah was telling me was precisely the same message the native elders and healers were teaching me – and what my own unconscious was telling me through my dreams: Everything animate and inanimate has within it a spirit dimension and communicates in that dimension to those who can listen. . . .

Hannah is a “Borderland personality.” She lives in the Borderland. She embodies and reflects an evolving psyche that is not only new unto itself but one that in profound ways is strange and alien to her, as do many others. Such people are the frontline recipients of new psychic forms that are entering and impacting the western psyche. They experience the tension resulting from split-off psychic material reconnecting with an ego that resists and is threatened by it.

Borderland people personally experience, and must live out, the split from nature on which the western ego, as we know it, has been built. They feel (not feel about) the extinction of species; they feel (not feel about) the plight of animals that are no longer permitted to live by their own instincts, and which survive only in domesticated states to be used as pets or food. Such people are highly intuitive. Many, if not most, are psychic to some degree, whether they know it or not. They are deeply feeling, sometimes to such a degree that they find themselves in profound feeling states that seem irrational to them. Virtually all of them are highly sensitive on a bodily level. They experience the rape of the land in their bodies, they psychically, and sometimes physically, gasp at the poisoning of the atmosphere. Often they suffer from “environmental illness.” This psychic identity with the animate and inanimate objects of nature is a phenomenon that anthropologist Lucien Levy-Bruhl recognized among native cultures, and which he called participation mystique. It is a psychic identification from which, up until recently, westerners have been totally alienated. My experience working with Hannah brought into focus phenomena I had observed both inside and outside my practice over the past 20 years – phenomena that until now had made no sense.

The Borderland is a phenomenon of the collective unconscious. It is an evolutionary dynamic that is moving the western psyche to reconnect our overspecialized ego to its natural psychic roots. It is my view that we are all in the grip of this unfolding. Indeed, it is possible that our very survival as species Homo sapiens may depend on this shift that is taking place. The people I have dubbed Borderland personalities experience and incarnate these new psychic forms into their lives – and directly and indirectly into ours as members of the western cultural collective. In the case of Hannah, I felt I was observing the impact of this evolutionary process on a specific individual. (7-9)

Our inquiry invites a return to Mystical Participation—as the better way of knowing we should seek—but again with a radical revaluation of that term, one which our current conquest consciousness cannot accomplish. It seems that, only by means of surrendering that
consciousness, giving up what we cannot keep in exchange for what we are, can we come to wonderstand “mystical participation” and truly enter the sacredness it invites us to practice-and-realize.

It seems highly significant that, with Hannah, Bernstein finally came to insight regarding something that evaded him for so much of his career. As we have seen, this appears to be the situation with conquest consciousness: It cannot perceive properly, with sufficient skill and grace. The anomalous can help liberate it only to the extent that the anomalous can stop that consciousness in its habitual operation—a functional inhibition of default patterns of thought, speech, action and perception. Thus, we can perhaps also follow Jung’s lead in the recognition of the Bardo and the Mysteries of life. Like Bernstein (and dozens of other reasonable people we could cite), Jung did not long for mysteries and then create a psychology with space for them. Precisely the opposite: He felt the infections of “reason” and “science” as much as anyone in the academy, but reality kept knocking him on his backside. I think most of us are trying very hard to be satisfied with “reason” and “science,” and, like Jung, we may open ourselves, however uncomfortably at first, to things we may call transrational. In an important essay, Jung refers to, certain observations and experiences which, I can fairly say, have forced themselves upon me during the course of my long medical practice. They have to do with spontaneous, meaningful coincidences of so high a degree of improbability as to appear flatly unbelievable. I shall therefore describe to you only one case of this kind, simply to give an example characteristic of a whole category of phenomena. It makes no difference whether you refuse to believe this particular case or whether you dispose of it with an ad hoc explanation. I could tell you a great many such stories, which are in principle no more surprising or incredible than the irrefutable results arrived at by Rhine [one of the early scientific researchers into what we call ESP], and you would soon see that almost every case calls for its own explanation. But the causal explanation, the only possible one from the standpoint of natural science, breaks down owing to the psychic relativization of space and time, which together form the indispensable premises for the cause-and-effect relationship.
My example concerns a young woman patient who, in spite of efforts made on both sides, proved to be psychologically inaccessible. The difficulty lay in the fact that she always knew better about everything. Her excellent education had provided her with a weapon ideally suited to this purpose, namely a highly polished Cartesian rationalism with an impeccably “geometrical” idea of reality. After several fruitless attempts to sweeten her rationalism with a somewhat more human understanding, I had to confine myself to the hope that something unexpected and irrational would turn up, something that would burst the intellectual retort into which she had sealed herself. Well, I was sitting opposite her one day, with my back to the window, listening to her flow of rhetoric. She had had an impressive dream the night before, in which someone had given her a golden scarab—a costly piece of jewellery. While she was still telling me this dream, I heard something behind me gently tapping on the window. I turned round and saw that it was a fairly large flying insect that was knocking against the window-pane from outside in the obvious effort to get into the dark room. This seemed to me very strange. I opened the window immediately and caught the insect in the air as it flew in. It was a scarabaeid beetle, or common rose-chafer (*Cetonia aurata*), whose goldgreen colour most nearly resembles that of a golden scarab. I handed the beetle to my patient with the words, “Here is your scarab.” This experience punctured the desired hole in her rationalism and broke the ice of her intellectual resistance. The treatment could now be continued with satisfactory results.

This story is meant only as a paradigm of the innumerable cases of meaningful coincidence that have been observed not only by me but by many others, and recorded in large collections. They include everything that goes by the name of clairvoyance, telepathy, etc., from Swedenborg’s well-attested vision of the great fire in Stockholm to the recent report by Air Marshal Sir Victor Goddard about the dream of an unknown officer, which predicted the subsequent accident to Goddard’s plane. (CW8: 981-3)

We consider this artefact for several reasons, perhaps foremost among them the following: If anyone should ask me what I recommend in order to help with the practice-realization of a better way of knowing, I would suggest, “Cultivate Synchronicity.” Such a recommendation comes altogether with recommending a spiritual way of life, a life that includes sati (awareness of everyday actions, and a remembering of oneself, the world, and the imperatives of philosophy), a life that includes ethical vows and wise intentions, a life of Wisdom, Love, and Beauty that Synchronicities express, expound, and lead us further and further into. Synchronicities rupture the barriers of “reason,” they shift the encumbered archetype of rationality and open us to
unencumbered ways of thinking and knowing. Synchronicity ruptures the barriers that prevent our perception of the mystical participation we can never escape. The intimacy of interwovenness that we ourselves already are has perhaps no better name than “Mystical Participation,” and any way of knowing worthy of our attention and care must somehow arise altogether with that interwovenness.

Related to this, the second reason the artefact above holds special significance rests in the resistance of the client, the rationality and “education” that has fostered a resistance to healing and holiness that only a rupture can dispel. Without synchronicity, and/or without holotropic medicines, and the spiritual practices that go along with these, today’s academic, and much of our culture, may remain resistant to healing and the possibility of verifying the sacredness of life.

With respect to these considerations, we can consider something Pauli wrote:

Sometimes I think that I will only be able to reach the longed-for coniunctio [sacred marriage] if I could say something or formulate something that would greatly shock both the representatives of conventional religion and the representatives of conventional science. But I do not yet know exactly what it is. (from Gieser, 255)

Pauli’s sentiment resonates with our inquiry—though we could add conventional philosophers, academics, and even citizens to the mix. At the same time, somehow there is something that wants to be said and wants not to be said here, in this inquiry. In part, it cannot be said. In part, as much work as we have done, we have not done enough to say what we might need to.

We might at least say that, whatever we want to call the Sophianic process that created our Cosmos, our home, perhaps only delusion keeps us from sensing that it created relationally—in,
through, as relational openness—and that it itself must be relational. Our science and psychology, it seems, need to embrace this, on the basis of an epistemology rooted in it. As Pauli wrote in another letter:

To sum up, I should like to say that it seems that there must be very deep connections between soul and matter and, hence, between the physics and the psychology of the future, which are not yet conceptually expressed in modern science. [—] Such deep connections must surely exist, because otherwise the human mind would not be able to discover concepts which fit nature at all.

(from Gieser, 2005: vii)

It says a lot that Pauli refers here to a physics and psychology that does not currently exist—it didn’t in his day, and it seems not much of a venture to suggest it still doesn’t today. We come face to face with this again and again: The dominant culture, including its sciences of “mind” and “matter,” require a paradigm shift, and this means the nature of reality remains obscure to us, in ways that have become critical. In yet another letter, Pauli writes,

The layman usually means, when he says “reality,” that he is speaking of something self-evidently known; whereas to me it seems the most important and exceedingly difficult task of our time is to work on the construction of a new idea of reality. (Gieser 2005: 268).

Not only the layman. Perhaps because this letter is earlier than the previous one, he forgets to mention the scientist, and of course doesn’t bother to mention the philosopher, and yet all of them need a new vision of reality.

William James suggested that, “Where there is no vision the people perish. Few professorial philosophers have any vision” (1987: 705). He discusses Fechner as an example of a philosopher with vision: “Thus is the universe alive, according to this philosopher! I think you will admit that he makes it more thickly alive than do the other philosophers who, following rationalistic methods solely, gain the same results, but only in the thinnest outlines.” (708) This thinness
James finds troubling. He says “If philosophy is more a matter of passionate vision than of logic,—and I believe it is, logic only finding reasons for the vision afterwards,—must not such thinness come either from the vision being defective in the disciples, or from their passion [compared to that of someone like Fechner] being as moonlight unto sunlight or as water unto wine?” (710)

Somehow, our inquiry seems to invite us into a more passionate vision, a more passionate relationship with ourselves, each other, and the sacred, living World. The barrier seems to be something interwoven out of fear, delusion, pride, an ego-centric style of consciousness cultivated powerfully in the west, active misknowing, conscious and unconscious dynamics, the things we call science and philosophy, politics and economics. It’s a complicated story in a way, and also a simple one in some sense.

Somehow, we have to experience a philosophical thunderbolt to startle us out of our slumber. As Charles Seif wrote in the journal Science, “Every once in a while, cosmologists are dragged, kicking and screaming, into a universe much more unsettling than they had any reason to expect” (2005: 78). Scientists dragged, kicking and screaming—I think some philosophers would do worse. Why is this? Doesn’t it seem to come from apparent certainties about what the Cosmos simply cannot contain as possibilities? Doesn’t it come from a kind of foreclosure on what we will allow? What makes us the arbiters of the possible?

Hans-Peter Dürr suggests that,

If it had been originally assumed that in the course of the progress of the sciences the ‘transcendental’ would be increasingly suppressed, because in the last resort
everything would be capable of rational explanation, it now turned out, on the contrary, that the material world which is so tangible to us increasingly proves to be apparition and dissolves into a reality where it is no longer things and matter, but form and shape, which dominate. [----]

Quantum physics made it clear again that our scientific experience, our knowledge of the world, does not represent the ‘inherent’ and ‘ultimate’ reality, whatever one wishes that to mean. (from Gieser 2005: 252)

One can find lots of little tidbits like this amongst the physicists and other “serious” scientists of the past century or more—so many that it remains puzzling why so many academics, especially in the case of scientists and philosophers, remain hostile to what might transcend their notions about “ultimate” reality. One finds this hostility expressed outside of academia in the literature that presents itself as “skeptical” “rational” “scientific” discourse, such as the various skeptical blogs and wiki pages. Will any of that skepticism help philosophy as a discipline, or help sentient beings on a planet in which a breakdown of mystical participation has gone altogether with the degradation of that planet, in a manner which we have tried to consider as in some sense causal, and not mere correlation? What if there is something we are just not seeing with the mind we take to be normal? We can also ask this from the standpoint of what we might fail to see from the standpoint of the science we take to be normal. William James suggested that, “Repugnant as the mystical style of philosophizing may be,” it may yet be that paying attention to mysticism could put a philosopher in “the best possible position to help philosophy,” and, given the sense of “philosophy” we have cultivated in our inquiry, this would in turn put the philosopher in the best possible position to help the sciences, the arts, the World and its beings. Here is the larger artefact from James:

“The great field for new discoveries,” said a scientific friend to me the other day, “is always the unclassified residuum.” Round about the accredited and orderly facts of every science there ever floats a sort of dust-cloud of exceptional observations, of occurrences minute and irregular and seldom met with, which it always proves more easy to ignore than to attend to. The ideal of every science is that of a closed and completed system of truth. The charm of most sciences to
their more passive disciples consists in their appearing, in fact, to wear just this ideal form. Each one of our various *ologies* seems to offer a definite head of classification for every possible phenomenon of the sort which it professes to cover; and so far from free is most men’s fancy, that, when a consistent and organized scheme of this sort has once been comprehended and assimilated, a different scheme is unimaginable. No alternative, whether to whole or parts, can any longer be conceived as possible. Phenomena unclassifiable within the system are therefore paradoxical absurdities, and must be held untrue. When, moreover, as so often happens, the reports of them are vague and indirect; when they come as mere marvels and oddities rather than as things of serious moment,—one neglects or denies them with the best of scientific consciences. Only the born geniuses let themselves be worried and fascinated by these outstanding exceptions, and get no peace till they are brought within the fold. Your Galileos, Galvanis, Fresnels, Purkinjes, and Darwins are always getting confounded and troubled by insignificant things. Anyone will renovate his science who will steadily look after the irregular phenomena. And when the science is renewed, its new formulas often have more of the voice of the exceptions in them than of what were supposed to be the rules.

No part of the unclassified residuum has usually been treated with a more contemptuous scientific disregard than the mass of phenomena generally called *mystical*. Physiology will have nothing to do with them. Orthodox psychology turns its back upon them. Medicine sweeps them out; or, at most, when in an anecdotal vein, records a few of them as “effects of the imagination” a phrase of mere dismissal, whose meaning, in this connection, it is impossible to make precise. All the while, however, the phenomena are there, lying broadcast over the surface of history. No matter where you open its pages, you find things recorded under the name of divinations, inspirations, demoniacal possessions, apparitions, trances, ecstasies, miraculous healings and productions of disease, and occult powers possessed by peculiar individuals over persons and things in their neighborhood. We suppose that “mediumship” originated in Rochester, N. Y., and animal magnetism with Mesmer; but once look behind the pages of official history, in personal memoirs, legal documents, and popular narratives and books of anecdote, and you will find that there never was a time when these things were not reported just as abundantly as now. We college-bred gentry, who follow the stream of cosmopolitan culture exclusively, not infrequently stumble upon some old-established journal, or some voluminous native author, whose names are never heard of in our circle, but who number their readers by the quarter-million. It always gives us a little shock to find this mass of human beings not only living and ignoring us and all our gods, but actually reading and writing and cogitating without ever a thought of our canons and authorities. Well, a public no less large keeps and transmits from generation to generation the traditions and practices of the occult; but academic science cares as little for its beliefs and opinions as you, gentle reader, care for those of the readers of the *Waverley* and the *Fireside Companion*. To no one type of mind is it given to discern the totality of truth. Something escapes the best of us—not accidentally, but systematically, and because we have a twist. The scientific-academic mind and the feminine-mystical
mind shy from each other’s facts, just as they fly from each other’s temper and spirit. Facts are there only for those who have a mental affinity with them. When once they are indisputably ascertained and admitted, the academic and critical minds are by far the best fitted ones to interpret and discuss them—for surely to pass from mystical to scientific speculations is like passing from lunacy to sanity; but on the other hand if there is anything which human history demonstrates, it is the extreme slowness with which the ordinary academic and critical mind acknowledges facts to exist which present themselves as wild facts, with no stall or pigeon-hole, or as facts which threaten to break up the accepted system. In psychology, physiology, and medicine, wherever a debate between the mystics and the scientifics has been once for all decided, it is the mystics who have usually proved to be right about the facts, while the scientifics had the better of it in respect to the theories. The most recent and flagrant example of this is “animal magnetism,” whose facts were stoutly dismissed as a pack of lies by academic medical science the world over, until the non-mystical theory of “hypnotic suggestion” was found for them when they were admitted to be so excessively and dangerously common that special penal laws, forsooth, must be passed to keep all persons unequipped with medical diplomas from taking part in their production. Just so stigmatizations, invulnerabilities, instantaneous cures, inspired discourses, and demoniacal possessions, the records of which were shelved in our libraries but yesterday in the alcove headed “superstitions,” now, under the brand-new title of “cases of hystero-epilepsy,” are republished, re-observed, and reported with an even too credulous avidity.

Repugnant as the mystical style of philosophizing may be (especially when self-complacent), there is no sort of doubt that it goes with a gift for meeting with certain kinds of phenomenal experience. The writer of these pages has been forced in the past few years to this admission; and he now believes that he who will pay attention to facts of the sort dear to mystics, while reflecting upon them in academic-scientific ways, will be in the best possible position to help philosophy. (1987: 680-2)

It is interesting how James relates an interest in mysticism with scientific genius—perhaps because at least some famous scientists seem to exhibit or wrestle with a mystical impulse, but also perhaps because James, like Pauli and Jung, sensed how important it seems to be in our historical context to inquire into the nature of mind and arrive at some real understanding of the relationship between what we have called “mind” and what we have called “matter”. According to Gieser, Pauli’s studies of Kepler indicated that, “Kepler retained a mystic element in the science of his time, but from modern science this element, this value, has totally disappeared. Pauli asks: Where can it have gone? There can only be one solution to the problem: science must
also include ‘knowledge of salvation’” (Gieser 2005: 257). In other words, science must become more philosophical, more mystical, more ecological—more skillful and realistic. It seems that taking James or Pauli seriously implies the possibility that academic-scientific thinking itself needs revisioning on the basis of mystical experience. And thus we face all the challenges and interesting potentials we have touched on in our inquiry.

The importance James senses in mysticism also relates to his own work as a psychologist. He tells us in *Varieties of Religious Experience*,

I cannot but think that the most important step forward that has occurred in psychology since I have been a student of that science is the discovery, first made in 1886, that, in certain subjects at least, there is not only the consciousness of the ordinary field, with its usual centre and margin, but an addition thereto in the shape of a set of memories, thoughts, and feelings which are extra-marginal and outside of the primary consciousness altogether, but yet must be classed as conscious facts of some sort, able to reveal their presence by unmistakable signs. I call this the most important step forward because, unlike the other advances which psychology has made, this discovery has revealed to us an entirely unsuspected peculiarity in the constitution of human nature. No other step forward which psychology has made can proffer any such claim as this. (1987: 215)

The most important step forward? And it has to do with Liminal Awareness, crossing a threshold, entering into a margin, entering a Bardo. We see this even today, not only in the so-called parapsychology literature (peer-reviewed and rigorous as much of it is), but even in the once-taboo but now acceptable study of advanced meditators who can enter non-ordinary states. James, it seems, was onto something. Near the end of his life, in *The Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods*, James made “A Suggestion about Mysticism”:

The suggestion, stated very briefly, is that states of mystical intuition may be only very sudden and great extensions of the ordinary “field of consciousness.” Concerning the causes of such extensions I have no suggestion to make; but the extension itself would, if my view be correct, consist in an immense spreading of the margin of the field, so that knowledge ordinarily trans-marginal would become included, and the ordinary margin would grow more central.
Fechner’s “wavescheme” will diagrammatize the alteration, as I conceive it, if we suppose that the wave of present awareness, steep above the horizontal line that represents the plane of the usual “threshold,” slopes away below it very gradually in all directions. A fall of the threshold, however caused, would, under these circumstances, produce the state of things which we see on an unusually flat shore at the ebb of a spring-tide. Vast tracts usually covered are then revealed to view, but nothing rises more than a few inches above the water’s bed, and great parts of the scene are submerged again, whenever a wave washes over them.

Some persons have naturally a very wide, others a very narrow, field of consciousness. The narrow field may be represented by an unusually steep form of the wave. When by any accident the threshold lowers, in persons of this type—I speak here from direct personal experience—so that the field widens and the relations of its center to matters usually subliminal come into view, the larger panorama perceived fills the mind with exhilaration and a sense of mental power. It is a refreshing experience; and—such is now my hypothesis—we only have to suppose it to occur in an exceptionally extensive form, to give us a mystical paroxysm, if such a term be allowed.

