

**FINDING THE LOST HEART:
A VISION FOR CREATING PERSONAL FULFILLMENT
AND WORLD HARMONY
BY
GLENN STEVEN BERGER, PHD**

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**108 East 38th Street #208
New York, NY 10016
917 596 0650
www.GlennBerger.com
[www. GlennBergerBlog.wordpress.com](http://www.GlennBergerBlog.wordpress.com)**

To Sharon, Maya, and Ethan
You are my heart.

The Master said, 'T'ze, you think, I suppose, that I am one who learns many things and keeps them in memory? No, I seek a unity all-pervading.'

-- Confucius, *The Analects*

(The myth) reveals the answer to what is asked of it. It has no final answer.

-- Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with A Thousand Faces*

The energy of the central point is manifested in the almost irresistible compulsion to *become what one is*, just as every organism is driven to assume the form that is characteristic of its nature. . .

-- Carl Jung, *Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*

"You're a goose," said the giant; "where my heart is, you will never come."
"Well," said the Princess; "but for all that, 'twould be such a pleasure to know where it really lies."

Then the poor Giant could hold out no longer, but was forced to say-
"Far, far, away in a lake lies an island; on that island stands a church; in that church is a well; in that well swims a duck; in that duck there is an egg; and in that egg there lies my heart. . ."

-- The Giant Who Had No Heart in his Body

The heart is where I am whatever I am.

-- St. Augustine

"Fool," said my Muse to me, "look in thy heart and write."

--Sir Philip Sidney

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PREFACE

Everyone has problems.

Whether we wake in the middle of the night in a panic over money troubles, can't find someone to love, find ourselves in the grip of an addiction, or don't know our purpose in life, we all struggle with the distance between who we are, and who we would like to be, between the life we have, and the life we imagine.

We not only battle personally with our addictions, fears, failures, and loneliness, but we watch in confusion as our economic leaders steal billions and bring ruin on themselves and society, politicians end stellar futures with meaningless sexual escapades, and the most creative among us destroy their talents before their time.

Our seeming inability to act with prudence has consequences for all of society. While we drown in debt, our economy is bipolar, manic one moment and depressed the next. With drug and alcohol use rampant and obesity out of control, our health care system is at a breaking point. Chronic planet-wide issues like global warming and the energy crisis are denied or avoided. More than 3 billion people around the world are malnourished when we could feed every person on this planet for a fraction of the cost of our last war.

People everywhere are searching for an answer. We try to cure the human condition with drugs: over 30 million Americans alone take psychotropic medications. Self-help is a ten billion dollar industry and growing, despite the fact that diets, secrets, and quick fixes have failed to heal us. Billions search for relief from their anxieties in the

certainties of fundamentalist religions or the panaceas of the New Age, but neither have made mankind courageous, peaceful, or fulfilled.

As a psychotherapist, I have devoted my life to finding the common root cause of this human suffering. This work is part of my lifetime quest to unearth the hidden answer to this universal dilemma.

I wish to acknowledge the following people who have provided invaluable help in the creation of this project. I would like to thank Dr. Stephen Daniel for his friendship, tireless patience, open-mindedness, generosity of spirit, and for bringing his empirical mind to this work of speculative inquiry. I thank Dr. Richard Stromer for his invaluable assistance in creating this work. His intelligence, sensitivity and insight have helped me travel to the verge of mystic insight. I thank Ruth Greenstein for her encouragement, optimism, talent, hard work and unsparing pen. I thank Irene Reichsbach for her worldly wisdom. I thank Helen Eisenbach for her belief and loving work. I thank Don Shewey for his sensitive feedback. I thank Michael Cohen for sharing himself so openly. I thank Tom Staudter for his close read and generosity. I thank David Yarosh for his teaching and reliability. I thank all of my teachers at the Gestalt Associates for Psychotherapy for their knowledge, empathy and skill. I thank the staff and faculty at the International University for Graduate Studies for their integrity and care. I thank all of my clients for travelling the great journey along with me. I thank my children, Maya and Ethan, for their inspiring example. I especially thank my wife, Sharon, for her unconditional love, support, vision and belief, and for taking care of the kids on Sunday mornings when I worked on this project.

INTRODUCTION: IMAGINING THE SAGE

An ancient book of history tells us that 3000 years ago, in a land as far away as you can travel on this planet, a Profound King held dominion over the greatest civilization humankind has ever known. This was a land at peace with the world, where each individual achieved the fullness of their potential. Good relationships were held by all. Leaders were admired and trusted by their citizens, families lived in harmony, couples were in love, the aged and children were cherished and cared for. All was right with the world because the King lived according to the *Way*. He had achieved the *Central Harmony*: both within his heart and throughout the world his thoughts, feelings and actions were in accord with the *Heavenly Mandate*.¹

But the King died, and over the course of many years, in the inevitable motions of growth and decay that mark the nature of manifestation, the world declined. The *Way* fell into obscurity, and heresies and violence arose. Kings and fathers were killed by their subjects and sons. Tyrants without prudence provoked wars for dubious causes. Warlords, thinking only of their own lucre, plundered neighboring states. Relationships were in disarray. Divorce was epidemic. Children and parents were divided by an unbridgeable gulf. Individuals were depressed, anxious, cynical, hopeless or despairing. There was no balance in life. People mostly thought about their own profit and little about the good of the whole. Morality appeared absent from the world. The Kingdom fell into ruins.²

Out of this shattered civilization, a hero was born. The hero bemoaned the state of the world. He saw suffering wherever he looked. Not least of all he felt the pain in his own heart. Like all the spiritual seers and prophets, the wise and enlightened, the chosen and the divine, his heart overflowed with compassion. He asked, “Why do people suffer unnecessarily?” “Why should they be so riven with fear?” “Why do the great masses waste the few precious specks of time that they have on this planet in useless pursuits?” The hero knew there had to be something better than the world and the lives he saw around him. He longed for a way to transcend his own feeling of being lost.

He set as his goal in life to set things right again. He studied day and night trying to answer the questions: how does one heal the wounds of the world, and return it to a condition of harmony? How can humankind be liberated, freeing its potential for joy and love? How could he *be* that which he knew he *must*?

The hero looked within himself for the answer, but the waters were murky and having no compass he lost his way. He then looked to the world outside for a model to follow but he could not find one honest man who lived in his own day.

With nowhere else to turn, he looked to the distant past and it was here that he found the light for which he had been searching. He discovered a legacy of explorers of humanity who, too, devoted their life to the study of themselves and others to advance the cause of universal realization. He traveled back through the generations and found that each teacher had a teacher, until he chanced upon the story of the King and his time of peace and happiness.

Now he knew what he had to do. If he could understand the way of this King, if he could follow this model, he could bring this boon back to his own time and return the

world to its purity. The hero knew that something of the greatest significance had been lost from those golden days. If this thing could be named it could be found. And if it could be found, the world could be restored to fruitfulness.³

Through unceasing self-cultivation, the hero became a Sage. Over the decades, by following the instructions of those who came before, he came to know his own nature and so he came to know human nature. From his understanding of human nature he came to grasp the nature of the cosmos. With the discovery of the ineluctable laws of the whole he uncovered the central clue to the intractable problems of humankind.

With this discovery, he knew that it was he who had been chosen to bring this gift back to humankind. He said,

“Heaven, in producing the people, has given to those who first attain understanding the duty of awakening those who are slow to understand; and to those who are first to awaken the duty of awakening those who are slow to awaken. I am amongst the first of Heaven's people to awaken. I shall awaken the people by means of this Way. If I do not awaken them, who will?”⁴

He brought his wisdom back to the world, but no one would listen. The leaders paid him no mind. He was not able to convince others to follow the ways of the ancient Sages and Profound King. Though he was respected by his disciples, he had to accept that he fell short of his goal. Old and past the peak of his powers, he retired to a life of study and writing. He died in obscurity. His one hope was that his writings might be uncovered at some later time when humanity would be ready to hear, and follow, the truth.

For many years the work of the Sage remained unknown. Though he did not solve humanity's difficulties, in each generation new scholars, mystics, and poets emerged to continue the search for what was lost, within the self and in the world. They, too, turned

to the past for guidance and eventually the words of the Sage were rediscovered. His work became the object of veneration. Seekers scrutinized his oracular writings, trying to understand the mysteries held in his texts.⁵ For over one thousand years every student across a great land studied his words. His words built a grand civilization.

Despite the fact that our exemplar transformed more human beings than any other he has again fallen into obscurity. Today, this man's name is virtually unknown. He is all but forgotten. Yet to understand what people can be -- to know wisdom -- one begins with him. Who was he? The man whose words have the power to inspire us to this day lived in China around 300 BCE and was named Meng-K'e. If he is known to us at all it is through the name of Mencius (pronounced MEN-shus). Of his many cryptic writings the most compelling were,

“Pity the man who has lost his path and does not follow it, and has lost his heart and does not go out and recover it. When people's dogs and chicks are lost they go out and look for them, but when people's hearts – or original nature – are lost, they do not go out and look for them. The principle of self-cultivation consists in nothing but trying to find the lost heart.”⁷

Within this paragraph lies the clue. Mencius tells us that what we seek is the *lost heart* and the way to find it is through *self-cultivation*. What does this mean? Since the time of their composition, across the ages and down to the present day these words still resonate. Scholars have pored over these symbols to discover the central meaning, the core – *la coeur* -- of the Sage's revelation that holds the answer to the mysteries of the human condition.⁸

The work of self-cultivation and finding the lost heart that the Sage inspired is far from complete. The quest for harmony continues as humanity stumbles along its way.

The search is kept alive by a tradition of explorers who have passed the torch of illumination, one to the next, down over the millennia to this day.

In order to find what we are looking for, those of us who have joined this project do what the Sage did. We travel back in time and ‘commune with the ancients’⁹ to find examples, or models, on which to base ourselves.

As the Sage looked backwards and found the Profound King as his model, when we look backwards to find the person who can serve as our inspiration, we find the Sage. As the Sage was a disciple of those before him, we become a disciple of the Sage.

The Heart’s Goal: The Aim of this Work

The adventurers who travel into the depths of self to understand the mysteries of human nature and the universe are no longer called sages. In modern garb, we are sometimes called psychotherapists.

As a therapist, I meet each new wanderer when they step beyond the threshold of my office door and enter into my sacred circle. Most are called not by the condition of the world, though many deride it, but by the struggles in their own lives. Like most of us who are called to participate in the Great Work, they arrive with an *aporia*, which is a dilemma, paradox, or problem, something urgent and seemingly unfixable in their life. They lay the story of the problem in their lives before me like some inscrutable text. Together we enter the tale to see past the veil of appearances, to uncover it, to decode it and to reveal the truth in its depths.

People come to therapy because they are suffering, unhappy, and they are stuck. They are perplexed. They don't know why they can't do the things they want to do. They do not understand themselves.

Our sufferings, frustrations, and dissatisfactions lead them to imagine a better life, a better self, a better world. As they can imagine these ideals, they hope that they are more than what they appear to be.

Though these pilgrims believe they come to me for relief from their life's problems and have that better life, though they may not know it, they come for a reason beyond the problems they present. The puzzle of their existence goes far beyond the struggles of which they are aware. The true cause of their arrival is beneath the threshold of consciousness. They come because the universe works in mysterious ways. It uses personal pain so that we pay attention to the reality that we are in some way living out of harmony with the laws of the universe. They come, ultimately, because they need to answer the question of what is the best way to live their lives. And nature asks of each of us that we live according to universal law because that is what is best for the greater whole. Each traveler comes with their unique story, but they share a universal heart. Deep within, they are following in the footsteps of the Sage. They come to bring the world back to a condition of harmony and rightness.

