

Metaxis and Recovery: Towards a New Vision of Health

CHAPTER FIVE

THE DIVINE POLE

Approximately twenty-five hundred years ago Plato provided for us in Book VII of the *Republic* his Allegory of the Cave. Picture a cave with people arranged so they can only see the back wall. Projected onto the wall would be the shadows from outside the cave. Now these people, knowing only the cave, conclude that the shadows are real people--not just projections from the real world outside--and that the cave is the whole of the world. But perhaps one person turns around and looks out the mouth of the cave. He would realize what the shadows *indicate*: that there is a whole world of sunshine and color unbeknownst to the inhabitants of the cave.

Plato used this story to illustrate his conception of education and his theory of forms--that there is an ideal world of perfect archetypes. *The* perfect cat and chair, and the virtues such as the good the true and the beautiful resided in this world of forms. *Our* sense of these things are but pale and shadowy versions of their perfect form.

Of course, we are not going to argue for a separate world of forms. However, Plato's story is still instructive all these centuries hence. It is instructive in that it challenges us to look at what we *do* know and wonder what this *indicates*. Does our everyday, lived experience point to something that is not as apparent to us? Something that we can easily overlook or ignore but is, in fact, part of our reality? Does our mechanistic world view effect our lives in the manner of Plato's cave? Does it restrict our vision of reality?

In the previous chapter we discussed some aspects of the natural pole and how our understanding of the human-as-field alters our perception of ourselves as physical, organic creatures. The natural pole is certainly not anything that has to be "indicated." It is just about the most blatant and obvious dimension of our being. Anyone who seriously denied that they were a physical creature embedded in a physical world would be a most disturbed individual indeed. The obvious quality of the natural pole made it a good introduction to the ramifications of the field approach. It also made it relatively easy to begin to understand how the four poles interpenetrate and influence each other.

We shall now turn our attention to one of the more difficult to understand aspects of our being: the divine pole. This area is not so difficult to understand *per se*, after all it is evidenced in our everyday lives. It is difficult because it has been increasingly neglected, ignored and disparaged during the last number of centuries. It is also difficult because the divine pole is where we locate our awareness of the mystery of our lives. So pervasive is this mystery in our lives that we can be likened to a fish in the ocean. It has been said that a fish would be the last creature to discover water.

THE DIVINE POLE

We've had some degree of difficulty even deciding what to call this pole. We tried a number of terms but none were able to indicate the phenomenon we wished to discuss and so, at a loss, we decided to stick with the term used by William Thompson, though our understandings may differ a bit. Please understand though that by using "divine" we are not indicating any usual sense of religious practice or understanding. We just don't have a more suitable word.

The divine pole is not known or experienced as are the other three. That is, we directly feel our bodies, our psyches and our social relations. This is not the case with the human spirit which is an aspect of the divine pole. The presence and functioning of spirit and spirituality, and hence the divine pole is more or less indicated by and through the other three poles. This is not to say that *to some degree* the divine pole cannot in itself become an object of understanding. However, this understanding must always be limited because of the main identifying feature of the divine pole which is the essential mystery of life, reality and existence.

The mystery beyond our limits is always something *not known* in and of itself. It is able to be "seen" in the events of our lives and in the hidden depths of ourselves, others, and the natural world. We are able to "see" it when encountering boundary or limit, such as in an experience of disease and illness. This mystery is *indicated by* the processes of symbolization. These processes of symbolization are most clearly indicated during times of boundary or limit, in artistic creation and in certain types of religiosity. The divine pole is that area wherein we indicate such symbolizing activities--especially in so far as they indicate the mystery.

SYMBOLS AND THE MYSTERY

No matter whether our attention is focused upon the subjective, natural or social poles we necessarily make extensive use of symbolic meanings. We have said earlier that the human is the animal symbolicum, the creature-that-interprets. It is in and through our drive to symbolization that the small degree of freedom enjoyed by humans is expressed. Though our processes of symbolization are largely manipulated by social and historical conditions there is always present the possibility of the individual being able to "take charge" of these processes. He is then able to re-interpret the symbolic meanings to which he is presently aware, or even invent new symbols.

We are not free to change our individual or collective histories. We are not free to transcend the limits imposed upon us by our bodies, the natural laws or our biological wirings. We cannot make our blue eyes brown. We cannot see infrared. We cannot fly. We cannot undo a murder, take back the harsh word, relive our lives. Yet such things are not mere facts. The human is *dasein*, a term used by Heidegger to refer to our essential human condition. Dasein is the human as a dynamic being, moving back and forth between *facts* and their *meaning*. This movement between the facts of our lives and our relatively free interpretations of meaning is experienced by no other animal.

We can effect our world through interpretation and giving meaning. These effects are based upon, and are indications of our primary, foundational influence upon the world. This influence is the projection of *meaning* upon the world. The end result of our meaning projection is not to be minimized. The effects are seen in the impact of

modern cities that alter the landscape, the mighty dams that change rivers' courses, and the pollution that endangers life itself.

All human actions, effects and movements are based upon this fundamental principle of giving meaning. The exploitation of the world's natural resources followed from an interpretation: nature *meant* "there to subdue and exploit" before we actually did so. A person first *means* "love and companionship" before marriage. A life first *means* "lousy and hopeless" before the suicidal action. We always encounter our selves, others and the world not just on its own terms, or as it appears in and of itself. We encounter a *hybrid* of the world, self, others as they are in themselves *combined with* the symbolic meanings we project onto them.

Herein lies freedom. The world, the people and things in it generally stay the same, but our meanings change. We reinterpret. We still have volcanoes and virgins, but we no longer throw the one into the other. The sun still rises, but we no longer bow down to it. The symbolic meanings we project onto these things have changed. In our own individual lives we have the freedom to reinterpret and thus change our behaviors and our lives.

And what happens when we reinterpret or project new and different symbolic meanings? There is a brief moment, a terrible opening, a void, a nothingness. Fully one half of what makes the human-world interaction vanishes: opening up onto the darkness of the mystery. A darkness of nothing and the light of anything. The complete fullness of possibility and potentiality. The constellation of symbolic meanings that we use to order the world and to organize chaos is torn. Like the Dutch boy with his finger in the dike we plug these holes of possibility with symbols, once again sealing together the human-world totality that is *dasein*. Ordering the universe. Keeping chaos at bay. Simplifying complexity.

The break in the wholeness of the human-as-field that occurs during reinterpretation affords us a terrifying glimpse of our essential primal condition. We are surrounded by this mystery. Everywhere we look it lurks. *It is the undeniable root, foundation and primal fact of our life*. It is possibility without end. It is a lack of structure and order and the freedom to structure and order on a whim. It is the threat of chaos and also the promise of ultimate meaning. It splits the unity that is *dasein*. It is the threat of non-existence and the possibility of life everlasting. After all, it's a *mystery*. *Anything* is possible. It is our processes of reinterpretation of symbolic meanings that allow us to glimpse the mystery. Concurrently it is the mystery that allows us to reinterpret.

We utilized an analogy wherein the human realm was like an island composed of symbolic meanings. The ocean represented the mystery. The ocean defines the boundaries of the island. Its action can change the shape and size of the island. It can wash away sand and its waves can deposit sand. The human world is a world of symbols. When we add to our symbolic repertoire we "expand" "into" the mystery. It is the mystery that provides the "space" needed for the reinterpretation of symbolic meanings.

It is in these processes that we discover that which is distinctive about the human: the human spirit. Development and growth in these processes is spirituality. It is in the

divine pole that we discover the human spirit: the processes of symbolization that indicate the presence of, and make us aware of this mystery. A mystery that is necessary for those processes to even occur.

SYMBOLIC BEHAVIORS

It is odd that the divine pole, so long ignored and seemingly not as "close" to us as the more physical natural pole is really so easily recognized. The mystery, and hence our spirituality, is indicated through the other three poles. If we were to take but a moment, add a dash of true openness and really look at the marvel that is our bodies or the magical wonder of the natural world we would easily get a glimpse of the mystery. If we are just a little bit honest we could admit that none of us really *know* much of anything. Our answers are but tentative symbolic interpretations. Our symbolic behaviors are varied and show themselves most clearly and definitively through our myths, our art, our science, and in religion.

