

Reflections on Sacred Experience and Sacred Science

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This article argues that a secular science is inadequate for our times and points to the pressing need to resacralize our experience of ourselves and our world. It suggests that a sacred human inquiry based on love, beauty, wisdom, and engagement is one of the highest virtues and possibilities of human consciousness.

What would an ecological religion look like? Humankind has been involved in a gross desacralization of this planet, of the universe and of our own souls for the last three hundred years. Here lies the origin of our ecological violence. Can we recover a sense of the sacred? (Fox, 1992, p. 24)

These first words of Matthew Fox in his 1991 Schumacher Lecture reinforced my intention to articulate a spiritual dimension of human inquiry. The question, What would an ecological *science* look like? is nearly as important as What would an ecological religion look like? because it is the scientific myth of materialism that has, hand in hand with capitalism and religion, helped us in our march toward a secular, a disenchanting world.

In this article, I begin with an autobiographical account of my growing concern for these matters and show how this concern is matched by contemporary critics of Western epistemology. This leads me to suggest that an ecological science will be a sacred science that will be as concerned with questions of love, beauty, and right action as with questions of knowl-

edge. I then sketch out some characteristics of a sacred-inquiry process.

PERSONAL EXPERIENCES

My growing concern for the quality of sacredness has developed as I have explored shamanic paths and learned particularly from the Medicine Wheel teachings (Storm, 1972).¹ Several times over the past years in Medicine Wheel ceremonies, those of us studying this path have been confronted by our teachers for not treating the space we are in as sacred—a space carefully prepared with an altar and with power objects present, a space into which we have called the Powers of the Four Directions. I think that for a long time I regarded the teachings as another version of transpersonal psychology, as fine and beautiful, but essentially secular. So I couldn't really work out what all the fuss was about, and on many occasions I experienced these confrontations as having a quality of scolding and have retreated into a place of a hurt child.

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Then all of a sudden I learned something new. I heard for the first time the challenge that we in the West had lost the feeling for sacredness, the ability to notice the sacredness of our world, and that we need to discover this anew if we are to learn from the traditions of Native Americans. One is entering a different world, a world that is again alive and enchanted, a world in which all sentient beings bring their gifts of teachings and are thus worthy of honor. Such an animate world is akin to that inhabited by the alchemists and can only be comprehended fully through a participatory consciousness (Berman, 1981).

Reflecting on my own life experience, I can see the intense secular quality of what I have been taught. We went regularly to a Congregational Church when I was young. Apart from romanticized teaching in Little Church about "gentle Jesus, meek and mild," this was a primarily cerebral, rational, and certainly nonceremonial tradition. I remember in my teens engaging in arguments with devout Christians (often fundamentalists) in which I scorned the idea of transcendental God. I remember arguing with the chaplain at school, who taught that the point of religion was the worship of God; my view was that the only worthwhile purpose of religion would be to make us live better lives with our fellow men (sic). In my later teens I became quite directly secular in my views, joining the humanist society at university and seeking answers to the questions of existence through psychological study. I was particularly influenced by existentialism, by the notion that we are our choices, that we are responsible for our lives in the face of a totally contingent existence.

This secular approach to life took off into a satisfying career when I discovered organizational development and humanistic psychology. At last here were technologies through which we could adopt a humanist, person-centered and problem-solving approach to the world's problems. Feminism, too, seemed to have exciting things to say about how we ordered and might reorder our world.

Much of my professional work involved the development of the theory and practice of cooperative experiential inquiry, which took me along a similar road. In *Human Inquiry* (Reason & Rowan, 1981), *Human Inquiry in Action* (Reason, 1988b), and a series of associated works I presented and developed the argument that the key characteristic of the human person is the capacity for self-direction. If we are to fully respect this capacity and allow it to flourish, we must treat all those involved in an inquiry as at least potentially

self-determining and thus see them as coresearchers involved equally in the action and in the reflection that is part of inquiry. This methodology is a great improvement on the objectifying and alienating approach of orthodox social sciences but remains within an essentially humanistic worldview in which "man is the measure of all things."

Cracks appeared along the way in this secular quest. There was the occasional crisis in my later teens about the meaningless of my life; there were "odd" experiences in various groups that seemed to point to a wider reality. There were some more startling experiences of nonordinary reality in ceremony and at power spots (for example at an ancient stone circle near the tip of Cornwall). But I was for a long while able to treat these as curiosities about which I could chatter as part of my slightly eccentric and offbeat presentation of self. I am not sure how seriously I ever took them.

So I am not quite sure if I can tell where the leap happened, and, anyway, some experiences should remain private. I am now prepared to take more seriously—indeed I am taking more seriously—the reality that the planet earth and all her worlds are sacred space. This means that our experience, our knowing, and our action, at its best, will also be sacred. My point is that this is in profound contradiction to the secularized experience, knowledge, and action of Western society. My further point is that if we are to live our lives as high-quality inquiry (to which I remain committed as a dream), we need to look at the idea and the experience of inquiry as sacred too.