This work was originally inspired by these *aporia*, the host of seemingly inscrutable life problems that people bring into psychotherapy. My original intention in writing this was to deepen our understanding of the human condition especially in relation to these problems. In so doing, my hope was to add to our knowledge of, and improve the method of, the psychotherapeutic endeavor. However, as a result of the

research that I have now completed, it has now become clear that the problems we find in our individual lives are rooted in the same soil as our interpersonal, social, political and spiritual difficulties.

Contemporary intersubjective psychological theory posits that we cannot understand ourselves unless we recognize that there is no self separate from a web of relationship. As Robert Stolorow, one of the progenitors of the theory, asserts, intersubjectivity is,

“ . . . a field theory or systems theory in that it seeks to comprehend psychological phenomena not as products of isolated intrapsychic mechanisms but as forming at the interface of reciprocally interacting worlds of experience.”¹⁰

We are born into a relational world, and there we exist till our last breath. As such, a study of self leads to an understanding of relationships. The Confucian philosophy which holds a central place in this study asserts that we are in connection to all things and so a study of relationships leads to an exploration of the universe with its patterns, principles, and laws. Just as this web of connections extends to all things, it extends through all time. Therefore, the study of the cosmic leads us to Eternity. If the self is intrinsically embedded in a web of relationship that has universal and eternal extension, then the self and the eternal cosmos are one. Not only the Confucian philosophers, but a great many others in our wisdom tradition, as I will show in this work, captured this mystic insight. Psychological and spiritual development begins with the wish to heal the self, and to get all that we desire, but I will aim to show that this isn't our true purpose. As we develop and come to know our connectedness to the All, the final end of our development is devoting ourselves to realizing the purpose of the

universe. What I aim to illuminate is that our suffering comes from not playing our essential role in the realization of the universe.

This intertwining of self and All is conveyed in the Confucian insight that Self-discovery is the beginning of returning the cosmos to harmony. In order to make the cosmos right, the Confucians tell us, we need to make the Kingdom right; in order to make the Kingdom right, we need to make the family right; in order to make the family right, we need to make the self right.¹¹

In this work I will aim to reveal something universally applicable about human nature, psyche, and experience. As such, I will propose a cause of, and a direction for solving, not only our personal difficulties but our human travails in our personal relationships, socially, and politically. My purpose, then, in some small way, is to contribute to *tikkun olam*, which is the kabalistic notion of healing the broken world.¹²

In harmony with the argument that I will be making throughout this work, to strive for personal fulfillment is to participate in the development of humanity which intrinsically leads to the growth and development of the cosmos. If the incomprehensible pain and suffering of one individual can be given meaning, and so transformed, then this is done for all of humanity and has universal ramifications. We each have a significant purpose in the realization of the cosmos.

Some may find it audacious, if not arrogant, for me to claim that I am on the quest for the ultimate cause and cure to the grand variety of life problems that people suffer and struggle with. In addition, it is even bolder to assert that this work contributes to the development of the cosmos.

The enemies of such boldness might say that such an answer is impossible to find. It is true that we have a long way to go in understanding these conundrums and in coming up with a reliable method of psychological transformation or spiritual liberation.

Humanity is greatly varied, as is our experience. Clearly there is no one answer to all of life's questions. We know that answers that have seemed correct in the past have turned out to be wholly foolish. Humans are complex and there are an infinite number of ways to explain or describe the human condition. Some assert that we are intrinsically irrational, and this is proved by the fact that everyone is so, and this is how it has always been. Such explanations are given for war -- we will always have war, because we have always had war. But we also know from human history that those things which appeared wholly unsolvable, like the problem of infectious bacterial diseases, have been in large measure conquered. We now have anesthesia, when until just a short time ago any human being who suffered the surgical knife did so with excruciating pain.¹³ Just because a problem appears insolvable doesn't make it so.

To those who say that finding this answer is impossible, I say, you are right. As everyone from Socrates through the Post-Modernists tells us, the ultimate truth exceeds the capacity of the human.¹⁴ So how do we proceed? As is central to the argument that I will make, to wholly take on such a task is the answer that we are seeking. Despite our certain failure, we must try. As it was said of Confucius (551 B.C.E – 479 B.C.E.), the transcendent Chinese Sage who is one of the primary inspirations for this work, “Confucius is the man who was told a thing couldn't be done and did it anyway.”¹⁵

*

In support of the skeptics, I confess that the ambitious work that follows is incomplete. I justify this incompleteness in part with the claim that no scholarly work is the end of research, but rather one part of an ongoing conversation. As I assert in this work, this incompleteness is intrinsic to the nature of the adventure I am embarking on, which is the human project of finding the heart. The finding of the heart, the great Sage, Mencius, tells us, is in the lifelong seeking. The realization of *jen*, or ultimate humanity, is never reached. The noble goal, not the end, defines who we are in our hearts, our essence. As I am asserting that the heart, as a symbol for the essentially human, is never fully found, so too, this work could not possibly be complete. At over 300 pages, I stop at this point only out of mercy for the reader.

Another central point of this work is that such an inquiry, as much as it is meant to add to universal enlightenment, is the process of development for the writer. In this regard, I have had to penetrate the subject matter presented here in this depth and breadth to live out my own story of development, of finding my heart. For that, I will not apologize. Though I present this much so far, my work will go on. This is so because my own quest for heart will go on as long as I have breath.

The research for the entire work as I conceive it, both in this volume and in my proposed writings, is sufficiently complete. Most of what remains for further volumes is the writing. The remainder of the research that I have completed will be enough for at least one, or perhaps, two more works of comparable length.

The structure of the proposed complete work follows the path we need to take to find the heart. It travels with the reader through this story of the loss of our original

nature, the arduous journey of searching for that which has been lost, and the rediscovery of the treasure within.

Inspired by the Mencius quote, the complete work will aim to answer the following questions:

- **What is the heart?**
- **What does it mean to have a lost heart?**
- **How do we lose the heart?**
- **How do we find the heart again?**

This volume, which is the part of this work that has been completed thus far, is in three main sections.

Parts One and Two are preparatory for the answering of the four questions. Part Three aims to answer the first of the four questions: **What is the Heart?**

Part One justifies and demonstrates my approach to gaining knowledge on my subject matter, my methods of proof, and the unique goals that result from this method of inquiry.

In order to gain an understanding of how to answer these questions, my first problem was to search for the appropriate method for understanding the human aporia. As this subject matter is unconventional, I discovered that it requires its own approach. The first chapter of Part One reveals the results of my research into the ways of knowing and provides a justification of my method. It compares the subjective dialectical, rhetorical, informal logic, phenomenological, normative and procedural methods with objective empirical, scientific, statistical and demonstrative ones. It asserts, in contrast to our present concrete way of approaching knowledge, that for the understanding of human

beings, which is the subject matter of this text, the former subjective methods are as, or more, necessary than the latter. This section is a defense of utilizing the methods inherent to what scholars have called *mythos* as a means of not only fulfilling the requirement that a scholarly work expands knowledge, but also develops wisdom.

The second chapter is an exploration of *hermeneutics*. The entire work is inspired by a wisdom text by the Chinese Sage, Mencius. As such, hermeneutics, or the study of texts, where “we encounter meanings that are not immediately understandable but require interpretive effort,”¹⁶ is the method of the work. This section not only justifies the approach that I will be utilizing in the work, but shows how this approach fits directly into the assertions that I am trying to prove about the meaning of the heart, its loss, and recovery. The method, in this regard, is the result. A penetrating exploration of wisdom texts, in whatever form, is a significant method of self-cultivation, which leads to the finding of the lost heart, as I will come to define it.

The third chapter is an exploration of *symbolism*. In this part I show that humans naturally manifest the complex contents of their psychic experience, relational meanings and universal insights through the creation of particular complex symbols which I call *yantric* symbols. The phenomenological, rhetorical, and hermeneutic exploration of yantric symbols is an even more specific way of defining the process of finding the lost heart or coming to know what it means to be human. Study, as the Chinese regarded it, is not only for the accumulation of knowledge, but is primarily for the purpose of self-development toward the realization of one’s highest virtues.

Finally, the fourth chapter of Part One is an exploration of why myths and fairy tales are a primary source of yantric symbols that are worthy of hermeneutic penetration.

The results of Part One are the proof that a central means for understanding human beings is a hermeneutic one, and that this is a core aspect of a program of personal development and self-realization. Hermeneutics is here defined as using texts, or in particular yantric symbols, which can take the form of wisdom texts, artistic products including myths and tales, the products of nature, the narratives of our own lives or other's lives, for the purpose of a penetrating understanding and development of the human and the universal. The hermeneutic process is ongoing, never complete, and involves examining the text from as many vantage points as possible. This includes both a broad historical survey and the deepest possible phenomenological introspection.

Now that I have defined and justified an approach, I begin to use that approach in this work. I begin my exploration of the wisdom text of Mencius from as many perspectives as possible. In order to provide the proper context for this study, Part Two is a literature review and overview of the philosophy of Confucianism, in which the work of Mencius is embedded.

Part Three answers the first of the four questions of the proposed complete work, which is: **what is the heart?** I explore this question by following the guidelines of St. Augustine's hermeneutics. First is the finding of the compelling text. Next is an immersion in all that has been understood about the symbol. Finally, I travel within myself to answer the question from my own heart.

Chapter six is a survey of the meaning of the heart symbol from earliest recorded history in Babylonia and Egypt, through several of the great wisdom traditions and religions in East and West up through contemporary times.

Chapter seven is an exploration in depth of the meaning of heart for Mencius and his fellow Confucian explorers.

Chapter eight is my personal, culminating vision of the heart.

This completes this volume.

The proposed further volumes will answer the remaining three questions.

- **The Tale of the Lost Heart** helps us make sense of our suffering. It names and describes the syndrome that underlies most of the life problems that we struggle with: having a lost heart. It names and illuminates the nature, symptoms, and consequences of this condition.
- **How We Lose the Heart**. Using the psychological theories of attachment, shame, and trauma, along with the latest scientific research on brain development, this section will validate the wisdom of the ancients by revealing how we have lost the heart in the first place.

This section will include cutting-edge psychological theories, including works, among many others, by John Bowlby on attachment, the work of Bessel Van Der Kolk and Francine Shapiro on trauma, and the works of John Bradshaw, Fossum and Mason, and Kaufman on shame. I have been deeply influenced by the Gestalt work of Fritz Perls, and by the relational work of Harville Hendrix. It also will include the paradigm-shifting work of Allan Schore in neuroscience.

- **Finding the Lost Heart**. With this understanding, we are finally ready to follow the results of our explorations on how to find the heart, become everything we are meant to be and fulfill our universal purpose. This

section reveals the necessary steps of self-cultivation to finding the lost heart. We learn that we need to take a wholistic approach to finding our authentic being. We do this by working on ourselves in every way and committing to doing this daily for the rest of our lives. Through living out this path or way, we discover our unique and individual nature. We, as individuals and in relation to others, in our work, in our culture and society, and as residents on Earth, have chance and hope. Though the road is long and arduous, if we dedicate our lives to following the universal truths of Mencius' path of self-cultivation, we will reach our joyous destination.

In order to penetrate to the deepest possible truths within the text, I will include in my proposed complete work how others have interpreted this text; related wisdom texts; myths, fairy tales, art, literature, ritual and dreams; psychological theories, scientific studies, client reports and personal experience.