A few remarks about the field of consciousness may be needed to give more definiteness to my hypothesis. The field is composed at all times of a mass of present sensation, in a cloud of memories, emotions, concepts, etc. Yet these ingredients, which have to be named separately, are not separate, as the conscious field contains them. Its form is that of a much-at-once, in the unity of which the sensations, memories, concepts, impulses, etc., coalesce and are dissolved. The present field as a whole came continuously out of its predecessor and will melt into its successor as continuously again, one sensation-mass passing into another sensation-mass and giving the character of a gradually changing present to the experience, while the memories and concepts carry time-coefficients which place whatever is present in a temporal perspective more or less vast.

When, now, the threshold falls, what comes into view is not the next mass of sensation; for sensation requires new physical stimulations to produce it, and no alteration of a purely mental threshold can create these. Only in case the physical stimuli were already at work subliminally, preparing the next sensation, would whatever sub-sensation was already prepared reveal itself when the threshold fell. But with the memories, concepts, and conational states, the case is different. Nobody knows exactly how far we are “marginally” conscious of these at ordinary times, or how far beyond the “margin” of our present thought trans-marginal consciousness, of them may exist. There is at any rate no definite

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223 James includes the following footnote here, the end of which seems particularly important, as it seems not so much a matter of preference but scientific conscience: “Transmarginal or subliminal, the terms are synonymous. Some psychologists deny the existence of such consciousness altogether (A. H. Pierce, for example, and Münsterberg apparently). Others, e. g., Bergson, make it exist and carry the whole freight of our past. Others again (as Myers) would have it extend (in the “telepathic” mode of communication) from one person’s mind into another’s. For the purposes of my hypothesis I have to postulate its existence; and once postulating it, I prefer not to set any definite bounds to its extent.”
bound set between what is central and what is marginal in consciousness, and the margin itself has no definite bound a parte foris. It is like the field of vision, which the slightest movement of the eye will extend, revealing objects that always stood there to be known. My hypothesis is that a movement of the threshold downwards will similarly bring a mass of subconscious memories, conceptions, emotional feelings, and perceptions of relation, etc., into view all at once; and that if this enlargement of the nimbus that surrounds the sensational present is vast enough, while no one of the items it contains attracts our attention singly, we shall have the conditions fulfilled for a kind of consciousness in all essential respects like that termed mystical. It will be transient, if the change of threshold is transient. It will be of reality, enlargement, and illumination, possibly rapturously so. It will be of unification, for the present coalesces in it with ranges of the remote quite out of its reach under ordinary circumstances; and the sense of relation will be greatly enhanced. Its form will be intuitive or perceptual, not conceptual, for the remembered or conceived objects in the enlarged field are supposed not to attract the attention singly, but only to give the sense of a tremendous muchness suddenly revealed. If they attracted attention separately, we should have the ordinary steep-waved consciousness, and the mystical character would depart. (1987: 1272-4)

James here works in his own way with the notion of the threshold, the liminal, the Bardo. He goes on to consider experiences of a mystical character, including a dream experience of his own. In contemplating it, we can note the fear we reflected on earlier, when considering Mayer’s experience of extraordinary knowing. The fear seems to go together with whatever energy our system invests in keeping us anchored in a sense of self, keeping the range of mind states fairly restricted, keeping us in a supraluminal state, keeping a sense of control and of a controller, keeping a sense of the known, keeping the Bardo at bay. We seem to need the right kind of context to drop off the body and mind we habitually identify with and enter the mystery of what we are. This dream experience may not seem strange to us, and perhaps all we can do is imagine a dream experience that somehow ruptures the ordinary solidity of the self, dispelling our ability to conveniently hide behind our own skin:

On the following night (Feb. 12 13) I awoke suddenly from my first sleep, which appeared to have been very heavy, in the middle of a dream, in thinking of which I became suddenly confused by the contents of two other dreams that
shuffled themselves abruptly in between the parts of the first dream, and of which I couldn’t grasp the origin. Whence come these dreams? I asked. They were close to me, and fresh, as if I had just dreamed them; and yet they were far away from the first dream. The contents of the three had absolutely no connection. One had a cockney atmosphere, it had happened to some one in London. The other two were American. One involved the trying on of a coat (was this the dream I seemed to wake from?) the other was a sort of nightmare and had to do with soldiers. Each had a wholly distinct emotional atmosphere that made its individuality discontinuous with that of the others. And yet, in a moment, as these three dreams alternately telescoped into and out of each other, and I seemed to myself to have been their common dreamer, they seemed quite as distinctly not to have been dreamed in succession, in that one sleep. When, then? Not on a previous night, either. When, then? and which was the one out of which I had just awakened? I could no longer tell: one was as close to me as the others, and yet they entirely repelled each other, and I seemed thus to belong to three different dream-systems at once, no one of which would connect itself either with the others or with my waking life. I began to feel curiously confused and scared, and tried to wake myself up wider, but I seemed already wide-awake. Presently cold shivers of dread ran over me: am I getting into other people’s dreams? Is this a ‘telepathic’ experience? Or an invasion of double (or treble) personality? Or is it a thrombus in a cortical artery? and the beginning of a general mental ‘confusion’ and disorientation which is going on to develop who knows how far?

Decidedly I was losing hold of my ‘self,’ and making acquaintance with a quality of mental distress that I had never known before, its nearest analogue being the sinking, giddying anxiety that one may have when, in the woods, one discovers that one is really ‘lost.’ Most human troubles look towards a terminus. Most fears point in a direction, and concentrate towards a climax. Most assaults of the evil one may be met by bracing oneself against something, one’s principles, one’s courage, one’s will, one’s pride. But in this experience all was diffusion from a centre, and foothold swept away, the brace itself disintegrating all the faster as one needed its support more direly. Meanwhile vivid perception (or remembrance) of the various dreams kept coming over me in alternation. Whose? whose? WHOSE? Unless I can attach them, I am swept out to sea with no horizon and no bond, getting lost. The idea aroused the ‘creeps’ again, and with it the fear of again falling asleep and renewing the process. It had begun the previous night, but then the confusion had only gone one step, and had seemed simply curious. This was the second step—where might I be after a third step had been taken? My teeth chattered at the thought.

At the same time I found myself filled with a new pity towards persons passing into dementia with Verwirrtheit, or into invasions of secondary personality. We regard them as simply curious; but what they want in the awful drift of their being out of its customary self, is any principle of steadiness to hold on to. We ought to assure them and reassure them that we will stand by them, and recognize the true self in them to the end. We ought to let them know that we are with them and not (as too often we must seem to them) a part of the world that but confirms and publishes their deliquescence. . . .
The distressing confusion of mind in this experience was the exact opposite of mystical illumination, and equally unmystical was the definiteness of what was perceived. But the exaltation of the sense of relation was mystical (the perplexity all revolved about the fact that the three dreams both did and did not belong in the most intimate way together); and the sense that reality was being uncovered was mystical in the highest degree. (1276-9)

The evocation of compassion seems like a nice benefit, and it also seems significant that we have ourselves suggested an intimacy between Wisdom and madness. It seems we must tread carefully, lest we slip off the razor’s edge of Wisdom and fall into delusion or psychopathy. And, in case the reader underestimates the intensity of this experience or its effect on James, we can consider a footnote he places with the above account, in which he refers to the experience as involving a kind of devastation:

In my own case the confusion was foudroyante [devastating, or perhaps terrible, sudden, violent]—a state of consciousness unique and unparalleled in my 64 years of the world’s experience; yet it alternated quickly with perfectly rational states, as this record shows. It seems, therefore, merely as if the threshold between the rational and the morbid state had, in my case, been temporarily lowered, and as if similar confusions might be very near the line of possibility in all of us.

There are also the suggestions of a telepathic entrance into some one else’s dreams, and of a doubling up of personality. In point of fact I don’t know now ‘who’ had those three dreams, or which one ‘I’ first woke up from, so quickly did they substitute themselves back and forth for each other, discontinuously. Their discontinuity was the pivot of the situation. My sense of it was as ‘vivid’ and ‘original’ an experience as anything Hume could ask for. And yet they kept telescoping!

Then there is the notion that by waking at certain hours we may tap distinct strata of ancient dream-memory. (1987: 1278-9)

In addition to his own experience, James examines the experience of someone else. Of his reflections on both of these experiences, he concludes this way:

I have treated the phenomenon under discussion as if it consisted in the uncovering of tracts of consciousness. Is the consciousness already there waiting to be uncovered? and is it a veridical revelation of reality? These are questions on which I do not touch. In the subjects of the experience the “emotion of conviction” is always strong, and sometimes absolute. The ordinary psychologist disposes of the phenomenon under the conveniently “scientific” head of petit mal, if not of “bosh” or “rubbish.” But we know so little of the noetic value of
abnormal mental states of any kind that in my own opinion we had better keep an open mind and collect facts sympathetically for a long time to come. We shall not understand these alterations of consciousness either in this generation or in the next. (1987: 1280)

This notion of uncovering something already there, but beneath the threshold of supraliminal awareness, pervades the whole of our inquiry, and it seems to pervade the whole of philosophy in one way or another. It is never “cutting-edge” wisdom that we invent out of nothing, never a bag of tricks we present in the manner of “cutting-edge” science and technology, but rather insights that deserve the name Wisdom because of how they touch the obvious that had somehow become lost. This does not mean Wisdom never goes altogether with new “knowledge,” but that Wisdom is the precondition for anything that deserve to be thought of as based on knowing, rather than rooted in ignorance. Knowledge rooted in ignorance does not seem worthy of being called knowledge, but simply a set of techniques, a bag of tricks, a program of cleverness.

Jung gets at this “already there” quality James alludes to, and somehow we have to try and approach a sense of it that does not lurch into the “myth of the given”. The nonduality of unity and diversity, self and world, and so on makes it challenging to wonderstand the difference between the giftedness of life and the myth of the given.

What if there was a living agency beyond our everyday human world - something even more purposeful than electrons? Do we delude ourselves in thinking that we possess and control our own psyches, and is what science calls the “psyche” not just a question mark arbitrarily confined within the skull, but rather a door that opens upon the human world from a world beyond, allowing unknown and mysterious powers to act upon man and carry him on the wings of the night to a more than personal destiny? (CW15, par. 148)

Lived by powers we pretend to understand, the ego tries to maintain an illusion of boundedness and control. Nevertheless, transdermal and in general non-cranial factors seem real, and seem to influence our lives and our loves. Jung referred to these factors or powers, at least some of them,
as archetypes. In his collaboration with Pauli, the physicist got him to carry the notion of the archetype beyond the psyche. In a lecture delivered in honor of Jung’s 80th birthday, Pauli said,

Although in physics one does not speak of ‘archetypes’ which reproduce themselves, but of ‘statistical laws of nature with primary probabilities’, both formulations meet in the tendency to amplify the older more narrow idea of ‘causality (determinism)’ to a more general form of connection in nature, toward which the psychophysical problem also points. This way of consideration leads me to the expectation, that the ideas on the unconscious will not be developed further in the narrow frame of their therapeutic applications, but that their junction with the general stream of the natural sciences of the phenomena of life will be decisive for them. (Gieser, 345)

We see here an intimation of a non-dual reality behind or under or pervading what we call “mind” and what we call “matter”. Pauli seems, then, to demand a new kind of science, a new kind of “natural law” that will account for both “physical” and “mental” phenomena. It does not seem that neuroscience is any closer to leaping into such a science than is physics or psychology.

There is yet a role here for the philosopher and the psychologist if they can remain experimental, and if they can get beyond mere “therapy” and enter into the therapeia of old, reinvigorating it.

Based on a study of the many letters exchanged between Pauli and Jung, Gieser explains some key features of Pauli’s view as follows:

It is the occurrence of similar concepts and thought models in both physics and psychology that makes Pauli so certain that they rest on a foundation of shared structures. It ought to be possible to express these structures in a generally neutral language. As yet we know remarkably little about this depth structure, but one thing is certain – to understand it we must seek a new type of natural law, one which can include psychic reality as well as physical. This natural law must also encompass the irrational, in the sense of the creative and unique. In this way Pauli wants to unite the classical search for an objective worldview with the epistemological revolution implied by Kant and his successors. The irrational enters into science with the observer and the moment of observation, where every observation becomes to some extent an act of creation. By including the observer – not only as a measuring instrument but as a person – in the description of nature, we must also include psychology. The most evident psychological role in science is naturally that played by our intellectual apparatus: the possibility of
processing, interpreting and understanding our observations. But man as a psychological being consists of much more than a recording intellect. Man consists of impulses, feelings, fears, fantasies and convictions which are based on archetypal models.

One of the ways in which such a psychological factor expresses itself is in the fascination of the practitioner of science with a subject, a fascination which is at best a commitment and at worst an obsession. If one is gripped by entirely different visions, a scientific discussion is difficult, if not impossible. An epistemological insight into the religious side of scientific work might be able to prepare the way for a more humble and fertile meeting of different schools and disciplines. The insight into the fact that science rests on irrational foundations, in other words that rational conceptualization and scientific theory rest on a preliminary stage of figurative and intuitive viewing, was developed by Pauli in his essay on background physics. It became important for Pauli to emphasize that one can never achieve a complete knowledge of the process of scientific conceptualization if one does not take this preliminary stage into account. For it is here that the creative side of scientific activity is based. Pauli divided up science into two distinct parts: on the one side the discovery of laws of nature and the advent of theories, on the other the confirmation or application of them. The greatest gains of science quite often take place in an ‘unscientific’ manner, via feelings, intuitions, impulses and sudden flashes of inspiration – even via dreams and visions. Developing these inspirations by hard work and testing into applicable and fertile instruments is of equal importance. . . .

[Pauli] seems nonetheless to have entirely accepted the idea that the archetypes are associated with numinosum, a force which expresses itself in everything from pure instinct to the most spiritual striving. At the same time Pauli was fully convinced that the archetypes in themselves could not be defined as purely psychic factors. It is quite evident that it was Pauli’s pressure that led Jung to widen his concept of the archetype in a more non-platonic, non-visual and non-mentalist direction and resort to the concept psychoid, as a reference to the possibility that perhaps the archetypes are not of a solely psychic nature. A further step in this direction was taken with the idea of a potential, constellating archetype ‘becoming’ and ‘emerging’ at certain qualitative moments in life closely associated with a widening and evolution of consciousness.

Might it be possible that the archetypes also structure matter? Pauli appeared convinced of it. That this is so is suggested by the fact that it is apparently possible to understand matter on a basis of mathematics, a discipline which both Kepler and Poincaré saw as ‘the archetype of the beauty of the world’. From this angle Pauli constructs an epistemological theory entirely of his own which we do not find in Jung: at a certain level of abstraction our internal images and the structures of the external objects come into congruence and overlap. When this happens man has an a-ha experience.

Towards the end of his life Pauli came increasingly to place feeling in the centre of his view of things. Feeling goes as deep as thought, claimed Pauli, amo, ergo sum is at least as well-founded as cogito, ergo sum. The strongest of all sensations is the experience of numinosum. Just as in the case of the archetypes,
he did not wish to limit this phenomenon to purely psychic experience. In line with his other ideas, he believed that the deepest processes of the psyche must have an equivalent in a generally valid natural process or natural law. What is expressed on a psychic level in a turbulent a-ha experience and in the experience of meaning and purpose – in other words the experience of having gained insight into a wider context – was something that he wished to link with a purposeful holistic regulation of life phenomena. These holistic structuring factors lie beyond psyche and matter and they are relative to time, space and causality. They possess an organizing and synthesizing character and express themselves in unique, creative forms. When such forms and systems are observed in external nature, we use words like purposefulness to describe their occurrence. If on the other hand one meets these factors in one’s personal life they are experienced as an intervention from a higher order, often rich in meaning.

Pauli understood his late ideas as speculative and hypothetical. It is also quite clear that these perspectives and outlooks had the character of questions rather than of answers. But if both psyche and matter form an expression of a common, objective, underlying order – then one may also imagine that changes in the underlying order have repercussions on the whole world of phenomena, both psychic and physical, possibly according to some kind of parity principle in the cosmos. One may then imagine that by penetrating the foundations of matter one comes into contact with this deep level, and thereby also influences psychic reality. In the same way one would have an effect on matter by penetrating the deepest layer of the psyche. Pauli was at any rate convinced that psyche and matter reflect each other or as he speculates in his last letter to Jung, that the archetype is a ‘kind of mirror which manifests itself as reflections’ in psyche and matter. Concretely this implied that every individual, in particular every scientist, bears a great responsibility for his psychic attitude but also for what he does with matter. (345-8)

Somehow we can imagine a patterning that constellates what we call mind and what we call matter. This is indeed a Platonic-feeling suggestion, and we should—perhaps importantly—think of the energy of the numinosum in relation to the Eros discussed by Sorenson, the LUV experienced by McKenna, and the Love of LoveWisdom, as presented by Plato. Interestingly, Bateson too found his work in sympathy with Plato’s. He places the following passage from St. Augustine as an epigram for his book, Mind and Nature: A Necessary Unity:

Plotinus the Platonist proves by means of the blossoms and leaves that from the Supreme God, whose beauty is invisible and ineffable, Providence reaches down to the things of earth here below. He points out that these frail and mortal objects could not be endowed with a beauty so immaculate and so exquisitely wrought,
did they not issue from the Divinity which endlessly pervades with its invisible and unchanging beauty all things.

Bateson did not seem to set out to write a Platonic work, but describes a process in which the Platonic dimension sort of dawned on him as he developed it. He found himself laying down very elementary ideas about epistemology . . . that is, about how we can know anything. In the pronoun we, I of course included the starfish and the redwood forest, the segmenting egg, and the Senate of the United States. (MN: 4)

We have tried to look with this same inclusiveness in our inquiry. Bateson goes on to write,

It is the Platonic thesis of the book that epistemology is an indivisible, integrated metascience whose subject matter is the world of evolution, thought, adaptation, embryology, and genetics—the science of mind in the widest sense of the word. . . 

But epistemology is always and inevitably personal. The point of the probe is always in the heart of the explorer: What is my answer to the question of the nature of knowing? I surrender to the belief that my knowing is a small part of a wider integrated knowing that knits the entire biosphere or creation. (87-8)

This knitting . . . it is what Bateson calls “the pattern that connects.” Kohák writes: “The logos is the order of the cosmos” (10). Cosmic vision can reveal an Ordering, Logos, Dao, the Good, the Great Mystery, the Creator, the Patterning, the Dharma, Pratityasamutpada, Wildness. We can call it what we like. Call it God, or the Mind of God. In any case, Bateson, Jung, Pauli, and others suggest there is a patterning the pervades all things, “guiding alike the flight of the sparrow and the life of the sage” as Kohák puts it (10).

We can sense this in a “scientific” mode, but our science seems too young, too partial, too limited. This is perhaps why Bateson repeatedly emphasizes the aesthetic, and in some ways preferred the company of even the anti-scientific. We will see him reference the potential value of an anti-scientific mind in a moment, but we can for now at least recall that he lived at Esalen
and seems to have preferred the minor insanities he perhaps encountered there to the major insanity gripping the dominant culture, including its “science”.

Bohm, too, tried to touch this from a scientific perspective or with a scientific sensibility:

The ‘quantum’ context thus calls for a new kind of description that does not imply the separability of the ‘observed object’ and ‘observing instrument’. Instead, the form of the experimental conditions and the meaning of the experimental results have now to be one whole, in which analysis into autonomously existent elements is not relevant.

What is meant here by wholeness could be indicated metaphorically by calling attention to a pattern (e.g., in a carpet). In so far as what is relevant is the pattern, it has no meaning to say that different parts of such a pattern (e.g., various flowers and trees that are to be seen in the carpet) are separate objects in interaction. Similarly, in the quantum context, one can regard terms like ‘observed object’, ‘observing instrument’, ‘link electron’, ‘experimental results’, etc., as aspects of a single overall ‘pattern’ that are in effect abstracted or ‘pointed out’ by our mode of description. Thus, to speak of the interaction of ‘observing instrument’ and ‘observed object’ has no meaning.