For me the idea, the dream, of a fully human inquiry represents one of the highest virtues and possibilities of human consciousness. It is a process through which we may honor our human lives and the planet that nurtures us. It is a process through which we live fully in our experience, participating in creating our lives with others and with the many worlds of our experience, and to which we also bring a loving, imaginative, exploratory, critical, sense-making reflection that informs our future action and experience. In this article, I wish to begin an exploration of some of the qualities this may entail.

THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL CRISIS OF THE WEST

But first, let me put my autobiographical sketch alongside a brief account of the epistemological crisis facing the West as seen by some contemporary writers.

And here I will just touch on one or two key points, assuming that the reader has some familiarity with this material. First, Gregory Bateson's work (1972, 1979) points to what he terms "errors in epistemology" in treating the living world, the *creatura*, in the terms of the nonliving world, the *pleroma*. A related error lies in separating what is "in here" from what is "out there," thus cutting the circuits of Mind which are immanent in living ecologies. The errors are the result of thinking in terms of energy rather than of information, of cause and effect rather than the "pattern which connects." To repeat a famous quote:

If you put God outside and set him vis-à-vis his creation and if you have the idea that you are created in his image, you will logically and naturally see yourself as outside and against the things around you. And as you arrogate all mind to yourself, you will see the world around you as mindless and therefore as not entitled to moral or ethical consideration. The environment will be yours to exploit . . .

If this is your estimate of your relation to nature and you have an advanced technology, your likelihood of survival will be that of a snowball in hell. You will die either of the toxic by-products of your own hate, or, simply, of over population and over-grazing. (Bateson, 1972, p. 462)

Despite his use of the metaphor God, Bateson is of course committed to his cybernetic vision of creation—"neither mechanical nor supernatural," as he writes in *Angels Fear* (Bateson & Bateson, 1987)—and is deeply suspicious of the spiritual perspective. However, his emphasis on the immanence of Mind in living systems is congruent with the vision I am pursuing. Similarly, James Lovelock's (1979) articulation of the Gaia hypothesis that the planet Earth is a living being rests fairly firmly within a materialist worldview, yet speaks an inspiring vision. Peter Russell (1982, 1992) has developed this hypothesis to suggest that we are at a critical point in the evolution of Gaia's consciousness as human beings and together may take the next step in self-reflexive consciousness.

Morris Berman's (1981) wonderful book *The Reenchantment of the World* explores the roots of our crisis—a crisis not only social and economic but epistemological—in the shift away from a participating consciousness to a mechanical worldview that took place with startling rapidity in Europe in the 17th century:

The view of nature which predominated in the West down to the eve of the Scientific Revolution was that of an enchanted world. Rocks, trees, rivers, and clouds

were all seen as wondrous, alive, and human beings felt at home in this environment. The cosmos, in short, was a place of belonging. A member of this cosmos was not an alienated observer of it but a direct participant in its drama. . . .

The story of the modern epoch, at least on the level of mind, is one of progressive disenchantment. From the sixteenth century on, mind has been progressively expunged from the phenomenal world. . . . At least in theory . . . the "mechanical philosophy" . . . [is] the dominant mode of thinking. That mode can best be described as disenchantment, nonparticipation, for it insists on a rigid distinction between observer and observed. Scientific consciousness is alienated consciousness: there is no ecstatic merger with nature, but rather total separation from it. (pp. 16-17)

Of course, as Berman (1981) noted so forcefully, to see nature in this way is in the end to see ourselves in this way, as writers from Blake to Nietzsche to Laing pointed out, so what we feel is a "sickness in the soul," and as Wilhelm Reich (1945/1972) described, our behavior in the world is alienated from experience through character armor—the defenses are structured into our musculature, our posture, our breathing, and our movement, *and* into our similarly overstructured and repressive social and organizational arrangements. At its extreme (and it seems we may be reaching that extreme) this produces a human society that is essentially destructive. Berman (1981) argues that some kind of participative, holistic consciousness must emerge if we are to survive as a species.

Henryk Skolimowski's (1992) recent contribution to the debate starts with the similar point that "we have constructed a deficient code for reading nature, leading to a deficiency in interacting with nature" (p. 1); we need a new matrix for our action, because given the current framework our action "continuously misfires." Central to his construction of an "eco-cosmology" is the idea of a participatory mind: Mind is present in all constructions of our knowledge and in all pictures of the world. All experience is influenced by our perspective. But this is not in any sense a limitation on knowledge, because our mind "invariably and tirelessly elicits (through its various faculties and sensitivities) from the amorphous primordial data of the universe" (p. 20) and thus *cocreates* with the universe. Skolimowski goes beyond the Kantian argument that our knowledge is limited by the categories of thought to suggest that human consciousness is part of the celebratory self-creating dance of the cosmos.