The questions that spurred this work emerged from my work as a psychotherapist. It began with the aim of furthering the understanding and solution of the problems that my clients presented. Though they are alluded to in this work, the specific dimensions of understanding that emerge from the discipline of psychotherapeutic theory and an expansion of psychotherapeutic practice that derive from this work are mostly reserved for these later parts of the work. Suffice it to say that the discoveries contained herein point beyond the problems of my clients to the human condition as a whole, and reach beyond psychotherapeutic understanding and process for the solution to the human dilemma.

The Heart of the Matter: The Central Claim

What is the cause and solution I propose? My central claim is that human beings experience unnecessary suffering and have problems in their lives because, as the existential philosopher/theologian Paul Tillich (1886-1965) said in his masterwork, *The Courage to Be*, they are estranged from their essential nature.¹⁷ Philosophers have come up with many definitions of essence and in modern times some question the notion of essence entirely. For our purposes, I will use Aristotle's definition. He used the phrase *to ti esti*, which means 'the what it is.' Essence is here defined as that which makes an entity what it is and no other. In this sense, it is definitional. For example, freedom is the essence of a democratic society or reproduction is the essence of living things. An essence is not a substance, but rather a defining quality.

One dictionary definition of heart is essence. This is what is meant by the common phrase, "the heart of the matter." In this sense, one way of interpreting what Mencius means by the term, "heart" is as our essential nature.¹⁸

As essence is defined as what is unique about a thing, the human essence can be defined by the human attributes that make us unique. Aristotle also tells us that all developing things have an entelechy. Entelechy is defined as that which a developing thing is meant to be. A developing thing's entelechy is another way of defining its essence. Within the acorn is the oak. This developmental end is known as a *telos*. I will aim to show that the human telos, or the realization of the human, is then manifested in the optimal development of at least five attributes. These human capacities are cognition, emotion, action or volition, imagination and connection. We are born with these capacities in potential and we can participate in their cultivation and realization. The

optimal realization of a human attribute is known as its *virtue*. I will call the virtues of these five capacities wisdom, passion, strength, creativity, and love. Correspondingly, our telos, the result of our entelechy, is to be wise, passionate, strong, creative and loving.

I will further demonstrate that when we have optimally developed these attributes we are capable of optimal relationships. I will assert that our evolutionary purpose is to have harmonious relationships and love. This is what is best both for the species and the universe as a whole. When we are optimally realized this results in harmonious personal relations and a harmonious and optimally functioning social and political order. This is a reflection of the laws of human nature and universal nature. We are a part of the universe in the same way that an organ functions in the human organism. The human entelechy is to realize our innate potentials in order for the organism of the universe to function and develop optimally.

There is an extensive line of philosophical thought which culminates in Tillich's statement that we are estranged from our essential nature. This estrangement means that we do not realize our entelechy, or do not make manifest our unique human capacities. We do not fulfill our potentials. As the heart is a symbol of our essence, I will show that estrangement from our essence is what Mencius means when he says that we have a lost heart. I will aim to show that when we are living in some way out of alignment with our nature, we are living out of alignment with nature in general. When we do not fulfill our potentials, we do not fulfill our purpose in the functioning of the grand universal organism. This manifests in our suffering and problems, in the same way that when a part of our body is diseased we experience symptoms, so that part can be healed for the health of the whole.

I will aim to show that we are distanced from our essence because of our conditioned existence. There are three aspects of conditioned existence that lead to our becoming estranged from our essential nature. They are existential¹⁹, archetypal²⁰ and through the circumstances of our individual histories.²¹

Existentially, we are all prevented from fully realizing our human capacities by the fact that we are separated from the great All through physical manifestation. We will each only go so far in our short lifetime and are all doomed to death.²²

Archetypally, we are estranged by patterns that all humans experience in our ways of constructing and experiencing our self and world. We are each, in some way, determined both by the structure of our psyche and by the course of human history as it lives within us.²⁴

Individually, we become distanced from that which we are meant to be due to relationship failures in our upbringing. Our potentials develop as a *result* of loving interactions in our relationships.²⁵ When things go right in our relationships, especially our earliest and most important ones, we develop optimally. The ability of our caregivers to give us what we need for our optimal realization is a measure of their realization. As no one is raised by optimally-developed parents, or in a world of optimally-developed people, no one of us gets all the emotional nourishment we need growing up. We are all, more or less, and in different ways, emotionally wounded. Therefore, no one of us develops optimally.

We are in part determined by our genetic inheritance, and this can define one aspect of the limits of our development. However, contemporary genetic science tells us that we cannot separate genetic from environmental influence. Genes become expressed

through interaction with our environment.²⁶ Therefore, our experiences in the world go far in determining who we become and so limitations in environmental cultivation are a prime source of our lack of the complete manifestation of our potentials.

Though our early interactions leave very deep traces, we continue to grow and develop through life. Though we are wounded, we are not wholly determined by our conditionings. We, as Mencius would put it, always “have” the heart. It is simply “lost.” This means we can “find it” again. The means for restoring our ability to continuously grow toward the optimal realization of our potentials is what Mencius called “self-cultivation.” This is a process that is primarily, as the great Mencian student Wang Yang-Min referred to it, a “personal pilgrimatic.”²⁷ The means of self-cultivation is a dedication to a process of self-discovery and realization.

I will propose that the method of self-cultivation involves a phenomenological process of self-exploration, a study of the wise who have traveled the path before us, an immersion in culture, communion with nature, contemplation of the transcendent, and dialogical practice in relation to others. This is a lifetime path of attempting to align with universal principle. It is what the ancient Chinese called the “Tao,” or Way.²⁸ I aim to show how this “method” includes, but goes beyond, the psychotherapeutic process.

To summarize, the answer to the four questions implied in the Mencian text are as follows.

What is the heart? The heart is a symbol for our essential nature. This essential nature is an expression of our entelechy, or our developmental end. When we are true to our nature we embody the virtues of wisdom, strength, courage, genius and love.

What does it mean to have a lost heart? When we do not live in harmony with our own nature, we are not in harmony with the patterns of nature as a whole. This manifests in the seemingly insoluble problems that we have in our lives.

How do we lose the heart? We lose connection to our essential being existentially, archetypally, and through the accidents of our personal life history. Most significantly for our purposes, the effect of our personal history is that we lose connection to our essential attributes through relationship failures, especially in our attachment relationships.

How do we find the heart again? The realization of our optimal potentials, which ends in love, is what is meant by “having our heart.” We find the heart through a lifetime devotion to a process of self-cultivation. This results in our personal fulfillment and the realization of the universal telos.

Endnotes

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PART ONE: THE HEART OF KNOWING THE HUMAN

CHAPTER 1
THE METHOD OF THE HEART:
AN EXPLORATION OF THE WAYS OF KNOWING

The Grand Split

In order to justify my hermeneutic approach, which is somewhat unconventional for a contemporary work of this kind, I will compare my method to the usual means employed in scholarly writing. In order to put my method and result in context, I will also provide a cursory history of some of the generally acknowledged means of, and reasons for, knowing. In addition, this somewhat lengthy introductory survey into the method that I employ is intrinsic to this work itself, because it goes to the heart, so to speak, of the subject matter that I am addressing. It also provides context and evidence for the answer to the general and specific questions that this work poses.

This section is significantly influenced by the book, *A Philosophy of Science for Personality Theory* by Joseph F. Rychlak.¹

Commonly, the point of a scholarly work is to expand human knowledge.² The most acceptable means of expanding human knowledge in contemporary culture is to use some kind of scientific process. This means that something is demonstrated. We do this by creating a hypothesis, proposing something to be true, coming up with a way for testing that hypothesis and showing the results. Such results are presumed facts, and facts, appropriately presented, is knowledge. To know things is to expand our understanding of what is true.³ Conventionally, in research projects in the human

sciences, claims are often based on, or at least backed up by, quantitative and statistical studies and research.

If the purpose of writing of this kind is to increase what we know, this leads to the question: Why know? Again, conventionally, based on its emphasis and belief in empirical, scientific method, the dominant reason to increase knowledge is to predict and control.⁴

However, historically, these have been far from the only reasons that people have believed it is important to know. Some of the other reasons include:

- comprehending the workings of nature;
- understanding the laws that transcend the physical universe;
- to become one with god;
- to fulfill the essential purpose of humankind;
- to be able to act on the good, and discover the right way to live;
- to transcend knowing itself.

Very few of these reasons, and the methods utilized to explore them, would be considered valid in most academic works.

The next question is: how do we know? In our culture, scientific method is considered the best way of ascertaining truth and knowledge, especially to predict and control. However, there are several other ways that we come to know things. We can know things, for example, through revelation, that is, through a mystical experience.⁵ We can also know things through obedience to an authority, especially of a religious kind.⁶

Though works of scholarship give the greatest validity to empirical proof, the primary method of knowing used in works of this kind is one that is not considered

rigorously scientific (though its claims are often supported by the warrants of scientific proof). It is the method of informal logic, which finds its roots in rhetoric.⁷ The method of informal logic proves by following standard methods of making a convincing argument, which we will explore in somewhat greater depth further on.

This was the method used in most classic philosophies, including the Indian and Chinese. This method took advantage of the earliest form of hermeneutics, *exegesis*, or the study of sacred texts.⁸

This process of proof by informal logic was the primary means for ascertaining truth in western culture until the innovations of the philosopher Socrates who lived from 469 BCE to 399 BCE.⁹ He believed that the best process of proof was a *dialectical* one. We find the greatest evidence of his method in the dialogues recorded by his student, Plato (428-348 BCE).¹⁰

Socrates recognized, and took advantage of, the natural way that humans think. We think dialectically. This means that when we encounter something or form a concept, the mind naturally thinks of its opposite, its ideal, or its negation. That is, people think in opposites, contrasts or inferences. Our dialectical mind is based on our uniquely human capacity to imagine without evidence of existence. We can imagine from the known to the unknown. If we can think of a good, we can imagine a best, bad, or worst. The definition of dialectical mind is perhaps most simply demonstrated by the character Tevye, in *Fiddler on the Roof* who, in considering a problem, would say, “On the one hand, but on the other hand. . .”¹¹

Socrates’ dialectical method was based on this natural attribute of mind. He would explore a question through dialogue, a form of inquiry where each position was

imaginatively questioned with its alternatives. The aim was to discover truth through a resolution of differences.¹²

Each method that aims to ascertain truth has its strengths and limitations. The development of the dialectic method came as a reaction to the abuses of rhetoric, where philosophers used the manipulations of argument to justify any claim, irrespective of its fundamental truthfulness and utility. This development of dialectic led to a highly sophisticated form of philosophy, a formalized process where the goal became to know the truth. Knowing came through disciplined thinking. It was through an honest exploration of a question, rather than an attempt to win an argument, that we would come to know the true and good.¹³

This method promoted idealism, suggesting that the only truths were those things that were eternal, and these were the immaterial world of ideas. Through this lens, materiality, being impermanent, had no intrinsic reality.¹⁴

Though the dialectic approach was an improvement on the limitations of rhetoric, or the making of a convincing argument, this dialectical method had its limitations as well. One problem of dialectic philosophy is that it can only result in a negation. It asked the big questions -- like what is truth, the good, and happiness -- but the only answer it could come up with was that we could not know. Though it was a great achievement in the development of a true sense of humanity and human limitation, it remains a problem that the only thing Socrates could prove was that nothing could be proved. Dialectical philosophy, which aims at the truth, can only prove a negation because we think dualistically. Every possible thought gives rise to the Tevyan thought, "on the other hand." All philosophy begins and ends with ideas which need to be proved, and so

nothing *is* proved. The end point of this method of thinking is the philosophy associated with post-modernism, which has come to recognize that everything we consider self-evident isn't.