A centrally relevant change in descriptive order required in the quantum theory is thus the dropping of the notion of analysis of the world into relatively autonomous parts, separately existent but in interaction. Rather, the primary emphasis is now on undivided wholeness, in which the observing instrument is not separable from what is observed. (1980: 169)

We can think of our typical way of knowing as something like one part of a pattern pointing out other parts of a pattern. If we were woven into the fabric of reality, and we pointed at some other part and said, “That is a flower,” in some profound sense, we would have gotten things incredibly wrong—most especially if that is what we focused on being able to do in terms of our practice of life. The truth is that “we” are a patterning, alive and alove, and we are part of the same patterning as the “flower” (its threads go right through us), and thus, in the statement, “That is a flower,” patterning “points” “at” patterning, ignorant of its self-sameness, its nonduality of unity and diversity. Because of the nature of this error, we essentially become
thirsty while swimming in a lake. Taking up conscious purposes on the basis of this error results in pervasive negative side-effects.

Lee tried to help readers understand Trobriander culture by evoking the notion of pattern:

What we consider a causal relationship in a sequence of connected events, is to the Trobriander an ingredient of a patterned whole. He names this ingredient u’ula. A tree has a trunk, u’ula; a house has u’ula, posts; a magical formula has u’ula, the first strophe; an expedition has u’ula, a manager or leader; and a quarrel contains an u’ula, what we would call a cause. There is no purposive so as to; no for the purpose of; there is no why and no because. The rarely used pela which Malinowski equates with for, means primarily to jump. In the culture, any deliberately purposive behavior—the kind of behavior to which we accord high status—is despised. There is no automatic relating of any kind in the language. Except for the rarely used verbal it-differents and it-sames, there are no terms of comparison whatever. And we find in an analysis of behavior that the standard for behavior and of evaluation is non-comparative. (91)

Perhaps one might find a parallel in our culture in the making of a sweater. When I embark on knitting one, the ribbing at the bottom does not cause the making of the neckline, nor of the sleeves or the armholes; and it is not part of a lineal series of acts. Rather it is an indispensable part of a patterned activity which includes all these other acts. . . .

. . . It is because they find value in pattern that the Trobrianders act according to nonlineal pattern; not because they do not perceive lineality.

But all Trobriand activity does not contain value; and when it does not, it assumes lineality, and is utterly despicable. For example, the pattern of sexual intercourse includes the giving of a gift from the boy to the girl; but if a boy gives a gift so as to win the girl’s favor, he is despised. . . .

. . . it is probable that the Trobrianders experience reality in nonlineal pattern because this is the valued reality; and that they are capable of experiencing lineally, when value is absent or destroyed. (93)

Bateson wrote in his book, *Mind and Nature: A Necessary Unity*, that the book could have been called “the pattern which connects” (his emphasis), and that this phrase is “a synonym” for the book’s title. Of this pattern which connects, Bateson writes,

*The pattern which connects*. Why do schools teach almost nothing of the pattern which connects? Is it that teachers know that they carry the kiss of death which will turn to tastelessness whatever they touch and therefore they are wisely unwilling to touch or teach anything of real-life importance? Or is it that they
carry the kiss of death because they dare not teach anything of real-life importance? What’s wrong with them?

What pattern connects the crab to the lobster and the orchid to the primrose and all the four of them to me? And me to you?

What is the pattern which connects all the living creatures?

Let me go back to my crab and my class of beatniks. I was very lucky to be teaching people who were not scientists and the bias of whose minds was even anti-scientific. All untrained as they were, their bias was aesthetic. I would define that word, for the moment, by saying that they were not like Peter Bly, the character of whom Wordsworth sang

A primrose by the river’s brim
A yellow primrose was to him;
And it was nothing more.

Rather, they would meet the primrose with recognition and empathy. By aesthetic, I mean responsive to the pattern which connects. (8)

And thus we must declare philosophy a fundamentally aesthetic discipline. Let us inhibit our habits of reifying, subject-object duality, noun-verb structuring, and so on by calling that to which our practice of beauty responds the Patterning That Connects, the Sacred-Creative-Patterning-in-through-as-Relational-Openness. That must seem cumbersome, and it is not necessarily more accurate than calling it responsiveness itself—the responsiveness Bateson just referred to as “aesthetic,” and which we could call Wisdom-Love-Beauty. We could also just call it the sacred.

This patterning is Mind, in the sense of Nature, and in the sense of Nature of Mind and its immediate, intimate manifestations. To say Mind is not a thing but activity marks no major revelation in the dominant culture in terms of intellectual speculation, analysis, and argument, but it does suggest a major realization yet to come, a revelation still waiting for a better practice to bring it to fruition.
Epistemology means a way of knowing-by-being the patterning that relationally cultivates life forward, what functions now, in, through, as us. The patterning is a play of correspondences, a dance of synchronicities, a spiraling out of archetypes by means of sacred powers and inconceivable causes—not “knowable” as objects, but realizable as intimacy, as divine madness, as holy sanity.

Archetypes are patternings of activity or behavior, which we should relate to the concept of habit (partially described by Dewey, who noted that habit precedes “thought”) and the concept of instinct as discussed by Jung, and the patterning that connects (partially described or inquired into by Bateson, who thought he was doing something akin to a Platonic epistemology, i.e. an epistemology of living, loving patterning, which we might think of as an epistemology of ideas, but with some caveats as to how that relates to the conventional—and boring—interpretations of Plato, who was nothing if not a rather delightful mystic, even if only a moderately accomplished one). We can expand Bateson’s questions:

What Is It? What patterning connects the crab to the lobster and the orchid to the primrose and all the four of them to us? What connects me to you? What connects the dream you had to the happenings of the World? What connects your soul to the souls of other beings, humans, lions, tigers, wolves, whales, fishes, in Africa, South America, the Pacific, the Himalayan mountains? What connects all those souls, yours and mine and all the rest, to the Cosmos, such that meaningfulness reveals itself anytime we attend, anytime we remember to look, listen, feel, rest as the Nature of what we are?
Philosophically, all of these questions can be condensed into one: Who am I?

All arts of awareness function as attunements to the patterning, attunement in, through, as the patterning. These arts of awareness include the following:

Spiritually rooted interbeing with Nature (and thus ethically, aesthetically, epistemologically rooted interbeing with Nature—all of the arts of awareness depend on wisdom, love, and beauty)
Meditation
Interbeing with Horse and other non-human beings
Koan, Spiritual Common Law
Mandala
Drumming
Dance
Shamanic Journeying
Yijing
Music
Synchronicity
Labyrinth walking
Dream work: Social dreaming, lucid dreaming, dream yoga, cultural dream practices
Alexander Technique and other forms of psychophysical education
Holotropic Medicines (Ayahuasca, Psilocybin, Peyote, etc.)
Breath work, including holotropic breathing
Tarot and similar practices
Astrology
Jungian Active Imagination
Art
Focusing
Demon Feeding (Machig Labron’s practice, adapted by Tsultrim Allione)
Tantra
Myth
Ceremony, Celebration, Ritual
Dialogue: Insight, Bohmian, Platonic, Socratic, Community Circles
Fasting
Prayer

The *Art of Awareness itself* is central to epistemology, and by this we can mean that the practices have to do with intimate realization of awareness itself, or the Nature of Mind itself. The Art of Awareness is the Art of Living, the Art of Renunciation, which means forgetting, letting go of
the narrow sense of self in the fundamental activity of attunement with the World, with the Sacred. The arts of awareness are not arts of our own skills, so to speak, but arts of return to the fundamental awareness of Sacredness itself. We cultivate not an individual mind (though we do that in some sense) so much as the Mind of Life. We cultivate sacredness in, though, as sacredness.

This sacredness transcends the ego and yet is the consummation of the Self. This sacredness is not somewhere else, or at some other time. Our knowing comes alive and alove in the here and now—nowhere else. As Ajan Chah invites us to see:

In samadhi [well-put-togetherness, in mental terms a state of concentration or focused attention] that is sure and stable, even when the eyes are opened, wisdom is there. When wisdom has been born, it encompasses and knows (‘rules’) all things . . . Samadhi doesn’t reside in having the eyes closed, the eyes open, or in sitting, standing, walking or lying down. Samadhi pervades all postures and activities. Older persons, who often can’t sit very well, can contemplate especially well and practice samadhi easily; they too can develop a lot of wisdom. How is it that they can develop wisdom? Everything is rousing them. (14-15)224

Everything is rousing us—rousing us to know better, rousing us to receive wisdom-love-beauty.

What a lovely invitation. What a lovely way to sense the World, to make sense of our life, to know ourselves and the nature of reality. Sophia sends us countless messages: “Come Home! Come Home to Us!”

In this particular passage, Chah may not have as broad a meaning as we can receive from it. In a more focused way, Chah means the rousing of the body by means of discomfort: “When [older people] open their eyes, they don’t see things as clearly as they used to. Their teeth give them

224 https://www.ajahnchah.org/pdf/everything_is_teaching_us.pdf
trouble and fall out. Their bodies ache most of the time. Just that is the place of study” (4). First of all, we should allow not only our own pain to rouse us, but also the pain of others, the pain of other humans, the pain of non-human beings, and the pain of the World. The World calls to us at every moment, sentient beings call to us at every moment: Please awaken!

But just this is always the place of study: Just this Moment, just this arising. Always, always: just this, just Sophia saying, “Here! Now! Just this!” Knowing is always, “Just this”—which never excludes, “and also,” “and more.” Just this already bursts the barriers of the ego, ruptures space and time, gallops along in placelessness even as it roots us to place.

This orientation makes spirituality and epistemology painfully simple, obvious, and even fun, joyful, peaceful, relaxed—even if it’s not necessarily “easy”. Nothing hidden. Nothing obscure. Nothing “esoteric”. Our fear of facing our own lives stokes a hunger for hidden secrets, esoteric concepts, and complicated analyses. All we need to do is stop fighting and relax, stop knowing and open, stop evading and attend. When we fail to attend, Sophie sends divine messengers. She has five angels permanently in place: Birth, Aging, Sickness, Negative Side-effects, and Death. Any of us can listen to these angels: “when [we] chew on something hard [we’re] soon in pain. Right there the devaduta (divine messengers) are talking to [us]; they’re teaching [us] every day” (15). They teach us to become valid knowers, attendant knowers, attendant care-givers, attendant lovers. To know only means attending awakening.

Chah asks, “What do you want to meditate on? Who will you learn meditation from?” (15) This is like asking, “What do you want to know? Who will you learn knowing from?” The answer:
Sense the body in the body, sense the World in the World, sense sensations in sensations, feel feelings in feelings. Do we truly see, do we truly sense our life, our body, our World—our World together, our altogether-World? Or do we turn away, in fear? Do we grasp elsewhere, in hope or craving?

If we open the heart: Everything appears! We learn knowing from the World and all its beings, and everything is rousing us, rousing us to awaken from our slumber and know. We need only practice well-put-togetherness to verify just this, to verify the appearing, the play, the dance of Mind. As Chah puts it: “You have to see it within yourself. When you sit, it’s true; when you stand up, it’s true; when you walk, it’s true. Everything is a hassle, everything is presenting obstacles—and everything is teaching you. Isn’t this so?” (15-16) Thus, we should never say that it’s too hard to meditate or too hard to know, to become truly wise, loving, and beautiful, appreciative of the wisdom, love, and beauty all around us. That is like saying it’s too hard to live, too hard to open our eyes and let the World appear, too hard to stub our toe and let it hurt, too hard to wreck ecologies and let that break us open in compassion, break us open to wisdom, love, and beauty.

In the noise of our clinging, we do indeed make it difficult for the World to appear, just as it is, so to speak (with no “myth of the given,” but only an end to ego-centrism and human agendas). When we think ourselves happy, we don’t think we need spiritual practice. When we feel uncomfortable, we just want the feeling to go away. But often the discomfort comes on angel’s wings, because we needed a little clarity, needed something to get our attention and return us home, return us to Sophia’s loving embrace. As Pema Chödron puts it:
Generally speaking, we regard discomfort in any form as bad news. But for practitioners or spiritual warriors—people who have a certain hunger to know what is true—feelings like disappointment, embarrassment, irritation, resentment, anger, jealousy, and fear, instead of being bad news, are actually very clear moments that teach us where it is that we’re holding back. They teach us to perk up and lean in when we feel we’d rather collapse and back away. They’re like messengers that show us, with terrifying clarity, exactly where we’re stuck. This very moment is the perfect teacher, and, lucky for us, it’s with us wherever we are. (2005: 14)

Now more than ever, as we sense the suffering we have brought to ourselves and countless sentient beings in countless degraded ecologies, we need a terrifying clarity, and the strength of heart to turn toward that terror, with warmth and openness.

The important point is that epistemology requires the incorporation of practices of awareness, requires training the mind to attend, to realize openness and presence, for when do we think knowing will arise except in the present moment? And how can we receive it if we are always trying to escape, if we are so often mindless, distracted, tired, and in various ways suffering? Hasn’t our inquiry indicated the many ways we seek to escape or avoid the present moment, the liminal, the Bardo of Here-Now? There might be sheer terror that holds us back from knowing, and this too relates to our resistance to the mystical: It is no “easy,” “rational,” controllable path. It is not mean, stupid, irrational, or merely chaotic in the pejorative sense. But, it involves various things that worry the ego, and these days we must add to the list the religious sensibility the mystic often exhibits, however atheistic they may have started off. But, to say it again, “religious” here does not mean “dogma” or “dogmatic,” and it has only to do with experimentation and verification. For the philosopher in us all, we intend a greater intimacy with Wisdom, with Sophia, and thus we can enthusiastically read the most religious mystics and receive “God” in each case as “Sophia”. For instance, consider this passage from Eckhart:
I am often asked if a man can reach the point where he is no longer hindered by time, multiplicity, or matter. Assuredly! Once this birth has really occurred, no creatures can hinder you; instead, they will all direct you to God and this birth. Take lightning as an analogy. Whatever it strikes, whether tree, beast, or man, it turns at once toward itself. A man with his back toward it is instantly turned round to face it. If a tree had a thousand leaves, they would all turn right side up toward the stroke. So it is with all in whom this birth occurs, they are promptly turned toward this birth with all they possess, be it never so earthy. In fact, what used to be a hindrance now helps you most. Your face is so fully turned toward this birth that, no matter what you see or hear, you can get nothing but this birth from all things. All things become simply God to you, for in all things you notice only God, just as a man who stares long at the sun sees the sun in whatever he afterward looks at. If this is lacking, this looking for and seeking God in all and sundry, then you lack this birth. (Walshe 2009: 59)

By means of a rupture of space and time (“no longer hindered by time, multiplicity, or matter”), all things become the divine, the sacred, Sophia, and we notice only the sacred in all things. This is the same as touching the patterning, becoming attuned in, through, as, with the patterning.

G.K. Chesterton gets at this in relation to St. Francis, who married Sophia in the form of Lady Poverty. This sacred marriage facilitated a transformation of his soul, and a transition into sainthood—recall Kohák: “The logos is the order of the cosmos, guiding alike the flight of the sparrow and the life of the sage” (10). (The link of sparrow and sage is most apt in the case of Francis.) As Chesterton saw it:

The transition from the good man to the saint is a sort of revolution; by which one for whom all things illustrate and illuminate God becomes one for whom God illustrates and illuminates all things. It is rather like the reversal whereby a lover might say at first sight that a lady looked like a flower, and say afterwards that all flowers reminded him of his lady. A saint and a poet standing by the same flower might seem to say the same thing; but indeed though they would both be telling the truth, they would be telling different truths. For one the joy of life is a cause of faith, for the other rather a result of faith.225

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225 [http://www.gkc.org.uk/gkc/books/St_Francis.html](http://www.gkc.org.uk/gkc/books/St_Francis.html)
We can offer a humble correction to the last line—and anyway, Chesterton himself already had it better written in the first line. The consummatory joy of life that the saint or sage experiences does not arise from faith, but from an intimate experience of sacredness. Spirituality is precisely not “a matter of faith,” but a *mattering* of practice-realization. As for the comparison with the poet, we may remind ourselves here of the great composer Haydn. Haydn was most certainly a genius, and his opus stands in no one else’s shadow. He supposedly had a very simple method of dealing with any blocks in his creativity—one that not only every artist could adapt in their own way, but also every scientist and every philosopher as well. When Haydn felt the flow of creativity and insight getting stuck, he would step away from the music and pray the rosary. So simple, yet so tremendously effective. Why would we ever bother composing with limited human capacities when we can allow the divine to compose the music for us?

If we work with Sophia, She can compose the music of our lives and set us dancing. She can illustrate and illuminate all things, including our own soul. This is the way LoveWisdom functions in general, and we needn’t rely on a particular image for that to happen (and, ultimately, we must transcend all images in order to fully realize ourselves and fully liberate our vision and our imagination).

In one of his poems, Rumi writes about Moses coming across a shepherd calling out to God. The shepherd was asking, “Where are you?” and telling God how he wanted to comb God’s hair, bring God milk, and even kiss God’s “little hands and feet” when it’s time for God to go to bed. Moses scolds the shepherd, telling him how inappropriate his words and intentions are,
essentially calling them worse than foolish and irreverent. The shepherd feels a deep sense of repentance. He tears at his clothes and wanders off into the desert. But then, in a moment of cosmic profundity, God’s voice speaks to Moses:

You have separated me
from one of my own. Did you come as a Prophet to unite,
or to sever?

I have given each being a separate and unique way
of seeing and knowing and saying that knowledge.

What seems wrong to you is right for him.
What is poison to one is honey to someone else.

Purity and impurity, sloth and diligence in worship,
these mean nothing to me.

I am apart from all that.
Ways of worshiping are not to be ranked as better
or worse than one another.

Hindus do Hindu things.
The Dravidian Muslims in Indian do what they do.
It’s all praise, and it’s all right.

It’s not me that’s glorified in acts of worship.
It’s the worshipers! I don’t hear the words
they say. I look inside at the humility.

That broken-open lowliness is the reality,
not the language! Forget phraseology.
I want burning, burning.

Be friends
with your burning. Burn up your thinking
and your forms of expression!

Rumi then tells us that God “began speaking deeper mysteries to Moses. Vision and words, which cannot be recorded here . . .” He tells us:

It’s foolish of me
to try and say this. If I did say it,
it would uproot our human intelligences.
It would shatter all writing pens.

Sophia shatters all writing pens, fries all laptops and tablets, melts down all servers and NSA spying devices. The voice of God in this poem is the voice of Wisdom. And Wisdom’s question holds for all of us: Are we here to unite or to sever? We must all cultivate prophetic vision (prophetic fire) to at least some degree, and we must each decide whether we will become visionary forces for Good, or narrow-visioned forces of evil. Are we here to unite or to sever, to cultivate and let ourselves be cultivated by wisdom, love, and beauty—or their “opposites”?

As for Moses, he wanders into the desert, searching for the shepherd, perhaps with the same kind of energy with which one searches for a loved one or a lost child. Moses finally finds him and tells the shepherd about what God revealed. Moses tells the shepherd to worship in whatever way he wants. The shepherd then tells Moses that he has transcended all of this:

“The divine nature and my human nature came together.  
Bless your scolding hand and your arm.  
I can’t say what has happened.  
What I’m saying now  
is not my real condition. It can’t be said.” (Barks 1995: 166-8)

It is possible in such cases that we enter a realm of things we cannot know. By this we must mean at least the following: We are not allowed to know them, so they must be not known. The epistemic policing of the culture makes it so that certain phenomena cannot be known, because the laws of a certain way of knowing have declared them unacceptable. Our scientists, philosophers, academics, intellectuals, politicians, and so on, playing the part of Moses, come along and tell us how we are allowed and not allowed to know, what we are allowed and not allowed to know. It doesn’t matter if someone claims to know them, for these knowledge claims will be dismissed out of hand. What such a person “knows” must be explained on the basis of
brain events or some version of deception, even self-deception. What does it take to enter that territory? Isn’t it an act of rebellion? It may not seem as though things are so controlled, and in many cases it seems that we are dealing with subtleties, but on a large scale things are rather stark, as the dominant culture’s way of knowing ourselves and our world spreads.