For those readers for whom the term *mind* may feel exclusively cerebral, I should point out that Skolimowski (1992) employs it with an encompassing meaning. For example, he uses the interesting term *reverential thinking* because "for the appreciative and sensitive mind, reverence for life appears as a natural acknowledgement of the miracle and the beauty of life itself" (p. 24). This means, he suggests, that good research will be conducted from a "state of grace."

If we turn to the teachings of creation spirituality (Fox, 1983), we find another critique of Western epistemology in a revisioning of the notion of sin:

Sin . . . would consist of injuring creation and doing harm to its balance and harmoniousness, turning what is beautiful into what is ugly . . . such sin is a break, a rupture in creation itself. . . . The sinful consciousness that lies behind ecological sin is that of a dualistic mentality that treats other creatures in a subject/object fashion of manipulation and control. (p. 119)

Finally, in this brief review of reflections on our epistemological crisis, I will turn to Christopher Fry's (1951) poetic writing, much quoted but still carrying an important vision:

The human heart can go to the lengths of God.
Dark and cold we may be, but this
Is no winter now. The frozen misery
Of centuries cracks, breaks, begins to move,
The thunder is the thunder of the floes,
The thaw, the flood, the upstart Spring.
Thank God our time is now when wrong
Comes up to meet us everywhere,
Never to leave us till we take
The longest stride of soul men ever took.
Affairs are now soul size
The enterprise
Is exploration into God.
Where are you making for? It takes
So many thousand years to wake,
But will you wake for pity's sake? (p. 49)

REACHING FOR A VISION OF SACRED INQUIRY

These personal experiences and my study of the epistemological crisis of our world lead me to the intuition that to be person centered or humanistic is not enough; to be planet centered is more satisfying yet still secular. Human endeavors must be both grounded in immediate experience of the presence of the world and contained within a wider cosmology; so an essentially mystic/spiritual worldview underpins my thoughts about quality in human inquiry (Fox, 1988).

As I reach for a vision of a sacred cosmos, words (necessarily) begin to be difficult, but let me make some attempts. I see a cosmos that is at the same time both unitary and multiple, both One and Many. In this cosmos are present many individual spiritual centers of consciousness (of which human persons are one kind), which are also connected in the web of the One (Heron, 1992). I see a world in which the physical is one lodge of the spirit, a panentheistic world in which spirit is both immanent and transcendent. Look around you at life on earth and you may experience the presence of the immanent Goddess, as Starhawk (1979) points out. Call the transcendent spirit God if you will, or Great Spirit, Wakantanka, but know that these are names for an ultimate unspeakable mystery. A sacred world is *alive*; it contains many different worlds—mineral, plant, animal, human, spirit—with their different consciousnesses and their different gifts; and such a world is *sacramental* in that it is the embodiment of the divine (Sherrard, 1987).

One way of expressing this is through the Medicine Wheel:

In many ways this Circle, this Medicine Wheel can best be understood if you think of it as a mirror in which everything is reflected. "The Universe is the Mirror of the People," the old Teachers tell us . . .

Our Teachers tell us that all things within this Universe Wheel know their Harmony with every other thing, and know how to Give-Away one to another, except man . . .

All the things of the Universe have spirit and life, including the rivers, rocks, earth, sky, plants and animals. But it is only man, of all Beings on the Wheel, who is a determiner. Our determining spirit can be made whole only through the learning of harmony with all our brothers and sisters, and with all the other spirits of the Universe. (Storm, 1972, pp. 4-5)

The human is the determiner, the one who through self-reflexive consciousness and intent may cocreate many different worlds. So our experience will be sacred or secular partly according to the purpose and intent we bring to it. In contrast to the doctrine that we are passive receptors of sense experience, a sacred and enchanted world will respond to the intentionality of the human mind and spirit. If we take a materialistic and utilitarian view of the planet as nonliving matter, then to a large extent that is the way the planet will be. And if we see the planet as ensouled, as Gaia or as Grandmother Earth, then she will unfold for us as living spirit. To a large extent, it is a matter of our

human intention—hence the importance of determining our purpose, of choosing what is worthy of our attention and the manner of our attention, and above all of envisioning the qualities of the world we wish to inhabit and living in accordance with that vision.

Now I do *not* mean this as a naive statement of “we can determine our own reality.” But I *do* mean to emphasize that the paradigms that frame our vision are self-sealing, overdetermined systems of experience, thought, and belief that bring to us only that which we allow them to bring. We *can* choose the mirror we hold, the aspects of the cosmic dance to which we wish to make ourselves available.