In addition, as Aristotle, the next immortal Greek philosopher who lived from 384 BCE to 322 BCE, noted, the dialectic conversation was only as good as the premises they were based upon. If the participants developed a reasoned assessment of truth based on false original assumptions the conclusions could not be true. He believed that original premises should be intrinsically true, or axiomatic. The best source of truth for original premises was sense data, or that which is objective.¹⁵

In reaction to this limitation of dialectic came the empiricism of Aristotle, which began with the claim that $A = A$.¹⁶ That is, the only reality we can know is that which is material, that which can be perceived by the senses. The immaterial world could not be validated objectively, because it was inherently a subjective, solitary, experience. Objectivity required a shared experience.

This dichotomy of idealism and empiricism is one of the grand splits in how we believe that we can come to know. This split, of course, ironically, proves that we think dialectically. On one hand, maybe the only reality is in our consciousness and all we see is illusion. On the other hand, maybe the world of consciousness is not real at all and the only things that are real are those we can touch and see.¹⁷

The Eastern Response to the Western Dichotomy

While the West was developing this argument between idealism through dialectic and empiricism, Eastern philosophies had another focus. Here the main goal of inquiry

was freedom from conditioned existence. The method for ascertaining truth was primarily a phenomenological one. Truth was to be found by exploring into one's depths. The source for knowledge, ultimately, was the self. The goal was not physically conquering the universe, but rather freeing one's self from the bondage of ignorance and pain. The goal was ethical.¹⁸ This did not fall so far from Socrates' belief, who stated that the unexamined life was not worth living.¹⁹

However the Eastern result was different. Eastern philosophers of the yogic and Buddhist strain would say that even this dichotomy between empiricism and idealism is in and of itself illusory. Through an immersion in a meditative process, rather than a dialectical one, there is a reality that transcends both the material world and the world of ideas. Thinking is in and of itself a manifestation that separates us from the great All, and so the ultimate truth cannot be known either through investigation or through thinking, but can only be apprehended through a mystical experience. In this view there is a belief that there is a bigger nothing beyond all this "something."²⁰ In western philosophy, Kant says you can't get beyond your mind.²¹ Buddha says that transcending mind is the point of existence. Nevertheless, becoming liberated from mind is rarely achieved. Even Buddhists and yogis use the trappings of dual mind, informal logic, to make these arguments. Intellectual study and the interpretation of texts are acknowledged as one path to enlightenment. Humans think, and we do so discursively, that is with language in a linear fashion. To get off this wheel requires enlightenment, a place where few of us go.²²

Knowing by Adherence to Religious Authority

The Western world of medieval Europe eschewed rhetoric, dialectic and empiricism for religious authority. All knowledge was replaced with the authoritative interpretation of scripture. Truth was to be found exclusively in the Bible, and held by God's chosen messengers, that is, the leaders of the church.

Beyond a simple acceptance in faith of what authority said, the primary method for students was *exegesis*, a particular form of study of sacred text, where the goal was to understand the revealed word of God. Though this sustained multitudes, and still holds great appeal, its limitation was the propagation of a tremendous amount of superstition, dogma and cant which justified terrible treatment of people. People lived in great suffering and ignorance through the appropriately named Dark Ages and the Medieval times, which saw only a gradual opening to other sources of knowing.

However, during this same period, following the stream of ideas from the early Greek philosophers including Pythagoras and Plato, a few Christian individuals, like Nicholas of Cusa (1401-1464), considered one of the genius polymaths of the early Renaissance whose expertise spanned several subject areas, arrived at the same conclusion as the Sages of the East. In his view, fueled by the dialectical understanding that nothing of ultimate truth can be known, only a mystical approach can lead to true knowledge, which consists in a "sacred ignorance,"²⁴ the realization that "the more he knows he is unknowing, the more learned he will be."²⁵ This sacred ignorance was a revelation that the essential nature of the cosmos is ineffable and unknowable. It is a knowing that transcends knowing.²⁶

The Scientific Method

With the rediscovery of the Classical world during the Renaissance, there was an awakened interest in knowledge. With the period of the Enlightenment, despite the views of the Neoplatonists like Cusa, Aristotle won the day. Empiricism led to the scientific method. Looking at the limited results of philosophy and faith, practical men would claim, “Why should we learn philosophy when it hasn't given us the answers we are looking for?” Science has proved to be far more efficient in solving practical problems.²⁷

Scientific method developed as a corrective to the method of belief. Investigators like Francis Bacon (1561-1626) asserted that the solution of a return to dialectic was rejected because the mind was full of tricks, and not to be trusted. If we could start with that which we could all observe, and come up with methods that led to predictable results, and we could tie this together with universal givens, we could come to real knowledge and understanding. This would then lead to the liberation of humankind from the muck of illusion which had been the cause of so much suffering.²⁸

The Primacy of Empiricism

The burgeoning humanists of this time recognized that a great deal of suffering came from ignorance. They saw that the church maintained its power by controlling what people knew. The religious authorities needed to repress the facts of existence, because these contradicted the stories of the Bible. The Earth was round, and rotated around the sun. If this was true, what other facts could empower the common person? The truth had the potential to liberate humankind from unnecessary privation. While the church was concerned with the salvation of the soul, science promised to figure out a way to meet the

physical needs of the multitude. The search for a true scientific method was an attempt to create a system that could eliminate distortion and illusion and reveal truth. On a concrete level science has been a very successful method in this regard. When we believed that illness was caused by being possessed by the devil and the cure was torture, this healed none and caused a great deal of unnecessary physical pain.²⁹ Certainly, to understand the mechanisms and functions of biology is a great advance from that old distorted view.

The means of science in overcoming these errors in thinking was a quest for validating evidence, that which can be replicated, where control and certainty is the goal. The primary means of ascertaining truth, from this view, then, became empiricism. The only things we could control, replicate and know with certainty were those things that could be observable by anyone. As subjective mind could distort reality, truth became a search for the objective, that which existed beyond the interpreting consciousness. The scientific method was one of controlling for as many variables as possible and to determine the antecedent cause of a thing. This meant that a thing was explained by its cause, in the sense that *this* caused *that*. The primary method of proving antecedent cause was the experiment. A scientific hypothesis states that this is caused by that, and the method is one that attempts to prove such a thing.³⁰

The scientific method did help us overcome many false beliefs and has improved humankind in many ways. This has led it to hold a primary position in the mainstream academic world – despite a vanguard of understanding that promotes another view -- which we will soon explore. Knowledge has been strongly correlated with scientific method. The scientific method, with its reliance on experimental method, quantitative

models, and statistical analysis, has brought us great advances in almost every area of life.

Limitations of Scientific Method in Understanding the Human

However, just as the scientific method and the more formal uses of logic were developed in order to overcome the limitations of dialectic, rhetoric, phenomenological and revealed knowledge, it has become increasingly clear that the scientific method has its limits, as well. Science naturally limits the range of what can be proved, because it is limited by that which can be observed by any and all, objectively. Though science can test hypothesis of methods to solve unnecessary emotional suffering, it has nothing to say about the ethical issue of defining human happiness. It cannot determine what is just or beautiful. And just like all other methods of knowledge, it has failed to end human folly. Science does not lead to wisdom. Attempts to find a purely linear scientific method for understanding human beings in a behaviorism that denies subjectivity has by-and-large failed. Despite all of science's other successes it has not solved the mystery *homo sapiens*.

In a limited sense, science can add to ethics, that is, it can help answer the question "what should I do." For example, through science we have empirical evidence that smoking kills you, and therefore, one should not smoke. Unfortunately, science cannot prove that it is good to make that choice. As Post-Modern philosopher Jean Lyotard (1924-1998) put it, "It has no relevance for judging what is true or just."³¹

Though scientific method may be able to engineer our brain chemistry and change our behavior, it cannot address the issue of telling us what it means to be a better person.

Science is limited in defining what it means to be more loving, accepting, compassionate, patient, understanding and courageous. No science has solved the problem of getting people to choose the good. As Lyotard says, “the game of prescription,” -- telling us what to do – “escapes it.”³² Science can provide good arguments for one position over another, but then it becomes one of many important parts of a dialectical debate, with revelation, tradition, superstition, misinterpreted experience, wounded perspectives, etc. in the mix.³³ As the post-modernists would say, scientific knowledge is “a kind of discourse,”³⁴ simply one way of making an argument.

Difficulties and Solutions of Science

Advances in science have proved to be its undoing. Science itself required a faith that truth could be known with certainty. This faith has now proved to be untenable. It is now commonly agreed that no idea can be proved to be true in any absolute sense.³⁵ Where once we believed that science was approaching a complete knowledge of the objective universe, 20th century science has made us doubt the very ground we walk on. Replacing the certainties of a Newtonian universe, we now conceptualize that matter is force field and empty space and time can be stopped and made to run backwards.³⁶ We now accept that truth is provisional. Our interpretation of data is colored by the paradigm from which we are approaching any particular question. Today’s truth can always be transcended by a truth that we as yet do not perceive.³⁷ Quantum mechanics proves that the result of the experiment is impacted by the observer.³⁸ Truth is only something that approaches, but never reaches, statistical certainty. Rather than talk of certainties, we talk of probabilities. As Lyotard put it, “It is producing not the known, but the unknown.”³⁹

Another central problem for science is that it operates from a linear cause and effect system. This operates best with physics, where one inert thing acts on another. Ball A hits ball B and something predictable happens. However, as religious philosopher and archeologist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955) explained, one small part of the universe has been evolving along an axis of complexity in a process he calls *complexification*.⁴⁰ As matter complexifies it evolves into systems. From the first hydrogen atoms bumping against each other in the beginnings of space/time, matter has formed greater patterns of complexity. As matter has complexified it has formed the building blocks of life. From this life has emerged. Then, as the systems of life have become more complex, consciousness has emerged, and self-consciousness beyond that.⁴¹ It is as if consciousness is intrinsic in the primal stuff of the universe. As complexity increases, the organism is freed from antecedent causality and moves toward freedom. Behavior is no longer strictly determined, but involves self-directed agency. A paramecium is freer than a rock, a dog more free than the bacteria and a human the freest to choose of all. With the capacity for self-conscious reflection, our freedom increases maximally and we have the broadest range of choice. If we are inert, we cannot choose. If we are instinctually programmed or driven, our choice is limited. As humans, being the most complex of beings, we are both determined and free. We are determined in part by genetics and the impact of life experience. We are free to the extent that we have conscious, reflective awareness and can choose self-directed acts. There are parts of the brain that determine automatic functions or instinctual drives and there are the more recently evolved parts of the brain, for example, the neo-cortex, which allows for self-

regulation. We are unique in that we can involve ourselves in the process of becoming freer.⁴²

As our degree of freedom increases predictability diminishes. Absolute certainty becomes impossible. Situations become far more unpredictable when we are dealing with interactive systems, where the interacting variables are agents that have some level of an internal locus of control. That is, when we have two human beings in an interaction, where both have a degree of choice, the results are impossible to predict with certainty. If we are attempting to establish some truth about human nature, we cannot predict a result that can always be guaranteed to be the same, something verifiable. We cannot say for certain what a person will do, because they can always choose to do something else. We can define as extensively as possible the likely range of possibilities and we can make predictions of probability based on understandings that we possess, but even statistical analysis strains against the real-world contingencies of human interaction. Once the object of our study is two human beings, neither of whom is predictable in a system of interaction, even the scientific methods of statistical probability, which require the control of variables, become increasingly ineffective. Even if we were able to determine every antecedent variable and conditioning, we could still never completely predict the results of human interaction. To paraphrase the philosopher, Hans Georg Gadamer (1900-2002), freedom is the mystery of the person that is ultimately unfathomable to research.⁴³

This movement toward increasing complexification, consciousness, and freedom implies something about the nature of the universe and points to something about the need for a new method to understand the human. Whereas science leads to a dramatic

simplification, the Sabian Pietist Oetinger saw this complexification as a universal law of growth.⁴⁴

Significantly, this complexity also has led to the emergence of a developed capacity for love. This axis of complexity is all leading to what Chardin calls an Omega point of the coming together of all consciousness into a universal conscious web of love. This is the movement of the human spirit.⁴⁵ Chardin saw this as the *entelechy*, or final aim, of the universe. To attempt to understand humanity through the scientific method is to go against this pattern of universal development and to miss its essence.