Even the suggestion that science requires spiritual practice may seem odd. Our science is set up as if it didn’t need any relationship to wisdom. As we now try to have it (going against the grain of reality), the scientist can be mindless, distracted, lacking presence. They don’t need to cultivate mindfulness, wholesomeness, generosity, inclusiveness, concentration, and other epistemic virtues, because they have ways to spread mind out into the ecology, in such a way that the pieces can catch something, as if in a net, and the larger ecology carries the burden of the negative side-effects that arise. Think of the startling contrast this marks in comparison to all our traditions of wisdom: To arrive at wisdom requires presence, while arriving at knowledge only requires cleverness and a bag of tricks (the notebook, the laptop, the beaker and Bunsen burner, the fMRI machine, the research team, the funding). What do we think will happen when we proceed as if knowledge can be gathered independently of our spiritual development? How does that ever make sense, considered broadly and deeply? What would we even end up with in such an approach? We don’t know, because we don’t know what we have gotten from science. We know aspects of it, but we don’t really know, because science gives no meaning in and of itself. Science is interwoven with life, but behaves as if it weren’t.

On the other hand, philosophy proceeds as if it were science that could get answers by doing nothing more than producing and analyzing equations—no experimentation, no verification in
any serious way, no examination of the broadest array of side-effects. Another way to think of philosophy’s approach would be to compare it to an attempt at food production by means of argumentation and analysis alone, with no seeds planted, no harvest gathered, no hunting, no fishing, no active work in living ecologies.

Neither of these approaches will function to keep life going, neither the delusion of science without philosophy nor the delusion of some sort of pure philosophizing that has no blood and guts, no lived connection to the Earth, no need for realization of wisdom-love-beauty in a moment-to-moment way. There are a few ways of characterizing how our inquiry suggests we proceed: That we need the cultivation of an ongoing activity of mind liberated into larger ecologies; or, more metaphorically, that scientists and philosophers in particular need to become more like eco-sensually awakening alchemists, magicians, healers, servants, artists, and therapists.

Perhaps it would help, as a way of closing our journey together, to consider briefly how we might think of this narrowly as a kind of ongoing state of insight and inspiration, and how we might broadly consider it as mystical participation.

As ongoing inspiration and insight, it involves the cultivation of serenity and wonder, something familiar to many ancient schools of philosophy in the east and west, and familiar to most spiritual and religious traditions. But, we can consider it scientifically. One of the most valuable studies on this was done by Petitmengin-Peugeot (1999). Not only is it one of the few detailed studies of the state of inspiration or intuition, but it is well-done, and outlines major gestures of
awareness and insight that go together with intuitive insight. Petitmengin-Peugeot writes that, “Our research comes as the result of our surprise at the silence surrounding the intuitive experience, though it seems to be at the heart of human experience” (45). Why the silence?

Throughout the history of human thought and in every field of knowledge intuition has played an essential role. It is therefore very surprising that so few studies have been dedicated to the study of the subjective experience which is associated with it.

For example, the history of the sciences from Archimedes to Ampère, Gauss, Kekulé, Pasteur, Poincaré, Hadamard, Heisenberg . . . is full of testimonies of scientists telling about how a new idea came to them in a sudden, unexpected manner, without any discursive activity. A lot of attention has been paid to the content of these intuitions, and a considerable amount of energy spent on exploring their consequences. However, even though a discovery has had important repercussions in our daily lives, very little attention has been paid to the experience itself, what the scientist was living through at the very moment of the intuitive breakthrough: ‘the art of knowing has remained unspecifiable at the very heart of science’ (Polanyi, 1962, p. 55). Astonishingly enough, this ‘forgetting’ of the intuitive experience also affects philosophy. Yet there are very few philosophic systems that do not work with the notion of intuition. From Plato’s intuition of Idea, to Descartes’ intuition of simple natures, to Hegelian and Husserlian intuition, ‘intuition represents the ideal of all knowledge, the ideal of understanding of being in general’ (Heidegger, 1993, p. 167.) Nevertheless, compared to the volumes and volumes consecrated to the definition of the concept of intuition, to the description of the content of philosophic intuitions, and to the theoretical exploration of their consequences, how many pages have been written on the intuitive experience itself?

. . . . The intuitive experience is not studied for itself, neither in the field of artistic creation, nor in the field of psychotherapy, nor in that of managerial decision-making, not even in daily life, where intuition often appears although in a more subtle form. When studies on intuition are not just limited to the recording of anecdotes, their objective is usually to prove the existence of the intuitive phenomenon, or to identify popular beliefs about intuition, or even to evaluate the intuitive capacities of a given population, but not to describe the actual subjective experience associated with the intuition.

Why evade the subject? Can we explain this through the weight of rationalism, which, considering knowledge as an analytical, deductive process, can only ignore intuition, or bring it down to the level of an unconscious inference, which is the same as denying the phenomenon? Can it be explained through the weight of positivism, which, only considering objective phenomena as objects of science, rejects the study of the subjective experience? (43–4)
Our inquiry here might suggest that, not only does an emphasis on rationalism tend to push intuition into the shadow of the psyche, but that our way of knowing doesn’t teach us how to know in this way, which clearly exceeds conscious control and relies on something beyond the little box of the ego. It is the hypothesis of this inquiry that all our insight depend on these larger ecologies, and that we tap into them often in spite of ourselves, and typically in ways co-opted by the ego and its agendas, which are in turn structured by the dominant culture and the conquest consciousness that pervades it. That is not necessarily the most precise way of putting it, but the point remains: The dominant culture is not a culture that educates its participants to know, and thus to live, in an ongoing way that involves liberation into larger ecologies of mind. It cannot maintain itself this way, so we are permitted only to take from those ecologies, not to live in, through, as them. And thus, even people who draw from them regularly may have a lack of clarity about how they accomplish this, and they may not root their way of coming to insights in a holistic ethical-spiritual life. The quote from Polanyi stands out: “the art of knowing has remained unspecifiable at the very heart of science.” This “art of knowing” comes from the arts of awareness.

Petitmengin-Peugeot found ways to get participants in the study to examine the details of the intuitive process. They also relied on two written accounts. They included artists, scientists, psychotherapists (who rely on insights into the client’s psyche), and ordinary people who experienced intuitive insights in daily life. They found the following: “To our surprise, we saw a generic structure of the intuitive experience emerge from this work of description and analysis. This structure is made up of an established succession of very precise interior gestures with a surprising regularity from one experience to another and from one subject to another” (45).
These “precise interior gestures” are part of the artfulness of practices that allow us to wake up a bit from the slumber of the ego. Oddly, as we shall see, the transcendence of the self we think we are liberates us into a sense of wholeness that feels like a more authentic experience of what we truly are. But, first, let us consider the basic gestures, which have a certain kind of correlate in many if not all of the arts of awareness in our list:

Out of this modelling and comparison of different descriptions emerged a generic structure of the intuitive experience, which is made up of a succession of very precise interior gestures. Four of them can be found in a large number of the explored experiences:

[1] the gesture of letting go, of deep-rooting, of interior self-collecting, and of the slowing down of the mental activity, which makes it possible to reach a particular state of consciousness, the ‘intuitive state’ (described in 22 interviews).

For several of the people interviewed, access to this calm state is made easier through some preliminary work of interior clarification, a work of deep transformation carried out thanks to daily practicing, which is integrated into a long-term process.

[2] The gesture of connection, which makes it possible to enter into contact with the object of the intuitive knowledge (a human being, an abstract problem, a situation…) (described 14 times).

[3] The gesture of listening, with an attention that is at the same time panoramic and very discriminating, focused on the subtle signs announcing the intuition (described 13 times).

[4] The intuition itself, of which certain of the subjects have acquired (or acquire during the interview) a sufficiently discriminating consciousness to point out three distinct moments: the moment preceding the intuition, the intuition, the moment following the intuition. (59)

Eight other gestures appear in only a few descriptions. Their absence in the other descriptions can be explained by the fact that either they were not the object of a clarification because they stayed at a pre-thought state, or the gestures in question effectively present no reason for existing in certain particular cases of intuition.

* The gesture of maintaining, which makes it possible to remain in the intuitive state (5 times)
* The gesture of anchoring, which makes it possible to rediscover the intuitive state more easily by associating a sensorial stimulus to it (once).
* The process of disconnecting (once).
* The process of getting out of the intuitive state, of getting back to the usual mode of functioning (4 times).
* The gesture of protection, found only in certain cases of intuition: when the object or the person one has come into contact with carries an energy that could be harmful (twice).
* The process of distinguishing intuition/projection, which makes it possible to distinguish a real intuition from a projected desire or fear thanks to subtle interior criteria (3 times).
* The process of interpreting the content of the intuition when it is not sufficiently explicit (1 time).
* The process of translating the content of the intuition into a communicable form: words, drawing, scientific hypothesis… (6 times). (60)

The detailed study is worth reading, but let us focus on just a few of the most essential features, as they relate to everything we have considered. For one thing, the gesture of awareness involves a kind of attention that is, “very attuned, sensitive to the slightest detail”. Petitmengin-Peugeot quotes one participant as reporting:

> More attuned and wider perceptions. I feel myself in a very focused state of consciousness, very, very present in the moment. (…) I have the impression of being a little bit like a funnel, a very long funnel with a very small opening, a little bit like a laser beam, which is at the same time there, very present, and at the same time I’m conscious of everything that is happening around me. (Francis, 28). (67)

The attention releases conscious purposes. This is a delicate thing, because those purposes sadly continue to function. Intuition has a context. This is why a better way of knowing cannot simply teach these sorts of “techniques,” because they can be co-opted. The point, in part, has to do with the way our typical mindset of agendas and clocks stands in direct contrast to the knowing required to arrive at important insights:

> Intuitive listening is characterized by the absence of any precise intention, of research of a defined goal. On the contrary it is being ‘open’ enough to let the unexpected come. It is relaxed, detached, light. It does not involve any effort. It is a peaceful waiting, patient, which is not expecting anything in particular.
I lay my hands down and I wait; it’s as if it didn’t depend on me. The huss [sensation] is going to come or isn’t going to come, but I can’t do anything about it. (Amel, 150)

What’s needed is putting your hand, then you wait. And then little by little things are described in your hand. If you have an idea of what you are going to feel or want to feel, you don’t feel anything, or just false things. (Monique, 77)

Intuitive listening corresponds to a state of receptivity, which consists not of looking for and grasping at, but of letting it come and welcoming it.

To see in receiving, isn’t casting your gaze towards something, projecting it, holding it out, but really it’s letting the thing imprint itself in you. You are completely passive, and you let the color, the landscape, come to you. You aren’t going to look for it, you’re going to gather it in. You’re there and you receive it. (Monique, 4)

This receptive gazing enables us to find the sensation in all its immediacy and freshness:

When you look in this way, there’s no filter in your head. It’s more alive. Things are much more alive, more real. (Monique, 158)

Listening in a receptive way is not trying to recognize the sensations, to identify them immediately, and to pull out some information at all costs:

The aim of ‘poised’ attention cannot be instantaneous understanding, immediate placing among things known. (Reik, 1948, p. 165)

It is a question of having a sufficiently attuned ear to listen to one’s own sensations, one’s own fledgling thoughts which ‘walk on dove’s feet’, before conceptualizing anything:

I suggest that the seeker forget what he has learned, neglect what he has heard and read, and listen to his own response. (Reik, 1948, p. 303) (67-8)

The spiritual practice of not-knowing comes into full bloom in this way of gnosis. In some cases, we might imagine a rebellion against the known that finally gives way to a relaxing into not-knowing, into a kind of vitalizing renunciation. We cannot expect something that will fit into our agenda or our system of knowledge. We must open to wonder, relax into serenity, surrender
control, throw out our agenda, and even let go of what we think we are, so that what we truly are can function:

Even if it is possible to prepare, to encourage the appearing of an intuition, this appearance always retains a capricious, unpredictable character; it escapes all control. All of the subjects — this is an invariable characteristic of the intuitive experience — notice a state of passivity at the moment when the intuition springs forth. ‘It escapes from me’, ‘It happens to me’, ‘It doesn’t depend on me’, ‘It’s given to me’ . . . this kind of statement is found in all the descriptions. This feeling of passivity can be partially explained by the absence of mental activity at the moment when the intuition appears. Recourse to concepts and rules, or learned knowledge, all form of memory like all form of premeditation, are excluded.

This feeling of an absence of control is linked to a transformation of the feeling of individual identity. The sensation of the floating of the limits of the ego felt in the preceding phases is accentuated: at the moment of the intuition, the sensation of being an ‘ego’ distinct from the world vacillates and even dissolves:

You forget yourself. (Alain, 86)

I no longer exist. (Sylvie, 5)

You forget who you are. You lose consciousness of yourself. I am no longer there. (Barbara McClintock, in Fox Keller, 1983, p. 155)

Paradoxically, at the same time the person feels that he has found his wholeness, that he has become unified, body and spirit, in harmony with his inner being.

Body, emotion, spirit, all of a sudden it’s as if these three were linked, indissolubly linked. In a kind of lightning state. (Muriel, 121)

She feels deeply in correspondence, in harmony with her surroundings. She has the feeling of being wholly herself, in the right place.

I feel more myself than I have ever been. (Judee, 159)

I feel that at that very moment I am the right person in the right place to be doing that thing. (Catherine, 50)

All of the subjects interviewed have the impression of living something very important, even when the intuitions have an innocuous content. They feel completely mobilized, captivated by the experience:
The huss [experience] is a thing that gets hold of you in your totality. A little bit like a music that takes hold of you completely. . . It’s a little bit like a thing of life or death. (Amel)

They feel that they enter into contact with something essential for a few instants.

I have the impression that when I go down into my center, God is waiting for me there. (Monique, 204)

For some of them this experience brings on a sensation of astonishment, amazement—of being struck—or of fear:

I was afraid. I had the feeling that I was in contact with something I could not understand, that we cannot play with that. (Sylvie, 43)

For a lot of them it is a very moving experience, which brought tears when they told about it during the interview:

One of the first vibrations that I felt was so beautiful in my hand that I had two big tears that flowed. (Monique, 42)

. . . The intuition does not always emerge in a precise, complete, immediately understandable form. Most often it first caresses the consciousness as a hazy image, a vague sensation, diffuse, a line of interior force.

The threshold of awareness of the sensations varies considerably from one person to another, and essentially depends on the degree of practice in pre-intuitive gestures. The more a person practices bringing on the calm inside and listening, with the special mode of attention which characterizes intuitive listening, the more precocious will be his awareness, the more subtle will be the sensations perceived.

According to the people with the most experience, of those we interviewed, intuitive sensations are always present; the only variable is the attention we bring to them.

The day that I realized that I felt in a different way, I became aware of it suddenly, but it was already there. It was obvious. Because I had probably been living it for years, it seemed obvious to me; I knew how it functioned. (Antoine, 42)

It even seems that intuitive sensations can influence our behaviour before they reach the threshold of awareness. (71-2)

How many philosophers can say they came to insight by means of contact with something “within” that scared them, something that so transcended them that they felt it could not be toyed
with, but instead demanded a conversion in their way of life? The fear that liberation can evoke, along with its wildness and transrational quality certainly helps to explain why we don’t practice knowing this way. But so does the fact that living such a way of knowing might rupture the deceits and delusions upon which the pattern of insanity depends for its perpetuation.

If, then, such a way of knowing seems so transrational, why not compare it with “magic”? If above all we first understand magic as an art of awareness—let us call it the art of awareness centered on relationship with the Sacred, most typically as manifested in, through, as Nature. In a way, given all we have considered, magic involves relating to Mind as Sacred. That’s not the strangest notion.

The poet W.B. Yeats wrote,

I believe in the practice and philosophy of what we have agreed to call magic, in what I must call the evocation of spirits, though I do not know what they are, in the power of creating magical illusions, in the visions of truth in the depths of the mind when the eyes are closed; and I believe in three doctrines, which have, as I think, been handed down from early times, and been the foundations of nearly all magical practices. These doctrines are—

(1) That the borders of our minds are ever shifting, and that many minds can flow into one another, as it were, and create or reveal a single mind, a single energy.

(2) That the borders of our memories are as shifting, and that our memories are a part of one great memory, the memory of Nature herself.

(3) That this great mind and great memory can be evoked by symbols.

I often think I would put this belief in magic from me if I could, for I have come to see or to imagine, in men and women, in houses, in handicrafts, in nearly all sights and sounds, a certain evil, a certain ugliness, that comes from the slow perishing through the centuries of a quality of mind that made this belief and its evidences common over the world.²²⁶

²²⁶ http://www.ricorso.net/rx/library/authors/classic/Yeats_WB/prose/Ideas_G-Evil/Magic.htm
First let us note that these three principles of magic are the principles of cognitive science as we have considered it, even if they seem to move to the outermost edge of what that science is comfortable allowing—allowing in its activity of epistemic policing. It is not up to anyone living a magical life to describe some mechanism that accounts for these principles. Our science may yet have no explanation. Our job is to verify them, not merely to theorize about them, to engage in elegance theorizing on the basis of a limited and limiting worldview which seems long overdue for a paradigm change. The work of Varela, Di Paolo, Bateson, Rosch, Jung, Pauli, McConnel, Bohm, and others gives us a way to understand the principles Yeats offers, and we can at least understand them in a partial way, in a qualified way, from within the current paradigms—especially when we consider how poor a job we have done at incorporating the shift from classical to non-local physics, classical to non-local psychology, classical to non-local cognitive science, and classical to non-linear mathematics. We can note that classical philosophy has always had nondualistic varieties, but that non-local epistemology seems largely absent from all but Indigenous Cultures, and this marks one of the biggest challenges faced by children of the dominant culture, and any child of conquest consciousness.

When we contemplated Sorenson’s observations about how the invasion of conquest consciousness affected liminal awareness, we considered the possibility that western education practices and realizes a breakdown of truth, intimacy, resonance with Nature, attunement with the sacred—and we can reflect in resonance with Yeats and call this the breakdown of magic, thereby giving us a different way of understanding that term. This breakdown happens possibly because conquest consciousness goes altogether with aggression, competition, self-centeredness,
deceit, the need for medication, the pressure of time, the forcing of agendas, and so on. It is not to say there is nothing good in western culture, or that it is only these negative things, or that people in other cultures never practice and realize delusions, deceits, fears, cravings, and other forms of suffering. The issue has to do with a basic style of relating, and we may suggest that conquest consciousness may often mean the end of magic, especially if that conquest consciousness has co-opted what we call reason to justify and perpetuate itself by means of rational arguments and rational efficiencies.

We considered this in many ways, and several artefacts come to mind now, including the one from Gary Snyder about Cabeza de Vaca—that he stopped performing healings when he got back to “civilization”—and the one from Martin about how magic went away with the arrival of the white man—“... the conjuror does not exist any more with us, for there is no need of one,” and “our dreams and our prophecies are no longer true, and “The spirits do not come to help us now. The white men have driven them away.” The despoiling of the sacred is a despoiling of the Earth—the kind of despoiling we should sense as forbidden, in accord with Locke’s notion of what the divine does not allow us to do with its creation—and it brings an ugliness to the World. We can develop a sensitivity to it. But at first, we may be blind to it—or we may repress our vision.