In our chapter on the natural pole we spent considerable time discussing the field approach to medicine. We chose this as a main topic with the idea that it would be of most interest to people's lives as they are lived. At the same time, it would illustrate the change in perspective that comes with the field approach--especially the change in our understanding of human health. For the same reasons we shall spend considerable time discussing the understanding of religion from within the field approach. This does not mean that we shall be discussing theology, but rather "generic" religion as an attempt to understand, guide and develop spirituality. It is in religion that we discover the human attempt to come to grips with the mystery. It is in religion that the human struggles with boundary and attempts to give meaning to suffering, pain and death.

RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

While religion and spirituality are intimately connected they are *not* the same. It is quite possible, and today probable, to be religious but not spiritual, and conversely to be spiritual but not religious. The religions of the world share a common origin. They all initially developed out of the lived experience of the mystery; that is, spirituality. Religion is the outer, empirical form of an inner experience of spirituality.

The traditional religions serve as pre-scientific guides for the human spirit and the development of spirituality. This guidance is communicated in two types of tradition. Religious traditions communicate and guide through: a. interpreting the meaning of the mystery, and b: establishing behavioral guidelines (morality) based upon interpreted meaning. The meaning tradition communicates issues concerned with the mystery and its interpretation. The behavioral tradition guides practical human behavior in light of that interpretation.

A good example of the difference between the two types of tradition is shown by Christianity. Christianity is one genus of religious thought, but has many species. Both Catholic and Protestant Christianity share the same tradition of meaning. The mystery is God. The mystery revealed itself as being a loving God through the life of Jesus. The difference between Catholic and Protestant Christianity has to do with the tradition of behaviors based upon the meaning given to the mystery. Given the interpretation of the mystery, how do people *act*? How do people behave when they

interpret the mystery in such a way? The Protestants have arrived at conclusions different than the Catholics. Even within the Catholic church there is great variety in behavior. The various religious orders, from cloistered hermits living alone and in silence, to lay persons protesting in the streets, witness to the variety of behaviors derived from the same primal interpretation. The interpretation of the mystery is the same. The activities based upon that interpretation shows variety.

All religions function in the same way. They have a faith component related to a primal interpretation of the mystery as being for, against or indifferent to human health, and a component related to action in light of that interpretation.

Religions develop out of an individual's or (in Judaism) people's spiritual experience. Religion develops out of an attention to the mystery beyond our boundaries and limits as it shows itself through our subjective, social and natural experiences. Religion is the attempt at symbolically interpreting that experience of the mystery. Once developed, a religion can then serve as an *entrance* and *guide* to spirituality. Spirituality *may* be evoked, directed, understood, and developed *through* religious language, belief and behavior.

Buddhism provides an easily understandable account of religion developing out of spirituality. For Buddha, Hinduism failed to provide him with meaningful symbols and practices. Buddha's own symbolic interpretation of the mystery proved meaningful for not only himself, but for others as well. It thus became a new religion-capable of developing other's spirituality.

BUDDHA'S STORY

Guatama, who would become a buddha, was a member of the upper class in India. He experienced the encounter with boundary and limit not through personal organic illness, but through the social ills of the day. He observed people who were sick, in poverty, and dying. This encounter with human boundary effected him profoundly. In asking why we must have such cruel boundaries and limits he opened himself up to re-interpretation of the mythic symbols of his cultural and religious traditions. That is, he awakened his spiritual capacity. He encountered the mystery beyond those boundaries and limits and the necessity of reinterpretation. Guatama left his palace and undertook rather strenuous practices to find the "truth" or an "answer." He attempted to give new symbolic meanings to his experience of life and reality.

Now Guatama had, like all of us, been born into a religious tradition that provided both an interpretation of what the mystery actually was and guidelines for behavior based upon that interpretation. In his case it was Hinduism. For many years he followed the dictates of the Hindu behavioral tradition such as extreme asceticism, but it didn't work for him. He gave them up, essentially renouncing his tradition. He vowed to sit in one place until he reached "enlightenment." His encounter with the pain, suffering and injustice of his day produced a boundary experience as did his dissatisfaction with the tradition into which he was born. Every pole of his field was effected by the inexplicability of his encounter with human suffering. His Hindu tradition failed to heal him. It failed to produce a healthy re-symbolization. He vowed to "sit in one place"--to *dwell on the mystery*. Finally, he discovered his "Four Noble Truths." Through an act of spiritual inspiration and creative imagination he had

uncovered a system of symbolic meanings that were meaningful for him. His truths are 1. To exist is to suffer. 2. Desire is the cause of suffering. 4. There is a way to end suffering. 4. Get rid of desire and you destroy suffering.

Guatama, now a buddha ("enlightened one"), taught this new meaning of reality. Other people were able to respond to these symbolic meanings and became students or disciples. Buddha taught meditation as a means of understanding his four truths and as a way of practical embodiment of those truths. What evolved was a new religious tradition: Buddhism. He began with encounter with limit. He utilized his birth tradition of Hinduism. When this failed to provide the meaningful symbols for which he yearned he dwelt upon the mystery *as* mystery which he then re-interpreted. The result was the birth of a new religion. Buddhism interpreted the mystery of reality as being impersonal and indifferent to human health. Meditation, working out one's own salvation through getting rid of all desire, became the behavioral hallmarks based upon that interpretation.

GENERIC RELIGION

The human is *always* spiritual if by spirit we mean a link or connection to symbolic meaning, and the attempts to re-interpret those symbols in light of experiences of boundary or limit. The development of spirit--of spirituality--is in this sense central to distinctively human life. Traditional forms of religion have declined because of the Cartesian paradigm's inability to understand the link between symbolic processes and the awareness of the mystery. This inability is not present when we utilize the field approach.

The traditional religions are our pre-scientific attempts to interpret the mystery beyond our boundaries and develop human spirituality. Earlier in the book we indicated the three primal interpretations of this mystery. These are: mystery as being benevolent, indifferent or hostile to human life, its health and fulfillment. The traditional religions say what the mystery actually is. In the Jewish, Christian and Moslem traditions the mystery is called "God." The mystery is interpreted as personal and benevolent. It is *for* human health and happiness. In Buddhism and Taoism, for example, the mystery is seen as indifferent to human life. It is not given a personal name. It is "the Void," "the Way." It is detached from or indifferent to human concerns. Again, we are not theologians and so will not critically discuss any particular religion. However, we must acknowledge the importance and function of religion in human life. In so far as we must always interpret this mystery (at least unconsciously) we are always religious creatures. Its just that our "religions" today are usually of a secular nature. We are more concerned with wealth, power and consumerism as opposed to being concerned with the mystery.

With the advent of the scientific enlightenments the traditional religions lost much of their explanatory power. The mystery was ignored, symbols were demythologized to be replaced by abstract reason and technical production. The Cartesian approach to the human would leave no room for discussions or interpretations of the mystery or spirituality. Since the mystery is never "known," since it is not an empirical "thing" it cannot be "seen" from within the mechanistic Cartesian approach.

The traditional monotheistic religions are grounded in the concept of "revelation." The mystery "revealed itself" to people in the form of prophecy and graced wisdom. Revelation reinforced for people the experience and knowledge of what the mystery actually was. That is, since one could not empirically comprehend the mystery, (it was beyond boundaries/limits of comprehension) the mystery itself effected communication. The mystery itself told followers about itself. This, of course, cannot be proven through any experimental methods.

Only the monotheistic religions, the ones that call the mystery "God," refer to revelation. Religions such as Buddhism and Taoism, interpreting the mystery as indifferent to human life, need no such claims. Their conclusions are based upon natural reason and philosophy.