One solution that science has developed to cope with indeterminisms and uncertainty is statistical analysis. This is the primary means of applying scientific method to human beings. Highly complex systems have been developed to predict generalities from the analysis of samples. Statistical methods have also expanded our means of prediction and control, and have led to great advances. Statistics are a convincing proof in arguments of informal logic, and are greatly favored in contemporary research. Unfortunately, statistical analysis also has its limits. Like any method, it can be manipulated for good or ill. It is still limited in helping man know, and act from, the good. It can predict what will happen in the aggregate but not in the individual. In order to comprehend individual experience and meaning, something else needs to be employed.

The observation of the workings of nature planted the seeds of the scientific method. The ancient Chinese philosophers used their understanding of agricultural growth as a central means for their rhetorical arguments. They recognized that if these laws of growth were understood, they could be utilized to promote a maximal yield. But they also realized that such laws were ecological. To simply use one of these laws to get

the greatest immediate yield would not necessarily be the best thing for the land in the long run. In its ideal form, science will include ethical considerations that fall outside of its domain of discourse. Unfortunately, we have too many examples where those that take advantage of the power of science do not fully consider this wholistic approach, with sometimes dire consequences. For science to correct for this error, it will require a reconceptualization. Using experiment, scientists approach a problem two dimensionally, in lines of cause and effect. In fact, this method can only work if it creates two-dimensionality. This leaves out all other consequences that are not being measured. This often does not promote a wholistic, systemic view of interacting parts. This can lead to unintended results. We have, for example, figured out that if we can convince people to work 70 hours a week, we can increase profitability. But a certain literal mindset has led to a lack of consideration of the emotional impact on family and person in doing what is good for the organization. Science, which was meant to free us of suffering and folly, has led to the invention of atomic weaponry and global warming, which is capable of destroying our entire planet.

This recognition that living organisms cannot be understood completely through the scientific experiment of the laboratory led scientists to develop other methods of inquiry and research. The best of science is always working towards better and better methods of ascertaining truth. Science continuously struggles with the problems of understanding living beings, especially people. Solutions are being developed and tried all the time. Certain scientists understood that the constraints of the laboratory limited the accuracy of observation, especially with living things. Hence, a branch of science was

developed called *ethology*, a technique where we learn from observing living things in their natural environments.⁴⁶

Aristotle's Four Causes and an Explanation of the Symptom⁴⁷

To understand the limitations of the scientific method as applied to human beings, we need to examine one assumption of the method, which is the definition of cause.

Aristotle said that to understand a thing is to understand its cause. In science, cause is defined as antecedent or efficient cause. What in the past leads to this event in the present? If we understand this we can say that if x occurs, we can predict that y will follow. However this is a limited view of the meaning of cause.⁴⁸

Aristotle's view of causality was that things can be explained in reference to four causes. These are efficient cause, material cause, formal cause and final cause. In Aristotle's view, efficient cause is simply one dimension of cause. For example, a chair is a chair because someone made it.

Aristotle's three other causes are defined as follows. Material cause is the substance of a thing. For example, a chair is a chair because it is made out of its materials; wood, cloth, foam, etc. Formal cause is the arrangement of a thing's parts that make it what it is. A chair is a chair because it has arms and legs and cushions arranged in its particular shape. This anticipates complexity theory. Soul or essence, Aristotle claimed, emerges from the totality of a thing, its particular organization, and its form.⁴⁹ This conforms to the Chardainian complexity theory that something intrinsic yet new emerges from a thing's complex organization.⁵⁰ Finally, Aristotle posits a final cause: a chair is a chair because of its purpose, sitting. Aristotle's conceptualization of final cause

led him to believe in teleology, a notion that in many ways as applied to unconscious nature has been debunked. Teleology is the belief that things have a purpose to which they are driven. In his view, the apple falls from the tree because its aim is to hit the ground. We now grasp that inanimate objects do not have a will that longs to achieve some end, but human beings do. This is why human beings cannot be investigated in as simple or pure scientific way as inanimate objects can. Humans are not entirely predictable, because they have a measure of control, in part determined by self-chosen ends.

To understand how this broader definition of cause applies to people, we will use the example of a psychotherapeutic client. When people come into therapy, they will often want to know why they do the things they do that make no sense to them. They hope that if they understand the cause of their behavior they will find a way to gain control over that thing and to change it. As I aim to show, the linear cause and effect model is insufficient in understanding a client's inexplicable behavior. Why individuals do what they do can be better understood if we approach it from the vantage point of these four causes. For example, one might say, "Why does that person drink too much?" We can name the material cause. A person is an alcoholic because of dysregulation of chemicals in his brain. We can speak to efficient cause by saying that the individual was abused as a child and this led to this bad behavior in the present. We can speak to a formal cause. An alcoholic is someone who has several drinks several times a week. If he stopped this behavior, he would not be an alcoholic. We can speak to functional cause, or final cause. One final cause hypothesis might be that this person drinks for the purpose of not feeling shame. This is a complex result that comes from a series of *signs*. Signs are a

method of informal logic where an inference is made based on a predictable relationship between factors. The presence of one predicts the presence of the other.⁵¹ For example, in this case, the person's addictive behavior is a *sign* that they are anxious. The anxiety is a sign that they feel inadequate. The feeling of inadequacy is a sign that they suffer from chronic shame. In reverse order, the person feels shame which makes them feel inadequate which makes them anxious and so they drink to cover their anxiety.

One can go further with this system of signs. We can assert that the shame is a protection against traumatic pain. In this sense, the shame is a sign of traumatic pain. We can then say that the purpose, or final cause of the drinking, is to avoid feeling traumatic pain. From this view, the symptom has a final cause. It is functional. Usually, the purposes of our apparently dysfunctional behaviors are protective and of survival value. From this point of view, there is no such a thing as irrational behavior. If we understand its function, though the behavior may cause other problems, in this system of logic, it has its purpose.

We can see with this example that simply looking at antecedent cause in a scientific, empirical model is not sufficient to understanding the truth of the behavior. All of those "causes" are "true." To simply use our scientific understanding which is to say that the person's drinking is a sign of the dysregulation of chemicals in the brain, and therefore if the person's brain chemistry can be corrected the problem will go away, is to miss at least three quarters of the person, in the sense that it does not include efficient, formal or final cause.

Science is very effective -- but only effective in that which can be explained through the efficient cause. Whereas humans operate along the axis of the four

Aristotelian causes: material, efficient, formal and final, the scientific model fails. For example, source, origin and root are different than antecedent cause. These require abstract metaphors of depth and essence. If we apply the notion of function and choice to human beings, then when it comes to human behavior there is an aspect that is teleological. People choose actions toward some end. There is a purpose to our behavior.⁵² As science is built on the premise of predictability, where a set of antecedent conditions can be used to explain a result, final ends, or unpredictable choices, have no place in the method.

Entelechy

In Aristotle's search for a description of the soul he developed his notion of *entelechy*. Entelechy relates to a thing's final purpose. It is that which a growing thing is meant, ultimately, to be. In this view every living thing has a developmental end. The acorn is meant to be the mighty oak.

That which we are meant to be is a way of defining our essence. This end is what makes us unique and separate from anything else. Without this final manifestation, we would not be that which we are. It is only when the acorn develops fully from its blueprint that we have the oak and not a maple, or a chair. The ultimate form is inherent in the developing thing, and when that form is realized, the thing achieves its entelechy, its purpose. For animate beings, which are those things that develop, it is ensouled. This means that the light of realized life shines through it.⁵³

If we believe that there is an intrinsic optimal realization of developing beings, then human beings have an entelechy. Determining what it is that we are meant to be, that

which makes us essentially human, is far more difficult to define than describing the oak tree. Our essence is that thing without which we would not be human. This is our human nature. Human nature has been defined as a process, rather than a thing.⁵⁴ It is a process of development towards certain ends. This realization in human beings, since our potential is, if not infinite, far greater than what any of us achieve, is never complete. We can continue to evolve as long as we have the aliveness to do so. Paradoxically, one aspect of our essence, or end, is to continuously develop through our own participation.

What is the human entelechy? Aristotle claimed that humans are conjugal, that is they form bonds of intimate love; political, that is, they form organized systems; and mimetic, that is, they form representations or symbolize. In this regard he sees them as imaginative. He also sees man as the rational animal, that is, the animal that thinks.⁵⁵ Famously, this thinking element was seen as singular by French philosopher, Rene Descartes (1596-1650) in his statement, "I think, therefore I am."⁵⁶ The Buddhist doctrine of the Eightfold path includes Right View, Mindfulness and Concentration, indicating a potential to develop our reasoning and thinking capacity.⁵⁷ Plato claimed humans have a rational, thinking capacity, a spirited or energetic one, and an appetitive one.⁵⁸

Though appetite is not unique to humans, Eastern philosophers would claim that the human energetic capacity is unique to the species in their doctrine of gross and subtle *ch'i*. Humans are made of a combination of gross and subtle *ch'i*, the elemental energy of the universe.⁵⁹ This *ch'i*, I will show later, is intrinsically related to courage, the ability to freely choose the good. Therefore, an intrinsic element of humanity is having a domain of agency, or choice in action. This is paralleled by the Buddhist Paths of Right Intention,

Right Action, and Right Effort. These imply that we have a volitional aspect we can develop.⁶⁰

Researchers as varied as Descartes, Charles Darwin, psychologist William James and archetypal psychologist James Hillman have explored the nature and meaning of emotions. Sociobiologists operate from the premise that emotions serve an evolutionary function. Though there has been a commonly held view that emotions interfere with good decision making which would counter the theory that emotions serve a purpose, new research indicates the opposite: cognition without passion leads to poor outcomes. Humans are not the only living beings to have emotions, but the complexity of human emotion is distinct, and one cannot imagine the human without emotion. Daniel Goleman, in his book “Emotional Intelligence,” combines extensive research to prove that emotions are central to successful human functioning.⁶¹ Socrates defined the human way of thinking as dialectical, that is, imaginative. Humans are the only beings that can imagine what does not exist.⁶² Contemporary philosopher Susanne K. Langer (1895-1985) calls human beings the symbolizing animal, also indicating, through linguistic capacity and the mimetic ability noticed by the Greeks, that humans are essentially creative.⁶³ Darwin agreed with Aristotle that we are social animals.⁶⁴ Psychological ethnologist John Bowlby and his followers in exploring attachment have shown that humans are intersubjective, we are not only embedded in relationship from birth to death, as everything is, but that our capacity for complex connection has unique characteristics that could be named essential to the human. Mencius would say that definitive of the human is our capacity for compassion and empathy.⁶⁵ Human love is perhaps our most defining characteristic.

