

Metaxis and Recovery: Towards a New Vision of Health

CHAPTER SIX

THE SOCIAL POLE

The truth of our human situation is often tragic. We are captive to illusory, almost insane pretenses and social assumptions which we unreflectively accept as the proper way of life. We are in many ways similar to prisoners. We are locked up tight in the prison of social determination. Much of our life is oriented by the symbolic meanings handed down to us by the dominant culture. The myths and beliefs of our culture shape our world view and our actions. If we are to truly develop our limited freedom we must learn to raise our awareness of social conditioning. If we are to ever increase in health--to attain metaxic balance--we must be able to rise above common social conformity. Socially proscribed meanings can often reduce us to a state which Nietzsche described in his famous phrase "The aim is lacking; `why?' finds no answer." Usually, rather than accept no answer at all we blindly accept as legitimate the symbolic meanings that originate in the social pole.

The extent of our freedom is directly related to our primal interpretation of the mystery of reality and so is a function of the divine pole. We usually act upon a combination of the three primal interpretations: benevolent, indifferent or hostile. If your primary interpretation were to become increasingly hostile it would be a safe bet that you were becoming increasingly suicidal. A fine example of a primarily indifferent interpretation is found in *The Stranger* by Albert Camus

THE STRANGER

On the very last page of this novel the main character, Meursault, tells us his sense of relation to the rest of the universe. "...I laid my heart open to the benign indifference of the universe." Meursault never strikes us as a bad or evil person, but as someone profoundly indifferent, unconnected, detached. He just sort of dispassionately goes along with the flow. He relates the occurrences of his life without affect, without vitality; just a string of events. His interpretation of the events of his life stems from his primal interpretation. He just floats along: neither good nor bad, neither involving and passionate nor boring and repulsive. Meursault never really initiates any actions, but he responds amiably enough to the overtures of his neighbors and employer. He responds to life the way life seems to respond to him: with benign indifference.

He does his job well enough so that he is offered a promotion. "I told him I was quite prepared to go; but really I didn't care much one way or the other." He appears to be an adequate lover. In a reversal of traditional roles his girlfriend proposes to him. When Marie asks him if he'll marry her "I said I didn't mind...I explained that it had no importance really, but, if it would give her pleasure, we could get married right away." Meursault initiates no contact with his neighbors, but they seem to trust him and so approach him for help and a sympathetic ear. Meursault though, is not really sympathetic. "I found him rather boring, but I had nothing to do and didn't feel

sleepy." "So now we're pals, ain't we?...I didn't care one way or the other, but as he seemed so set on it, I nodded and said, Yes."

Meursault is a puzzle to the reader. There is something not quite right about him, something missing, we don't know what makes him tick. To his friends, employer and lover it appears as if he isn't as bland or as boring as he can seem to the reader. To us he is lacking in vitality, but based on the reactions of the other characters in the book he must appear to them as a normal, vital young man. It is not until the end of the book, when Meursault is on trial for (an indifferently committed) murder, that we discover his particular dysfunction.

Meursault is condemned to death for the murder because he is made out to be a threat to society, to have a criminal mentality. After all the reader has learned about him how could this bland, dispassionate man possibly be described as having "the dark workings of a criminal mentality"? Well, precisely *because* of his lack of passion. *Because of his lack of authentic integration of social meanings.* Social meanings tell us that we should have genuine compassion for other's sorrow, should genuinely love our beloved, should work hard and be ambitious in our employment. It is discovered that Meursault merely goes through the motions. He is connected to these meanings, but they are not integrated with who he is as a person. For him these things mean nothing and so he is "a menace to society." "[H]e said I had no soul, there was nothing human about me, not one of those moral qualities which normal men possess had any place in my mentality."

Meursault goes through the motions of life that society values: passion, involvement, interest and compassion. Inside he doesn't care. This is what condemns him. This profound indifference is discovered by means of his mother's death and his lack of any outward appearance of mourning. He didn't shed a tear, he smoked cigarettes and drank coffee, he didn't view the body at the funeral--all most unseemly. The day after the funeral he went to a cafe, saw a comedic film, picked up a girl and had sex. There was no evidence of the mourning a son *should* feel for his mother. Meursault did not hate his mother, he cared about her albeit indifferently. He cared about her as dispassionately as he cared about Marie's wanting to get married and his neighbor's wanting to be a pal.

What do we learn from Meursault? We learn how dangerous it can be to transcend the social system of symbolic meanings. If caught we may be condemned as a criminal. Meursault did not mourn his mother properly and so was indicted as anti-social, as a threat to the meanings of the social pole. *We* might burn the flag in protest, blow the whistle on white collar crime, blaspheme against someone's tradition, produce the wrong type of art, or live a dangerously alternative lifestyle.

What kind of person is Meursault? Hard to say, so indifferent is he. In one way we could say he is metaxically balanced, and yet there is still something wrong. He doesn't appear like anything we might call a "creative hero." He does have a spiritual insight that mere social symbols will not provide a truly meaningful, healthy, fulfilled life, yet he accepts those socially proscribed meanings. There is no act of creative imagination, no plunging "into" the mystery through re-symbolization and re-interpretation. His understanding of life, reality and the universe as benignly indifferent keeps his own life benignly apathetic and lacking in vitality.

The only time we see passion in Meursault is when he encounters the prison chaplain and through the chaplain the possibility of a universe that is "on the side" of human health and fulfillment. Meursault's response? It is violent. He dares not even entertain the possibility such an interpretation might elicit. He is *certain* that his indifferent interpretation of the event that is death is correct. Reality holds no mystery for him. He dares not open himself to the terrible *insecurity* his questioning would elicit. "All alike would be condemned to die one day...And what difference could it make if, after being charged with murder, he were executed because he didn't weep at his mother's funeral, since it all came to the same thing in the end?" Indeed, what difference does it make? Can anyone say with absolute certainty that it all comes to the same thing in the end? Does not the end face us as a great, unfathomable mystery?

WILLIAM JAMES' RESPONSE TO FREEDOM

The American religious philosopher William James had a real life experience similar to Camus' fictional character in that he was faced with the issue of interpretation of the mystery. Unlike Meursault (and most of us), James managed to regain vitality and freedom. He had been feeling a vague sense of pessimism and depression but went about his daily activities as usual. Suddenly his life was disrupted by an unexpected horrible fear; a state of profound panic and fear of death. This was a breaking of his denial of death, a revelation of his own mortality, primal insecurity and fragile condition. Within this new sense of himself he imaginatively detected a shocking metaphorical similarity to one of his patients who was a deformed, idiotic, half-dead epileptic in an asylum. Now, of course, James was a vibrant, creative person. He was hardly comparable to this patient, at least in any external sense. This revelation was followed by months of generalized anxiety, dread and despair. The identification with the epileptic in the asylum seemed to truly express his real life condition. He felt hopelessly trapped, imprisoned.