So it seems to me that this must mean that human inquiry must be grounded in a sense of the sacred, and its purpose must be to nurture the growth of love, beauty, wisdom, and compassionate action. These are important for the flowering of all forms of life. Yet I am sufficiently a child of my education to want to hold also to some intellectual rigor. I wish to heal the barrenness of the isolated intellect by bringing it into relationship with emotional, practical, aesthetic, and spiritual rigor and to discover what these are. Through a process of human inquiry, we may learn to walk in spirit, walk in beauty, walk in wisdom, walk in skill, and we may through this learn what we mean by spirit, beauty, truth, and skill . . . maybe that is one way of seeing the quest.

ASPECTS OF SACRED INQUIRY

Thus human inquiry is one path toward creative experience of our world, which includes *experience* of the sacred whole, *representation* of that experience in ways that bring beauty, *understanding* and framing of that experience in ways that are not alienated, and *action* and *engagement* to heal ourselves and our planet. Thus experience, representation, understanding, and action are four aspects of sacred inquiry I wish to consider.

Experience

We are, it seems, alienated from our experience, identified with false selves (Laing, 1967). A major contribution of existentialist philosophy has been to point out the extent of this alienation:

Neither puzzlement nor awe, neither a thirst for knowledge nor a craving for clarity, has been the abiding inspiration for philosophy. Rather, this has been the perpetual threat posed by the sense that people are hopelessly alienated from their world. (Cooper, 1990, p. 22)

This suggests that we might think of human inquiry not so much as a search for truth but as a way of healing alienation. Our attempts to define validity in our newer forms of inquiry, drawing as they have on analogies with orthodox research (e.g., Lincoln & Guba, 1986) have been struggles in vain. The existentialist position suggests to us that quality inquiry would seek first to acknowledge and then to heal our alienation and that in doing this it would shock or otherwise disturb our cozy acceptance of our alienated existence.

If we wish to talk about experience, we must have some notion of the human person as one center of experience. John Heron's (1992) *Feeling and Personhood* offers a perspective on the human being that I find sympathetic. For Heron the *person* is a “fundamental spiritual reality, a distinct presence in the world” (p. 52), a view of the person that avoids several traps: It doesn't reduce the person to a biological or social animal, nor does it see the individual as a separated and alienated ego; it also avoids the “transpersonal” fallacy that the person is no more than an illusion on the way to Nirvana (Wilber, 1980). We are here and we are “real,” and our reality includes material and social and psychological and spiritual dimensions.

I should note in passing that for Heron (1992) the person may progressively actualize through eight different states from the primal person in the fetal world to the “living presence” of the transpersonal, charismatic person. Being a person in the fullest sense is therefore “an achievement of education and self-development” (p. 52), and most of us are still at some stage of developing potential.

Heron (1992) portrays the psyche as having four primary modes of functioning: affective, imaginal, conceptual, and practical.² In the affective mode, the basis of experience, the psyche reaches to the *individuating* pole of *emotion*—joy, surprise, fear, grief, anger, and so on—and also to the *participatory* pole of *feeling*, which Heron describes as

the capacity to participate in wider unities of being, to become at one with the differential content of the whole field of experience, to indwell what is present through attunement and resonance, and to know its own distinctness while unified with the differentiated other. This is the domain of empathy, indwelling, participation, present, resonance, and such like. (p. 16)

This feeling dimension is the grounding of psyche and of the person. It is the “root and fundament” (p. 20) of all other modes, through which I

resonate with being . . . indwell the world, participate in its qualities, am attuned to how it is. I am in communion with what is manifest here and now, and while feeling at one with it, I am at the same time aware of my own distinctness. (p. 92)

This view is in accord with Whitehead's (1933/1942) view that the ultimate metaphysical reality is creative experience. In similar vein, Martin Buber (1958) writes of the "two primary words I-Thou and I-It." I speak the primary word I-Thou when, as a whole being, I am in relationship with the other, equally as whole being. The world of I-Thou is a world of no bounds, a world of relations. On the other hand, I speak the primary word I-It when I relate to my world in terms of bounded objects, thus fragmenting both myself and my world.

Morris Berman (1981) argues persuasively that a participatory consciousness must be at the heart of all knowing, even of the scientific knowing that denies it. He follows Polanyi (1962) in pointing out how we emphasize the analytical, digital, conscious modes of knowing without acknowledging that these must rest on the vast bed of tacit, analogic, necessarily unconscious knowing.

To explore more fully this participatory consciousness, one needs to turn to an experience of participation, because, by their very nature, words as concepts tend to separate us from our experience. This might take the form of a vision quest or of wilderness experience as recommended by the exponents of deep ecology (Seed, Macy, Fleming, & Naess, 1988). For a micro teaching in participatory consciousness, the following experiment (which is adapted from Skolimowski, 1991) is worth trying.

Go outside and find a tree. First of all decide what kind of tree it is, and then identify and name all the separate entities you can find: trunk, branches, twigs, bark, leaves, stems, ants, bugs, drops of water . . . and so on. Identify and name as many as you can in as much detail as you can. Make a list. When you have finished (if you do finish) begin to count the number of each entity you have identified.