In recent times the function of religion in human life has, in many situations, been replaced by a specific ideology such as Marxism or humanism. This too is an attempt to understand issues and dynamics of symbolic meaning. Ideologies function as do traditional religions. That is, ideologies can address natural human concern with the divine pole. Marxism, with its view of evolutionary history can be said to interpret the mystery as impersonal, but benevolent. To a loyal Marxist it is inevitable that we will evolve into a "worker's paradise." *How* we get there and what it will be like--the *form* of it differs. We see this variety of Marxist traditions of behavior in the various socialist systems (i.e. Soviet vs. Chinese). *Marxism is a religion* in that it provides an interpretation of the mystery and guides behavior based upon that interpretation.

RELIGION AND SUPERSTITION

A large part of the behavioral component of religion has to do with ritual. Religions, to be sure, provide guidelines for moral or ethical behavior, but they also proscribe certain ritualistic behaviors such as going to church, praying, making offerings etc. The true intent of these rituals can easily be confused or covered up and lead to superstition. We must distinguish between healthy religion which fosters and develops spirituality, and unhealthy religion that fosters superstition. Religion is always concerned with change of both individual and society. It seeks to "save," to "awaken," to "enlighten," to "convert." Change and growth is the key to what is distinctive about the human. This distinctive change and growth occurs through symbolic meanings and is a function of the divine pole of the field. In the example of the person who "goes to church on Sunday, sins on Monday" we have an example of someone who is superstitious--who is satisfied with the *illusion of change*. Healthy religion seeks to reorient the person towards the mystery as the central, most important factor in human life. When this reorientation occurs change and growth are more easily effected.

Superstition is the illusion of change. It mimics real transcendent change, *but without the terror and insecurity of encounter with the mystery*. It is an attempt to have your cake and eat it too. It divorces the reason for the ritual, which is to foster spirituality, from the ritual behavior itself. A simple engagement in, or repetition of ritual behaviors is ineffective in developing the spirit unless you pay attention to the meanings of the ritual and apply those symbolic meanings in each pole of the field.

Remember, illness effects the whole field no matter if your disease is physical, social, psychological or spiritual. Recovery, in the form of symbolic re-interpretation must also effect every pole. To gain health benefits through developing spirituality your religious beliefs cannot be divorced from your everyday life. The meanings fostered by the ritual behaviors must be applied to each pole of the field. When our religious life is disconnected from any part or aspect of the field it degenerates into superstition.

Superstition mimics change. As children most of us played a game; "step on a crack, break your mother's back." Even as children we didn't *believe* this, but it will serve to illustrate how superstition, or pseudo-spirituality operates. Superstition connects two unrelated things. In this case, "stepping on a crack" and "breaking mother's back." Of course, even children know that this is ridiculous. If we changed this a bit and said "step on a crack, John will run home and break your mother's back" we are no longer superstitious. This *could* happen. It is no longer an example of superstition. Superstition *looks* like change, it looks like a cause and effect, it looks like connections between various poles, but in reality is not. In a similar way religion becomes superstition. Going to services or reading our particular holy scripture will not necessarily change us. It will not necessarily communicate meaningful symbols. It will not necessarily develop our spirituality. It looks like it would, but it denies basic human fact. It attempts to link the cause (religious beliefs and rituals) with the effect (human health) without the intervening necessity of re-interpretation and transcendence.

When religion functions as superstition it easily becomes an enslaving type of mind control. The mystery is terrifying. It represents a primal insecurity that we all experience. What relief to have some sort of definite answer! How easily we can exploit people when, with confidence in our voice and fire in our eye we declare that we *know* the answer! They will happily turn over their minds, their money, even their lives to us because we seem so sure what the mystery actually is. How less painful is the human condition when we can easily blame it upon our lack of "faith," the insufficiency of our "prayers," the amount of our "love offering." An answer! An understanding! Security! Salvation! A *denial* is what it is.

Superstitious religion kills the creative imagination needed for the life affirming act of creative heroism. Heroic imagination demands the act of the question. It is the question that fuels all creativity, all science, all human growth and development. It is what moves us towards health no matter if that health is physical, resulting from the physician's question, or symbolic resulting from the questioning of the artist or prophet. The imaginative question dares to see what would happen if we combined apples and oranges, or followed the logic of mathematics to quantum realities. In creative poetry the imagination questions the meanings of words and thereby stretches them through metaphor and analogy. To question is to be aware of the mystery on its own terms: *as a mystery*.

THE WISDOM OF THE ATHEIST: FROM SUPERSTITION TO SPIRITUALITY

In the area of religious thought the most dangerous question is that of the atheist, but in the field approach a question is always to be welcomed. A question will always free, will always induce growth. Any structure of symbolic meanings that can not

withstand the assault of the question is not worth our allegiance. Such a structure can only be aiding our denial. The French thinker Paul Ricoeur has applied the power of the atheist's question in his paper *Religion, Atheism, and Faith*. He writes: "[A]theism is not limited in meaning to the mere negation and destruction of religion but that, rather, it opens up the horizon for something else..." That "something else" is healthy religion and spirituality. Ricoeur recognizes that while to question may mean to destroy it also, at the same time, necessarily means to build.

It may seem odd to use the question of atheism as a route to healthy religion or spirituality. While atheism is destructive it is also liberating. Atheism and its questioning destroys symbols that are neurotic and illusory, making way for a more authentic spirituality. The atheistic question cuts through the wishful thinking of the egocentric and pseudo-religion thus allowing for a healthy transcendence. In this sense it enables the mystery to be appropriated as essentially beyond, non-empirical or unknowable. It allows the mystery to be what it is: a mystery. The use of atheism stresses the fallacy of mistaking the symbol--the *interpretation* of the beyond--as being a literal or true representation of that beyond.

Ricoeur identifies two main aspects of primitive, undeveloped, unquestioned religion: 1) the fear of punishment and 2) the desire for protection. Religion has been, and is too often a realm of the *accusation* and the *condemnation*. For Ricoeur these are the "corrupt parts of religion." It develops out of the basic fear and desire of the human: fear of punishment, and desire for protection and salvation. It is an infantile and suspicious response to the cruel injustices of life.

The mystery of evil and injustice may be one of our greatest experiences of limit besides that of death. Primitive, unhealthy religion posits something that will "come down" and justly punish the wicked and reward the good. But what is good? What is evil? Two thousand five hundred years ago Socrates was executed because he wouldn't accept maudlin answers to these basic questions. We *still* can't define "the good" in such a way that we will always *know* what is good and what is bad. We have had to construct a (symbolic) metaphysical view of reality wherein good and evil are seen as something outside of the human. Good and evil come down to us from a non-human realm. Reality is symbolized as hierarchical, *not* holistic. These symbolic interpretations of the mystery lead to a belief of the "god of prohibition" rather than a God of life and freedom. Our legalistic views of good and evil are largely cultural constructs that develop out of the basic vulnerability of the human. Ricoeur writes:

"Prohibition and condemnation come down to man from this realm of the outside and up-above. But this `realm' is, after all, `nothing'. The God of prohibition is this ideal realm which does not exist and which is yet the source of all prohibitions. This non-existent realm is what traditional metaphysics had described as the intelligible, the absolute good, as the transcendent and invisible source of all values..."

This "realm" Ricoeur speaks of is none other than that mystery that always lies beyond our boundaries. In the face of the unjust cruelty of painful terminal illness it is tempting to *justify* the illness, even as a punishment. The "god of morality" provides easy, conventional meanings that explain human boundary. An imaginative metaphysics is created wherein the mystery is "explained" in a compensatory fashion. Unfortunately, this occurs at the expense of that which is distinctively human: the

spiritual. The spiritual experience of the mystery is beyond imaginary, ego-compensatory explanations.

It is often neurotic escape which leads to the referral to a "god" above or beyond us for value; good, evil, right or wrong. Does this mean that there is no moral guide or value? From within the Cartesian approach it does mean this. Contemporary society is already witness to the breakdown and "relativizing" of morality and ethics. Ricoeur believes that there *is* moral value, but it cannot originate from some metaphysic construct "above" us. It cannot originate from a belief in the "god of prohibition." It cannot refer to a religion that is based upon accusation and condemnation.