Camus is popularly known as the philosopher who felt that in an absurd, meaningless world the only sensible action was that of the suicide. We are imprisoned by the apparent meaninglessness of life and the absurdities of the meanings given to us by society. William James arrived at different conclusions. He summoned forth the courage to escape his imprisonment, to forge meaning without succumbing to absurdities unthinkingly accepted by most people. His tale of courage and recovery is recalled in the following dated April 30, 1870:

"My first act of free will shall be to believe in free will....

"Hitherto, when I have felt like taking a free initiative, like daring to act originally, without carefully waiting for contemplation of the external world to determine all for me, suicide seemed the most manly form to put my daring into; now, I will go a step further with my will, not only act with it, but believe as well; believe in my individual reality and creative power. My belief to be sure, can't be optimistic- but I will posit life (the real, the good) in the self-governing resistance of the ego to the world. Life shall [be built in] doing and suffering and creating."

This is an extremely powerful tale. Here was one of the intellectual giants of the twentieth century reduced to a state of fear, withdrawal and dread. He even had thoughts of suicide. He had come face to face with boundary and the unknowability of

the great mystery. He felt trapped despite his success up until this point. On one level he was a prisoner to social conditioning. His recovery began with his belief and affirmation of freedom. He found a new balance through resisting the world, in pursuit of the belief "*in my individual reality and creative power.*"

THE SOCIAL POLE

The social pole is where we understand all of our interactions and relations with other people and social institutions. Most obviously, these interactions take place in our day to day dealings with people: our friends, families, enemies, co-workers, etc. A bit more subtly, but powerful just the same, is the influence of institutions and traditions that people have developed over time.

As we turn our attention to the social pole we discover the importance of *shared* mythic-symbolic beliefs. Our identity as individuals is largely attributable to symbols communicated by the social pole. Society is a symbolic universe that shapes our lives. We "invent" our identity through culturally-based myths. The human, according to Ernest Becker is "constituted symbolically" where our "cherished narcissism feeds on symbols" prevalent in society. For Becker, society is seen as a "symbolic action system, a structure of statuses and roles, customs and rules for behavior, designed to serve as a vehicle of earthly heroism." Becker notes that society offers the symbolic codes that enable the human to experience totality, vital meaning, and ultimate value.

We are always present to a world of symbolic meanings. Most of these symbolic meanings are shared and public, i.e. social. We begin learning them at the moment of our birth; perhaps even while we are still in the womb. So pervasive are social meanings in our lives that it has spawned the seemingly endless debate between nature and nurture. Are our behaviors predominately determined by natural considerations such as genetics, or by the early social interaction with our family? Social meanings can act in our lives in a way similar to various biological determinates, they are that much a part of what we do.

The social pole provides us with a repertoire of symbolic meanings that guide our life. If we have not developed our spirituality, if we are cut off from the divine pole, we will unquestioningly accept interpretations of reality found in this pole. *The social pole can easily act as a substitute for the divine pole.* Social influences are like a vast system of metaphors which have real and practical power over our lives. When we utilize this system of symbols creatively, imaginatively and heroically in light of the mystery we maintain balance. However, we often fail to creatively interact with the meanings that are given to us because we fail to acknowledge the mystery that is the key to creative symbolization. We may not have forged an adequate connection to the divine pole. We become trapped, the prisoners of social meaning, locked in a gulag of social symbols.

A lack of spiritual development leads to a lack of symbolic flexibility. Without this flexibility our field, which should be dynamic, becomes increasingly solidified and static. We do not creatively excavate meanings from each pole. Like cows in a field with their cud we endlessly chew upon socially received meanings. We become *victims of history* ruled by the tyranny of received meanings rather than *creators of our future*. If we fail to remain open to symbolic freedom through awareness of the

mystery of life we are reduced to captive inmates. Adrian van Kaam has written: "The creation of our history is entrusted to our freedom." Our freedom is found in the divine, not the social pole.

SOCIAL SYSTEMS: THE FAMILY

Both James and Camus express for us the tyranny of received views. The fact that social meanings surround us, can imprison us, and yet make us who we are. This pervasiveness of social meanings can be best illustrated through family dynamics. In the last number of years there has arisen a school of thought called "family systems." Family systems fits in well with the field approach and offers us insight into the nature of our social relations.

Picture a family. Mom, Pop, little Susie and baby Bobby. It appears as if the family is really just a collective of four individuals living together, but this is not quite accurate. According to family systems (and from within the field approach) the family is one whole interactive system. It is *different* than just a collection of interacting, independent, isolated individuals.

John Bradshaw, in books and videos, compares the nature of the family system to a mobile. Imagine a mobile hanging from the ceiling. The different objects that make up and balance the mobile are likened to the members of the family. Now if you gently push just one of the hanging objects that comprise the mobile all of the other objects eventually move too. If we remove one of the objects all the other objects shift position and achieve a new center of balance. A mobile is not just a collection of objects. It is a dynamic *system*. A family is similar to this.

Family systems, and the analogy of a mobile, can be used to illustrate the effect of one person's abuse or illness upon the entire family. Let us say that one member of the family is alcoholic. The impact of the alcoholism is similar to when you push against one part of the mobile. What happens? The whole mobile moves in response to that push. The whole family moves in response to the alcoholic. When therapists treat the child for some kind of difficulty they often want to treat the entire family. This is not because they are going to "blame" the parents. It is because a family is always a system. The whole thing (composed of individuals) has to be treated, not just the one part where the dysfunction is most obvious. We hope that you see the similarities between this understanding of the family as a system and the field model. Any change in one pole of the field will effect all other poles. The same is true in family systems and social situations. Like so many things viewed from within the field approach, the nature of our social relations is quite counter-intuitive.

Recently, there has been a lot of attention paid to the victims of various types of child abuse. It has been noticed that such victims are more likely than the general population to abuse their own children. Similar patterns have been discovered in the families of alcoholics or in other types of dysfunctional families. For instance, therapists can predict that in such families the various members will have certain specific symptoms and will often play out certain specific roles. In a dysfunctional family you will find the "mascot," the "lost child," the "scapegoat," etc. Examples of symptoms as adults would be an inability to have fun, problems with intimacy, rigid thinking, abuse, etc.