After fifteen minutes or so, sit back and notice the state of consciousness you are in.

Then approach the same tree in the following fashion. First, quieten your being with some gentle breathing and mind-clearing meditation. Then approach the tree with reverence and ask for permission to engage. If the permission is granted identify with the tree, enter into its being, experience its history and present state. Ask the tree if it will tell you its Name.

After fifteen minutes or so, thank the tree, disengage, and notice the state of consciousness you are in.

This participative consciousness is part of a resacralization of the world, a reenchantment of the world. Sacred experience is based in reverence, in awe and love for creation, valuing it for its own sake, in its own right as a living presence. It is based in the emotions—zest, joy, passion—that help the life process flow as opposed to the stuck unexpressed emotions that may distort experience. Quality inquiry will be rooted in love for oneself and for the world in which and with which one inquires. We may learn much about this from Matthew Fox (1983) and his view of a creation-centered spirituality, which begins in awe and delight at the beauty and richness of creation.

Fox (1991) suggests as a first commandment, "Thou shalt fall in love at least three times a day," meaning by this that one can reach out in love to all different aspects of creation. He contrasts this *via positiva*, which starts in awe and love, with the more orthodox fall/redemption theology, which has original sin as its starting point.

The devastating psychological corollary of the fall/redemption tradition is that religion with original sin as its starting point and religion built exclusively around sin and redemption does not teach trust. . . . It teaches both consciously and unconsciously fear. . . . It teaches distrust beginning with distrust of ones own existence. (Fox, 1983, p. 119)

Similarly, sacred inquiry will start with awe and love, rather than with the suspicion, skepticism, and defensiveness that is at the root of so much of our current worldview and science (Devereaux, 1967; Maslow, 1966).

However, although emphasizing that participative consciousness starts with love, awe, and delight, we must also honor the dark side of our experience, "sitting with what is spoiled," as my friend Alan Bleakley puts it (personal communication, September, 1992; see also Bleakley, 1989). We are indebted to Jung for drawing attention to the shadow of our experience and endeavors and to Hillman (1975) for pointing out the importance of pathologizing:

the psyche's autonomous ability to create illness, morbidity, disorder, abnormality and suffering in any aspect of its behavior and to experience and imagine life through this deformed and afflicted perspective. (p. 57)

As Hillman draws our attention to pathologizing, so Fox (1983) points to the second path of creation spirituality, the *via negativa*, which demands that we let go, empty ourselves, let darkness be darkness, pain be pain, and silence be silence. Acceptance of the shadow, of pathology, of the *via negativa* is essential

for deepening our experience beyond a humanistic perspective dominated by ego needs to an experience of the sacred.

Representation

We cannot express experience directly, even to ourselves. Once the immediacy of the moment has passed we need to re-member it for ourselves, and to re-present it in some form if we wish to communicate with others. As John Heron (1992) points out, the first step from experiential knowing is not to concepts and ideas, but to images, dream, story, poetry, and metaphor. This presentational knowledge is an important (and often neglected) bridge between experiential knowledge and propositional knowledge.

If we agree that presentational symbolism is indeed a mode of knowing, then we can no longer conveniently distance ourselves from its use by delegating it to the artistic community. We need to bring it right back into the mainstream knowledge quest. (p. 176)

The idea that what is important is to walk in beauty, as the traditional Navaho prayer would have us, is strange to Western ways of thinking. But it seems to me central to a worthwhile epistemology that it's knowing is beautiful. What is the warrant for your knowing? is the traditional epistemological question. To my mind one sound answer might be, It is beautiful, or It leads to a beautiful life. As Whitehead (1933/1942) has it, it is "beauty which provides the final contentment for the Eros of the Universe" (p. 18). Certainly many of the outcomes of a utilitarian worldview are not beautiful.

Hillman's (1981) essay *The Thought of the Heart* explores many of these issues. For Hillman, through the thought of the heart we open ourselves to creative imagination, "the imagination in which and by which the spirit moves from the heart towards all origination" (p. 1); through this imaginative power, we may experience what is *essentially real*. This means we may avoid the "modern psychological illusions" that lead us to confuse the *imaginal* with the *subjective*, and the *externally real* with the *essentially real*. This imaginal world then might be seen as the world of sacred essentials, not to be confused with either a subjective or an objective "gloss" on experience.

The heart that is capable of such knowing is hidden behind several disguises:

First, my heart is my humanity, my courage to live, my strength and fierce passion. . . . My most noble virtues

emanate from the heart: loyalty, heroic boldness, compassion. Let us call this heart the heart of the Lion, Coeur de Lion.

Second: my heart is an organ of the body. It is a muscle or pump, an intricate mechanism and secret holder of my death. Let us refer to this pumping heart as the heart of Harvey.