Aldo Leopold wrote that,

One of the penalties of an ecological education is that one lives alone in a world of wounds. Much of the damage inflicted on land is quite invisible to laymen. An ecologist must either harden his shell and make believe that the consequences of science are none of his business, or he must be the doctor who sees the marks of death in a community that believes itself well and does not want to be told otherwise. (1993: 165)
Any serious philosopher would say the same about LoveWisdom: To study any Way with heart makes us sensitive to wounds and wounding in every direction. Much of the damage inflicted on the soul remains repressed and unconscious, essentially invisible to the general public. The absence of liminal awareness goes without conscious notice, and everyone walks asleep yet frantic along the edges of a threshold they do not perceive and are seduced to ignore. We can become sensitized, and we can notice a missing wildness, a missing magic, and an invasive profanity, even as we continue to sense the sacredness of the World that makes this spreading degradation all the more horrific. So many of us simply do not know what we are missing, even if we suspect, even if we become sleepless, agitated, stressed, full of self-doubt and self-loathing—because we have forsaken what we are and what the World is.

In the same essay, Leopold writes,

One the marvels of early Wisconsin was the Round River, a river that flowed into itself, and thus sped around and around in a never-ending circuit. Paul Bunyan discovered it, and the Bunyan saga tells how he floated many a log down its restless waters.

No one has suspected Paul of speaking in parables, yet in this instance he did. Wisconsin not only had a round river, Wisconsin is one. The current is the stream of energy which flows out of the soil into plants, thence into animals, thence back into the soil in a never ending circuit of life, . . .

We who are the heirs and assigns of Paul Bunyan have not found out either what we are doing to the river or what the river is doing to us. (158)

There is a marvel, a wonder—already in the World, as the World—and there is a penalty for ignoring it. No ignorance of wonder goes unpunished, no degradation of sacredness comes without a self-wounding. How many philosophers today can say they know what they do to the river or what the river does to them? To find out means entrance into Nature, self-liberation into ecologies of Mind that we can call the practice of magic and mystery. Again, we intend no
obscurantism, irrationalism, or airy-fairy foolishness. We are talking about a paradigm shift. And the liberation, the magic, has to do with a kind of attunement with what Bateson calls the pattern that connects, an inhibition of the tendency to point at parts of the pattern and take them as parts in a linear, mechanistic conception of causality, and instead to intimately realize a deeper, non-linear ordering.

The horseshoe crab marks an interesting case to consider here. The horseshoe crab has been called a living fossil. It has been around for 450 million years, thus surviving 5 mass extinction events. But, it may not survive humanity.\(^{227}\) We err if we think that “climate collapse” is killing off this and other species. Rather, human activity and human thinking (specifically, unwise, unskillful, human activity, on the basis of conscious purposes) is the properly identified “cause” of extinction. We may think of the extinction in relation to “climate change,” and then trace that back to human interventions. But perhaps a better way to think of it is that humans are out of whack, and things are falling apart. We don’t see what we do to the crab and what the crab does to us. It looks like some sort of primitive cause-effect chain, but it is the intimacy, the interbeingness, the interwovenness of human and crab that can reveal itself. If humans could get back in touch with themselves, back in attunement with Dao, Divine, Sacredness, Sophia—call it what you will—then beings would not go extinct as they are.

Jung tried to touch this with the Synchronicity principle. In the Visions seminars, Jung relates a story that he frames as illustrating “being in Tao”. Tao (or Dao, 道) in a functional sense means

\(^{227}\) https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/nov/03/horseshoe-crab-population-at-risk-blood-big-pharma
the pattern that connects. Indeed, Dao is closely related to Li (理), which refers to the patterns in jade or the grain in wood (we can follow li to become attuned with Dao, and attuned with Dao we can work with li). There is a vast literature in Chinese philosophy that works with the Li principle, and even the word physics incorporates this principle (wuli), as do Sino-Japanese words for logic and psychology. Dogen, following the Indian sage Bodhidharma, uses 道理 — literally “the way of reason”—to define meditation. Bodhidharma says there are two ways to practice philosophy: Practice with the mind, and practice with the body. Practice with the mind is called “the way of reason,” and this practice is defined as—meditation. Why? One way to get at why involves sensing that whatever we mean by “reason” has to become transcended yet not defiled—a kind of synthesis of apparent opposites. In a famous passage, Dogen describes a spiritual common law case (koan) that goes like this:

Once, when the Great Master Hung-tao of Yueh shah was sitting [in meditation], a monk asked him, “What are you thinking, [sitting there] so fixedly?”
The master answered, “I’m thinking of not thinking.”
The monk asked, “How do you think of not thinking?”
The master answered, “Nonthinking.” (from Bielefeldt 1990: 147)

We can work with these concepts as follows: Thinking means habitual mind and its conscious purposes, which we follow without really seeing what they are; not thinking means an interruption of this, a preliminary rupture that marks the beginning of a spiritual/philosophical life; and nonthinking means the nondualistic functioning of a better way of knowing, which cannot be called “thinking” in the normal sense, since the “thinker,” the limited ego, has been forgotten. Dogen uses this to introduce the practice of meditation:

Once you have regulated your posture, take a breath and exhale fully. Swing to the left and right. Sitting fixedly, think of not thinking. How do you think of not thinking? Nonthinking. This is the essential art of zazen. Zazen is not the practice of meditation: it is just the reality gate of ease and joy. It is the practice and verification of ultimate awareness. The fundamental point of wisdom realized, baskets and cages cannot get to it. (adapted from Bielefeldt, 181)
Note, Dogen indicates that he is not talking about “meditation” in the sense of something cut off from life. He is talking about a threshold, a bardo, an entrance to the joyfulness of reality. To try and clarify this, Dogen offers these reflections:

Although the employment of nonthinking is crystal clear, when we think of nonthinking, we always use nonthinking. There is someone in nonthinking, and this someone maintains us. Although it is we who are sitting fixedly, our sitting is not merely thinking: it presents itself as sitting fixedly. Although sitting fixedly is sitting fixedly, how could it think of sitting fixedly? Therefore, sitting fixedly is not the measure of the Buddha, not the measure of awakening, not the measure of comprehension. (189)

This gets us some understanding of Dao, because all of this simply means attunement with Dao. Dao is the reality to which we awaken, and nonthinking is the awakened thinking of our original mind, the mind rooted in Dao. Dao is what already maintains us, maintaining us even in our delusions. This nonthinking we can call synchronistic thinking, or magical thinking in a thoroughly positive sense.

Here is Jung’s story:

As an example of “being in Tao” and its synchronistic accompaniments I will cite the story, told me by the late Richard Wilhelm, of the rain-maker of Kiaochau: “There was a great drought where Wilhelm lived; for months there had not been a drop of rain and the situation became catastrophic. The Catholics made processions, the Protestants made prayers, and the Chinese burned joss-sticks and shot off guns to frighten away the demons of the drought, but with no result. Finally the Chinese said, ‘We will fetch the rain-maker.’ And from another province a dried up old man appeared. The only thing he asked for was a quiet little house somewhere, and there he locked himself in for three days. On the fourth day the clouds gathered and there was a great snow-storm at the time of the year when no snow was expected, an unusual amount, and the town was so full of rumours about the wonderful rain-maker that Wilhelm went to ask the man how he did it. In true European fashion he said: ‘They call you the rain-maker, will you tell me how you made the snow?’ And the little Chinese said: ‘I did not make the snow, I am not responsible.’ ‘But what have you done these three days?’ ‘Oh, I can explain that. I come from another country where things are in order. Here they are out of order, they are not as they should be by the ordinance of heaven.
Therefore the whole country is not in Tao, and I also am not in the natural order of things because I am in a disordered country. So I had to wait three days until I was back in Tao and then naturally the rain came.’’ From “Interpretation of Visions,” Vol. 3 of seminars in English by C. G. Jung (new edn., privately multigraphed, 1939), p. 7. (This is note 211 in CW 14, page 1375 in the digital edition, and it also appears in Sabini, 2002)

Commenting on this story, Jung says the following:

It is a miracle only to someone who thinks along the lines of causality, but if one thinks psychologically, one is absolutely convinced that things quite naturally take this way [speaking of the rainmaker’s ability to create rain]. If one has the right attitude then the right things happen. One doesn’t make it right, it is just right, and one feels it has to happen in this way. It is just as if one were inside of things. If one feels right, that thing must turn up, it fits in. It is only when one has a wrong attitude that one feels that things do not fit in, that they are queer. When someone tells me that in his surroundings the wrong things always happen, I say: It is you who are wrong, you are not in Tao; if you were in Tao, you would feel that things are as they have to be. Sure enough, sometimes one is in a valley of darkness, dark things happen, and then dark things belong there, they are what must happen then; they are nonetheless in Tao. (This too is from the Visions Seminars, and it appears in Sabini, 2002: 213)

This of course sounds exceedingly strange. It brings to mind another sort of anecdote, this one from Gilles Quispel. It has to do with one of Jung’s influential students, Erich Neumann who earned a Ph.D. in philosophy, and then went on to get a medical degree and to work in the field of psychology. Quispel relates that,

Erich Neumann was a sweet soul, but he had a ruthless mind. His logic was as prosaic and rectilinear as a certain Berlin avenue called the “Kurfürstendam”: the world is a projection, your wife is a projection, the neighbor is a projection, God is a projection. And now Jung left the limitations of the psyche and found in the cosmos meaningful correspondences, which made sense and seemed to convey a message. This played havoc with Erich’s views. And perhaps he had premonitions of his premature death which was to follow soon afterwards. He became more open to reality and disciplined the fancies of his reason. With great emotional relief he told a fascinated audience in 1952 that there was a “Self field” outside the psyche, which created and directed the world and the psyche, and manifests itself to the Ego in the shape of the Self. And this Self in man is the image of the creator. Erich Neumann had found peace with himself, with the world, and with God. (from Segal 1992: 249-50)

This in turn brings a passage from Benjamin to mind:
If one had to expound the teachings of antiquity with utmost brevity while standing on one leg, as did Hillel that of the Jews, it could only be in this sentence: “They alone shall possess earth who live from the powers of the cosmos.” Nothing distinguishes the ancient from the modern man so much as the former’s absorption in a cosmic experience scarcely known to later periods. Its waning is marked by the flowering of astronomy at the beginning of the modern age. Kepler, Copernicus, and Tycho Brahe were certainly not driven by scientific impulses alone. All the same, the exclusive emphasis on an optical connection to the universe, to which astronomy very quickly led, contained a portent of what was to come. The ancients’ intercourse with the cosmos had been different: the ecstatic trance [Rausch]. For it is in this experience alone that we gain certain knowledge of what is nearest to us and what is remotest from us, and never of one without the other. This means, however, that man can be in ecstatic contact with the cosmos only communally. It is the dangerous error of modern men to regard this experience as unimportant and avoidable, and to consign it to the individual as the poetic rapture of starry nights. It is not; its hour strikes again and again, and then neither nations nor generations can escape it, as was made terribly clear by the last war, which was an attempt at new and unprecedented commingling with the cosmic powers. Human multitudes, gases, electrical forces were hurled into the open country, high-frequency currents coursed through the landscape, new constellations rose in the sky, aerial space and ocean depths thundered with propellers, and everywhere sacrificial shafts were dug in Mother Earth. This immense wooing of the cosmos was enacted for the first time on a planetary scale – that is, in the spirit of technology. But because lust for profit of the ruling class sought satisfaction through it, technology betrayed man and turned the bridal bed into a bloodbath. The mastery of nature (so the imperialists teach) is the purpose of all technology. But who would trust a cane wielder who proclaimed the mastery of children by adults to be the purpose of education? Is not education, above all, the indispensable ordering of the relationship between generations and therefore mastery (if we are to use this term) of that relationship and not of children? And likewise technology is the mastery of not nature but of the relation between nature and man.228

We can possibly return here to the notion of Mysticism and sense the Mystical spirit suggested by these considerations. Evelyn Underhill famously defined Mysticism as “the art of union with Reality. The mystic is a person who has attained that union in greater or less degree; or who aims at and believes in such attainment.”229

228 Benjamin, To the Planetarium: https://retinalechoes.com/2013/05/03/fragment-012-walter-benjamin/
Underhill herself admits that, “It is not expected that the inquirer will find great comfort in this sentence when first it meets his eye.” She continues:

The ultimate question, “What is Reality?”—a question, perhaps, which never occurred to him before—is already forming in his mind; and he knows that it will cause him infinite distress. Only a mystic can answer it: and he, in terms which other mystics alone will understand. Therefore, for the time being, the practical man may put it on one side. All that he is asked to consider now is this: that the word “union” represents not so much a rare and unimaginable operation, as something which he is doing, in a vague, imperfect fashion, at every moment of his conscious life; and doing with intensity and thoroughness in all the more valid moments of that life. We know a thing only by uniting with it; by assimilating it; by an interpenetration of it and ourselves. It gives itself to us, just in so far as we give ourselves to it; and it is because our outflow towards things is usually so perfunctory and so languid, that our comprehension of things is so perfunctory and languid too. The great Sufi who said that “Pilgrimage to the place of the wise, is to escape the flame of separation” spoke the literal truth. Wisdom is the fruit of communion; ignorance the inevitable portion of those who “keep themselves to themselves,” and stand apart, judging, analysing the things which they have never truly known.

This does not elevate “the mystic” above the rest of us—no more so than we would elevate the physicist by defining what it should mean to know about quantum mechanics. We might say that only a physicist can answer the question, “What is a quark?” since it takes training of a certain kind, knowledge and above all experience of a certain kind, to answer such a question with any depth. Underhill’s discussion does not reduce to, “You aren’t a mystic! Neener, neener, neener!” In any case, we intend it here to try and get at the intimacy Sophia demands. Knowing does not happen at a distance or in abstraction.

LoveWisdom has to do with sensing the mutual embracing of life and entering that embracing. As we have noted, certain anthropologists and psychologists have a term that kind of fits this
practice-realization: Mystical Participation. But the term is used in a slightly negative way, even by fairly progressive thinkers.

The phrase “mystical participation” sometimes appears in its French form (*participation mystique*), since the French scholar Lucien Lévy-Bruhl coined the term. Lévy-Bruhl associated “mystical participation” with a “primitive” mindset. From a western perspective, a “primitive” mindset allows for “supernatural” dimensions to reality. The western mindset thinks that the “primitive” mindset is not realistic, that it is deluded somehow. But, of course, from the standpoint of such “primitive” mindsets, the western mindset appears quite deluded—and if the present conditions of life become grounds for evaluation, we should side with the “primitive” view and call the western mindset troubled, troubling, and even insane. In all cases, we cannot lay hold of anything monolithic: We no more find a single “primitive” mindset than a single “western” one. But, we do find some trends and general features—perhaps a familial resemblance.

The arrogant western mindset looks down on the “primitive” mindset that accepts “supernatural” dimensions to reality—since the western mindset has apparently determined the true metaphysical nature of reality, and it knows without doubt what is real and what is not. According to the western view, the “primitive” believes in things that do not exist. The western view may refer to the “primitive” mindset as a “mystical” mindset, because the “mystical” too gets disparaged by the western mind, written off as obscurantist, deluded, superstitious, and so on.
But this all amounts to gestures of intellectual hubris. “Mystical” means, etymologically, one who has been initiated, and life is an initiatory experience. We cannot hide from it. We cannot escape. And yet we must actually enter, just like an initiate must enter a sacred space and time, enter into a vision quest (in one form or another), enter into and receive their soul purpose, thus entering the World and their society, giving and receiving the World. We live in a participatory Cosmos, and that means we have to learn how to participate, learn the skillful and realistic Ways of participation. To learn these, which is a matter of co-discovery-creation, and thus teaching-learning, is to enter into our life together. It is to become a mystic, which is the most practical or pragmatic relationship with ourselves, each other, all beings, all of sentient being.

Mystical participation is not “primitive,” but is precisely the opposite: Mystical participation is the most sophisticated way of life—wise, loving, and beautiful.

Of course, mystical participation exudes an aura of wonder, and this terrifies the rationalistic mind. This wonder is the wonder of childhood—but not the encumbered child archetype. The “primitive” seems “immature” to the rationalistic mind. The “primitive” seems childlike, and so it seems unsophisticated. But, we can note the irony there, since western culture, we have suggested, does not orient itself to producing adults and Elders. It may be that, in some important sense, western culture produces mature children, advanced juveniles, many of whom remain trapped in more encumbered versions of the child archetype. This arises from the culture’s self-taming and also from its fragmentation, since we cannot truly mature if we only cultivate fragments of ourselves. It would be like an oak tree focusing on the production of acorns alone,
and never becoming more than a sapling. For a little sapling, the weight of all those acorns is not healthy.

Jung tried to face some of these ironies of reason, and yet he still falls into the camp of seeing “mystical participation” as some kind of limited mindset. In the “Definitions” section of his work of psychological types, he defines “mystical participation” this way:

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Participation Mystique: This term originates Lévy-Bruhl. It connotes a peculiar kind of psychological connection with the object wherein the subject is unable to differentiate himself clearly from the object to which he is bound by an immediate relation that can only be described as partial identity. This identity is based upon an a priori one-ness of subject and object “Participation mystique”, therefore, is a vestigial remainder of this primordial condition. It does not apply to the whole subject-object relation, but only to certain cases in which the phenomenon of this peculiar relatedness appears. It is, of course, a phenomenon that is best observed among the primitives; but it occurs not at all infrequently among civilized men, although not with the same range or intensity. Among civilized peoples it usually happens between persons—and only seldom between a person and thing. In the former case it is a so-called state of transference, in which the object (as a general rule) obtains a sort of magical, i.e. unconditional, influence over the subject. In the latter case it is a question of a similar influence on the part of a thing, or else a kind of identification with a thing or the idea of a thing. (CW6, para. 781)

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Perhaps because he was still young, and so far from even the principle of Synchronicity, let alone the bardo of dying, Jung seems to fall into the trap of western egotism, and thus reveals how well the conquest consciousness held him, how much he had to struggle against. He pathologizes a mind he has not experienced, lumping it together with fragmented versions of itself. He sees the “primitive” mind as a mind caught up in projection, in which that mind cannot distinguish itself and its own contents with others and their experience (a deluded unitivity, rather than something nondualistic, or a union of opposites—sacred marriage—in accord with Jung’s own vision). This is all atomistic. Jung elaborates on the pathologies in other passages. For instance:

The further we go back into history the more we see personality disappearing beneath the wrappings of collectivity. And, if we go right down to primitive
psychology, we find absolutely no trace of the idea of the individual. In place of individuality we find only collective relationship, or “participation mystique” (Lévy-Bruhl). But the collective attitude prevents the understanding and estimation of a psychology which differs from that of the subject, because the mind that is collectively orientated is quite incapable of thinking and feeling in any other way than by projection. What we understand by the concept ‘individual’ is a relatively recent acquisition in the history of the human mind and human culture. It is no wonder, therefore, that the earlier all-powerful collective attitude almost entirely prevented an objective psychological estimation of individual differences, and forbade any general scientific objectification of individual psychological processes. It was owing to this very lack of psychological thinking that knowledge became psychologized, i.e. crowded with projected psychology. Striking instances of this are to be seen in the first attempts at a philosophical explanation of the universe. The development of individuality, with the resulting psychological differentiation of man, goes hand in hand with a de-psychologizing of objective science. (CW6, para. 12).

Here Jung gives us insight into pathologizing at the cultural level. One can still find strong currents of this thinking, even in “progressive” thinkers who have been influenced by Jung’s work. There is an effort But Jung is taking a page from Nietzsche here, and those familiar with Nietzsche’s work know that Nietzsche’s genealogy of morality is not strictly speaking a work of “literal” genealogy. It is a spiritual and philosophical diagnosis of the western soul. We can see in the above passage from Jung the bias that human beings had to become “individuals,” and that the “individualistic” western psyche gave birth to the “miracle” of “science”. Before this western innovation—the “individual”—people were stuck in “the collective”. This sounds so obviously like a trope—really, like propaganda (for instance, versions of this argument are offered as justifications for “capitalism”)—that one can hardly believe someone as progressive as Jung bought into it—that is, if it weren’t for the fact that his own view of the psyche explains why he would buy into it, and the other facts, such as his critical views of western science and western culture (but, of course, one hears this in all of today’s “progressive” thinkers as well, as they try to justify western culture, making it “necessary” for the world soul, rather than just engaging in the truth and reconciliation we need to heal are karmic wounds).
The pathologizing becomes clearer on an individual level in the following passage:

I am reminded of another mental case who was neither a poet nor anything very outstanding, just a naturally quiet and rather sentimental youth. He had fallen in love with a girl and, as so often happens, had failed to ascertain whether his love was requited. His primitive participation mystique took it for granted that his agitations were plainly the agitations of the other, which on the lower levels of human psychology is naturally very often the case. Thus he built up a sentimental love-fantasy which precipitately collapsed when he discovered that the girl would have none of him. (CW7, para. 231)

This too is an earlier work, and in this passage he describes only a failed, fragmented, unskillful “mystical participation.” We must either call this a terribly deluded mystical participation, or just call it delusion. It would be no different than someone’s justifying genocide on the basis of Christian or Buddhist teachings. We can only consider such activity as ideology, spiritual materialism, delusion. We must admit that ALL practices can be turned to delusion, violence, and so on. But that does not mean anything as far as characterizing the Mystical and the Spiritual orientation as skillful and realistic.