The pattern that a family system develops can be reproduced in each generation. In *The ACOA Syndrome* Wayne Kraitsberg notes that the symptoms of being an adult child of an alcoholic may be evident even though it was your grandparent, or even your great-grandparent who was the active alcoholic. Whenever there is a member of a family who is an addict all other members must somehow adapt to the addictive behavior. They become what is called "co-dependent." The whole system that is the family is effected and that effect can last two or more generations. We can never claim the small degree of freedom enjoyed by the human unless we recognize and break the cycles that imprison us. Recognizing and breaking through social meanings that are not conducive to health takes great courage and effort. So pervasive are socially received meanings that we often have difficulty even recognizing them for what they are. They begin to inundate our souls and orient our lives from the moment of our birth. These meanings inform us about what is right and wrong, valuable and worthless.

Our social interactions are not the meeting between two separate, independent, isolated individuals. Social interactions are always the expression of the human as a dynamic field; not as an isolated entity. Thanks to the work of family systems therapists we are able to see how pervasive and manipulative our social experiences can be. *Social interactions are always symbolic interactions.* Whenever we engage in social conduct what do we do? We talk. We use language. Language is nothing more than one vast, coherent symbolic constellation. Our language is much more than sounds from our mouth. We have all heard of "body language." We all know that the tone of the person's voice can change the meaning of a word from insult to endearment.

When we encounter social meanings, which is all the time, we are encountering symbolic meanings *as events* which we then, in turn, interpret. This situation is both an opportunity and a danger. It is an opportunity because the re-interpretation of social meanings spurs creative growth and encourages an elementary form of healthy spirituality. It is a danger because rather than reinterpret the social meanings-as-events we uncreatively accept the *already given meaning* of the meaning-as-event (in a way similar to our discussion of the dogmatic religious fundamentalist). We can easily fall into crudely predictable roles or can be maliciously manipulated; certainly not an example of developed human freedom.

IMPORTANCE OF THE DIVINE POLE: TRANSCENDING SOCIAL DETERMINATION

This freedom, of course, is a function of our ability to interpret and dialogue with all the areas of our life by means of symbolic meanings. Connection to the divine pole is particularly important as this is our most powerful source for social transcendence, for breaking the received meanings within which we may be imprisoned. When we are closed off from the divine pole we become entrapped in the social pole. We unthinkingly, unreflectively, uncourageously accept social views, meanings and symbols. We say that this is a "tyranny" because it can be difficult, sometimes close to impossible to break. Anyone who, as an adult, has tried to break the behavior patterns developed out of some childhood trauma knows how difficult even professional approaches to change (such as therapy) can be. Anyone who has visited

another culture knows how totally strange, even repulsive, the foreigner's social pole can seem to be.

Even with a highly developed spirituality we never totally go beyond social meanings. A hermit living high in the mountains is never devoid of a social life. He carries within himself traces and meanings from past social interactions and from society's institutions and traditions.

It is this all-encompassing pervasiveness that Camus was trying to indicate. However, Camus concludes pessimistically. He sees no escape. His is a typical conclusion within the Cartesian view. Without acknowledgment of the mystery there is no "place" to go to get out of the social pole's network of symbolic meanings. We then become entrapped, imprisoned. In a very real sense we become *de-humanized*. That is, we become less than human, our humanity is taken from us because we deny that which is *distinctive* about the human, that which *defines* us as human: our spirituality. We deny the ability to act in freedom and create and re-create meaning. We become like any other animal: biologically determined and trained to perform. Generally, we tend to behave as animals, not as humans. It is in this that we can understand Camus' choice of a title. Not only is Meursault a stranger to his society. At his deepest levels he had become a stranger to himself. He has become totally alienated from the very foundations of his identity both as human, and as a unique, potentially creative expression of that species.

Any attempt at spirituality; that is, re-symbolizing or re-interpretation of mythic-symbolic meanings relies upon an openness to the mystery: the possibility of possibilities. In contemporary people this capacity for spirituality is rarely developed. We are not given the opportunity, nor are we given the tools necessary to develop our abilities of the spirit. Indeed, this capacity is often systematically crushed out of us by the symbolic meanings that pervade the social pole, thereby encouraging us to elevate social meanings.

The failure to transcend the forces that condition our lives is a major factor in the cause of metaxic imbalance, alienation and numbness. Failed transcendence is almost synonymous with unhealthy entrapment within the sociocultural meanings of the social pole. In a thoroughly conditioned life one lives within a closed world. With only the already present social symbols to feed upon it is inevitable that racism, injustice, scapegoating and crime would run rampant. Blacks cannot symbolically escape from being "oppressed." Whites cannot symbolically escape their "superiority." Neither group can symbolically escape the obsession with material goods which our society, in effect, interprets as having ultimate value. There is no place to escape to because as a society we ignore the divine pole.

SOCIAL SYSTEMS: CULTURE

When social meanings build up over time without significant change they become traditions. We see this in families, usually during the holidays. The symptoms of dysfunctional families can also be understood as a type of tradition in so far as they can be passed on to the next generation. Our culture as a whole is a social system similar to that of our families. We identify ourselves as members of an ethnic group, nationality or social level by virtue of symbolic meanings. In the larger system that is

"society" traditions often become institutions. Without creative reinterpretations social institutions can come to dominate the culture. This domination can continue for centuries after the original meanings and traditions upon which the institutions are based have ceased to promote human health.

When we think of social institutions the image that probably comes to mind is of a large Greco-Roman building. Set high upon stairs with massive columns towering over the visitor the building communicates power, history, timeless survival. With a sense of awe we may enter these buildings that represent our social institutions. Buildings such as the Capitol, the Supreme Court, the Lincoln Memorial are more than mere buildings. They are the "solidification" if you will, of social symbolic meanings that have become institutionalized.

Now, of course, not all institutionalized meanings fail to promote human health. Indeed, a symbolic meaning becomes institutionalized because it has continuously succeeded in that promotion. However, not all institutions become so highly visible in the form of grand edifices. Some institutionalized meanings operate "underground." They direct our lives in an almost unconscious, unacknowledged way. One of these "underground" institutionalized meanings is the American fascination with wealth, consumer items and material reality. Actually more than an institution, this fascination has become an American myth.

In our discussions of Eric Voegelin we saw that a myth is always "compact." It expresses meanings concerning all four poles. Our American myth of the relation among wealth, success and personal health orients us both as unique and as social. It effects our physical environment and our interpretations of the mystery of reality and existence. Subjectively, our sense of self-esteem and self-worth is tied up with our acquisition of material goods or corporate power. We also base social status--the value of another person--by the type of car driven, the job held. In the physical pole the American myth encourages pollution. In the divine pole we think we are blessed by God if we have material goods, or we will be blessed in this way if we only have enough faith. The American myth that explains reality in terms of material wealth and power is not a health promoting myth.