It is Ricoeur's opinion, with which we agree, that a mature religion must do away with the "god of morality" (that is, a belief in a god that is motivated by punishment and reward) so that we can enter into a living faith. In our conception it is a move from religion as ego-imaginary (superstitious, fundamentalistic, neurotic) to spirituality (flexible, creative, imaginative symbolizing). It is a move away from a fragmented, Cartesian-style understanding of the human to the holism of the field approach.

It is the power of the questions raised by the atheist that enable us to break through our socially and historically received symbolic understandings of the divine pole. We could say that Buddha had to make a similar move. He rejected Hinduism--questioned as does an atheist--in order to free himself to realize his Four Noble Truths.

Healthy religion and spirituality, cannot begin with, or remain with a god of prohibition and condemnation. This is though, what is often reinforced in the external forms of religion where neurotic compensation occurs. One must be "good" to go to heaven. Those who are "bad" will be punished in hell (or catch a disease). God is a god of retribution, judgement, strict law: *a neurotic, hostile interpretation of the mystery*. According to Ricoeur, when Nietzsche proclaimed "God is dead" it was *this* god (the Grand Inquisitor) who had died. What has killed this "god of prohibition" is nothing other than the recognition of the "specific nothingness" of the mystery the mystery. *The wisdom of the atheist crushes our egoic fantasies, not through denial of the mystery beyond our limits, but through denial of our imaginings about the mystery.*

With this death of god comes the symbolic freedom of the mystery which is distinctively human. Human change, growth, development does not come from the commands or imperatives of religion. It is too easy (and indeed is seen everyday) to be in self-righteous servitude to some sort of "divine law" but still remain cruel and lacking in compassion and love. Ricoeur recognizes the power of symbol.

"We are changed, not because a will is imposed on our own will; we are changed by the 'listening that understands'. Word reaches us *on the level of the symbolic structures of our existence.*"(emphasis ours)

If our religion is only for comfort and assurance in the face of fear and desire, if it is only the fear of punishment and the desire for reward it is not true human spirituality. Ricoeur speaks of the "night of the soul," that time wherein we "kill" ego imaginations and substitute real symbols of the mystery. We drift in the mystery with no anchor, no security. We must face, head on, the "dangers of a life worthy of being

called human." That is, the dangers of encounter with the mystery. Anything less is less than human.

Atheism kills the imaginary god, but it is through atheism that the real God is raised. It is only when we kill illusory symbols that have in the past fostered and encouraged denial and deficit compensation that we are freed to live in the future. This is the heart of healthy religion.

IS RELIGION ALWAYS NEUROTIC?

Religion is not necessarily Nietzsche's deficit compensation, Freud's fantasy fulfillment or Marx's opium of the masses. It may very easily become any one of these. For instance, a person may, in reality, feel out of control and powerless in their life. They may compensate for this real deficit through a religion that permits them imaginary compensation through self-righteousness or being "one of the elect." When religion bolsters neurotic fantasies and offers imaginary solutions for escaping the burden of human responsibility it functions neurotically. In this sense religion is an illusion and an opiate. It serves as a type of wish fulfillment where the seriousness of the human condition is devalued, unrecognized or ignored. It ends up aiding the denial of death.

Religious rituals then become an end in themselves. Goodness is equated with identification in a religious denomination. The importance of an authentic openness to transcendent symbolic meanings is minimized or ignored. Spirituality and personal mystical experience is not encouraged. Rituals are *symbolic* behaviors. If there is a closure to transcendence then the inner meaning of the ritual will be missed. Religious beliefs and rituals point toward the beyond of the mystery and are able to foster healthy spirituality. However, there must be an essential openness to transcendence and spiritual experience on the part of the individual. This is missing in the neurotic.

There is no doubt that religion can be a dangerous impediment to health. In a remarkable survey of literature on the topic of religion and health Bernard Spilka et al writes:

"Identification with 'higher powers' aids rejection of reality and potential helpers may be regarded as 'lesser beings.' Southard (1956) illustrates these possibilities in his examples of persons 'possessed by the Holy Ghost,' or, who receive 'messages from God.' In another case, the singing of religious hymns appears to have helped a patient keep out of contact with reality.

"Some religious activities may become substitutes for dealing with life."

Spilka goes on to note that religion cannot be *blamed* for various manifestations of ill health. Rather, it provides a convenient vehicle for the *expression* of any underlying disorders. Religion *will* tend to act as this vehicle from within the Cartesian approach but not within the field approach. Because human health, when viewed from within the field paradigm, cannot be reduced to any one pole there is an almost "in built" check and balance that demands the individual to be integrative. As mentioned earlier, the dynamics of a balanced field tend towards connection, movement and integration of all four poles. That is, the entire field must always be taken into account. No one

pole maintains any kind of priority or superiority. Unhealthy religion tends to occur in the person lacking in metaxis, the person who reduces all of life to the divine pole. Spilka indicates this lack of metaxis in a passage that will undoubtedly sound quite familiar to you:

"Religious institutions and their adherents benefit from what Pruyser (1977) terms 'sacrifice of intellect.' The *simplification of complex issues* and the sponsorship of polarized thinking into an either-or framework permits the psychological mechanism of *denial* to operate more easily. Awareness of reality is reduced..."

How then are we to distinguish a religion, or a religious practice that is healthy and encouraging of metaxis from one that is neurotic? Spilka continuously returns to a distinction that provides for us a guideline. If religion succumbs to compartmentalization or disconnection from the field it is probably neurotic. The new age approaches in holistic medicine discussed earlier are examples of this phenomenon. In such approaches the divine pole is elevated above, and disconnected from the other poles. Consequently, many new age (and born again) "religious" solutions are neurotic because they devalue and minimize the influences from other dimensions such as natural medicine or social science.

Gordon Allport posited two types of religiosity: extrinsic-consensual and intrinsic-committed. Spilka writes:

"Extrinsically motivated people seem activated by what they can get out of religion, while intrinsically motivated individuals are concerned about religion for religion's sake. In other words, extrinsics are utilitarian, asking the question, 'What's in it for me?' Intrinsic are searching for truth and living the tenets of their faith.

"(the intrinsic type) represents the spiritual orientation that theologians, clergy, and religious educators have valued for centuries. In contrast, the expedient, utilitarian approach...runs counter to religious ideals. Research has further shown that a pattern of desirable personal and social characteristics are the lot of those who tend to be intrinsic...The individual attributes of extrinsic...perspectives, however, leave much to be desired."

It is clear from research studies that extrinsic religion is highly correlated with poor emotional/mental health, prejudice, low self-esteem, guilt, fear, and lack of social/humanitarian sensitivity. Extrinsic approaches tend to interpret the mystery as a God who is negative and hostile. Their understanding is of a God that is cruel, punishing and vindictive. They tend to be legalistic in their outlook: the worship of the "god of prohibition." The extrinsic approach to religion is inclined to interpret illness as "punishment." The extrinsic religious regularly attends formal religious services and rituals, but mistakes the means (ritual) with the end (awareness of mystery/symbolic freedom). Such a person does not question. Their lives are based upon social convention, unthinking deference to authority and slavish, though unreflective, engagement with ritual.

In such a case religion fails to function in the divine pole and becomes reduced to the social pole. This is a common pattern of external religiosity. It has been referred to pejoratively with the cliché of the religious hypocrite: church on Sunday, sin on

Monday. Religious beliefs, in this sense, are prone to function along neurotic levels such as Marx's opium of the masses. They function not as encouragement to transcendent spirituality but as "security blankets" to compensate for neurotic deficits. In this sense they also block out and prevent the legitimate acceptance of limit. They encourage the denial of our mortality.

The intrinsic religious style is based more upon the person's encounter with mystery--the divine pole--rather than upon social convention. It tends to be mystic, and may even reject dogma and affiliation with a traditional religious institution. The intrinsic religious may devise their own symbolic rituals such as walks in nature or perhaps having a special meditation room in their home. (But of course, if a member of a traditional religion they *live* its tenets. They don't just go through the motions for personal gain or reward) They are behaviorally guided not so much by external "laws" or legalisms, but by inner direction, feelings, and intuitions. Spilka reports that the intrinsic religious tends to be psychologically healthier than the extrinsic religious.