Third: my heart is my love, my passion, my feelings, the locus of my soul and sense of person. It is the place of intimate interiority, where sin and shame and desire, and the unfathomable divine too, inhabit. Let us call this personal heart the heart of Augustine. (Hillman, 1981, pp. 5-6)

Coeur de Lion takes us outward into activity, into display in the world; it is other and outer directed, with an animal "wholehearted" quality, not recognizing reflection as such but as an aspect of activity. The *heart of Harvey* in reducing the heart to a pump brings to us a literalized consciousness and thus, as I have explored above, a literalized and mechanical world. The *heart of Augustine* is the personal heart from which the imaginal is driven out by personal feeling, so there remains only subjectivity. Thus

A gulf opens between subjective feelings without imaginative forms, and the literalism of images as sensations, ideas, data without subjectivity. (Hillman, 1981, p. 19)

Modern psychology is much occupied with the idea of projection, in which what belongs "inside" is placed on objects "outside."

The whole endeavour of retrieving projection . . . could become irrelevant once the theory of the heart were to shift from its personalistic base. We would then recognize much of what we call projection as imaginal presences, an attempt to restore both heart and image to things. Pornography, intellectual abstractions, and the impersonal data from the sciences and histories can be recovered by our taking them to heart, allowing them to invent themselves further, encouraging them to confess *their* imaginal reality. (Hillman, 1981, p. 19)

In contrast to these three "disguises," Hillman (1981) presents the *heart of beauty*. He points to the thrill of the experience of beauty and writes,

How is it possible that beauty has played such a central and obvious part in the history of soul and its thought, and yet is absent in modern psychology? (p. 26)

Fox (1992) makes a similar point that the West has not heard the mention of beauty in 300 years of theology. For Hillman (1981), beauty is not superficial adornment, but "the essential condition of *creation as manifestation*" (p. 28). In a comment that may remind us of

Bateson's (1979) notion of the pattern which connects, he points to the original Greek sense of *cosmos* as

an aesthetic idea, and a polytheistic one. It referred to the right placing of the multiple things in the world, their ordered arrangement. (Hillman, 1981, p. 28)

and thus quite different from the Roman imperialist and monotheist notion of a *universe*.

All this takes beauty from the surface to the core, an essential aspect of the pattern that connects:

Beauty is not an attribute then, something beautiful, like a fine skin wrapped round a virtue; the aesthetic aspect of experience itself. Were there no beauty, along with the good and the true and the one, we could never sense them, know them. Beauty is an *epistemological* necessity . . .

As well, beauty is an *ontological* necessity, grounding the sensate particularity of the world. Without (beauty), the world of particulars becomes atomic particles. Life's detailed variety is called chaos, multiplicity, amorphous matter, statistical data. (Hillman, 1981; pp. 29-30)

Thus, to take in the world, to breathe it in fully, is to take it to our heart and allow it to speak to us and to show us *its* heart and soul. For presentational knowing is the way through which "the heart's thought personifies, ensouls, and animates the world" (Hillman, 1981, p. 30).

But what, I hear you ask, about ugliness? Hillman (1981) asks this too, and points out that psychotherapy has had a pathologizing eye (in Jung's celebrated phrase, "the gods have become diseases"); and so, too, has much research in its creation of an ugly utilitarian worldview. We need "an eye for ugliness" in human inquiry, particularly for the ugliness that would standardize, secularize, and dry out the delights of the inquiring life—the kind of ugliness that characterizes much of what we find in social science journals these days.

Understanding

Often, when people rediscover the magic of participatory experience and the possibilities of presentational knowing, they reject ideas, concepts, and theories. This is understandable because language when used to classify and label leads to a reinforcement of the split between subject and object. As Heron (1992) points out, "The concept drives a wedge between the psyche and its world" (p. 146): Once we lose touch with participative consciousness and with the cocreative, transactional nature of perception, we

identify with the words that name our perceptions, thus reifying the world and setting ourselves up as subjects vis-à-vis an objective world.

However, one of our gifts as human persons is the gift of wisdom and understanding. Although certainly the shadow side of this is rigid and reifying conceptual structures, the light side is the ability to frame a limitless variety of understandings and descriptions of our world that open new possibilities for humanity and for the cosmos. As human persons, we bring as our gift the endless variety of ways we can dance with the primordial givenness of the cosmos.

But it is so easy to become caught in the maze of our conceptual structures, so easy to take them for reality. I remember listening to Reb Anderson, a Zen monk, describing how we create our world and how we may become fooled by our own creation. We need to notice ourselves moment to moment as we create our world, he said, because we can then understand that these forms are illusory:

A magician is not fooled by his tricks: he catches them at the beginning. But if you wait for five minutes, the magician can create quite a scene. (Anderson, 1984)

If you don't catch your world at the moment you create it, you can be pushed around by it; then you need to start trying to push it around.