There is irony here. At the same time that our institutions are espousing abstract reason, functionality and de-mythologized world views people still retain their deeper spiritual needs. They continue to operate, although unconsciously, under the auspices of mythic patterns which are now articulated and understood according to secular myths concerning wealth. Human desire for transcendence co-mingles with society's myths that are now distorted and reflect economic and civic ideologies. Our deeper needs are channelled into beliefs which glorify themes such as social function, physical longevity, material acquisition and youthful appearance.

We have already explored how a Cartesian approach results in an inability to even "see" the mystery in our lives. This mechanistic view prevents us from effectively using or understanding our spiritual traditions. We are denied sustenance for our deeper needs for symbolic transcendence. When we face boundary or limit, such as in times of illness, we will be met with a mythic-symbolic vacuum. We will suffer from a lack of life-affirming symbolic meanings. The individual needs symbols that are

truly transcendent, not just material, to enable him or her to be the "hero" when problems of suffering, pain or death arise.

HISTORICAL CONSIDERATIONS: THE RISE OF THE AMERICAN MYTH

Symbolic meanings change in response to boundary and limit. When people first came to the New World they were forced to re-evaluate many of their shared social beliefs. The institutionalized beliefs brought from Europe that were used to order their social pole centered around the symbolic meaning of an "aristocracy." In Europe it was heredity and birthright that determined jobs, marriages and living conditions as it had for generations. But economic concerns and the demands of simple survival forced the colonists to change. The old beliefs and symbols surrounding aristocracy were re-interpreted in the new context. A colonist who needed a barn raised would accept anyone's help regardless of class. There simply weren't enough people here to maintain the meaningfulness of "social class." What developed were the new symbols of the "American dream" such as social identity based upon the individual, not upon the level or class of birth. Economic and job status were not "given" by birth as in Europe, but by hard work. This change in symbolic meanings that ordered social relations, initially health promoting, produced some unforeseen consequences which today discourage metaxic balance.

The people had broken the aristocratic structure and found the power of the "rugged individual"; a mythic-symbolic meaning we still maintain to some degree. The ideas with which we are familiar of "pulling one's self up by your bootstraps" or of the "entrepreneurial drive" were unknown prior to these changes. Prior to this, the social pole was defined by symbols surrounding "knowing your place" based upon the aristocratic structure.

The early colonists came from societies where possessions were held by only the elite. Wealth, education and material goods were not accessible to the vast majority of the populace. With the move to the New World these envied trappings of the aristocracy were available to any individual regardless of their birth status. It was now legitimate for the individual to gain these trappings through hard work. The "American Dream" is an attempt to gain the trappings or the appearance of the Old World aristocrats.

The early Americans became free in terms of economic opportunity in a way not present in Europe. When this opportunity was combined with Cartesianism and the impact of the scientific enlightenments (which peaked at this time) it resulted in an ever stronger seduction into materialism. What was physical, material and firmly empirical slowly became all that was "real." Non-material symbolic concerns such as art, education, spirit, and even the divine pole itself slowly became less "real" and less valuable in and of themselves. Eventually, such concerns were labeled as ignorance, fantasy, wishful thinking or were reinterpreted in terms of material goods such as in some types of Calvinism. Thus were Americans, the people initially so concerned with freedom, deprived of their freedom. Soul making eventually made no sense. Freedom was the freedom to acquire wealth. It was a freedom to affect the *appearance* of an aristocracy, but not necessarily its traditional refinement (we recognize this when we talk of the *nouveau riche*). The acquisition of wealth became the institutionalized mythic-symbolic tradition indicating a fulfilled, successful,

healthy life. The acquisition of wealth became the shared myth that compactly explained, oriented and directed the four pole structure of human life.

We can understand much of the American difficulty with spirituality and symbolic processes through the institutional rituals that have developed out of the fascination with wealth and with the material elements of reality. A fascination with the material or empirical has a tendency to feed itself. It is easier for the human to "see" what is material, visible, measurable, as opposed to what is symbolic, non-mechanistic and mysterious. Once an emphasis is placed upon the material aspect of reality there will be a tendency to restrict awareness to *only* the material. We call this process of restriction "functional circularity."

What has developed is a belief that the individual gains value in so far as they are able to function in order to produce maximum wealth. Our institutions become functional systems to assist the individual in this endeavor. The power of today's corporations highlight this tendency of modernization. The individual becomes a member of such a functional system in order to maximize their potential to acquire wealth. As long as the individual functions in a manner dictated by the corporate system he or she is enabled in this pursuit.

THE PRIMACY OF AMERICAN FUNCTIONALISM

The central myth of America that wealth is the sign of a fulfilled life has led, over the years, to the primacy of *function*. We function when we perform any type of task whether it be getting a glass of water or writing a complicated financial report. In this book we have critiqued the Cartesian notion of the body being like a machine. We have pointed out that we tend to reduce the entire human to a machine-like thing. Please remember that we mentioned benefits to this approach in a previous chapter on the medical model of the human. However, the human is much more than a machine-like being. Machines are functional and pragmatic. People are also, in some respects, necessarily functional and pragmatic. Our ability to be functional is necessary to carry out and complete any sort of task. It is when these pragmatic aspects of our life degenerate into *functionalism* that we encounter issues such as "workaholism."

The husband or wife who, because of the demands of the work place, have no time for family are overly functional. When we fail to develop interests and activities that are not work related we are functionalistic. If we have difficulty relaxing--doing nothing--we are victims of functionalism. Functionalism places primary importance upon *doing* rather than *being*.

Functionalism is a prevalent imbalance in contemporary human life. Indeed, it will probably arise in any culture that is essentially materialistic. It is *the* social disease of our times. It overlaps with narcissism (to be discussed later) which is also a product of institutionalized social meanings. Functionalism delimits how we perceive ourselves, others and the world. It dictates our sense of values and ethics. It reduces the value of the human being to what the individual can do and how well he or she can do it.

Feminism has provided many needed critiques of culture and human relations, but it has also suffered from the disease of functionalism. A couple of years ago there was a commercial for a woman's scent that went: "I can bring home the bacon, fry it up in a

pan, and never let you forget you're a man." This epitomized functionalism which is a state of always *doing*. We go to our job and work long hours, then run to the health spa to stay physically fit, then home to cook, etc. The person suffering from this social disease does not "stop to smell the roses." Women, unfortunately, have been sucked into this imbalance. Feminism failed in not recognizing that functionalism is an equal opportunity disease. In some ways it may have encouraged this sickness. We willingly infect our children by trying to make "super" babies.