One look at the history of religions provides us with an idea of the fruits of these two types of religious styles. Contrast missionaries who destroyed native peoples' cultures with people who quietly set up soup kitchens or hospitals. Contrast a Mother Theresa with an Ayatollah Khomeini. Even contrast the "Christian" Ku Klux Klan with a "humanist" shelter for battered women. Contrast the traditional Jewish tendency to work for social justice and the oppressed with Meir Kahane's Jewish Defense League. It is in this we discover health and disease in the divine pole. The extrinsic religious has little compassion. If you do not believe in their scripture their deity will condemn you. Most of these types are not truly concerned with this life, but with the afterlife.

The dichotomy between extrinsic and intrinsic religion can be further explicated through two other dichotomies. These are the difference between dogma and mysticism, and the difference between fundamentalism and gnosticism.

DOGMA AND MYSTICISM

We have divided generic religion into two parts: "religion" which is the outer, empirical belief systems and rituals that are an expression and means of development of "spirituality." Healthy religion develops spirituality. Spirituality is our skills and ease in the necessity of re-interpretation of symbolic meanings in light of the mystery of life and reality. We have also noted that religion and spirituality can exist independently. Indeed, they often contradict and threaten each other. Religion, in this sense, gives rise to *dogma*. Spirituality gives rise to *mysticism*.

Dogma and mysticism are two sides of healthy religion. Dogma represents the outer, belief and ritual laden "religion" while mysticism represents the inner, experiential "spirituality." Both are necessary, but are usually seen as threats to each other. If taken to extremes they are.

Dogma is probably the most familiar aspect of religion to contemporary people while mysticism most likely conjures up strange associations of goofy people floating off into the cosmos. It is a shame that the words "mystic" and "mysticism" have become so polluted. We have lost how these words, and the states to which they refer, relate to real life as it is lived everyday. Every religion has its mystic traditions. The mystics

are those that seek a direct love relation/union with deity, or direct experience of the mystery. This usually occurs through what is known as contemplation. Perhaps this is best illustrated through a religious tradition with which most of us are unfamiliar: Islam.

Islam, like Judaism and Christianity, is based upon a book believed to be a revelation from God (the mystery interpreted as personal and benevolent) called the Qur'an. The Qur'an's demands upon people are really quite simple: pray five times a day, fast during certain months, make a pilgrimage to Mecca if possible and so on. Legal adherence to what is known as the Five Pillars of Islam is all that is needed to ensure reward after death. This is the dogma of Islam or the extrinsic part of this religious tradition which is sufficient for most Moslems. However, Islam has another school of thought called "Sufism." The Sufis are the mystics of the Islamic tradition.

"Sufism, by its very nature, is esoteric; formalistic and literalistic Islam is exoteric. The great mass of Muslims, then as now, followed the exoteric facet of the Islamic Message and had salvation as their goal, implying the posthumous entry into Paradise. Only a minority of the faithful were in one or another of the Sufi orders...they also observed the discipline of the Path, which has as its goal the salvific love and knowledge of God."

Mysticism looks for union with God now, not just as a reward in the afterlife. In Christianity such people are the monks and saints. These are people who allow and encourage their awareness to dwell upon the mystery itself with as few intervening symbolic meanings as possible. This is intrinsic or esoteric religion. The exoteric or extrinsic Moslem is only concerned with following the ritual law so that he will be rewarded after death. The Sufi follows the law it is true, but is concerned with *life, now*.

Part of the difficulty in fostering healthy religious symbolic meanings lies in the difference between religious dogma and religious experience or mysticism. A person's adherence to a dogma is relatively easily communicated. Specific beliefs, ritual behaviors, etc. indicate dogmatic belief. Mysticism is first and foremost an *experience* of the mystery. As such we have to distinguish between the experience of mysticism and the *report* of that experience. We have said that religions are pre-scientific ways of interpreting, dwelling within, understanding the mystery we encounter during periods of boundary or limit. The traditional religions are built upon *reports* of mystic *experience*.

We have also said that due to the influence of the scientific enlightenments much of the skills and abilities pertaining to the functions of the divine pole have been lost. Experience is now valued primarily in terms of its empirical qualities. The mystery however is non-empirical (this is why mystics always say that their experiences are ineffable--cannot really be talked about). This empirical bias influences the religious institutions and sensibilities prevalent in society. The result is an over-emphasis and over-training in dogma, but not in mysticism.

Dogma should encourage and give rise to an active spirituality; that is, mysticism. But mysticism always goes beyond dogma and so poses a threat to dogma. Mysticism is the skill of spirituality and transcendence. Of being open to that mystery beyond our

limits, and so open to new symbolic meanings. Often these new symbolic meanings are contrary to the dogmatic meanings that have been institutionalized. Dogma at the same time threatens the mystic experience. Dogma is a collection of set, firm, symbolic meanings and interpretations; "sacred cows," if you will. It is not properly understood as *truth*, but as particular *interpretations* of a certain view of the mystery. When it is taken as truth, not to be questioned, it closes the door for the mystic-spiritual experience. This experience *is* a type of questioning. It is a questioning of human boundary and limit. It is a questioning of what lies beyond that boundary. The mystic-spiritual question is asked in every illness, and especially by the terminally ill. It is the question raised when we cease our denial of death.

We have said that in some way we are all and always religious by virtue of being human and thus potentially aware of the mystery. Given this we can say that many of us do have mystic experiences, but simply have difficulty in the *report* of the experience. Spilka, discussing Abraham Maslow writes:

"Maslow suggested that many persons have religious and mystical experiences but fail to understand them precisely because they lack a meaningfully felt religious system within which to acknowledge these experiences. [P]ersons may fail to admit these events because of their unease with the religious language that most typically has been the legitimating language for such experiences."

Dogma can be used as both an entrance into mystic experience and as a means to report the experience. It is a language and perspective used to understand and appropriate spiritual experiences. Dogma is important, and is useful vis a vis its relation to mystic experience, but taken by itself dogma leads to extrinsic religion and can kill spirituality.

Dogma and mysticism can both be taken to extremes. One without the other loses the necessary checks and balances the other provides. We then degenerate into either fundamentalism or gnosticism.

FUNDAMENTALISM AND GNOSTICISM

When religion is reduced to dogma it becomes a form of fundamentalism. When religion is reduced to mysticism it becomes gnosticism. Both extremes can be dangerous for the person searching for metaxis. Both are prevalent in our mechanistic era.

Fundamentalism is a type of symbolic response that is becoming more and more prevalent politically, religiously and artistically throughout the world. It is the tendency to understand interpretations of the mystery as being Cartesian-style empirical fact. It is the attempt to reduce the insecurity and terror inherent in the encounter of that mystery by *de-mystifying* the mystery. It pretends to know, in an empirical way, *what the mystery is*. It closes the person off from true human spirituality. As such, it can work against recovery from illness. The fundamentalist displays much of the behavior of a person in denial of their addiction. Indeed, fundamentalism can be seen as a type of addiction; an addiction to meanings. Such a person knows they are ill, but deny it. The fear is too great. The fundamentalist knows at some level that his/her belief is just that: faith and belief, not empirical Cartesian

knowledge. In a culture so influenced by the Cartesian approach the fundamentalization of symbolic processes is inevitable. Fundamentalists have not been trained in the mystic aspect of their religious tradition. Hence, they never learn to accept and deal with the fear that we experience in boundary moments.

The fundamentalist is in a curious position. They are often "supernaturally" inclined. They give a type of lip service to the mystery beyond their limits, but they are hindered in their slavish belief in dogma. Rather than engage in a truly mystic (i.e. "mystery centered") experience they confuse subjective altered states of consciousness with the divine pole. For instance, many fundamentalist Christians place great emphasis upon "speaking in tongues" or *glossolalia*. Glossolalia is found in all cultures and all religious traditions. It can even be self induced by non-religious people. It is a natural experience, an altered state of course, but quite normal as far as altered states go.