One form of language that will help avoid this kind of reification is dialectical and paradoxical (Berman, 1981; Reason & Rowan, 1981; Wilber, 1981, also writes of mandalic knowledge). Formal Aristotelian logic states that no proposition can be both true and false at the same time, and that every proposition is either true or false. These assumptions, although they may be helpful in certain (quite limited) circumstances, also lead us directly to the reification of our concepts.

So although a traditional logic creates a dichotomy, a dialectical ontology embraces the paradox of opposites. Dialectics involves a recognition of the inseparability of two apparent opposites and an exploration of the interplay between these interdependent poles, because "what lies between the poles is more substantial than the poles themselves" (Watts, 1963). As Watts points out, this understanding of polarities is quite different from the splitting of opposites into a duality. In dialectical thinking and experience, we explore and seek to understand the interdependence, interpenetration, and unity of the two poles. Then we can maybe understand the cocreated realities within which we live as moments within this dialectic where we may exist for a while.

We can see this kind of thinking expressed in Bateson's (1987) "syllogism in grass":

Men die
Grass dies
Men are grass (p. 26)

as well as in Laing's (1970) *Knots*:

it hurts Jack
to think
that Jill thinks he is hurting her
by (him) being hurt
to think
that she thinks he is hurting her
by making her feel guilty
at hurting him
by (her) thinking
that he is hurting her
by (his) being hurt
to think
that she thinks he is hurting her
by the fact that
da capo sine fine (p. 13)

The disciplines needed for dialectical thinking are phenomenal and certainly are not taught in our schools or universities. Dialectical thinking may be metaphoric and poetic rather than literal (Bleakley, 1989); it is demonic and ironic rather than logical (Torbert, 1991). Dialectical thinking is "post-linguistic," to use Heron's (1992) term in that it self-reflexively draws attention to the distorting possibilities of its own categories: It is aware that the map is not the territory, that the map even is not the map.

My own experience suggests that it is not possible to escape from our normal logical thought modes by just thinking about it: One needs to be shocked out of one's thought patterns by paradoxical events time and again; shocked by direct experience that involves the defenses of the body. And each time one may see the old thought patterns inexorably take over again; reading Castaneda's (1976) early accounts of his work with Don Juan provides some interesting accounts of this.

Another helpful discipline is openness to chaos: John Heron and I have suggested that, in the conduct of cooperative inquiry, a descent into chaos—into an experience of the arbitrariness, randomness, chaos, indeterminacy, and thus paradoxically the enormous creative potential of experience—may often facilitate the emergence of new order (Heron, 1988; Reason & Heron 1986). It is interesting to compare this insight with Berman's (1981) account of the alchemical process:

Life, and human personality, are inherently crazy, multifaceted; neurosis is the inability to tolerate this fact. The traditional model of the healthy soul demands that we impose an order or an identity on all of these facets. (p. 90)

But the alchemical tradition sees the resulting personality as prematurely and rigidly structured, as an "aborted metal that sulfur fixed too quickly":

Solve et coagula says the alchemist; abandon this prematurely congealed persona that forces you into predictable behaviour and a programmed life of institutional insanity. (p. 90)

Judi Marshall and I have noticed in our work with postgraduate research students the fine line that is walked between dialectical paradox and Aristotelian order—at worst, between chaos in which all is lost in confusion, and order in which all is lost through calcification. One creative way through is to allow the experience of inquiry itself to speak thoroughly, to pay attention to dream and metaphor, to build fully on the representational knowing so that the words, logical or metaphorical, grow out of this deep experience. I suspect also that we need to return to the knowing of the body more often than we do, for as Berman points out, the body holds the residues of holistic consciousness.

Engagement

A sacred inquiry will be one in which people can act to heal their lives and their worlds. It is a science of engagement, a science of action. Knowledge is for action (Macmurray, 1957), for the worthwhile transformation of our world. Bill Torbert (1991) has articulated this nicely, in describing his vision of action inquiry as

an attention that spans and integrates the four territories on human experience. This attention is what sees, embraces, and corrects incongruities among mission strategy operations and outcomes. It is the course of the "true sanity of natural awareness of the whole." (p. 219).

Torbert's purpose is to reach for both justice and high-quality work; he continuously challenges us to develop our ability to reflect, moment to moment, whether our actions are fitting our purposes, whether they are sufficiently subtle and supple, ironic, and, where necessary, diabolic:

action—movements, tones, words, and silences—sufficiently supple, attuned and crafty to create scenes of questionable taste. (Torbert, 1981, p. 149)

Similarly, as John Heron (1992) points out, practical knowledge is the "final outcrop" of what he terms the "up-hierarchy of knowledge, from experiential to presentational to propositional" (p. 172). The validity of practical knowledge rests on the "canons of competence" in the application of skills: "Skills are a blessed relief. They bring us to the business of living" (p. 173).