When we operate under and within our civic religion of wealth and power we become functionalistic. It is inevitable and necessary. It is necessary because the desirable qualities of wealth and power are in short supply. We must compete for these pseudo-spiritual icons. This competition demands that we work more and more to the point that it can only be described as obsessional, unfree behavior; but it seems like the "right" thing to do. It is fascinating to think back when people fought for and valued leisure time. The eight hour work day and five day work week was a grand experiment intended to free people for more elevating pursuits. So what have we done? Many of us willingly work a twelve hour day six days a week! In a way this is quite silly, but it is also tragically sad. When we do have leisure time it is still often overly pragmatic. We eat in the "right" restaurant. We want to be "seen" in the "right" places. We train for races and improve our golf handicaps not for enjoyment, but as an extension or enhancement of our functional role in the society.

American functionalism is inevitable. We are fascinated with the visible, the material, and the empirical. Pragmatism inevitably becomes the end-all and be-all of our lives. Functioning *is* the visible, material, empirical aspect of our being. My physical heart functions well if it keeps pumping. The latest fashion has pragmatic value as a statement of economic and social class. The unflappable person functions well in an emergency. If we are fascinated by the material and the empirical we will also be fascinated by what is pragmatic. If we only value what is material, it is inevitable that we will only value people in so far as they are function well.

The greatest tragedy of this imbalance is its effect upon people's lives. We are all quite familiar with the workaholic mommy or daddy who doesn't have time for the kids. But we have also heard scarier stories about people who work for a corporation twenty or thirty years only to find themselves on the street because they don't function well enough. You might say: "Well, corporations are in business to make money. If the guy can't cut it too bad." Sorry, from within the field approach that attitude indicates a lack of metaxis; a *sickness*, a *disease*. When we understand the value of a person only in terms of pragmatic utility than we are truly a most abject society. There *is* inherent value to a person's twenty or thirty years of service. If we reject or accept people solely upon how they function we have reduced the complexity of the human to its most basic, animal elements. Naturally we are not talking here about *incompetence*. If someone is incompetent that is a demand for training or replacement (in the sense of "placing somewhere else," not "throwing away").

When we live in a hyper-functional system we are taught to manage our feelings and to be maximally efficient. These are both issues of *control*. The popular movements associated with adult children of alcoholics and co-dependency have recognized the control issue as central to a balanced life. The first step of 12 Step programs states: "We admitted we were powerless..." Human feelings are not inherently controllable.

Feelings *just are* and so can be a threat to functioning. If you work in a corporate utilitarian system you must control any negative feelings towards your supervisor or you may find yourself out of a job! This goes beyond the need for compassionate sensitivity towards one another to bureaucratic control of a basic human reality.

We are told not to bring our personal lives into work with us. In many ways, of course, this makes sense, but when taken to extremes or treated as "gospel" it violates basic human integrity (remember integrity is a basic function of the human-as-field). This attitude sees the human almost like a T.V.: we can simply switch channels and get a clear picture. The work place is not simply another "channel" of human life. The human is an integrating creature. Our life is always a whole. It is not divided into separate, discrete compartments. A functional system *is* divided into discrete parts. When we are overly functionalistic the systems that result from this approach can do violence to basic human reality. The human animal is not always an efficient animal. Traditionally, work has always meant much more than just making an economic profit.

FUNCTIONAL RITUALS

America is a vast ceremonial landscape. We engage in banal ritualistic behaviors: the business lunch, beauty contests, the Super Bowl, the single's bar, "networking," shopping, watching our favorite T.V. shows. These are all much more than simple activities. *They are rituals* that communicate the beliefs and myths in which we *really* believe. Even our "religious" rituals have become banalized: non-Orthodox Jewish Bar/Bat Mitzvah and the kosher kitchen, Catholic Baptism and Confirmation, Christian businessmen's groups and "spiritual" groups for young professionals are common examples. As a culture, our spiritual lives have gone underground. There we feed on civic forms of religion and other secular substitutes. Real religious rituals are converted to secular substitutes. We call these *quasi* or *crypto rituals*.

We have developed ceremonies and rituals that reflect our modern myths. Significant life events such as initiations (baptism, confirmation, bar and bat mitzvah), graduation, marriage and death are largely commercialized. These ceremonies have become contaminated and influenced by our material world-view. They have lost their spiritual and transcendent value. Instead they have degenerated to materialistic and secular rituals. They lose their paradigmatic and universal qualities as they become de-sacralized. These rites of passage originally contained powerful transcendent meaning. They inspired lasting ideals by offering symbolic models for emulation. Instead, they have become reduced to civic functions supporting the established order of commerce.

Our way of life is structured by commerce and the procurement of money and material goods. Vested capital interests drive our secularized and banalized ceremonies. We have already seen how this functions in our medical system under the phenomenon of medicalization. Our sciences are increasingly developed only to aid and devise tools for the consumer system. Our universities and research labs are increasingly funded by governmental, business and commercial interests. Pure research and the search for knowledge for the sake of knowledge are slowly losing their intrinsic value. If it isn't functional and pragmatic, if it doesn't produce wealth or consumer goods we don't want it. It isn't valuable to us.

The mythic-symbolic themes in our society consciously (or more commonly unconsciously) serve to direct the course of our lives. Human beings act according to the models and paradigmatic stories found in their social world. In America the belief in myths of wealth, power, and control guide our lives no matter whether we are rich or poor, conformist or radical, religious or humanist. We lose our freedom and fall victim to those who manipulate symbols of this myth such as advertisers, politicians and public opinion makers. This results in a situation where, according to Heidegger: "Everyone is the other and no one is himself." We fall victim to what he called "the they." We go by what "they" think is right, what "they" feel is valuable, we do what "they" do. "The they" is no one in particular, and yet it is each one of us. It is "the they" that encourages mindless social conformity.

EGOCENTRICITY: THE DISEASE OF THE SOCIAL CONFORMITY

We are able to reflect back upon ourselves as objects in the world. It is this that gives rise to egoic identity. But this egoic identity is not primary to our encounters with the world. It is a secondary result of those encounters. What is primary in the human-world interaction that is *dasein* is the dynamic flux between the four poles. When we slip into a functionalistic style of life we restrict the dynamism of the human-as-field.

In past societies the individual's sense of self-identity went way beyond his or her mere function in the society. He was a part of a clan or tribe. His identity was not just in the here and now, but linked to the distant past by means of ancestors and projected into the unfathomable future through the next generation. He was not just a puny speck upon the earth, but a vital component of the entire cosmos. In short, his sense of self, his self-identity was "large." It was much, much more than his immediate, subjective experience of himself.