The fundamentalist insists this is from God. Now notice what they do. They go through the motions of "soul making" by interpreting the "speaking in tongues" as being in some way related to the divine pole. However there is *no* creative symbolization occurring. All ultimate symbolic meanings are in the Bible as *facts*. They simply borrow an already present, accepted meaning. Their field configuration does not change. There is no transcendence, no spirituality. Since they are slavish towards the dogma they can never go beyond or transcend the dogma. And transcendence is what the human is all about.

Many people today react against fundamentalism, and the general closure to spirituality fostered by the Cartesian approach, through an over emphasis on mysticism. Extreme mysticism is called *gnosticism*. A gnostic can be called a "holy floater." The Catholic saint, Saint Teresa, referred to these types as spiritual boobs! Many of today's "new age" spiritualists would qualify for Theresa's scorn.

Religious gnosticism tends to ignore, or feel they have totally transcended dogma and limit. They throw out all past, traditional interpretations. They behave in a way similar to those who reduce the whole human to the mental. They become idealistic in the negative sense of the word. We are always a product of our history and traditions. Our degree of freedom in overcoming these received views and meanings is limited. Just as the fundamentalist is in denial when faced with primal insecurity, so too the gnostic is in denial when faced with the fact of limit. One is terrified of the mystery beyond our boundaries, the other is resentful of the fact of boundary. The gnostic tends to disconnect from the natural and social poles. He/she "floats" in the divine pole and, like the fundamentalist, becomes fascinated with their own subjective experiences of non-ordinary states of consciousness.

In times of social change and upheaval gnosticism offers a tempting alternative to the confusion engendered during such times. It allows a type of symbolic escape from social, political, economic or personal uncertainty. Gnosticism is a recurrent social phenomenon. The contemporary new age movement is largely gnostic. It provides certain, escapist beliefs during a time when much is uncertain. The threat of nuclear annihilation, the de-mythologizing of the traditional religions and America's slow decline as a world power often confuse and distress the individual. The new age philosophies serve to comfort the individual and provide a meaningful framework in

which the individual can integrate these threatening changes. However, much of the new age is magical, escapist wishful thinking; not too different than fundamentalist thinking.

Neither the fundamentalist nor the gnostic achieve metaxic balance of their field. Both cut off symbolic awareness of certain poles, both dwell or center in only specific poles. Just as in health services where the Cartesian approach encourages separation and isolation (physical from mental; material from idealist) so too in our religious traditions that were meant to guide our symbolic lives. We separate the lived experience of mystery from the interpretations of that experience handed down through history. The contemporary person is seduced into fundamentalist or gnostic reductionism. Either way it is a denial of the whole person.

From within the field approach it appears wise to emphasize religious mystic traditions rather than dogmatic tradition; especially since we have ignored our mystic traditions for so long. Religious mystic traditions are directly related to awareness of the mystery and the flexible symbol making that awareness entails. Mysticism can often develop out of dogma, but it also transcends dogma. There is evidence that the mystic is the mature religious person, and that the mystically inclined will be possessed of greater health.

SPIRITUALITY AND RECOVERY

A superstitious religion may hinder recovery from illness. A superstitious religion may even help *cause* illness. This is powerfully displayed in the recent tragedy of the AIDS epidemic. AIDS provides us with a health issue that effects each pole of the field. Organically, it is in many ways a death sentence. Socially, it has predominately struck a group of people who are often the target of hate, and are somewhat outside of the social mainstream. Subjectively, it has given rise to unreasoning fears of contagion. Spiritually, it is being called by some a "curse from God."

For the AIDS victim the experience of illness is heightened and intensified in ways not experienced by our earlier example of the mastectomy patient. First, they have a terminal disease. This is a fact. They will experience the need for transcendence shared by all terminal patients. Secondly, most victims to date have been male homosexuals. The discrimination and hate to which, even when healthy, they have been exposed is in itself already a type of generic disease. This social hate-disease has already demanded that they be adept at re-symbolization. Thirdly, their own subjective sense of self has been effected by the usual social hate, acceptance of their own homosexuality, and now irrational fears of their infectiousness. Fourthly, they combat not just the disease, but the fear that their disease is a punishment for being who they are. For the AIDS victim the illness experience truly overwhelms the entire field in a way unlike any other disease.

Religion, which *should* foster the spirituality needed by the AIDS victim, tends now to exacerbate the illness experience. When the victim hears "curse from God," "punishment for sin" they are encouraged to interpret the mystery as hostile. The mystery is interpreted as the cruel and vindictive god of prohibition and condemnation. They have already experienced great pain in trying to accept who they are and in trying to deal with other's hate (and even their own self-hate). The field has

usually been hostile. Their homosexuality has been a constant boundary. A boundary they have had to transcend physically, socially, and personally. Many homosexuals feel that "God made me this way." Now they are told they are being punished for being what God made them. Truly a rather hostile, mean-spirited God! If they incorporate this meaning the road to recovery from the illness experience may be permanently blocked. If they cannot trust the mystery as *for* them they will not be able to transcend "into" the mystery. Religion functions as superstition and actually helps cause the illness and hinders recovery.

It is illuminating to use Christianity as an example of the relation between religion and illness. Christianity has traditionally condemned homosexual behavior (and sexuality in general). It has also propounded (though not as loudly) a radical morality of service, non-judgmentalism, compassion and "turning the other cheek." The AIDS crises has displayed these two sides of the Christian tradition: the call for condemnation and the call for compassion.

The Christian who reacts to the AIDS victim with anger, fear and rejection because the victim has "sinned" acts out of superstition. This Christian "knows" what God wants because it's "in the Bible." Notice what this says from a field approach. It says that the person *knows* what the mystery is and what it wants. He has *demystified* the mystery. He has made it into a "thing." In effect there is no "mystery" beyond our limits. *Such a person is in denial of that which is distinctively human.* The mystery is *always* a mystery. It is never "known." To say "God," "Void," "Krsna" is to cite a *belief* or a *faith*. It is *not* Cartesian, empirical, factual knowledge *and never will or can be such knowledge*. When we confuse faith and symbolic interpretations of the mystery with empirical fact and Cartesian-style knowledge our religion degenerates into superstition. What we *do* know is human pain, vulnerability, fear, and the need for compassion. If what we *do* know is secondary to what we believe or have faith in we have destroyed healthy religion. *We help cause illness rather than aid recovery.*

Let us suppose that our AIDS patient has exhausted all treatment possibilities and is now approaching the end. A hospital chaplain comes to visit. What will be the effect if the chaplain is fundamentalist? He may communicate to the dying patient--a person in pain, afraid; a person who honestly tried his best in life--that he is being punished, that if he doesn't condemn what he is he will burn in hell. The chaplain closes the patient off to anything that could make the patient's experience meaningful; that could still, in the face of death, connect the patient with life. The gnostically inclined chaplain will do no better. The patient is given metaphors becoming increasingly common today. "Disease producing lifestyle." "You aren't thinking *positively*." "Death is just a beginning." or even "I just spoke with my spirit guide through a channeler. Here, take this crystal."

Neither the fundamentalist nor the gnostic address the whole person. The fundamentalist denies any good, discourages the hope that is always available--even to the terminal. The gnostic fails to address the patient's fears and guilts. The gnostic chaplain *exploited* the patient's propensity for hope. Neither chaplain addressed the very real, human issues of boundary and the mystery that lies beyond. Both could see only from their reductive Cartesian "map."

Hospital chaplains or religious professionals, like bio-medical physicians, must resist the seduction into one or the other regional "map" of the human. They must resist mistaking their own tradition as something more than an interpretation of what is non-empirical: the mystery. At the same time they must resist the temptation to "float" in the mystery thereby losing touch with concrete human reality. Neither approach benefits the patient. Especially today, they must recognize the difference between psychology and spirituality.