As a result of the above, I posit that humans have at least five basic potentials that need to be optimally manifested in order for us to realize our entelechy. These are the potentials:

- for wisdom, or optimal thinking, based on our capacity for cognition;
- for passion, or optimal emotion;
- for genius, or optimal creativity or imagining;
- for strength, or optimal action based on our capacity for volition and;
- for love, or optimal connecting.

To realize these potentials is to go far in fulfilling our essential nature, to become our entelechy, and be that which we are meant to be.

Science can provide us with no proof in this regard. It can tell us much about how we got here, but it has little to say about where we are headed, which is the subject matter of final cause and entelechy. It is only through the dialectical process of extrapolation, or inferring from a set of givens where something is going, that we can make guesses and predictions about where we, as beings of choice, are headed.

We can never leave final cause considerations out of our understanding of the human. Even the scientific method is driven by final cause considerations. For example, the scientific method includes giving value to control and prediction. Science, like everything else, has a system of values, and those values presuppose final ends. We engage in science because we believe this is the best way to make a better world. We come up with particular things to work on in science toward certain ends. The method may be one of exploring efficient cause, but the enterprise is purposeful.⁶⁶ The generation of theories happens through a process of dialectic, or disciplined thinking. The generation of a theory is an imaginative act. We imagine a solution to a problem when currently there is no solution. This is a normative ethical process, one that involves imagining an

ideal, which is intrinsic to a dialectical process. This is an ethical process, because in the choice of what to investigate, we are choosing on the basis of some good. We cannot remove ourselves, as human beings, from employing and utilizing a dialectic process of knowing.⁶⁷ Though science eschews teleology, it is embedded in the web of human existence and cannot be ignored.

Why Humans Don't Work in S-R Systems

Classic science measures things in a linear past-present framework, in order to predict the future, but this is not applicable in an intersubjective developmental framework where something completely novel and unique can emerge through a relationship. It can only predict that the *same* result will occur if the same conditions are met. Behavioral science attempted to apply this framework to human behavior by developing the stimulus/response model, or S-R concept. In this view, a stimulus in the environment will always lead to a predictable response. There may be an apparent discontinuity between the behavior we observe and its stimulus, because such responses can be conditioned, but in this view all behavior can be explained from the S-R model. One reason that we know this doesn't work is because of the final cause problem. That is, a self-chosen end does not emerge from a conditioned stimulus.⁶⁸ Another reason that the S-R system fails, is because we exist in cybernetic systems. S-R depends on a linear model: *this* leads to *that*. But complex systems operate with information and feedback. There is a constant interaction between elements of the system with the joint purpose of keeping the system stable and ongoing, and also changing and growing. People are systems and they are embedded in systems. Information is fed into the system, to which

the system responds for the sake of (there's that for the sake of) self-regulation. This response is fed back into the system, and further mutual adjustments are made.⁶⁹ Self-regulating systems are not passive recipients, but respond. In a system made up of an endless number of inter-responding, self-regulating parts, an S-R relationship cannot be explanatory because the S-R model moves in one direction only, while systems operate with endless feedback.

Furthermore, humans cannot be put into an S/R model because they do not simply automatically react to events, but rather they make meanings out of events. To be human is to create meaning, and we create meanings discursively and imagistically. We make stories out of what happens, and we react to events as if they have a complex of meaning that cannot be put into words. This is a process of complex symbolization, which we will explore in greater depth as we go along.⁷⁰

In human interactions, rather than a simple S-R sequence, there is a feedback loop that looks something like the following. An event occurs. For example, a person arrives late for an appointment to meet their wife. The wife on the receiving end makes a meaning out of that event, which is accompanied by an emotional response. To this wife, this means that the husband doesn't care about her. This leads to a feeling of hurt. Based on this meaning and emotion, she responds. When he shows up late, she yells at him. The husband interprets this response by giving it a meaning, and has his own emotional reaction that accompanies the event and meaning. To him, this means that his wife is impossibly critical, and so he feels angry. He responds by sullenly withdrawing. Then the wife acts out her part and the pattern continues. There are stimuli and responses in these

interactions, and so this can be looked at through the S-R lens, but it is incomplete, because the S-R patterns refer to behavioral responses, and not meanings.

Our meaning-making patterns have their own set of causes. Each person, for example, brings their life experiences to this encounter, which influences the meanings they create and the actions they take. We make meanings, and each of these meanings can be explained by the four causes. In this way, every meaning/emotion/action pattern has its own embeddedness in past, form, and function. The process of growth, development or learning that occurs in this feedback loop is based on the person's ability to modify meanings based on feedback from the other person. Learning is possible. If the husband would say that he was late because someone was having a heart attack on the subway and he gave this person CPR, the wife could alter her meanings and react differently. Therefore, the process is not simply one of internal meaning making and behavior, but a response to feedback from the other participant. This process is far more complex than a simple S/R. The S/R model falls into the logical fallacy of "nothing but." theory.⁷¹ This theory holds that a multidetermined phenomenon is reduced to a singular explanation, eliminating the complexity from the thing under consideration. For example, it is as equally inaccurate to state that the cause of a behavior is the result of the sexual drive, as Freud might posit it, as it is to claim that all behavior is "nothing but" a conditioned response.

In therapy, what we are often exploring is this meaning-making function. Meanings are never fully accurate because they are not based on some objective criteria, but are evolved through an interactive process. Rather we are looking for the flexibility of the meaning making process itself. Increased accuracy is based on accepting the

possibility that this time, this event will mean something new. This is the opposite of a scientific approach, where we are looking for things to always mean the same thing. The most flexible and therefore functional process would be one where we would not create any meanings without checking in with the other person, that is, by asking them what they meant. We return here to a dialectic understanding, where an approach to knowledge begins with the knowledge that we cannot know. Optimally, we are always open to new meanings emerging from a process of dialogue. The wife could override her conditioned response, and instead of believing her meaning that her husband is a jerk and reacting with anger, despite the fact that he has behaved that way countless times and she has responded that way innumerable times, she could breathe, and ask him why he was late instead. Despite the statistics that would indicate what their interaction would look like, her choice would make it different.

The S/R model of causation is not sufficient for human beings because of the massive amount of complexity of human interaction. Along with simple, conditioned responses, we have certain meaning/emotion/behavior patterns that are innate and not learned; there are archetypal patterns that reflect inherited, given ways of responding and interpreting depending on our development and the level of realization of potentialities; and we are continuously creating meanings in a spontaneous interaction with our environment. This intersects with our capacity for freedom, and systemic cybernetic feedback procedures. We cannot speak of a first “stimulus” in a world of continuous feedback loops.

The Post-Modern Critique of Science

From the point of view of contemporary critics, the scientific method is also suspect for a number of other reasons. One primary reason is that capitalistic power structures have an inordinate influence on what is considered important, and therefore worthy of research. In a world where science costs money, those who have the money have the power to determine what is true, by determining what will be “proved” using what the post-modernists call the “game” of science.

The great emphasis in our materialistic culture is on what Lyotard calls, *performativity*. The aim and goal of knowing is efficiency, that is, what will yield the greatest financial gain. In a culture where efficiency is the goal, individuals look for the quick fix, the shortest text, the immediate gratification. Instant is made equal to good. Science, from this view, is no longer the bridge to enlightenment or justice, but rather to the greatest profit of the smallest number. In this view science can be “an ideology or instrument of power.”⁷²

The cataclysms of the 20th century brought us to understand that we have far to go to realize the positive potential of humankind. Rather than a security of answers, we were left with questions that not only left us aching politically, but personally as well. Technology, which dominates our culture increasingly, does not provide the answer. As theologian Karen Armstrong (b. 1944) put it, “people were becoming conscious of a void, an absence at the heart of their lives.”⁷³ How much has changed in the last 2300 years? As Mencius described, “Pity the man . . . who has lost his heart, and does not go out and recover it.”

The post-modernists return us to the premise of Socrates and the intuitions of the mystics. In critical thinking the implications of questioning are taken to their logical end. The essence of exploration is to question the foundations of the way we construct our notion of truth itself.⁷⁴ The notion here is that each method of finding truth is a game that has its own language and rules and as such only reveals an aspect from its own system, not something intrinsically valid.⁷⁵ From this view, science is simply one approach to truth. On the other side is narrative, or symbolic, truth. Science shows its limits because it has no place for this kind of vision, though it is, in its own way, simply another kind of symbolic narrative.⁷⁶

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Given these complexities, how can we fulfill our aim of solving the human equation? How do we explain the person? If the primary means of validation, science and statistics, won't work in the understanding of the human being, what method can we use to validate a hypothesis about us? On what basis can matters that apply to human existence be investigated? How do people work, and how can we say that we know it? How do we prove anything to be true of human beings?

The Method of Proof is Informal Logic

We can get our first clue if we turn to the primary text that instructs us in the creation of a scholarly work of this kind, Kate Turabian's, *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses and Dissertations*.⁷⁷ Here we are returned to humankind's original method of proof, rhetoric. In this book the process the author describes is one that takes the shape of informal logic. The writer chooses a resolution, or ultimate claim,

and in a complex way, decides on issues that need to be resolved, and comes up with claims, evidence, inference and warrants to build and prove the case.⁷⁸

Claims, evidence, and inference are all rather commonly understood concepts. The warrant is an agreed upon justification for accepting the inference based on the evidence to prove the claim. For example, it is fair to infer the claim from the evidence because the evidence is a *sign* of that claim, or is an *analogy* to the claim, or the evidence is a *cause* of the claim.⁷⁹ In a concrete example, in the 2009 debate, Republicans justified their claim that health care reform would lead to socialism by using the warrant of the “slippery slope,” which is the assertion that things tend to move inexorably in a particular direction in invisible increments. The ancient Chinese philosophers often used the warrant of *analogy*. Mencius would say “don’t pull the seedlings.”⁸⁰ What this meant was that it doesn’t work in planting to try to make things grow faster than nature intended. Correspondingly, by analogy, the teacher shouldn’t try to make the student grow faster than nature allows.

In greater harmony with current thinking, informal logic operates from the assumption that there are no certain truths. Returning to the methods of classical rhetoric, “proof” is found in the assent of the reader.⁸¹ The more convincing the proof and the more relevant the topic, the greater likelihood of getting the reader to care and agree.⁸² If the reader is convinced, the argument is won. Here there is a trust in the *sensus communis*, or the common sense.⁸³

Though on one hand philosophers assert that different “language games” are incommensurate, paradoxically, rhetoric in this view, is not seen as opposed to dialectic or scientific method but is synthesized with it. In the Hegelian sense, knowledge

advances dialectically. Our advances in understanding lead to higher syntheses. The best method for understanding the human is one that combines procedural evidence, the result of ethical, rhetorical and dialectical processes *and* the empirical methods of science.

In the case of this work, the point of the argument made is essentially an ethical one. It is to convince the reader the good of taking a particular course of action.

Procedural evidence is good for such moral or aesthetic judgments.⁸⁴

These procedural processes generate theories that validating evidence proves. Validating methods assess these theories, which generate further dialectics. Again, paradoxically, this is not so far from the meaning of science at all. A good theory is one that generates ideas. As P. B. Medawar says, “having ideas is the scientist’s highest accomplishment.”⁸⁵

A direction for a means of understanding the human can be found in the dialectic correction that occurred in the Romantic era in reaction to the over-dependence on reason that emerged through the Enlightenment. Romanticism values what is old for the quality that it assumes in the aging process. This corresponds to the Japanese notion of *wabi-sabi*, which is the name for the beauty that emerges from the imperfect and that which has aged.⁸⁶ In this we herald to a reappraisal and redefinition of the ancient forms of rhetoric and informal logic.