It seems to me that we must rediscover the Buddhist notion of "right action" (Reason, 1988a; Schumacher, 1977) and that the purpose of right action in the present time must be for healing: for healing the rift between persons and the experience, between persons and others, between groups and societies, between our human existence and the requirements of the ecology of the planet, and between ourselves and the realm of spirit, however one may wish to speak of that.

SEPARATENESS AND INTERPENETRATION

So in reflecting on right action, of engagement with our world for the purpose of healing, I come back full circle to the issue of the alienation of modern human persons. And this is fitting because although I have abstracted (and thus maybe alienated) four different aspects of human inquiry—experience, representation, understanding, and action—these, of course, also interpenetrate and inform each other. At any aware moment we may make sense of our actions, represent them to ourselves and to each other, and experience both ourselves as acting and the consequences of our action. This is close to Torbert's (1991) proposal for action inquiry based on a consciousness that can attend to all four "territories" of experience. Knowledge-in-action may be seen as this kind of living synthesis, a dance between experience of the sacred and management of the practical—and is of course a phenomenal challenge.

And yet it is also helpful to hold the four aspects of human inquiry separate, to see them in an inquiry cycle involving phases of action and reflection. Seen from this perspective, we first *engage* in action, experience ourselves acting, and notice the consequences; we then move *away* from action into reflection, developing images, and making sense of what we have done; this sense making may then revise our action plans for the next cycle. Such cycles, along the lines of cycles of cooperative experiential inquiry (Reason & Heron, 1986), offer a discipline and a framework within which aware action may develop.

Whether we experience these four aspects of human inquiry as interpenetrating, as following each

other in a cyclical fashion, or as some combination of these two, *we must attend to all four*. For to be stuck with one aspect, to overinvest in one phase, is to pathologize it so it turns against us, and thus to lose all. As John Rowan (1981) showed us in his dialectical cycle of research, we must commit ourselves fully and in depth to each phase of inquiry and be open to the emergence of the next opposing aspect demanding attention in its proper time.

Further, in all our inquiry and our attempts to bring love, beauty, wisdom, and creative action to our world, we must recognize both the light and the dark: As we attend to experience, we must respect the essential mystery, the impossibility of experiencing all; as we reach for beauty, we must acknowledge ugliness; as we illuminate and understand, we must know what is beyond understanding; and as we act, we must also know when to leave alone.

In Conclusion

If a science of phenomena starts out, as modern science does start out, with a mistaken idea of the relationship between the divine and the human, or the divine and nature, or, quite simply, with no awareness of the divine at all, the conclusions it reaches as to the nature of both man and the natural world will necessarily be false and to that extent diabolic . . . and its consequences in the sphere of practical application [will be] inevitably destructive. (Sherrard, 1987, p. 116)

We are, I believe, at a time of serious challenge to our secular worldview: Wherever we look, it "continuously misfires." We cannot go back to a medieval participative consciousness, but maybe we can see that that which the mechanical worldview discarded along with a tired Scholasticism—the notion of a living, sacred cosmos—can inform our notions of inquiry so we can develop a new kind of sacred science.

Sacred human inquiry would integrate a critical self-reflexive consciousness with a deep experience of the sacred and would thus make a major contribution to what Maslow (1971) referred to as the "further reaches" of human nature.

NOTES

1. By Medicine Wheel teachings I mean that version of the sacred teachings of Native Americans that has become available to White people through books such as *Seven Arrows* (Storm, 1972) and the workshops and ceremonies conducted by those native, metis, and White teachers with whom I have

had contact. I am sensitive to the need when speaking of the teachings of an indigenous people such as the Native Americans to acknowledge both that the teachings are wide and diverse between different tribes; that I am not a Native American and cannot claim their experience; and that some Native American groups and organizations object strongly to White people using (they would say abusing) their traditional teachings. Nevertheless I wish to give thanks for the beauty that these teachings have brought to my life and acknowledge with gratitude and respect the sources; in particular I wish to thank Arwyn Dreamwalker and members of the Dreamweavers Morningstar Lodge.

2. These four modes of psyche are of course very close to the four aspects of human inquiry I am articulating in this essay.

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Errata

In "Reflections on Sacred Experience and Sacred Science," by Peter Reason (Vol. 2, Issue 3, September 1993), six paragraphs appeared as regular text that should have been block quotes.

On page 275: The paragraph that begins "If this is your estimate . . ." is part of the Bateson quote that appears above it. The paragraph that begins "The story of the modern epoch . . ." is part of the Berman quote above it.

On page 276: The paragraphs that begin "Our Teachers tell us . . ." and "All the things . . ." are part of the Storm quote above them.

On page 279: The paragraphs that begin "Second: . . ." and "Third: . . ." are part of the Hillman quote above them.

On page 280: The paragraph that begins "As well, beauty . . ." is part of the Hillman quote above it.

In addition, one paragraph (that begins "This feeling dimension . . ." at the bottom of page 277) was set as a block quote but should have appeared as regular text.