We have said that, from within the field approach, religious traditions are understandable as pre-scientific interpretations of the mystery encountered during experiences of boundary or limit. As such they provide a degree of wisdom and insight necessary for healthy spirituality. A healthy spirituality is demanded in times of illness. Religious professionals, in many ways, face the same Cartesian-induced difficulties experienced by biomedical physicians. They may be tempted to reduce understanding of human symbolic processes to either dogma or mysticism. Taken to extremes dogma and mysticism become fundamentalism and gnosticism.

For the terminal or addicted patient this change from religion to spirituality takes on an urgency not usually experienced. They must liberate themselves from illusory and ego compensatory imaginations. They must free themselves from literal or gnostic misinterpretations of the mystery. The journey of mature spiritual acceptance is the path from which one accepts and abandons to a tragic, poignant faith. This is a true human spirituality. They must cast themselves--*abandon* themselves--to the "nothingness" of that mystery beyond their limits.

POSITIVE ABANDONMENT: OUR RELATION TO THE MYSTERY

Religion has often today become a source of fear and alienation. This is precisely what it is *not* supposed to do. A religion that promotes fear of the mystery through constant threats of punishment is not a healthy, life-affirming religion. A religion that claims it has the "truth" while other traditions do not is not a healthy, life-affirming religion. A religion that is legalistic and externally oriented, or that cannot stand up under detailed scrutiny and questioning by its members does not promote health. In short, if religion or ideology encourages fear of the mystery (that is, a hostile interpretation) it is not healthy, life-affirming, or capable of aiding recovery from illness or addiction, and does not aid us in our response to boundary and limit.

When we discussed the primal options for interpretation of the mystery we said that a benevolent interpretation is conducive to health. Such an interpretation helps mitigate the fear and insecurity elicited in any experience of boundary or limit. If the mystery beyond that boundary is "for us," is "on our side" we are enabled to move "into" that mystery in order to flexibly re-interpret symbolic meanings. This benevolent interpretation implies a certain experience of trusting *abandonment* to the mystery.

Most of us are aware of the importance of a basic ability of the individual to trust. This ability is often traced back to the initial interaction of the newborn with the mother. If the newborn is fed, cared for, touched, basic trust will develop. As the person matures it is this basic trust that allows them to grow in life. It allows the person to try new activities, to overcome failures, to initiate and maintain intimate relationships. This basic trust carries over into every pole of the field, including the

divine pole. For the maturing person-as-spiritual this basic trust is applied to the mystery. It inclines the person towards a primal interpretation of the mystery as benevolent.

For the religious it can lead to a living dynamic faith in God. For the humanist it can lead to a strong unwavering conviction of the goodness and desirability of life *for its own sake*, regardless of difficulties and disappointments. For the artist it leads to confidence in their unique vision and the determination to manifest that vision in their art. It spurs the scientist to creative theorizing and research development for the sake of knowledge rather than monetary reward.

All religions talk about doing God's will, or following "the Way." What can this possibly mean? From within the field approach it means developing and maintaining a benevolent interpretation of the mystery: that the universe, the mystery of life, reality and existence is *for* our health and fulfillment. Certainly this interpretation is difficult to maintain. Sometimes it seems as if this mystery is against us; when the hurricane destroys our home, when the business into which we have poured our blood and savings fails, when our child dies. All such occurrences incline us towards an interpretation that the mystery is hostile, or at best indifferent to our health and fulfillment. Hence the emphasis upon the maintenance of faith in so many religions.

We would say that a positive abandonment is simply a necessity of human life. There is no escaping it. We don't *know* which interpretation of the mystery is accurate--benevolent, hostile or indifferent--or indeed if any of them are accurate. Looking at the world though, we are inclined to opt for benevolence. After all, discounting the human influence, the world *is* amazingly beautiful. All life *does* fit together and there are resources to support all life. We *do* have all we need for survival and happiness. Perhaps it is our own desires that are warped: the possibility that we don't really know what makes the human fulfilled.

There is a fine book from the Christian tradition that describes abandonment. Of course, it presupposes a Christian interpretation of "God" as the primal reality that always appears to us as a mystery. However, it contains considerable wisdom which transcends specific denominations or interpretations. As such it is quite enlightening for all of us whether Christian, Jew, atheist, agnostic, Buddhist etc.

On trusting and abandoning to the mystery...

"You will then have some inner prompting which makes you say: 'I feel drawn toward this person or this book; I would like to give another person some advice or ask for some myself; I wish to complain about something, to open my heart to someone and in turn receive confidence, to give something away or to perform a certain action.' We should at once obey these promptings of grace without relying on our reason or considering the matter at all. We must give ourselves to whatever God wishes..."

If we have abandoned ourselves, there is only one rule for us: the duty of the present moment.

When God becomes our guide he insists that we trust him without reservations and put aside all nervousness about his guidance. We are sent along the path he has chosen for us, but we cannot see it, and nothing we have read is any help to us.

When we are led by this action, we have no idea where we are going, for the paths we tread cannot be discovered from books or by any of our thoughts.

We feel that this passage gives a good idea of what abandonment to the mystery entails. It means living life in the present moment or living "one day at a time." Another example of abandonment is provided by Paul Ricoeur and his understanding of the biblical story of Job. Job is an Old Testament story of a righteous, good man beset by all sorts of misfortune and tragedy. It is an early attempt to address the issue of "why bad things happen to good people."

The "tragic faith of Job" is, for Ricoeur, the hallmark of the mature religious person. It is a faith that goes beyond mere comfort and assurance. It is the faith of abandonment to the mystery. Job's friends believed in the god of prohibition, the god of retribution. Job did not. He dwelt in the mystery. Job is never given a reason for his suffering other than it is clearly *not* an act of retribution. The mystery, speaking to Job from a whirlwind and interpreted as "Yahweh" points to itself as being beyond human understanding: "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?" it asks. It does not justify Job's friends who insisted he must have sinned to be so grievously afflicted. It does not offer consolation through a *reason*, but through an invitation to abandonment. Job interprets the mystery as being benevolent, but what does this mean? It means that Job cannot use his symbolic understanding of the mystery as "Yahweh" as a form of neurotic compensation. Even if Yahweh *was* punishing Job for sin, or was even acting capriciously it would at least be *some* sort of compensation for his suffering. But Yahweh says that Job's misfortunes are not a punishment. Yahweh's reasons are simply unfathomable. Job must dwell within what mystics have termed the "dark night of the soul." It is by going through the insecurity, the terror, the not knowing that true consolation and recovery come within reach.

Our ego is prone to accept imaginary compensations for the real pain in our lives. It tends to accept the illusion of a simple answer to life's mystery. An excessive ego orientation leads inevitably to pseudo-spirituality. Neurotic responses to pain and suffering from the egoic realm are marked by denial, escape, superstition, fundamentalism, and extrinsic religion. This approach fails to confront the full reality of human limit and its concomitant terror and insecurity. The ego is bolstered by comfortable conventions, such as sin and punishment, which buffer the person from appropriating the full meaning of suffering. There is no creative response, no genuine transcendence, no personal experience of mystery.

Mature responses to grave and constant limits and the difficulty of life are characterized by acceptance, positive abandonment, and creative symbolization. The processes of the human-as-field are concerned with real deficits, accepting limits and embarking on a spiritual journey. This journey is guided by abandonment to the mystery and a flexible symbolic imagination.

CONCLUSION ON RELIGION

The experience of ultimate boundary and the concurrent encounter with mystery is a terrifying experience. It represents a primal insecurity. Disease and illness are prototypes of ultimate boundary or limit experiences. When disease is terminal the individual comes up against the ultimate boundary of death. This is understandably terrifying, at least on a primal level.

Religious beliefs address the angst and fear associated with the experience of limits. Religious beliefs incline and encourage us away from resignation, hopelessness or stagnation. Religious belief offers a path of adaptation to limit, away from hostile or negative interpretations of the mystery. A hostile interpretation results in a closure to the very ground of spiritual being. Negativity and closure leads to increased vulnerability. An interpretation of the mystery as hostile is the interpretation of despair, hopelessness and suicide.