This Romantic Movement fostered an interest in the unknown regions of humanity, which found a natural development in the discoveries of the great psychological explorers, Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung. In Jung’s work in particular, he had an appreciation for the pre-scientific forms, and the insights of the mythic age. We are still discovering and interpreting our evidence in the continued process of coming to

understand our great heritage of fairy tales, legends and rituals of ancient peoples.⁸⁷ This movement toward an appreciation of the unknowable can be found in diverse contemporary sources. For one we have the work of Joseph Campbell, who in his essay, “The Symbol Without Meaning,” says,

“Let us . . . recognize . . . that what is intended by art, metaphysics, magical hocus-pocus, and mystical religion, is not the knowledge of anything, not Truth, or Goodness or Beauty, but an evocation of a sense of the absolutely unknowable.”

This he contrasts with science, saying that science is about that which can be known.⁸⁸

For another we have the work of J.F. Lyotard in his seminal “The Post-Modern Condition,” who stated that, “. . . it is not our business to supply reality but to invent allusions to the conceivable which cannot be presented.”⁸⁹

An answer to the problem of understanding the human and the role of science has been cogently laid out by Karen Armstrong. She tells us that ancient cultures “evolved two ways of thinking, speaking, and acquiring knowledge, which scholars have called *mythos* and *logos*. Both were essential; they were regarded as complementary ways of arriving at truth, and each had its special area of competence.”⁹⁰ She points out, that thinkers as varied as scientist Max Planck and evolutionary theorist Stephen Jay Gould affirm her distinction, where science tells us what the world is and how it works, while the world of symbols, that is, narrative, myth, dialectic and religion, help us to explore the deepest strata of life, the essential, eternal and universal. It allows us to ask questions of meaning and value.⁹¹

Once again, our culture needs a romantic renewal. In order to ascertain a method of expanding knowledge about human beings, we need to return to a definition of

knowledge which prevailed before the scientific era where truth is knowledge of essence. The answer, if we can learn anything from our past, is to find a synthesis of mythos and logos.⁹² This corresponds to the concept embodied in this work of heart. This is in contrast to the nominalistic view of reality,⁹³ where nominalistic means that only the particulars exist, and there is no essence that transcends the concrete.

In the processes of knowing the human we do not begin with a physical fact as we do in empiricism, but rather with accumulated experience. It is within the moral struggles of humanity that we find a different order of truth. What would be considered completely “unscientific,” that is, the subjective, is here our prime source of evidence.⁹⁴

The dominance of authority had to be overcome in the Enlightenment and the period to follow, because religious authority was oppressive. Any obedience to authority is dangerous when it promulgates that a singular view is the means toward truth. But we can return to a new form of respect for authority in the wisdom held in traditional views that are chosen by us, because we are not embedded in those cultures. When truth is ascertained by an examination of authoritative texts from an endless range of sources, this is not authority by power or force, but authority by proven value.⁹⁵ As Confucius said, truth does not come merely from experiment, but from the test of human experience and time.

“ . . . every system of moral laws must be based upon man's own consciousness, verified by the common experience of mankind, tested by due sanction of historical experience and found without error, applied to the operations and processes of nature in the physical universe and found to be without contradiction, laid before the gods without question or fear, and able to wait a hundred generations and have it confirmed without a doubt by a Sage of posterity.”⁹⁶

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As James stated this view, “The romantic spontaneity and courage are gone, the vision is materialistic and depressing. Ideals appear as inert byproducts of physiology; what is higher' is explained by what is lower and treated forever as a case of 'nothing but' nothing but something else of a quite inferior sort. You get, in short, a materialistic universe, in which only the tough-minded find themselves congenially at home.”
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CHAPTER 2 THE HEART OF SYMBOLIZATION

In order to understand the nature of the method that I will employ in my exploration of what it means to be a person, and the source of knowledge that will provide my evidence, we need to understand the uniquely human process of symbolization.

What is a symbol and what is the symbol formation process? Langer, in *Philosophy in a New Key* stated that ". . . the brain is actively translating experiences into symbols, in fulfillment of a basic need to do so. It carries on a constant process of ideation." In fact, "symbolization is the essential act of mind."¹ The process of symbolization is conceptualization. That which occurs at the meeting place of self and environment² is mediated by a symbolic process. As James Hillman put it, ". . . this concatenation of inner and outer . . . we (called) a symbol."³ This is where experience occurs. We do not experience the "now" directly, but rather through a process of symbol formation. "Now," like everything else that is conceptualized, is a representation, and therefore a symbol.

Experience and perception is an active process, and, "each of us creates a representation of the world in which we live -- that is, we create a map or model which we use to generate our behavior."⁴ As Langer put it, the purpose of symbol formation is our "ceaseless quest for conception and orientation."⁵

Not only do we translate experience into symbol, but we are equally driven to communicate our experiences and understandings, and to make concrete our symbolization process through the creation of symbols for others to experience, interpret, understand and comprehend. This inward symbolization process is made manifest in our world of symbolic products. We communicate experience symbolically.

This symbolization process is how we think. We name things, that is, we denote them, and these denotations have connotations. That is, they have meaning for us. These symbols can be simple, like the line drawing of a cat symbolizing a cat, or they can be highly complex.

We have two basic processes of symbolization. The most immediate form that results from our symbolic processes is our language of words. We turn raw sense data into ideas and concepts.⁶ However words are limited in capturing the full complexity of self, event, world and experience. It can only represent complex symbols sequentially. This leads us to a dialectical thinking, where this is followed by that. This and that cannot be held, understood, or conveyed simultaneously, even though we may experience in that way, or that may be the truth of the thing.

There are other processes of representing certain complex symbols that are far more complete than discursive language. These include ritual; art in all of its manifestations, including the visual forms, music and narrative; mathematics and symbolic logic; dreams; and wisdom texts.⁷ As Freud pointed out, our behavior itself is symbolic,⁸ in the sense that it represents and conveys a complex meaning.

Essentially, we have two modes of symbolic formation: the discursive, linear model as represented by spoken and written language, which we normally characterize

as left-brain processes, and the visual, wholistic, ritualistic processes that are associated with right brain functioning.⁹ A middle zone is covered by texts which use words but speak in strictly symbolic modes like fairy tales and spiritual wisdom texts.

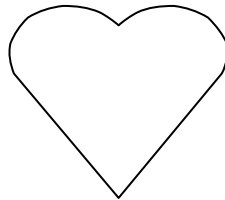
As an example of how visual representations can serve as symbols, and to understand what "symbol" means, notice what happens when we move a few lines around.



With a complex symbol we find there are emotion, meaning, significance, thought, associations, and an impulse to action. Symbolic meaning emerges in the particular confrontation between a symbol and the accumulated experience of the interpreter. It has the capacity to hold many meanings simultaneously that emerge from the associative matrix of the observer. In our current cultural context, to most of us, the figure to the left is a sign that points to an instruction that means addition. This image, however, is one of the earliest human symbols and has been significant in religions as diverse as Pagan, Native American, and Greek Christian. In these faiths it held many

complex meanings, including, but not limited to, the union of the divinity and the material world, and the division of the cosmos into four aspects, or elements.¹⁰ . In the Western contemporary Christian world, the cross on the right is a complex symbol of infinite meaning. It can mean, among many things, purity, redemption, suffering, oppression, godliness or abuse. Seeing the cross might move us to prayer, to feel guilt, or to throw up, but if we have any associations to it at all, it does not leave us unmoved.

Certain symbols, abstract though they may be, seem to emerge out of a collective archetypal matrix that gives them an almost universal valence. The symbol of this work is one of those.



A symbol therefore, is not merely an object used in a one-to-one correspondence to indicate something. Rather, it is a way of organizing complex experience into meaningful wholes through delineation and differentiation. It separates out the interactional pattern between world and self and makes it something particular, but not simple. By the nature of the symbol's complexity it reflects desire and gives rise to emotion. It is pervaded with a quality of identity. It can motivate action. When fully realized the symbol results in a unity and completion. This realized representation of a

need, thought, emotion, action and satisfaction pattern is what is called a *gestalt*, where gestalt means a complete form or figure.¹¹

For example, when a receptive listener hears the song, Amazing Grace, this can unearth a universal need for spiritual transformation. It can spur a strong emotion of longing and relief. It can illuminate the human struggle of the distance between what one is and what one wants to be. It can make one think of one's own shortcomings and bring up the conviction to change. It can inspire a person to behave in a better way toward others. Its harmonic resolution can produce a *catharsis*, or a purging of deeply-held feeling that leaves one spiritually refreshed. The song is an example of a symbol that embodies a strong gestalt. It is so vivid and clear that it has virtually universal appeal. We can say that the experience is that which happens when we encounter the beautiful. This in one way defines the beautiful.

The capacity to form clearly delineated, differentiated, complex symbols spontaneously in an interactive process of meeting the environment is one way of defining the realization of the human being. As Perls, Hefferline and Goodman put it in *Gestalt Therapy*, ". . . the achievement of a strong gestalt is itself the cure . . . the contact is heightened, the awareness brightened and the behavior energized . . . the figure of contact is not a sign of, but is itself the creative integration of experience."¹² Again, Perls states that, ". . . successful therapy frees in the patient the ability to abstract and integrate his abstractions."¹³ Our freedom comes from our ability to not be limited by rigid, stereotypical interpretations of ourselves and the world, but to continuously expand our repertoire of possible interpretations, and to see ourselves and the world in more and more nuanced and complex ways.

The process of encountering complex symbols, which means participating in a phenomenological process in depth to explore the meaning of that symbolic utterance and realizing our own symbolic response, is what we will come to define as our process of “heart,” that is, the method of acquiring knowledge of the human, self-discovery and realization. It is this process that subsumes, but transcends, the psychotherapeutic encounter.

The greater our capacity for gestalt formation, or the realization of highly delineated and differentiated symbols, the greater our awareness and the deeper our experience of self, and the more capable we are of meeting, and interacting with, the other. Such symbolic formation activity leads to identity, agency, meaning, understanding and significance.

Joseph Campbell tells us that “symbolization is the characteristic pleasure of the human mind . . .” and the greater the complexity of the symbol the greater its fascination.¹⁴ These complex symbols are of particular interest to us because they are our primary means of understanding what it means to be human. They address the central human problems of what we are, our story, how we live, what we are meant to be. This ineffable complexity of being can only be manifested symbolically.¹⁵

The primary evidence that we have of inward, phenomenological experiences are the symbolic expressions of the individual. Those people who are capable of producing profound symbolic representations of the inner life we consider to be wise or artistic geniuses, and provide us with the source material for our own processes of self-exploration and discovery.

A process of utilizing a wisdom text as a point of departure for a deepening of our own knowledge and wisdom reflects this understanding. The text is chosen primarily for its symbolic power as a singular expression of what is essential about being human.

For our purposes we will denote the kinds of complex symbols that we are talking about as *Yantras*. Yantras are symbols that have the purpose of functioning as “revelatory conduits of cosmic truths.” They are used for the purpose of helping us self-cultivate, or realize our entelechy.¹⁶

Anamnesis

Symbolic manifestations validate the Mencian view that what we are looking for is already within us. It is just lost or at least hard to find. The creative process of symbolic representation is a way of accessing this vital inward experience and articulating it. Therefore, yantric symbols are a reflection of what is already within us. These symbols are a means for what Plato called the process of *anamnesis*. He believed that all essential, universal knowledge is within us prenatally and is forgotten in the act of birth. The process of learning is one of “remembering” that which we already “know.”¹⁷ As we are existentially, archetypally, and historically distanced from a complete self-knowledge, these symbols serve the purpose of helping us move toward discovering what it is that we are. An exploration into ourselves to discover these symbolic contents is a means of uncovering the parts, or aspects of us, of which we are unaware, that we are dissociated from, that we have disowned, or have not yet come to manifest.