Returning to Underhill, one quibble we might make with her contemplation of mysticism relates to her suggestion that, as to the question, What is reality? “Only a mystic can answer it: and he, in terms which other mystics alone will understand. Therefore, for the time being, the practical man may put it on one side.” Rescuing the terms Mystic, Mystical, and so on means ridding ourselves of certain “esoteric” or “impractical” connotations. Sophia is eminently practical, and Underhill could have and perhaps should have written the opposite: “The practical person, if they want to live well, if they want to live skillfully, wisely, compassionately, and beautifully, must become a mystic, and must wonderstand the Nature of reality.”
The Greek notion of *sophia* related to skillfulness, and the word “philosophy” comes to us under the influence of Socrates, who labored as a stone cutter. Life is activity, not abstract thinking, not speculation, pondering, navel-gazing, being absorbed in thinking or contemplation in the intellectual sense. Thinking must be living thinking, and we must evaluate our thinking on the basis of its skillfulness or lack of skillfulness, from the perspective of all beings, from the perspective of the Mystery itself, and not from the perspective of our narrow human purposes. Sophia presents a threat to all intellectualism and egotism, and also to all forms of domination, fear, craving, and ignorance—including present forms of “civilization,” for Sophia is the Wildness of the World. Zeus, the authoritarian leader of the gods, knew that Wisdom would give birth to something that would overthrow him, so he swallowed Wisdom in order to try and control Her (like a lot of men, he tried to gulp down without tasting). She must have laughed at his antics. Since She is everywhere, the attempt to control this or that manifestation of Her only leads to suffering.

Synchronicity is a moment of dispelment, a dragon moment that dispels the delusions of time and space, opening the heart to the spaciousness of the Windhorse of the Soul—we go galloping along with Sophia. A dragon moment is an all-accomplishing moment. Our doing drops away, as does body and mind. Synchronicity places us in the placeless place (atopos) of the mandala of the soul, simultaneously placing us, rooting us, in the living landscape of the loving World, realizing the adornment of the Cosmos, the inconceivable Beauty of sentient being. We intimately practice-and-realize the self-liberating essence of the being-moment, the beauty-moment, the love-moment, the wisdom-moment as the magical interwovenness that it is, that we are. Such a moment might do no more than bring us much needed levity, a first free breath after
so much tension and obstruction. Only in the context of LoveWisdom, only in the spiritual ecology of a life rooted in WisdomLoveBeauty can it become the moment of total revolution we all need right now, in this most challenging of historical contexts.

We do need to throw out the clocks. But this by itself will not suffice. We do need to cultivate Synchronicity. And this too, by itself, will not suffice. There is no “by itself.” We can never not practice our life, but we only do so more or less Wisely, Lovingly, Beautifully—which means more or less skillful and realistic, more or less poised and graceful. We need the living activity of grace in place of the activities of busyness, the hustle of business, the irritating movements of traffic, the meaningless transfers of data, the endless shiftings of entertainment and distraction that capture our capacity to attend, to make space for Synchronicity to enter, for everything rousing us to rouse us, for the dispelment of insanity, and the entrance of sacred madness to work its miracles and its magic. We have to cultivate a context of magic, ecologies of magic, in order to experience magic.

Part of our context involves making an artificial world and then giving ourselves a lot to “think” “about”. We “think” too much. We need to give ourselves an invitation to engagement with life and love, with mystery and magic. Encountering life is nice, but entering life is necessary. We can encounter everywhere, and the only true Good to arise from that is entering life, entering always. We enter into a participation, an intimacy that goes so deep it transcends unity and diversity, and thus realizes the Self. When we participate in a team, we may feel like a member of the team. But at other times we feel we have participated in something transcending self and other. The whole thing comes alive and alive. A mundane example—from the standpoint of the
Sacred, nothing is mundane—but a more “ordinary” example would be singing in a choir in such a way that overtones and undertones resonate with such magic that something beyond a collection of voices arises, a transcendent voice that is the voice of the choir and the cathedral as a whole, something holy. This happens through a process of living Thinking, a nonthinking. Each singer must go beyond “singing the note,” and must listen deeply, adjusting their voice to what is happening holistically. The magic appears beyond “notes”.

In our context we have reduced our capacity to experience magic. We have done this in a variety of ways, including the reduction in our capacity to experience the stability and clarity of Mind. Magic is less likely when the mind is distracted. We have trained ourselves to be distracted, and this, in a way, includes thinking in abstract, offline ways. We cannot actually “think offline,” but we can behave as if we can. If we need to make a decision about the future, we might sit around and have an abstract conversation, write pros and cons on a piece of paper, make mathematical calculations, draw up plans and proposals, and so forth. Such an approach lacks intimacy. It seems to function, it seems to allow us a measure of control over life and its energies. But this is all delusion—not in the sense that it doesn’t function in a relative way, but that it doesn’t function overall, when we step back far enough to enter our own lives with enough intimacy to really look. It actually doesn’t take too much work on our part. We need only examine the negative side-effects of such an approach to begin to sense this. We may be tempted to think the issue is one of scale, that if we did the things we do now on a much smaller scale, then it would be alright. If we hold such a view, it really does require a lot of intimacy to overcome it.
But we could also just make the attempt to think in the fullness of our being. To make a decision, we could instead tap into Transcendent Mind or Original Mind in various ways—integrated into a spiritual/philosophical life—like gathering together in community, participating in various ceremonies and rituals, sharing our dreams, sitting quietly, telling stories. Dreaming, the imaginative in general, would need rejuvenation. We have already suggested that this seems a grave challenge for the culture, and perhaps especially for philosophers. Consider this passage from the great scientist JBS Haldane, in which he contemplates an imaginary organism with a very special sensory awareness:

But how would the real world appear to a being with a complete series of senses which perceived periodic disturbances as qualitatively different, like our own senses of tone and colour? We will give it a range of seventy octaves, which would make it aware of the whole range of vibrations from one per second up to the unimaginably but not incalculably high frequency of γ rays from radio-active elements. And within each octave we will endow it with what we possess in our tone sense but not in our colour sense, a capacity for analysing mixed vibrations into their components, as a spectroscope does. Like a musician, too, it will be able to place the various types of radiation in a scale like that of musical notes. It is a curious fact that we men can place musical notes in their natural order by intuition, while it required the genius of Newton to do the same for colour. What is more, we know that an octave in one part of the scale is equivalent to an octave in another, and hence our musical scale is quantitative. Indeed, in the chromatic scale the notes are so arranged that to each interval between two of them corresponds the same difference in the logarithms of their frequencies. The piano keyboard is really a rather inaccurate table of logarithms, a fact which I believe is equally ignored in the teaching of mathematics and of music.

But to return to our hypothetical organism, one can point at once to some of its powers. It could distinguish any chemical substance from any other by the difference in their capacities for absorbing radiation. We men can distinguish a few by their capacities for absorbing visible rays, which give them their different colours, though our colour sense is so inadequate that we have to fall back on the spectroscope. Our organism could also tell the temperature of any object by analysing the radiation from it. So that from the qualitative point of view it would know far more than we about objects within the range of its senses. But it would only arrive at their shapes, sizes, positions, and motions by a most complicated process of deductions, the reverse of the process which we use to discover the nature of the periodic disturbances in molecules. With no other sense than that described above, its task of world-making would be more hopeless than that of a blind and deaf man. We must allow it a rudimentary appreciation of space and
motion, just as we have a rudimentary appreciation of radiation in our colour sense. It must have at least one movable organ, and be conscious of moving it. It will, however, take colours, if we may so describe the data of its vibration sense, for granted, and build up everything else on this basis. It will, of course, analyse all kinds of motion into periodic components, just as we analyse them into movements in various directions. But it will also, at first, at any rate, regard matter as merely a kind of vibration, or colour, and only very gradually, if ever, reach a point of view like our own.

Now, the oddest thing about its endeavours is that they are of the greatest importance for physicists to-day, and probably of the greatest practical importance to our grandchildren. A century ago physicists began to give up the corpuscular theory of light, which had satisfied them for two thousand years, in favour of a wave theory. Among the practical consequences flowing from this theory were wireless telegraphy and telephony. And in the last two years a much more surprising step has been taken. The wave theory of matter, enunciated by de Broglie, and developed by Schrödinger, has already rendered the mechanics of the atom relatively intelligible. It has further enabled mathematical physicists to predict several extremely surprising results which have been verified. In consequence some of the ablest men in the world are at present in the position of the mythical creatures which I have tried to describe. They take as their data the frequencies of the radiation emitted or absorbed by various kinds of matter, and very naturally come to regard the matter itself as merely a special type of undulatory disturbance.

So far as an outsider can judge, even Schrödinger’s world, fantastic as it is, contains many relics of ordinary thought which the creatures that I have imagined would hardly have taken for granted. However, Heisenberg and Born in Germany, and Dirac in Cambridge, are busily clearing away these vestiges of common sense. In the world of their imagining even the ordinary rules of arithmetic no longer hold good. The attempt to build up a world-view from the end which common sense regards as wrong, is, at any rate, being made, and with very fair success. I suspect that it is of far greater importance for metaphysics than the entire efforts of the philosophers who, from Kant onwards, have attempted to build on the ground cleared by Hume. If it were successful it might lead to philosophical systems in which the real elements in the external world were the secondary qualities of colour, tone, and so forth, rather than the primary qualities of the materialist’s world. One may perhaps speculate that in colour vision we have a real perception of light quanta, though the analogy with hearing renders such a theory dubious.

A natural philosophy of such a kind would be a step in the direction of idealism. The idealists have held that the spiritual alone is the real. They have failed to account in detail for the phenomenal world on this basis, the most magnificent of such failures being Hegel’s. (I call to mind an admirable picture by a deceased friend entitled ‘An Hegelian setting the Dialectic in motion.’ A small, bald, and myopic philosopher is turning the handle of a vast and complicated machine, fed from sacks labelled ‘Ideen.’ It has numerous doors at different levels. That which happens to be open is disgorging rabbits of various colours.)
That below would have presumably produced plants, that above ‘subjective minds.’) But the failure of these philosophers in detail does not prove that they were not correct in a general way. Secondary qualities, such as colour, are generally regarded as having less claim to independence of the mind than primary qualities, such as size and shape, and a working theory of the universe which started from them would certainly be a long way nearer to idealism than is present-day science. If, as Leibniz held, the universe consists wholly of minds, the transition to such a physics would only be a step in the right direction, but possibly subsequent steps might be easier. Perhaps an understanding of the psychology of social insects might help us to make them.

I greatly doubt if they will be made by professional philosophers. And though to-day the theoretical physicist is and ought to be the principal type of world-builder, the biologist will one day come to his own in this respect. And one day man will be able to do in reality what in this essay I have done in jest, namely, to look at existence from the point of view of non-human minds. Bergson has of course made this attempt, but not, as it seems to me, very successfully. Success is, indeed, impossible in view of our present ignorance of animal psychology, and that is why a purely speculative essay like the present can claim some degree of justification at this moment. Our only hope of understanding the universe is to look at it from as many different points of view as possible. This is one of the reasons why the data of the mystical consciousness can usefully supplement those of the mind in its normal state. Now, my own suspicion is that the universe is not only queerer than we suppose, but queerer than we can suppose. I have read and heard many attempts at a systematic account of it, from materialism and theosophy to the Christian system or that of Kant, and I have always felt that they were much too simple. I suspect that there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of, or can be dreamed of, in any philosophy. That is the reason why I have no philosophy myself, and must be my excuse for dreaming.230

We should note the surprising contrast here between what the scientist has to say and what our philosophers had to say about “more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of, or can be dreamed of, in philosophy.” Recall that the authors of the Philosopher’s Toolkit considered that this might be the case, that there might be more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in philosophy, and that this might then recommend the mystic’s approach. But, the tongue-in-cheek feeling of their response—“Then again, perhaps not”—seems to suggest philosophy’s imagination, and its practices, are just fine. By now we have come to sense that the opposite may

230 http://jbshaldane.org/books/1927-Possible-Worlds/haldane-1927-possible-worlds.html#start
hold: That philosophy lacks imagination, and that its lack is a symptom. This may explain why many a scientist would rather reject philosophy altogether, and instead turn to dreaming. As we have noted, dreaming is a primary spiritual exercise in many traditions of philosophy as a way of life, both in the west and in cultures all over the world. One could argue that the only issue we have in the west comes to perpetuating an anemic vision of philosophy, such that philosophy cannot vitalize and empower our dream life and our dream practices, and that consequently our dream life and dream practices have no real chance of helping us realize the ideals of our philosophies.

Dreaming is thinking in the proper sense—what we can call, following Dogen, nonthinking. Dreaming is an art of awareness, and such arts are nontinking. We don’t have to talk to ourselves and “think” “about” things. Trees don’t “think” “about” things. Trees nontinkleaves, roots, fruits, and oxygen into being. We nontink things into being too—like mountains, rivers, trees, leaves, birds, butterflies—but, not sensing this, we think abstractions that lead to more abstractions, and we think an artificial world into being, we think division into being, we think our own cut-offness into being, so that we are at odds with reality, at odds with our own ideals, at odds with each other, at odds with ourselves, and living at an ever greater virtual distance from life itself, Sophia, the divine, the sacred natural, super natural World, and our own true Nature.

In a more Natural setting the beings treat their context as their Home. It is natural to rub up against a tree because of an itch, to roll in the mud in order to get clean. Humans still put mud on their faces, but it’s a “sophisticated” thing to do, one that sometimes costs a lot of money. We don’t treat the Natural World as our home and as the broader context of thinking—not merely
“context” as in an inert container, but context as nondual relationality (e.g. the “nonduality of organism and environment”), such that the context does the nonthinking, not simply “with” us, but in a way in which we don’t live as if separated from it. It is a living ecology of Mind, and our stand against it, the delusion of separation, amounts to taking a stand against life. LoveWisdom typically prescribes the experience of ecstasy to dispel this delusion.

Ecstasy (ec-stasy, standing outside the self, consummation of the atops) is the Mystic’s Experience. It is the gift we all seek. Socrates was atpos, a being with no “place,” no label, no category, no agenda, no Cartesian coordinates. If we fit into the Cosmos itself, then no ordinary place can hold us. We don’t hide in the hovel of the ego, the fabricated life of a narrow, fearful, craving, and ignorant mind. We stop hiding behind the skin and the skull. Each time we try to take sides against reality, we try forcing ourselves to be in place, to stand in place. We stand in our mind, and we don’t stand up for Love, for Life. Ecstasy means a displacement out of habit, out of agendas, out of conquest consciousness. Our perspective gets displaced, our ignorance gets displaced, our self-centeredness gets displaced, our self-inspection gets displaced. We stop our fixed standing, our attempts to stand firm against reality, our attempts to defend something, and we enter the spaciousness of the dance, where no standing is possible. The dance never stands still, even as it flows in nonduality with its own stillness. Ecstasy is still, not moving. It is still, but not fixed—like the Dance. As T.S. Eliot properly describes it (likely stealing from the Upanishads and the Gita), nondual stillness is already movement, and nondual movement is already stillness. We enter the harmony of the Cosmos, the blissful equilibrium of the Nature of what we are.
Entering is central. We are always already in the womb and being birthed. Wisdom is the womb of compassion (sunyatakarunagarbham, sunyatakarunabhinnam), and we everywhere at all times give birth to love and compassion. We enter temples, we enter the Ways, enter the path, enter the teachings, enter the doctrines, enter the spiritual life, enter the traditions—and we verify them. We always already enter and encounter. Encounter is not, “I am here and you are there and we encounter one another.” Encountering everywhere means entering everywhere, everywhere rousing, everything rousing, everything in mutual nourishment and mutual illumination. We encounter the divine everywhere, already entered into sacredness. You and I already enter one another, arise entangled with one another, your roots and shoots growing as mine, your thread of the patterning running through my loom, in total interwovenness. We enter reality through a gateless gate, because there is no gate, no entrance to reality. And yet we must enter it. We live as outsiders until we enter our own lives and loves, cross the threshold, letting go of the known. Love is the ultimate entrance, and we cannot fully enter Love without entering reality, cannot enter reality without entering Love.

This entering is painful, even frightening, when we do not look. I have fallen many times, hurt myself physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually. I have many scars. Sophia has humiliated me countless times for not entering when the gate is always already here, open. She beckons, and I have turned a deaf ear again and again. She does not want to hurt us, but when She beckons and we are distracted, hurried, mindless, afraid, graspy, tense, narrow, dazed, confused, foggy, then of our own doing we suffer. She beckons us out of our self-torture, our spinning wheel of trauma, stress, strain, worry, fear, hatred, anger, jealousy, envy, craving, desire. All the nonsense makes noise. We walk in noise, breathe noise into us, breathe noise out. We are like insane trees filling
the atmosphere with toxins instead of oxygen, making suffering out of light instead of nourishing ourselves and our World. We could walk in Beauty instead—as the old Navajo prayer tells us:

With beauty before me, I walk
With beauty behind me, I walk
With beauty above me, I walk
With beauty below me, I walk
From the East, beauty has been restored
From the South, beauty has been restored
From the West, beauty has been restored
From the North, beauty has been restored
From the zenith in the sky beauty has been restored
From the nadir of the earth beauty has been restored
From all around me beauty has been restored

We could walk like this, restore life like this. But we get distracted, and we lack a practice of Beauty.

I have hurt myself and others ultimately out of distraction. If the gate is always already right here, what else would we call missing it again and again? It’s right HereNow. How can we miss it? We actively misperceive. We actively misknow. We call it perception. We call it knowing. It is not perception or knowing. It is a very precise misknowing and misperceiving. It is so sharp that it hurts all the time in one way or another, hurts all the way into each other, even if we feel relative happiness here and there in the midst of it. That can sound so harsh and depressing. But it’s actually refreshing. Why? Because it’s honest, and it points toward a total shift. We could give up all of our nonsense. That would feel very refreshing. It would feel light. We could drop the whole burden of our existence, including the burden of trying to be happy, or trying to ignore

\[231\] This prayer is fairly well-known. See Martin (2000: 25) for a nice context, and for another see https://americanindian.si.edu/education/codetalkers/html/chapter5.html
the suffering of others. We could return to Nature, to Mind, to the sacred presence already waiting for us, already in our blood:

Come into Animal Presence
By Denise Levertov

Come into animal presence.
No man is so guileless as the serpent. The lonely white rabbit on the roof is a star twitching its ears at the rain.
The llama intricately folding its hind legs to be seated not disdains but mildly disregards human approval.
What joy when the insouciant armadillo glances at us and doesn't quicken his trotting across the track into the palm brush.

What is this joy? That no animal falters, but knows what it must do? That the snake has no blemish, that the rabbit inspects his strange surroundings in white star-silence? The llama rests in dignity, the armadillo has some intention to pursue in the palm-forest. Those who were sacred have remained so, holiness does not dissolve, it is a presence of bronze, only the sight that saw it faltered and turned from it.
An old joy returns in holy presence.