Our full self, as a total human, is so much more than just our subjective experience. For instance, we are all familiar with the idea that we have unconscious depths to ourselves. Certainly we would say that our unconscious *is* a part of our self, yet we don't directly experience it. That's why its called "unconscious." The aspects or dimensions of ourselves that are "unconscious," or are not a part of the subjective pole are not necessary to most pragmatic pursuits. Hence, in a functionalistic society there is a tendency to ignore or devalue the poles that are not obviously utilitarian, or to value them only in so far as they effect our functional social role.

Functionalism causes us to lose *metaxis* because it encourages us to ignore aspects of ourselves that are not necessarily pragmatic. This usually entails an almost total forgetfulness of the divine pole and a dangerous restriction of our sense of self, our sense of who we are as unique individuals. Our sense of self becomes very "small." Its development is restricted to only our immediate subjective experience. Our self-identity builds upon symbolic meanings, it builds itself, "feeds" itself upon symbols. When we are functionalistic we restrict these options. The connections with past, future, cosmos and community no longer contribute to our sense of self. We then have fewer symbolic options upon which to build our identity. We view ourselves as autonomous, isolated, and independent with no sense of loyalty to others.

It may be plain at this point that the word "self" when used in the field approach is quite different than our usual understandings. In the next chapter we discuss this

difference at length. It is sufficient here to state that from within the field approach the "self," *who we are as unique individuals* is always a product of the dynamism between all four poles. Today's usual understanding of the "self" is a *restricted* understanding that has resulted from the mechanistic attitudes of Cartesianism that have encouraged functionalism. Functionalism results in a stilted sense of our self. Without the larger horizon of the *total* self that is the field our identity has only subjective experiences and social meanings to "feed" upon. This restriction elevates our subjective experience of the self over and against the rest of the field. We confuse the self (total human-as-field) with the ego (subjective experience of social meanings). This results in egocentricity. Egocentricity as extreme "self" interest is narcissism.

The ego is concerned with proximate issues, such as function, status and social achievement. The ego is concerned with appearances. It directs our social personas, our social identities. It looks to "the they" for identity and guidance. But the identity of the total person exceeds the limits of the ego-persona. The total person is much more than ego. The total person is the dynamic integration of spirit, subject, society and nature.

A strong ego is not necessarily bad. It can be healthy, particularly during certain stages of human development. But in order to fully mature the ego-identity must be transcended. The "death" of the ego, important in certain religions ("He who would lose his life will find it"), highlights this point. Our deeper identity must be continuously re-symbolized with the aid of a spiritual or transcendent perspective. We experience the ego as a small part of the field or as a subset of the self. It is not, however, who or what we *are*. The total human exceeds the confines of the ego.

Narcissism results when the dynamic dialogue between poles is interrupted. Symbolic processes become stuck as the ego "controls" the field. The ego closes the field in its obsession with certain social images, usually images prevalent in advertisements. The ego blocks the dialogical processes of the self. The human fails to connect, move and integrate. Narcissism is rooted in our culture's symbolism. It is influenced by the impoverishment of transcendent myths in our current society. Symbols which instruct and direct the human in ego-transcendence are lacking while those that encourage egocentricity are prevalent. Many of these are propagated by the advertising institutions of our commercial culture.

When egocentricity degenerates into narcissism it indicates a radical closure of the self to formative symbols. Formative symbols are those that inspire movement, connection and integration. The narcissistic person is disconnected from formative and ego-transcendent symbols. The field closes down as the ego fuses with its social reinforcers. The human is reduced to the obsession of the ego that is narcissism: wealth, power, personal appearances, social standing etc. There follows a radical closure of the subjective pole to dialogue with other poles and broader meanings. The person becomes closed, isolated, cut off from the field.

We are all familiar with egocentric or narcissistic types of people. We describe such types as "full of himself," "stuck on himself," such a person "thinks only of himself," he "looks out for number one." Such types act as if they are the center of the universe. Their egocentric concern rarely displays any imaginative creativity. The narcissistic

person is concerned only with the appearance of what is valued by the society such as fashion, youthful appearance, wealth and power. Ironically, though egocentric imbalance results in a total conformity to social meanings, it results in a degeneration of the social pole. The narcissist is deficient in the ability to communicate with other people on the level of true, distinctive humanity. They can only communicate by means of banal social symbols. Their incredible lack of imagination results in a deficiency of compassion and interpersonal loyalty.

The narcissist judges the value of human being upon appearances. Their connections to others is based upon the person's type of employment, style of fashion or make of car. A familiar type of narcissist is the female "gold digger." This woman is incapable of true human feeling and love. She looks only for professional and economic status as the qualities desirable in a mate. Narcissists are quick to divorce their spouse, stab their co-worker in the back and generally act in ways we would call unethical, immoral and disloyal. This is because the narcissist sees no intimate connection between himself and other people.

Functionalism run rampant causes the person to "split apart" the poles of the field. The complex dimensions of the human are compartmentalized. They are understood as being similar to parts of a machine rather than one whole. This splitting apart causes us to fail to recognize the intimate connection between our sense of self as unique and other people. It fails to recognize the connection between the subjective and social poles. When this connection is ignored and the social pole is compartmentalized we inevitably fall into egocentricity and narcissism.

INTERWEAVING OF THE SOCIAL AND SUBJECTIVE POLES PART I

From within the field approach our social interactions can not be adequately understood as the interaction between two independent entities. We can envision the meeting between two people as the conjoining of two "centers of uniqueness." Each person brings her own unique blending of event-interpretation to the encounter. It is because of this uniqueness that the other person is always an indicator of the mystery. Hence, all social interactions are essentially spiritual in composition and the person is seen as alien or "the other." However, if there is to be any real communication there must be some abdication of uniqueness for the sake of commonality. After all, if someone was totally unique you would never be able to relate to her. She would be one-of-a-kind in a way that does not inspire, but alienates. There must always be a degree of *shared* symbolic meanings. Language is the system of symbolic meanings that we share and use to forge connections to other people.

When we deeply and intimately communicate with another person we creatively utilize linguistic metaphors to express and share our uniqueness. One person talks expressively, trying desperately to communicate her unique interpretations, to forge a connection to her social pole, to have her *meaning* understood. She uses language, but language is more than mere words. The pitch of her voice rises and falls, her hands move animatedly; drawing her words in space. Her body shifts position, sometimes leaning forward, sometimes back. The many muscles of her face become a maelstrom of both obvious and subtle cues. She builds metaphors: "It was sort of like....," "It was like the time....," "Did you read that book where..."

The other person listens intently to every word. The speaker appears to him as a great mystery. He asks what does she *mean*, what is her interpretation of events? He scrutinizes her facial expressions, tone of voice, bodily tension. He asks questions for clarification, gives his own experiences and metaphors to see which fit and connect. The time flies by as they intently, and with great concentration, engage in dialogue. At the end of the session neither person is quite the same as before. The listener has been exposed to the other's unique interpretations. He has received a glimpse of a wholly other style of field configuration. His responses and attempts at understanding, in turn, effect the speaker. She sees her self--her field configuration--through the attempt to communicate it and through the reactions of the listener.