To be born into a tradition that imparts a benevolent, or at least indifferent interpretation of this mystery is beneficial to health. The basic religious belief lightens the threat posed by the demand for re-symbolization. They serve as guideposts in the journey of transcendence. Religious behaviors and rituals reinforce the primal belief-interpretation. However, if the person is cut off from the divine pole of the field they may not be able to respond to the spiritual intent of the religious beliefs and rituals.

SOUL MAKING, TRADITION AND RECOVERY

Symbolism and spirituality are of central importance to human life, health, and fulfillment. In some very real ways it is the death of symbolic meaning that is the death of the person. In many ways the terminal patient who "makes their soul" through meaningful mythic-symbols; who experiences terminal disease but adapts to the experience of illness *is the person most full of life*. That is, full of *human* life.

When we are born we are already present to a "world" of symbolic meanings. These are communicated to us through culture and our parents. These meanings are "given," they are already there, they automatically orient our lives as do bio-genetic instincts in pre-human life. Symbolic meanings are not "abstract" if by that word we mean detached from practical lived life. Symbolic meanings strongly effect and direct our behaviors. They act as do instincts. Recently, there has been an incident over a student's art exhibit at the Art Institute of Chicago. As part of the exhibit an American flag was placed in such a way that people would step upon it. This elicited anger and protests from members of the population. The flag in and of itself is only a piece of cloth, but it has *symbolic* meaning. That meaning has great power over people. Indeed, there are laws regulating how to treat that symbolic piece of cloth. Stepping upon it is a felony! As individuals we live and act out of a "world" or "realm" of symbols. In a sense we "have" this world of symbols. It has been given to us since the moment of our birth. We carry it with us. It directs our behaviors. In many ways it provides our identity as part of an ethnic group, nation, culture, and as uniquely individual. It is this world of symbols that is the human soul.

Human health is much more than physical and psychological functioning. It must also entail skills at soul making; at being able with some degree of ease to re-interpret. Soul making is the creative process of giving transcendent meaning to our lives. This involves the ability to connect to and integrate viable beliefs. It is contingent upon us,

in order to both maintain and recover health, to make our souls. It is our small degree of freedom. Without the development and growth of this freedom we are manipulated by symbols we have not chosen and that hinder us from feeling and acting in healthy ways. A person suffering from organic depression, cancer, or mastectomy is not free to alter that fact. However, they are free in what that fact *means* to them.

We said earlier that mythic symbols come to us by way of tradition. We briefly mentioned two main types of traditions: behavioral traditions and meaning traditions. A meaning tradition concerns ultimate meanings and symbols while the behavioral tradition communicates the practical embodiment of those ultimate symbolic meanings. For instance, religions and ideologies provide us with explicit ultimate meanings that are carried down through history as a meaning tradition. These ultimate meanings are interpretations of what the mystery beyond our limits may actually be. Our primal interpretation of the mystery as being benevolent, indifferent or hostile is determined, or at least influenced by the meaning tradition into which we have been born. This, of course, will influence the ease of our skills and abilities at transcendence. We must take care though, to distinguish between what the meaning tradition supposedly says and what it actually communicates by way of symbolic meaning.

Christianity is a meaning tradition that says that the mystery is God. It says that the mystery is personal and benevolent. How this tradition is *actually* communicated is often quite the opposite. A child may be told that "God is love," but in reality his parents are harsh and judgmental. The child is always being punished for "sins" that may, in fact, be quite normal behaviors for his age. The stigma of sin can actually communicate a tradition wherein the mystery beyond what the child knows is harsh, judgmental and punishing. In short, it is extremely hostile to the child. Ricoeur distinguishes between *la langue*--what is said, and *la parole*--what is meant. This same type of distinction must be made when we explore our faith tradition. If you were born Christian what was said is that the mystery is benevolent. The symbolic meanings you may have actually received could have said the opposite. This will impact upon your total health.

SOUL MAKING AND BOUNDARY

We encounter boundary and limit everyday of our lives. The very fact of being finite beings, of not being able to see infrared, of not being able to jump over a building in a single bound means that the very foundation of our existence is one of boundary and limit. *Every single moment of our lives is at the same time an encounter with boundary and limit and so a call to transcendence and re-symbolization.*

With the advent of the Cartesian paradigm the ancient talk of a human "soul" has been banished as ignorant. Even among people today who do believe in a soul it is understood as being a "ghost": a certain type of "thing." With the field paradigm we are able to understand talk of a human soul. It is an idea that is intimately connected to what is distinctively human. It is intimately connected to the realm of symbol represented by the divine pole. If we were to look at pre-human forms of life in terms of a field approach we would find that they had but three poles to their field. They are certainly organic, they engage in interaction with other organisms, and even at the most primitive level of reactions to light or temperature we can say they have a

subjective pole. They do not have the capacity to respond on the basis of mythic-symbolic meanings.

To be human is to be, at the root of your being, faced with boundary or limit. At the same time it is to be called beyond that boundary or limit through transcendence. To be human is to be growth oriented, but we know that many people do not grow, do not change. We call such people "set in their ways," "closed or narrow minded." They are closed to re-interpretations. They are closed to new meanings. Their inability to incorporate new symbolic meanings can result in great anger and bitterness at the unfair cruelty of life. They never achieve a sense of fulfillment because our fulfillment in life is directly tied to our skills and abilities of transcendence. That is, to our skills and abilities of soul making.

The encounter with the mystery, the unknown beyond our boundaries and limits, can be terrifying. It is an encounter with an extreme insecurity. It implies a questioning of all we know, all we value, all we care about because these concerns are not "things." They are symbols. Because they are not material "things" the Cartesian paradigm has been unable to offer guidance in an area such as soul making. Indeed, because they are not "things" the Cartesian approach can not really even "see" them. They are not mechanistic, they are symbolic.

The survivor of the disease-holocaust imprint is similar to the mythological hero. The hero who ventures to the underworld to re-connect to the holy grail or golden bough. Adaptation is seen as a creative process, a form of soul making. This is analogous to the notion of creative suffering found in the Christian tradition. The ecological model stresses the value of this kind of soul making in response to the impact of disease.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE DIVINE POLE

We have dwelt at length on the role of religion in the divine pole because it is the area of life wherein the processes of the divine pole are most easily recognized. However, earlier in the chapter we also said that we are all, always religious. We are all, always surrounded or immersed in the mystery of life and reality. At the root of our being, at the foundations of all our behaviors we have a primal interpretation of what this mystery is in relation to our health and fulfillment. It is simply a part of being human whether we like it or not, acknowledge it or not. In this way we are always religious. We are not, however, always spiritual in any developed sense of the term.

This automatic, human religiosity comes into play every moment of the day by virtue of the fact that we are always encountering boundaries and limits. The human is the animal symbolicum, the creature-that-interprets, *the religious animal*. There are many examples of primitive, undeveloped, naturally occurring religion. These all reflect interpretations of events that elicit our awareness (however dim or unconscious) of the mystery. They are all demands for us to fulfill our half of the human-world interaction that is *dasein* which is to give meaning, to organize events in the world. It is by such means that the divine pole interacts with the other three. It is when we pay attention to this or dwell on it in even a rudimentary fashion that our spirituality is awakened.

The field approach to the human necessitates that we redefine and reconceive much of our lives. We saw this earlier in our discussions of human health and in what the

human being actually is. We see it again, here, in our discussion of the divine pole. People don't "get" religion. They "get" either spirituality or pseudo-spirituality. You can't get what you've already got!

The traditional religions are not the exclusive means by which we can develop, guide and express our spirituality. As Bernard Spilka pointed out the traditional religions may not even be healthy for some people. They may allow some people the means to more fully indulge and express underlying disturbances. The question is: can we be spiritual if we don't "believe" in these traditional forms? The answer: yes, of course. Spirituality can be developed through most any creative endeavor such as art or science. It may be developed through any type of reflective solitude such as walks or meditation. However, in today's world the development of spirituality is implicitly frowned upon. Our society does not encourage or reward the development of a healthy human spirituality.