Assume for just a moment that this old teaching is correct. It is a teaching found in one way or another in countless traditions of LoveWisdom: We are missing something right now. Imagine that there is something we are not seeing, right HereNow, and that this not seeing is the source of

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232 Available in Selected Poems (2003), New Directions.
all our suffering. What might it be that we are not seeing? Where is it? What is it? How can we see it?

If it is truly already Here, it cannot be an object. We cannot look for it like looking for a lost wedding ring. We cannot search like searching for gold or diamonds. We cannot argue for it or analyze or think in the ordinary way.

The new epistemology is already here. A way to cultivate ecologies of Wisdom, Love, and Beauty is already here. We are it. There is nothing else but to arrive at aporia, release into rebellion and rupture, and begin the path of LoveWisdom. Countless sentient beings depend on our practice.

Appendix I: Basic Love and Compassion Practice

First: Set your intentions. Think about what matters most to you. I recommend for this practice that you don’t pick any kind of variable intention. In some forms of practice, we may want to heal a specific wound or address a specific demon. But those are sub-intentions, smaller intentions within the ecology of our larger intentions. In love and compassion practice, we can include those smaller intentions, but we always begin with our highest intention, the thing we would say our life is about. If our life is about love, then that’s the intention: To practice and realize love. Maybe we would say: My highest intention is to love and care for my family. Or maybe: I want to truly know myself and this wondrous World, for the benefit of all beings. Or: I want to truly embody Wisdom, Love, and Beauty for the sake of all beings. Whatever we think is the highest intention we could possibly have, we bring that to mind. If, for instance, we know that we need to practice compassion for someone who is suffering, we honor them by framing the practice in the context of something a little more Cosmic. We can Intend their well-being too, but we begin with a broader vision. We thereby weave them into the deepest meaning of our life and the mystery of being. It places them and us in an expansive space, with limitless energy and potential.

Next, think of a time when you experienced a moment of genuine love and happiness. Picture the person who was present with you, the person with whom you experienced this love and joyfulness. It can be a human person, a dog person, a tree person, a horse person, any person at all (or even a place, as long as you experience it as sentient). We are complicated beings, so you don’t have to worry about the whole relationship with this person. Just think of one moment, one very specific moment when you knew, or you know now, was a moment of love and happiness.
Picture that person, and let that feeling of love and joyfulness blossom in your heart. Allow yourself to really feel it. Allow it to bloom in the heart.

Then, think about that person, and send them that warmth of heart, that feeling of love you now experience in the center of your being. You can think these words: “May you be truly happy, and may you know the causes of true happiness.”

To love someone is to wish for their genuine happiness, to put their happiness above our own. Maybe we can only manage that sometimes, and hopefully at important times. But the ideal is that our beloved’s happiness is more important than our own, and we discover thereby that when we let go of self-centeredness, we are happier. Our true happiness lies in letting go of self-centeredness. Thinking about and taking action for the well-being of others brings us great joy. This does not mean becoming a slave to someone or neglecting our well-being. We must never lose discernment. Love and Wisdom must go together. To the extent that we lack Wisdom, we lack true Love; to the extent we lack Love, we lack true Wisdom.

But that is just a side note to bracket distracting thoughts and fears. Focus on the love. You just send that thought. You can send the words, saying them in your mind like an affirmation or recitation, or you can picture love going to them visually if you like, in the form of warmth, light, or however you would like to imagine it. Do that for at least a few seconds. You can do it for several minutes.

This first practice is the practice of love. It is sometimes called Loving-Kindness meditation. It’s just Love, but the “Kindness” part is there to remind us that we can send that love to anyone at all, and it is not a matter of romantic feelings or family connection.

Next, recognize that this person you have held in mind, held in your heart, may experience suffering. Recognize that you would like them to be free from suffering. Then send them this thought: “May you be free from suffering and all causes of suffering.” You can repeat these thoughts again and again. If your mind strays, return to the thought of that person, and return to sending compassion.

Then, recognize that you too suffer. Sometimes we ignore our suffering, or even think we deserve it. We can be quite cruel to ourselves. But if we are suffering, this means the World has that much more suffering in it, and this affects those we love, as well as everyone else. For your own benefit, and for the benefit of all beings, including those dearest to you, you deserve to be free from suffering.

When we are suffering, we are more difficult to be around, and we may do things that cause suffering in others, even accidentally or unconsciously. When people experience our suffering, it brings them suffering. For all these reasons, we begin to see that lack of self-compassion is itself selfish, and the practice of self-compassion is itself generous.

Practicing love and compassion for ourselves can sometimes prove challenging, but we can begin to see that everyone benefits if we can become truly free from suffering, even a little, and even for a moment. So, send the thought: “May I be free from suffering and all causes of
suffering.” Do it for several seconds, or even several minutes. You may even like to send this thought to yourself while placing one or both hands on your heart, in a gesture of kindness and warmth. That’s not about being precious, but about being honest, direct, and warm. It’s about acknowledging our own empowerment.

Finally, recognize that you too deserve to be happy. Even if you are scared to allow yourself to be happy (that can be an unconscious fear, not so easy to detect), you can see that the people you love, and the world in general, would be better off if you were happy. If you write me an email saying you feel very happy, I feel happy too, and I do not have to suffer because of your suffering. You are nicer to be around, and I don’t have to worry about you. So, my happiness is interwoven with yours. Therefore, for your own benefit, and for the benefit of all beings, you deserve to be happy. So, send those same feelings and thoughts to yourself: “May I be truly happy, and may I know the causes of true happiness.” The “truly happy” part means we aren’t wishing deluded happiness on ourselves or others. We want genuine happiness, not mere hedonic pleasures.

Start small with this practice. Doing 2 or 3 minutes per day, just once, is better than zero. And 2 minutes per day will transform you over time. No way around it. But, as you gradually build up to 14 or even 24 minutes a day, you will notice increasing effects. And we have hard science to back up that claim. These practices alter brain structure and even affect us at a cellular level.

Gradually, you can add two more parts to the practice: Wishing that the person you start out focusing on (and then you yourself) may know true peace and joy. The joy part is different than the happiness above, because it’s about practicing sympathetic joy. Sometimes we get a little freaked out by the joy and success of others. We even take pleasure in the downfall of others. The Germans call it schadenfreude. They are not alone in feeling it, even if we use the German word to describe it. So, we practice really wishing the joy of another to continue, and to grow. Then we wish true peace for them, which means their well-being is not based on success or failure, on pain or pleasure, praise or blame. If they feel truly peaceful, they feel really wonderful at the bottom of their being, even if something difficult arises. Similarly, they don’t get pulled and hooked by pleasures. You would wish these for another, and then for yourself. You would use phrases like this: “May you never be separated from true joy. May you abide in peace and equanimity.”

Always practice in mutuality: Self and other. Self-compassion seems to be particularly challenging for westerners (especially Americans), and that is an important spiritual symptom to ponder. This challenging nature makes self-compassion very important for us, for a variety of reasons. For instance, the work of Kristen Neff has shown that practicing self-compassion gets us what attempts at self-esteem aim for but fail to deliver. Self-compassion is not self-esteem. Self-compassion is not self-indulgence, it is not self-gratification, it is not self-obsession, it is not self-pity. Self-compassion is about seeing that you can handle seeing. Self-compassion is about allowing yourself to do the alchemy of the soul, discovering and creating your capacity to handle the heat, your capacity to be medicine for the World.

Self-compassion is practiced as a part of general training in cultivating wisdom, compassion, love, joy, and peace, and working toward the liberation of ourselves and all beings. It’s a come-
and-see thing and an altogether thing, which is the essence of Sophia Thinking. Compassion means the heartfelt wish to alleviate suffering wherever it arises, and engaging in endless creativity to help, benefit, and liberate all beings. If suffering arises “here,” then we deal with it. If it arises “there,” we deal with it. And we deal with it in an altogether Way. We are all interwoven (we are interwovenness, which is not a “thing”), and our practice of life is an altogether practice, not something we can “do” in pieces, even if pieces often deliver valuable relief from suffering measured in a narrow way.

After you work with the above practice for several weeks, you can gradually expand the practice from 2 people (someone you love, and then yourself), to four people. These are all individuals. The two people to add are a stranger and then a difficult person. The stranger could be someone you pass on the street, a shopkeeper, a neighbor you see often but never really interact with, or anyone else who seems right. Each time you practice, choose a unique individual (you can work with the same person over many sessions if you like, but choose a specific person for each session). Then, try a challenging person. Don’t start with anyone too intense. Maybe try a person you had a little argument with, or someone who gets on your nerves a bit. After a lot of practice you can move on to much more challenging people, but never push yourself. The practice should be done in a gentle way, so that you feel healthy, even if frequently challenged. You can work with the same difficult person over as many sessions as seems fitting, and you can gradually move on to very intense people. But don’t start with someone who has traumatized you.

As you progress in experience, you can send these feelings, these immeasurable goodnees, to larger and larger groups of people, and then finally you can beam them out in all directions, throughout the whole Cosmos (the brain waves of advanced practitioners doing that latter practice were so unprecedented that the scientists running an experiment on them thought machines had a malfunction).233

These practices were developed in part to help heal the psyche.234 We can find ways to engage with these practices no matter our current state of being. But, for those who have experienced trauma, it can take extra Patience (which means Inclusiveness) and Gentleness to Allow these

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233 Just Imagine . . . we know so little about our own HeartMindBodyWorldCosmos that a scientific result related to meditation and compassion initially appears as if it must be due to a malfunction in our equipment. I find this a remarkable fact. It was not included in the original study, but was reported by Richard Davidson, a lead investigator in the study, in the course of a presentation at Stanford University in June of 2016.

234 One finds these practices in the oldest layers of Buddhist philosophy. I have heard that certain love and compassion practices were prescribed by the Buddha to help practitioners in the grips of various “demons”. In our more prosaic, modern discourse we might say these monks were suffering from trauma, neurosis, and various other maladies of the soul. Given the intensely psychological orientation of Buddhist LoveWisdom, this is not such a horrible way of putting it, since many philosophers in Buddhist traditions are quite explicit that “demons” are simply obstructions to liberation, and that it makes little sense to try and think of “demons” as self-existing “creatures” roaming around “outside” of us. In other words, all demons are ultimately inner demons. But, to arrive at that, we must see the nonduality of inner and outer, and we must see the archetypal dimension of the energies that flow through us, directing our lives.
Practices to Heal the Psyche. The Healing will Come, with Patience and Sustained Effort, a kind of Joyful Perseverance. We must be Sensitive to the needs of anyone we introduce these Practices to, but they have proven quite safe and reliable, and are perhaps the safest form of Meditation with which any of us can begin, and which most all of us should always keep up with.

There is a growing, impressive body of science on compassion and other meditation practices. Frankly, our neuroscience is still in its infancy, and there is a lot we need to learn, though we will consider some of that science as we go along. I rely mainly on the 2500 years of philosophical elaboration and practical engagement with these practices, and on my own experience with them, including teaching them to students. I have seen profound changes in my own life and in the lives of my students. The main thing is to try it for yourself and see what you discover and create.

“Whatever kinds of worldly merit there are, all are not worth one 16th part of the release of mind, the heart deliverance by LovingKindness; in shining, glowing, beaming and radiance the release of mind, the heart deliverance by LovingKindness far excels and surpasses them all.” ~ Siddhartha

“As a mother even with own life protects her only child, so should one cultivate immeasurable Love towards all living beings.” ~ Siddhartha

“Indeed, Allah enjoins justice, and the doing of good to others; and giving like kindred; and forbids indecency, and manifest evil, and wrongful transgression. He admonished you that you may take heed.” ~ The Koran, 16:91

“And as for those who strive in Our path — We will surely guide them in Our ways. And Indeed, Allah is with those who are of service to others.” ~ The Koran, 29:70

“A guidance and a mercy for those who do good.” ~ The Koran, 31:4

“Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.” ~ Colossians 3:12-13

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.” ~ 2 Corinthians 1:3-4

“The Lord is gracious and righteous; our God is full of compassion.” ~ Psalm 116:5

“Thus if a man does kindness on earth, he awakens loving-kindness above, and it rests upon that day which is crowned therewith through him. Similarly, if he performs a deed of mercy, he crowns that day with mercy and it becomes his protector in the hour of need. So, too, if he
performs a cruel action, he has a corresponding effect on that day and impairs it, so that subsequently it becomes cruel to him and tries to destroy him, giving him measure for measure. The people of Israel are withheld from cruelty more than all other peoples, and must not manifest any deed of the kind, since many watchful eyes are upon them.” ~ The Zohar, 3.92b

“Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves.” ~ Philippians 2:1-3

“And the word of the Lord came again to Zechariah: “This is what the Lord Almighty said: ‘Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another. Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the foreigner or the poor. Do not plot evil against each other.’”

~ Zechariah 8-10

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.
Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.
Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.
~ from the Sermon on the Mount

“God has given each of you a gift from his great variety of spiritual gifts. Use them well to serve one another.” ~ 1 Peter 4:10

“Finally, all of you should be of one mind. Sympathize with each other. Love each other as brothers and sisters. Be tenderhearted, and keep a humble attitude.” ~ 1 Peter 3:8

Appendix II: Dangerous Wisdom, Philosophical Diagnosis, and Confidence in Love

As this inquiry unfolded, one of the most consistent concerns about it kept coming up. What if the “real” story comes to something like this:
Our main problem is not a crisis in our whole way of knowing, but simply the (relatively) mundane issue that we need to listen to the knowledge we have? After all, our scientists are the ones who told us about the threat of climate change, and they warned us with plenty of time to make changes. Why, then, critique science—even worse, critique it as part of a sweeping critique of the dominant culture, including its politics, media, and more? It’s dangerous, and it actually fuels the fire.

One of my readers put it rather well: This inquiry could be read as “more of the same,” more of the same thinking that has gotten us where we find ourselves—a sad and ironic furthering of the pattern of insanity. When did that particular reader first learn about climate change? Roughly 40 years ago! Where did they read about it? The newspaper! Based on what evidence? That given by scientists! We had time to take action, but we didn’t. The “why” of that failure could be explained in ways far different from the inquiry presented here, and the recommendations would come to things like this: Read the newspaper, have confidence in the findings of science, take political action, make sure our children go to school and study well, listen to what scientists and other experts tell us we need to do to make things better. The reader in question would certainly put all of this in more compelling terms, but in some sense I hope this captures the spirit of the critique.

Considered in this light, our inquiry may indeed be downright dangerous, for it further questions science, questions media, questions politics, questions education, questions the possibility of knowledge given the way we try to know. If the diagnosis given in this inquiry proves correct,
then it has significant value, no matter how uncomfortable or unfortunate. However, if the diagnosis proves incorrect, it may have caused further trouble, and though it aimed to alleviate suffering, it may yet bring about a great deal of it.

This concern, in various forms, has weighed upon the inquiry in the whole of its unfolding. We have tried in our reflections to differentiate what we considered from the kinds of things said by certain post-modern, new age, and political commentators. Plenty of what we considered could be compared to things claimed by political extremists, hate groups, abstruse intellectuals, and all manner of new agey thinkers. Many of these thinkers sound very confident in their claims. How can we be sure the present inquiry is correct? Why does it sound confident, when so many people are saying, “Things are not what they seem! Here, take this red pill!”

It seems first and foremost essential to acknowledge the reason why “take the red pill” resonates with people, why *The Matrix* was so popular, and why so many groups might hit on this theme: It is the heart of LoveWisdom, and thus we all resonate with it, possibly because we all sense that things are in fact not quite what they seem.

We may want to discount this suggestion and say that we merely hope or wish things were not what they seem, so that we can fantasize about a better life and explain our current suffering. But this requires a profound insult to almost all spiritual traditions, and it may indicate a clinging to the style of consciousness exemplified by the dominant culture. Every philosopher senses how *The Matrix* appears rather straightforwardly as a techno-dystopian update to Plato’s allegory of the cave, how Neo seems like a quasi-buddha, how the whole story manifests the archetypal
hero’s journey. Does the archetype force us all to see a need to take the red pill, or is it that, again, and again, and again, people have taken the red pill and verified something, something the sacred-creative-ordering seduces us into verifying because of its necessity for life?

Consider the Dalai Lama’s words again, as quoted in the inquiry:

After having talked to numerous scientist friends over the years, I have the conviction that the great discoveries in physics going back as far as Copernicus give rise to the insight that reality is not as it appears to us. When one puts the world under a serious lens of investigation—be it the scientific method and experiment or the Buddhist logic of emptiness or the contemplative method of meditative analysis—one finds things are more subtle than, and in some cases even contradict, the assumptions of our ordinary common-sense view of the world.

Science, too, asks us to take the red pill. But, nothing quite compares to the way the spiritual traditions ask this of us, and what happens to us when we navigate the journey it sweeps us into.

It also seems important to note a couple of things about the scientific diagnosis of our situation. Let’s first go back to the beginning of our inquiry and recall my confession that, if I want to “know” something about some set of phenomena, I will almost inevitably consult the available science. Again, this is not always the very first thing I do, and I never take the science as the final word, but I surely treat it with great respect.

Having said that, I find scientists’ capacity to tell us the world is in trouble far from impressive. It doesn’t take much to notice that the rivers are polluted, that species are going extinct, and so on. We may say, “Ah! But outlining the ‘greenhouse effect’ decades ago did require scientific
insight and analysis. It took science to give us a warning of decades.” This strikes me as problematic for a number of reasons.

First of all, if an alcoholic gets into a car and then crashes into my home while I am asleep, and for some reason I don’t hear it, then he will most certainly reveal something to me if he throws stones at my bedroom window until I awaken, and then gives me the news, many hours before I might have awoken to find out for myself. He has maybe given me enough warning to save some things from being looted, or perhaps being damaged in a coming rainstorm. I may be thankful to him. Nevertheless, he’s part of the trouble.

Our scientists helped to give us automobiles, rockets, missiles, and more. Add up all the ecological interventions resulting from all the scientific experimentation of the past century, and one surely has no small heap of suffering for the world, whatever the good we insist came out of it.

Our inquiry suggests that this is not merely a “material” issue, as if we could take out a ledger and count up how much environmental degradation can be specifically attributed to “science” and “scientists” in one column and add up all the good in another. The trouble goes much deeper, for there are countless sages, including many Indigenous Elders of the past and present, who would simply ask, “Why did you burn all those fossil fuels to begin with? On the basis of what knowledge did you think it was okay?” Have the scientists consistently told us, since the inception of science, that the world is so sophisticated and complex that we should not try and control and intervene? Have they cultivated in us a sense of reverence, a sense of sacredness?
In one sense, we might suggest that what we face is not a scientific problem. That scientists noticed it does not make it a problem they can resolve. That it was reported in newspapers does not make newspapers a medium for LoveWisdom. Newspapers might become a medium for LoveWisdom, but they certainly do not practice such a function now, and few of us would turn to newspapers in order to find much genuine wisdom—not that it’s completely absent, but that it seems rare. In the regime we have, reporters aren’t meant to be wise, and though they might interview wise beings or write from a rootedness in and dedication to wisdom, love, and beauty, I cannot see how, by and large, media escapes the critiques provided by people like Edward Herman, Noam Chomsky, Chris Hedges, and Matt Taibbi. Fortunately we have an impressive alternative press, and there are quite a few courageous and insightful journalists in the World. I am fairly confident that we should try our best to read their work—though we still require the wisdom of discernment to know what to read and what to make of it.

In any case, even if one has no sense that the problems we face are primarily of a philosophical or spiritual nature—and all the more so if they are—it is to philosophy and spirituality that we must turn to cultivate discernment and to take wise, loving, and beautiful action. The traditions and practices that in the dominant are referred to as science have no intimacy with traditions and practices that merit the designation of wisdom. The scientific traditions, and the journalistic traditions too, have much more to do with an attitude of manipulation than one of reverence. By and large, the wisdom traditions can offer us teachings and practices that can empower us to experience the World as sacred, and this would seem a better attitude than whatever it is we currently practice.
After all, if we look at the state of the World, does it seem like we hold it as sacred? Does it seem like we treat the rivers as a gift from the divine, as the very presence of sacredness, as a direct and intimate teaching of Sophia? And it seems that so many traditions would agree that receiving the teachings of the river means taking the red pill, while treating it as we have goes altogether with Sorrowville. Science as we know it is part of the functioning of Sorrowville. That seems radical in its implications, and thus may make us uncomfortable enough that we wish to evade it, but it seems so far from radical in its sense as to strike me as unavoidable.