Our social interactions both help make us who we are and reveal who we are to ourselves. Our sense of self-identity is *never* constructed by ourselves in isolation from others. Our understanding of the nature of our self-identity is never realized without the "mirror" of the other person. The dynamic connection between the social and subjective poles is more along the lines of a *continuum* than an *encounter*. *We need the other in order to find our self, we find our self in so far as we connect with others.* The other person is both a unique field configuration in her own right and is a part of our own social pole. In each social encounter we encounter our own selves-as-a-field and a wholly other possible field in its totality. A totality of which we are both separate from and a part of. True intimate communication recognizes the great mystery that is the other person and seeks to glimpse the unique symbolic constellation the other person represents to us: subjective, natural, social and divine.

The narcissist is unable to engage in true human communication which is one reason why we have such a high divorce rate. The narcissist fails to realize that the other person is, in some ways, *himself*: an aspect of his own field. At the same time the other person represents the mystery: an aspect of reality the functional narcissist most likely denies, ignores and doesn't think is "real."

Narcissism is a widespread social disease in America. It reflects a lifestyle mis-shaped by the symbolic guidelines of culture. It overlaps and is related with functionalism. Social pressures to compete, acquire wealth, status, and power; the emphasis on physical beauty and fitness all contribute to this prevalent problem. It is much easier to get a divorce than to struggle to understand the mystery that is the other person. It is so much easier and less of a hassle to simply conform to what "they" want you to do, think, say and be.

SOCIETY IN DISARRAY

Underneath the guise of civic religion and American crypto-quasi ritual we still have a basic unrest, an essential longing. We need to be accepted for who we are, we have real feelings of having "missed the mark," we experience the need to be made whole. We have desires for a deep transformation of our selves and desires for vibrant social connection.

As a group of individuals, a society, we have lost our vision of authentic transcendent realities. Our spiritual energies have been shunted and mis-directed into a myriad of other activities. We pay homage to materialism, money, competition and social status rather than knowledge, growth, fellow-feeling and discovery of our uniqueness. We

substitute patriotism or civic allegiances for communities based upon authentic spirituality and universal human attributes. We prefer secular ceremonies such as football games, bingo tournaments, the new year's eve party, or the fund-raising dinner rather than ceremonies by means of which we can share and be guided in our needs for transcendence. Our needs for transcendence are channeled into functional projects such as building efficient machines, bigger malls or more powerful computers rather than spiritual projects such as shared learning, artistic expression or growth in social understanding.

The proliferation of pseudo beliefs and crypto rituals from which we derive our communal and individual identity negatively effect not only ourselves, but the entire world. The fascination with what is visible, material, empirical and sensual is contagious. The human is offered the promise of temporary transformation through a wide assortment of banalized pseudo beliefs in the power of material accoutrements. The tendency is to sacralize our own way of national life. When this way of life is based upon the myth of wealth then the role of the businessman functions as the high priest in the massive civil religion of America. The quest for God becomes not a transcendent quest into awareness of the mystery, but a shopping trip to the local mall.

It is through the stories, images and symbols that comprise our national myth that we seek solutions to our human quest for fulfillment. Unfortunately, the symbolic environment in society has become one dimensional. Our culture's sense of reality is in many ways insane, self-destructive and empty. We are tempted by dreams of material prosperity to abandon the age old pursuits of folk traditions and common sense that bespeak of the transcendent yearning of the human and of the centrality of the mystery to that yearning. We are trained to be pragmatic. We worship the value of empirical reason. We over-achieve, out-compete and alienate our fellows. We become isolated in our autonomy.

We are a culture starving itself to death. Our love affair with the objective and the productive over the past two hundred years has produced a society of external plenty and inward poverty.

We fail to transcend the various social crisis such as racism and disparity of wealth. Our meager attempts to survive social boundary and limit are usually through rational and physical approaches. Mystery, awe and wonder are absent. The major symbolic structures of the human--language and culture--have been stripped of their potential to speak of the transcendent mystery. Transcendent symbols of wholeness have been destroyed or lost.

The personal alienation and social isolation we find in America now extends to and threatens the survival of our whole planetary community. We live under threats of nuclear holocaust and the destruction of our environment. We place greater value upon efficiency of production than upon the quality of people's lives. Our spiritual hunger for connection to noble purpose and uplifting meaning is not only neglected, but is actively rejected unless it has a functional purpose. We offer each other, and our children, the meager sustenance of training for competition, power and control. We espouse so-called "success" and "career climbing" over trust, fidelity, compassion and vision.

American culture is degenerating. Materialistic beliefs in wealth and power have largely replaced the original transcendent beliefs in freedom and expression. Our "sacralized" American way of life is limited. It flattens out our experience of the world, of our openness to awe, mystery and love. It is but a collection of pseudo-spiritualities that mislead, misdirect and end in frustration. It does not provide healthy guidance to our longing for transcendence and quest for meaning.

Humans are both free and determined. Our freedom is quite limited. It is not something that is always present--it has to be developed. The degree of our soul making capacity and skill is the degree of our freedom. To a large extent we are determined by our history and traditions. It is only through soul making that we are able to break through these determinisms, and then only to a limited degree. The thinker Hans-Georg Gadamer has written: "Long before we understand ourselves through the process of self-examination, we understand ourselves in a self-evident way in the family, society and state in which we live." The problem is that the majority of us never come to an understanding of ourselves through self-examination.

SELF-EXAMINATION: INTERWEAVING OF THE SUBJECTIVE AND SOCIAL POLES PART II

When we say "self-examination" we may immediately have an image of an isolated individual. In terms of the field approach we might be inclined to think that self-examination is solely a function of the subjective field. This would not be accurate. Our sense of self as a whole, as a total human being is a function of all four poles, not just our subjective experience. Self-examination or self-reflection is subjective, to be sure, but it is also largely social. It is through social meanings, through our interactions with other people that we come to know who we are. Conversely, it is also through interactions with others that we are enabled to change ourselves.

The modern proliferation of self-help groups and "grass roots" political activities indicates an inarticulate understanding of the social deficiencies that result from the Cartesian world view. Just as there is a reaction to techno-medicine in the form of the holistic health movement, so too we are witnessing a reaction to social alienation and interpersonal estrangement. This is most obvious in the various "anonymous" groups. Thousands, if not millions of these groups for Alcoholics, Gamblers, Overeaters etc. meet every week across the nation. As of August, 1989 Alcoholics Anonymous alone has 40,693 groups in the United States. Such groups provide an opportunity for true self-examination through authentic social communication. The honesty required of such communication breaks the entrapment of narcissism and egocentricity. It opens us up to rewards other than those provided by functional living. It increases our approximation of total metaxis.

It is on the level of the small group, the neighborhood, the community that *social* change occurs. The level of the sweeping movement, the political party, the grand utopian experiment may have limited value, but it can not address the real needs of human life as it is actually lived and experienced. It can never address our unique difficulties, such as childhood trauma, that now keep us from health and fulfillment. An inspiring mass social movement does not take into account, as James expressed, "my individual reality and creative power." Indeed, such a movement allows us to ignore our own individual reality, it tempts us to conform to "the they." It may cause

us to ignore the demand to be the creative hero of our own lives. We look to the "movement" or the "party" to provide us with health and fulfillment. We expect the government, the state or the federal program to rectify social imbalance. It is obvious today that such thinking is a dismal failure. In our own country this is most apparent in the realm of race relations.

It is on the level of the small group, the neighborhood, the community that *individual* change occurs. In the honest communication that can happen in such situations we are enabled to become the creative heroes of our own lives. In such situations our imaginative capabilities are fed and our abilities in "field thinking" can be developed. When we express our experience of life honestly in a small group we are in a position to receive feedback and ideas that might not have been realized on our own. We discover "blind spots" we might have. We discover alternative approaches and possible solutions to our difficulties that might not otherwise occur to us. We are alerted to the possible unforeseen consequences of our actions and our attitudes. In such interactions we not only discover who we are, but discover who we can become. We discover our "individual reality" and nurture our "creative power." We discover what is healthy and unhealthy about "the they" and gain support as we resist social conformity.

The "process of self-examination" which leads to re-interpretation, soul making, field thinking and freedom is *not* valued by us as individuals because it is not valued by us as a society. Many of the structures of our social system (such as advertising) rely upon our lack of self-examination. Like sheep, we unthinkingly acquiesce to forces that would manipulate us. We look to heroes outside of ourselves to provide us with illusory validation for our broken lives. Indeed, the symbolic structures of our society may make it difficult to even survive should we begin a valid process of self-examination. Community action groups are stymied by the bureaucratic red tape spawned by our functionalism. Those who seek to express their uniqueness or personal conscience may find they are not allowed to participate in our functional corporations.

RECOVERY AND METAXIS IN THE SOCIAL POLE

We live in social relations, act out cultural roles, and are influenced by historical themes. Our lives are always embedded in what Heidegger called "Everydayness." For Heidegger this was the practical determination of our lives by institutions, language and customs of culture. Most of human behavior and action is not freely chosen. Instead, it is shaped by the "horizons" of the public order. Our journey through life is shaped by this realm, the "public," the "common," our Everydayness. American society--our institutions, customs, beliefs and practices--determine the directions of our brief pilgrimage through life.

We must learn to raise our awareness of our social conditioning and break the effect of imbalanced institutions. We must learn to reclaim our autonomy through careful discernment and balance. We must integrate the deeper questions that pertain to ultimate concerns into our social, natural and psychological lives. We must avoid common conformity and an imbalanced reliance on arbitrary social meanings. For example, we should resist material wealth as an ultimate value. While certainly important and valuable in establishing our family's security, and perhaps in aiding our

expression as unique, money is, nevertheless, not going to provide adaptation during times of suffering, boundary or death.

We are creatures whose central creative energy, whose primary thrust is always to transcend, to go beyond, to reach for ever higher levels of completion and fulfillment, to develop the spiritual aspects of our being. We long for transcendence and some form of symbolic immortality. We seek answers to, and satisfaction of our ultimate concerns. There remains at the core of human life a search for deeper meanings. We pursue ultimate answers for our most difficult questions. To satisfy our deeper needs we must be able to rise above common conformity. We must rise above the "Everydayness" of life and become the creator-survivor of our functional era. We must break the tyranny of received views. We must resist "the they."

Our schools no longer educate the whole person. They too have become victims of our cultural failure. They produce generations of trained consumers and bureaucratic workers rather than generations of inspired vision and compassionate concern. The institution of education is a chief specifier of our culture's sense of reality. We are taught and trained at an early age to worship efficiency and productivity. The mechanisms and calculations of commerce and money are ingrained and reinforced. We are reduced to being technocrats and functionaries.

Ultimate concerns have been banished from our human sciences and so there has been little progress in this area of human life. At best they are considered to be of secondary importance. In their place proximate issues relating to function and material wealth have assumed prominence. The realms of commerce and economics have become the beacons of great truth for the average American. Money, status and measurable forms of success are our chief values. The ultimate values of fidelity, love and community have been converted. We now practice fidelity to our business involvements, we love ourselves and pursue rugged individualism. Our communal involvements are generated by our vested business interests. We end up using community ties only to advance our functional pursuits--our community is a "network."

The current state of social imbalance is caused by our failure to pursue what is highest and most noble in us. The highest levels of our human reality must be nourished if the necessary reversal of current cultural trends is to happen. Our Western culture in its manifestations as families, educational institutions, legal and economic systems, religious communities, etc. fails miserably to nourish what is deepest in us and is as essential for our growth as any vitamin or food. It is in this that our problem lies. We have reversed Plato's belief that "society is man writ large." We now believe that the individual is society writ small. Our individual problems in life seem to be the fault of society and so we continuously demand that our social institutions fix the situation. We demand more federal money, more federal programs, more special incentives, but this only makes us accomplices in our imprisonment.

Recovery from the disease of social conformity, from the tyranny of received views, is the responsibility of each individual. Only then does the society as a whole change. "Men must change before kingdoms change." "We have met the enemy and he is us." Now there is no doubt of the power of social meanings to orient our lives. There is no doubt that their overthrow is difficult. There is no doubt that our childhood

experiences of trauma and dysfunction can gravely effect our lives. However, If we have not the courage to get help for the healing of our childhood traumas, if we have not the courage to resist the enticements of the advertisers, then we have only ourselves, *as individuals* to blame for our own misery *and* we are to blame for making others miserable too. All of us, as individuals, together create our society.

In our current sociohistorical environment the journey of recovery becomes a difficult, if not a heroic task of immense proportions. The re-connection to transcendent vitality in the symbolic order entails creativity, imagination and courage. This journey involves recovering the lost capacity for symbolization. A flexible mythopoesis must replace the rigid and seductive parameters of our linguistic and cultural symbol systems. This is referred to by the poets as the enlightened exercise of the primary imagination. Through a flexible primary imagination, the poet re-connects to the symbolic order, creating and re-creating symbolic forms.