A further problem seems evident: Even if we grant that it takes some epistemic traction (so to speak) to notice that we need to change things (and leaving open the question of what that means), and even after we set aside the culpability of that epistemic orientation in creating the trouble, how do we make the change? In telling us about the “greenhouse effect” decades ago, science may as well have been telling us, “You are stooping! Stand up straight!” “You are stooping” still seems an unimpressive diagnosis. As for, “Stand up straight!” we have considered how that seems a useless directive. If a “doing” orientation got us into the climate catastrophe, if a certain style of consciousness bears any responsibility, then all efforts from that style of consciousness, all efforts at “doing” something to fix the problem, may result in more error. If conscious human purpose got us into the trouble, it strikes me as incredible—and incredibly tragic—hubris to think conscious purpose will get us out of it. Isn’t part of our lesson here that we cannot “control” the World? And isn’t science rooted in “predict and control”? That may not even be the most compelling way to make the link, to expose the style of consciousness at work here. This whole inquiry may not have exposed it enough for the skeptical reader. But I feel no
compunction for suggesting that science, media, politics, and so on will not likely dispel the pattern of insanity, and that they seem to be manifestations of it.

Yet another part of the problem with the skeptical attitude toward the dangerous suggestions of our inquiry comes from the way that skepticism seems, at base, to embrace the dominant culture’s assumptions about “history” and “progress”. We do need to recognize growth, evolution, insight, and so on. But something strange happens in the dominant culture’s narratives in relation to these things, and the “scientific” character of that culture is taken as a kind of superiority. Philosophically speaking, this seems dubious at best. These sorts of hypothetical exercises often seem quite silly, but perhaps it makes some kind of point to say that, given a choice between living in a “primitive” society properly rooted in wisdom, love, and beauty, or a “technologically advanced” society lacking this rootedness, it seems advisable to choose the former, since there is currently no vitalizing connection between science and wisdom, and no logical connection between science and happiness. It does not take wisdom to discover environmental degradation at the scale we have achieved it, nor is it particularly wise to suggest that we should stop it. Rather, saying that we need to stop environmental degradation seems rational, given the simple premise that we’d like to survive. It would have taken wisdom to tell us not to engage in the degradation to begin with, or to have caught it and warned against it long before any “scientific” data were compelling enough to warrant political action in a “free” economy.

Aside from these considerations, we might open ourselves to the possibility that standing up straight may itself mean a revolution in science. In other words, “You are stooping! Stand up
straight!” seems in some sense to be a surprising version of, “Things aren’t what they seem! Take the red pill!” That may seem odd, and admittedly one could easily avoid even the hint of having to choose to take the red pill in the mundane act of sitting and standing, but it nevertheless seems to be there, if we are willing to look with sufficient care—thus the many spiritual common law cases about utterly ordinary activities like clearing one’s throat or drinking a cup of tea.

It’s worth noting that Morpheus never says, “Take the red pill!” No one does, except zealots and other fools, who are typically unreliable, exhibiting as they do a kind of blindness that leads themselves and others into suffering. It is in himself and Morpheus as a person that Neo trusts, not any “truth” that Morpheus offers. And Morpheus insists that Neo must choose for himself, and then verify for himself. Without the possibility of verification, we remain stuck in blind faith.

In a sense, when responding to the charge that this inquiry is more of the same, the first reply goes something like this: “What did you expect? This is a work of philosophy. If it didn’t offer a red pill, offer the choice of it in the kind of framing Socrates, Buddha, and even Morpheus provide, it would have to make one hell of a case for abandoning all the venerable spiritual traditions of the world, its author has no idea how to do that, for he has himself practiced within those traditions, not outside of them. No one can help the fact that this archetypal patterning has become co-opted by all sorts of insanity. That is what we must expect to happen, for all the reasons discussed in this inquiry and in the many traditions that recognize problems of spiritual materialism, including its manifestation as political ideology. Moreover, the inquiry does not
choose on behalf of those who engage with it. If they contemplate with care, and then decide to take the red pill, that is their business. In any case, they should not take the red pill without first grounding themselves in some kind of ethical commitment, including the most basic commitment to only take the red pill (and do the work that follows) in order to benefit all beings, and to do everything possible to avoid harming them.”

How do we determine which red pill on offer to take? We shouldn’t rush into it. Someone well-grounded in a venerable tradition seems a much better choice than someone with a political agenda. That is not to say spirituality is a space of practice free of “the political,” but that we can certainly discern the difference between, for instance, a Sufi teacher or Tibetan monk on the one hand, and an internet conspiracy theorist or “law of attraction” guru on the other. After watching such a person for an extended period of time, we may begin to gain some confidence in them, their lineage, and their teachings. I admit a considerable level of confidence in some of the teaching lineages that make appearances in this inquiry.

But this raises a question that some readers of the text have raised: What am I actually confident about, and about what do I insist on saying, “I really don’t know”? 

The things of which I would admit confidence are not easy to discuss. First of all, it seems very “western” to make a list of confidences, which we might call an inventory of beliefs or a personal knowledge assessment. All of that seems misguided, in part because “belief” might be a silly concept, and further because, as Heinrich Zimmer famously quipped, the best things can’t be told, and the second best are generally misunderstood—the second best being the attempted
tellings of the best. So, we could begin by saying I am pretty confident that life is a come-and-see affair, that wisdom-love-beauty require intimate verification, that we can at best find guidance in texts and tellings, but in the end what we realize cannot be separated from what we practice. Furthermore, the altogetherness of things, the alive, alove interwovenness of Sophia’s sacred mystery means that texts and tellings cannot ever capture anything. Any list of confidences would leave things out, and give the impression that confidences are separable. The intimacy of life resists such notions.

I can’t give enough caveats on something like a confiding of confidences, but perhaps I still owe such a thing to the reader, since they may misunderstand the text, and take certain kinds of confidence for arrogance, projecting false certainties in places where there are in fact many unknowns and a great deal of precariousness. With all of that said, here are some confidences:

I am very confident in the venerable traditions of LoveWisdom found all over the World, including many Indigenous traditions. I am confident that a person can enter the spiritual path (take the red pill) and experience something genuinely revolutionary. In the practice and realization of these paths, one dispels “more of the same,” even as one risks working with dangerous wisdom, handling it the way one would handle poisonous snakes. I am very confident that the alternative is much more dangerous.

Apropos of the above, I am pretty confident that this inquiry is, to the best of the author’s ability, consonant with many strands in a variety of these venerable traditions. I am fairly confident I am not the philosopher who cried wolf. Setting aside the stupidities of how some cultures have
treated Wolf, I am saying I feel pretty confident that the situation seems serious. I have little confidence that I could declare once and for all that science and technology cannot “save” us. For all I know, the very thing we need will come out of academia and/or Silicon Valley. For all I know, we somehow “needed” to degrade the World as we have. For all I know, the Rapture may come, or we may all discover that life here never had to be treated as sacred. One cannot allow such “what if’s” to stifle one’s compassion, however limited it may be. Thus, even though I risk being labeled the philosopher who cried wolf, I have tried to be the philosopher who cried wisdom—not my own wisdom, but that of the traditions that have given vitalizing guidance to countless human beings. While some of the suggestions of this inquiry do challenge certain aspects of these traditions, the main stalk expresses common themes, and even the novel suggestions can find reconciliation in these traditions (e.g. nonlocal epistemology).

I am pretty confident that there are errors in this text, various places of confusion that arise from the author’s own confusions, since the author is not a sage, and even if the author were a sage, human fallibility remains with us, as do caveats of context. The suggestions about the altered state of philosophizing apply to all philosophers, especially those who cannot escape the busyness of the university and the general insanity of the dominant culture. I am not confident about whether the scholarly aspects of the errors in this text matter as much as I sometimes think they do. There are many things in this text which experts might contest, because we have become so specialized that we go on a quest for certainty that can even function as an unspoken quest for uncertainty. It is as if we all have to agree to not know very much except a tiny area of specialization, and our vast expertise in that narrow field seems to make us uncomfortable saying much at all that would serve us in our real lives. It is as if we can only ever offer more questions,
and this inability to arrive at a kind of knowing that would help the World, that would help sentient beings in their hour of need, seems to perpetuate the pattern of insanity. We need action—not foolhardy action, not action based on conscious human purposes, not action without reflection, not action as portrayed in action movies—action rooted in Wisdom, Love, and Beauty, to our best ability to presence those, to practice and realize them in the midst of activity and on the basis of an ethical, spiritual life, including plenty of practice in stillness (so to speak).

I am fairly confident that Socrates, Siddhartha (the Buddha), Jesus, the Peacemaker, and other great sages were not scholars. At the same time, I am not very confident about saying scholarship is not important for most of us. At times I feel pretty confident in saying we read too many books, and at other times it seems we don’t read enough of them.

Sadly, I am pretty confident that the U.S. in particular is an anti-educational culture—which means anti-book, if the book is, for instance, a book of LoveWisdom—and I am fairly confident that this is so because it serves structures of power. Our best books are dangerous to structures of power precisely because they invite people to practice and realize wisdom, love, and beauty, and thus to establish justice, righteousness, peace, and true freedom and equality. I am thus wary of the ways I have found it necessary to criticize intellectuals, because the anti-educational forces in the culture express themselves as anti-intellectual, and this is a problem, because I am quite confident that the best of our intellectuals offer us vitalizing invitations into wisdom, love, and beauty. But this in turn comes with a fair degree of confidence that the practices of academia (where so many intellectuals reside) are too narrow to allow us to realize the fuller potentials of wisdom, love, and beauty. Indeed, though I am fairly confident that the pattern of insanity of the
dominant culture survives by keeping the general public away from books like the ones cited in this inquiry, I also feel fairly confident that we should read them with a grounding in compassion (and ethics generally) and some set of practices for verifying what they invite us to make real. We need practices that can help us realize wisdom, love, and beauty, and reading alone does not seem sufficient.

When it comes to books of LoveWisdom, books of spirituality, they seem to offer much that we should practice and realize. And that often means we have to read them with the kind of care good scholars try their best to practice. I am quite confident that I am not a very good scholar, and it is not merely on the basis of “scholarship” that I would seek to earn a degree in philosophy. As the inquiry itself seeks to show, there is more to LoveWisdom than scholarship. In any case, I remain confident that most of the readings of the artefacts in this inquiry are at the very least useful, even if they may raise red flags for some scholars. I am confident that any interpretation offered here of any artefact—of anything at all—is far from the last word. I am somewhat confident that even the most dangerous suggestions and interpretations offered here may be genuinely beneficial, and that there is something at least passingly skillful in them—not because of any intelligence on my part, but because they come from a sincere dedication to the traditions of LoveWisdom that allow all of us access to inspiration.

I am very confident that arts of awareness are essential for fulfilling the potentials of our own souls and the soul of the World. Even if the philosophical diagnosis offered here is somehow off about the relationship between LoveWisdom and the ecological and other crises we face, the
ethical-aesthetic epistemology of practice and realization still seems fundamentally valuable, and the arts of awareness it recommends seem to offer the potential for paradigm-shifting insight.

I am very confident that the World is so interwoven that if any significant part of this inquiry seems “right,” then the dangerous diagnosis it presents needs to be taken quite seriously. I don’t see how the criticisms regarding science, media, education, and politics avoid being radical.

I am very confident that we need to keep trying to educate ourselves and our children, but I am not confident about what that means. I feel pretty confident that education is broken, but that doesn’t mean I wouldn’t send my own child to university, if I had one. I am fairly confident that structural inequalities contribute significantly to the diseases of education, locally and globally.

For instance, a recent study from Georgetown University’s Center on Education and the Workforce shows that a kindergarten child who scores in the bottom half in their school tests still has a 70% chance of reaching a high socio-economic status in life—if their parents have one. On the other hand, in the case of a child from poor parents, even if that child scores in the top half of their class in school tests, they have only a 30% chance of reaching a high socio-economic status in life—in other words, a child may demonstrate intelligence, but if they are poor they have a 70% chance of not enjoying affluence.\(^{235}\) Though we think of education as a matter of equal opportunity for all, and think of the dominant culture that way, it does not function as such. And the reforms, often guided by wealthy elites (such as Bill Gates and Betsy Devos) who typically do not send their own children to public school, and may not have attended public schools

\(^{235}\) [https://cew.georgetown.edu/cew-reports/schooled2lose/](https://cew.georgetown.edu/cew-reports/schooled2lose/)
themselves. When one looks at the society, seeing how the rich are somehow incapable of failure because of the many safety nets built in for them, and how the poor are almost destined to lose in spite of any talents and capacities they may harbor in their souls, it seems that reform in education has become a massive rationalization: If only the poor would get educated, they would have a fair shot at the wealth which the affluent have “earned”.

According to MIT economist Peter Temin, these and other symptoms are indications of a dual economy, which is typical of developing as opposed to developed economies, and that in turn would mean we have regressed in ethical, political, and even economic terms.236 Plenty of other thinkers have noticed the same set of symptoms. For instance, the economist Gregory Clark has also done interesting work in this general vein. According to Clark, “America has no higher rate of social mobility than medieval England, or pre-industrial Sweden.”237 If you had to place a bet about how well off a child in the dominant culture would end up in life, and you could only choose one factor upon which to base that bet, it would be foolish to choose their intelligence, grace, virtue, caring, compassion, nascent love of wisdom, or any other such factor. The single best predictor of material success seems to be the level of affluence enjoyed by a child’s parents. If you come from wealth, you will likely be wealthy, even if you are particularly unskillful, as in the case of some of our presidents, as well as many others in the society. And any hard work one

236 In Republic, Plato spoke of oligarchy as being not one city but two (551d). Temin’s paper is available at http://ineteconomics.org/ideas-papers/research-papers/the-american-dual-economy-race-globalization-and-the-politics-of-exclusion
237 The quote can be found at http://sacramento.cbslocal.com/2014/11/26/uc-davis-economics-professor-there-is-no-american-dream/, while the analysis to support it can be found in his book, The Son Also Rises: Surnames and the History of Social Mobility. See http://faculty.econ.ucdavis.edu/faculty/gclark/the_Son_Also_Rises.html for information on his book and other writings.
does often comes as a result of support that the impoverished have no access to. The poor cannot afford private tutors, cannot take unpaid internships, cannot go to family for bailouts, cannot rely on a relative to give them shot at a career-making job.

Institutional inequalities trouble any philosopher who has confidence in education as a general principle. I have great confidence in it, and a good deal of confidence that it is currently in terrible shape—principally because the culture is not rooted in wisdom, love, and beauty, and also (relatedly) because education has not taken into itself the kinds of insights we wrestled with in our inquiry, including the basic insight that knowledge depends on our way of knowing. I am pretty confident in that insight.

Related to all of this, I am most confident in you, the reader. That is why I have not proposed many “solutions” to the challenges raised by this inquiry. My confidence lies in each person’s capacity to practice and realize wisdom, love, and beauty. I don’t know what we should do. I don’t know what you should do. I am confident that we can find out.

But I am pretty confident that this is not an individualized process. I feel no compunction for suggesting that we need to get beyond our own egos. I am fairly confident in the assessment that validity, knowledge, truth, wisdom, love, beauty, peace, joy, justice, and all good things depend on transcending the ego. This does not mean “communism” or some other kind of fascistic regime in which beings get captured by “the collective”. Rather, it means that each of us already has tasted how we are most ourselves when we transcend the ego. In terms of an ethically and aesthetically rooted epistemology, it means we have to let the World speak to us. It is a mutual
empowerment. The river cannot think without us, and we cannot properly think without the river. Coyote, Wolf, Raven, Blue Whale, Red Tailed Hawk, Aspen, Honeybee, Horse, and countless other beings cannot fully realize the potential of their thinking without us, nor can we fully realize our potential without them. I do not hear many voices in the dominant culture inviting us to think along with these beings. I hear more of the same, more human agendas, more techno-fantasies. The scientists who tell us that things are bad do not tell us to listen to The Others for guidance, to listen to the World, to listen to Sacredness, to listen to Nature, to establish a proper Nature-Culture in the sense our inquiry has invited us to touch. That gives me very little confidence that the gestures coming from the dominant culture, including its science, really get beyond “more of the same”. Again, it seems like hubris, and the aim of this inquiry is to invite us into a broader humility.

That has at times involved some strong rhetoric. If we in the dominant culture cannot make fun of ourselves and our intellectual traditions, we may be lost. But I am not at all confident that we should avoid reading Kant and Descartes altogether. I am not very confident that inquiry into the question of how many grains make a heap might not lead us to life-saving insight. But, again, I don’t claim to “know” much.

I remain confident that the central issue of our inquiry has to do with samsara thinking, the mind of Sorrowville, the conquest style of consciousness, and that the diagnosis offered here actually seems rather predictable and mundane in some sense—far from “dangerous” except in the ways Buddha tried to get at in his great philosophical warning. We have come to a point at which we can see the real costs of remaining in a state of suffering and ignorance. It may have seemed to
us that our suffering was mostly personal, and that it could not poison rivers and extinguish species. It may seem that plastic is only a bad idea when we don’t make it in moderation. But the problem goes much deeper, and our interwovenness reveals itself as we plumb those dangerous depths—again, dangerous to the ego and to structures of power and domination. Thus, any suggestion that our inquiry is “more of the same,” while I may share some of its concerns, seems to end up requiring a defense of fragmentation and a case against interwovenness, a defense of a great deal of samsaric thinking and a case against much of the spiritual wisdom of a wide spectrum of traditions. I don’t think it appears that way to those of us raised in the dominant culture. I think it appears to us that our science and our culture in general must have a great many positive aspects. I feel pretty confident that this is true, but it does not mean there is not also something fundamentally ignorant in our practice and realization of life. It may seem that reason alone should be able to correct this problem, but so many traditions recommend arts of awareness that go beyond “reason” that one can only find this rather dubious at best, and perhaps a bit hubristic, because that “reason” surely takes certain key assumptions of the dominant culture for its premises. It is also quite a different thing to look at the World and think, “Wow! Things are really screwed up!” and quite another to be present in the World and feel its wounds, feel the suffering of countless beings. This requires nothing more than the capacity for wisdom and compassion that all of us share, and it doesn’t take too much effort to practice and realize this level of compassion. It does not require sainthood or sagehood. But it does take more than mere reason seems to provide—hence the need for an actual practice of compassion.

It’s good that we don’t need to be sages to practice compassion, for I am quite confident that I am not a sage. Thankfully the practice of compassion may help us to realize our spiritual
potential. And we should also remind ourselves that anyone who says they aren’t wise must say it with care. In an old spiritual common law case, a student asks a realized teacher, “What is a truly awakened being?” It is like asking, “What is Wisdom? What is Love? What really matters? What would it mean to live a truly philosophical life? What is Socrates? What is someone who is awake? What is someone who is fearless?” The student condenses it to just one of these, but all of them get caught up in the question—the whole point of spirituality and religion, the whole point of life, in one question. The question has a sincerity and urgency to it. We imagine an experienced student here, one who has practiced a long time, and suddenly sees just how much they still don’t understand. They have struggled. They may even have gotten to that point we sometimes get to, when we try and try and try, and then we can’t go on, and in the very act of throwing up our hands and saying, “I give up,” the situation resolves itself perfectly.

The teacher listens to the student’s question, and replies like this: “If I tell you, will you believe it?” We can hardly overstate the significance of such a question. Why wouldn’t we believe the answer? What could the answer be? Something mystical? What is mystical? How could it be that we wouldn’t believe the answer to this question? The student gives voice to this, asking, “Why wouldn’t I believe your sincere words?”

So, the old teacher tells the student: “You yourself are it.”

I am confident that you, the reader, are it, and that the World, that Sacredness itself, that WisdomLoveBeauty itself is it with you. Please take good care of it.
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