These kinds of symbols are a means of entelechy, of discovering and making actual what we are in potential. The heart, we will show, is a symbol of that in us which

symbolizes. It represents the faculty that apprehends the substance and meaning of these yantric symbols. It is that in us which is able to plumb the depths of ourselves to find the endlessly hidden meaning in the symbol. It is this faculty which illuminates us to ourselves.

Not only is this penetration into symbol a means of accessing our essence, but this brings us into contact with cosmic truth. It is only through an encounter with the complex symbol that we can approach the supra-human. Discursive language fails at this task. As the modern philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951) tells us, symbolic interpretation has the power to manifest a transcendent reality.¹⁸ The symbol begins with the known, that which we sense, and uses this common material to convey meanings that cannot be sensed because they are subjective, conceptual and outside the categories of the languaging mind. As Gadamer said, the symbol “presupposes a metaphysical connection between visible and invisible.”¹⁹ As Campbell put it, “. . . the whole work of manifesting symbol is an attempt to convey (the) ineffable. . .”²⁰

Kant said that the purpose of the symbol is as an object of reflection.²¹ Once we learn to access the faculty of the heart, the part of us that perceives symbolically, all of life becomes suffused with meaning and what is revealed is the interconnectedness of all things and events. As Goethe said, “Everything that happens is a symbol, and, in fully representing itself, it points toward everything else.”²²

Existentially, the symbol works to reunite, to bring together, what has been rent asunder by our manifestation in physical form. As Gadamer put it, “. . . what fills the symbol with meaning is that the finite and infinite genuinely belong together. Thus the

religious form of the symbol corresponds exactly to the original nature of "symbolon," the dividing of what is one and reuniting it again."²³

Symbolization is a necessary process because it is the only way to make sensible what is of infinite meaning, immaterial and unrepresentable. The unmanifest lives through us symbolically.

In addition, as the microcosm of the individual is a symbolic representation of the macrocosm of the universe, the faculty that creates and apprehends symbols also is capable of revealing the hidden nature and patterns of the universe.

The Attraction of Yantric Symbols

The power of the symbol derives from the fact that only what is true can be present in the symbol.²⁴ A text that is considered wise is symbolic: it continues to reveal meanings through time as knowledge and understanding advance; it is evocative, leading to resonances with readers across great spans of time and space; it holds transcendent truth. It is a yantra. Examples of yantric wisdom texts include the Indian Upanishads, The Dialogues of Plato, the Bible, the Qu'ran and the Four Books of the Confucians among many others.

In our relationship of self to environment, one of the components of strong gestalt formation is what Sigmund Freud would call cathexis,²⁵ or what John Bowlby would call attachment.²⁶ Because of its strong gestalt, the person, object, ritual or myth has the possibility of being imbued with meaning. We are attracted to those things which we believe will fulfill our needs.²⁷ Thus a text can be recognized as a yantric symbol because

it has a valence, it has an energetic cathexis. In Joseph Campbell's definition, "A symbol . . . is an energy-provoking and -directing agent."²⁸

As Langer says, our symbolization process meets a basic human need.²⁹ Jung says this is so because these symbols resonate with preexisting patterns within the psyche that strive to convert libidinal energies into higher order energies.³⁰ Texts that reach out to us have *numinosity*. This means that they are suffused with a spiritual quality and have a preternatural impact. Drawn to the symbol, we sense that the text will fill our highest order needs for spiritual connectedness. In this way we have a particularly sophisticated attachment relationship with a symbolic wisdom text.

Jung on Symbol

Carl Jung, who lived from 1875 - 1961, was a psychologist who worked closely alongside Sigmund Freud, the inventor of psychoanalysis. Eventually, Jung split with Freud and forged his own path. Jung was a great explorer of the world of rituals and symbolic texts.

The symbol, in the Jungian view, is a mirror, or projection of, the psyche. In the Jungian view, that which is universal to psyche, which he calls the archetypal, is found through the thematic consistencies found in complex symbols across time and place. If consistent projections, or complex symbols, appear throughout history in disparate locations, it reveals some common attribute of psyche. We have greater access to these common psychic substrata to the extent that we encounter the symbolic.

Complex symbols, or yantras, are multi-determined. That is, they hold an infinite number of meanings that can be potentially discovered through an encounter with it but is

in fact never exhausted. Complex, non-discursive symbolic products have the advantage of being able to hold multiple meanings simultaneously, including opposites.³¹ They bring us into contact with what the Indians call *paroksa*, the realm of subtle matter beyond duality.³² Thus the symbol making and experiencing process transcends the limits of the dialectical. The broader the concept, the richer and more complex the symbol, the more it can include within it. This brings us closer to the human. A person can feel two feelings at once. We can be happy and sad. We can shed tears of joy. We can feel this multiplicity in a piece of music, but our discursive language does not yet have a name for this kind of feeling. The symbol, the idea, the representation can be multiple. A sign, representing one simple object or operation, like a “stop” sign, cannot.

Psyche, in its essence, is non-dual.³³ The analytical part of mind, which tends to separate and polarize, is only one small aspect of psyche. Therefore, the subjective is more completely represented through the non-discursive symbolic.

The more vivid the complex symbolic text -- whether we are dealing with sacred writings, rituals, myths, fairy tales or dreams -- the closer we come to the common substrata of psyche and the more likely it is to function to reveal the deepest truths and to advance our self-realization. An encounter with a symbolic text of this kind reveals a more complete picture of psyche.

Jung believed that symbols are expressions of the unconscious creative force. In his view, the symbolization process -- that is the internal process of representation, the generation of symbols, their expression, and then their relational encounter and interpretation, whether it is with symbolic material generated by others, or in a confrontation with one's own generated material, as in dreams, has a spiritual dimension.

This speaks to the purpose of this process. In his view, it is a means of spiritualizing instincts. This is the opposite of a reductive interpretation of symbols, as Freud might do, reducing an overwhelming amount of symbolic content to the sexual drive.³⁴ In contrast, Jung suggests that the symbolic process, which might use sexual symbols, is to turn those instincts toward higher aims. It is to transmute, through the complexification process, sexual information (or symbols of natural events, the change of the seasons etc.) toward experience of a higher order, toward choice and meaning.³⁵

Jung used as an example of this:

“... Jesus’ challenge to Nicodemus: Do not think carnally, or you will be flesh, but think symbolically, and then you will be spirit. It is evident that this compulsion toward the symbolical is a great educative force, for Nicodemus would remain stuck in banalities if he did not succeed in raising himself above his concretism.”³⁶

Jung asserts that an active participation in symbolic life is central to the well being of the individual and the development of humankind and civilization. When we do not have complex symbols to contemplate, and when we do not participate in the process of symbolic encounter, including the phenomenological process of self-exploration, we are left with a dry and shallow view of ourselves and the world which is very dangerous. Most importantly, we do not go through the ritual process of sublimating our undeveloped potentials into higher forms. This maturational process is the entelechy of human beings, and represents what we are intended to become. Without this, our instincts do not only remain in an undeveloped state, but they putrefy, they degenerate. They *vitiare*. As Joseph Campbell stated in his “Ten Commandments for Reading Myths,” “*literalism kills*.”³⁷ Unfortunately, Jung recognized in his own time that there was scant

understanding of the importance of the human truths that were available in symbols. Despite his groundbreaking work, this problem remains critical today.³⁸

Why Our Capacity for Comprehending Symbols is in Crisis

There are multiple factors that have led to the lack of development of the aspect of our being that is able to participate in the world of complex symbols in a mature way. One aspect that we have mentioned is the emphasis in our society on “performativity,” where value is determined by our economic efficiency. In this kind of world, the technological, the fast, and the concrete are given primacy over the organic development that occurs through an encounter with the immaterial realms of the heart. Therefore, the culture does not support the development of our symbolic faculty.

Post-modern cultural critics like Walter Benjamin and Theodore Adorno add to this perspective. German-Jewish philosopher Benjamin (1892-1940) reveals that in our culture, art, which has as its central purpose “contemplative immersion,” has been co-opted by capitalist forces so that its central value has become “sales value.” Art as a means of self-development has become seen as dangerous and has been replaced by entertainment for the opposite purpose, distraction. In Benjamin’s famous essay, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” he attempts to name and envision the impact of reproductive technology on our experience of art, and so on our psyches and society. As we have moved from the kind of spectacle-space that he writes about, where a few powerful corporations determined the mass-produced symbolic products that we all bought and encountered, to the current world of cyber-space where any and all “content” is available to be experienced and reproduced by any individual, the impacts of

continual technical changes continue and their impacts are still to be determined. In Benjamin's view, one consequence of the coming together of the forces of modern capitalism and technology in the mass reproduction of art is that art has lost its function of "magic," -- that is its mediating capacity to help us grow and transform -- and has been replaced by its "exhibition value," its economic, and therefore, political, use.³⁹

Theodor Adorno (1903-1969), a polymath sociologist, philosopher and musicologist, tells us that the forms of contemporary media themselves, with their capacity for rapid and overwhelming sensory information stunts our spontaneous imaginative powers, the very dimension of our being necessary for a deep relationship with the life of symbol. The power of art, which is the ability to express the suffering of our distance from the realization of that which we can imagine -- the suffering that comes from having a lost heart -- comes not from overwhelming technical achievement, which is clearly the impressive goal of contemporary media spectacles like the 2009 film, *Avatar*, which cost a quarter-billion dollars to produce. Rather, the edifying dimension of art, that which makes it serve as a yantric symbol, emerges from "those features in which discrepancy appears: in the necessary failure of the passionate striving for identity." No artist purely realizes their vision, that which they "know" and work to convey. Paradoxically, its uniqueness and power emerges from that inability to fully perfect the representation. Music played on instruments or sung with all of its human imperfections, where every performance is unique, conveys something far more meaningful than perfected music created digitally. Without failure, everything turns out the same, which is what a culture obsessed with the certainty that a MacDonald's hamburger anywhere in the world will always be identical, demands, and is given.⁴⁰

The impact of symbols is now understood by, and has now been largely co-opted by, advertisers. Our economic system is driven by, and dependent upon, advertising. Whereas once a person traveling through a city like Rome may have been constantly confronted with the symbolism of church and monument, a traveler through a modern city like Los Angeles is confronted with the billboard. The driving force of consumerism is shame, which is the feeling that goes along with the belief that there is something fundamentally wrong with us. Symbols are used in advertising to promote shame, rather than to ennoble or elevate. For example, the words on a magazine cover might be, "Lose 30 pounds in Ten Minutes!" At the same time, the photo on the cover is of a sumptuous chocolate cake. This symbol of an impossible goal requiring a depriving sacrifice juxtaposed with the temptation to extreme indulgence results in a terrible feeling about the self. Another magazine cover might show a beautiful home, which only the super-wealthy could possibly afford. We see what we crave, and learn that we can never have it. This must mean that there is something wrong with us. We are then instructed through these symbols that the cure for this bad feeling is to buy the magazine, or another product that won't give us what the advertising promises, so we are left with our feeling of self-estrangement, which leads us to further purchases, and so the consumer economy drives on.

With increasing ubiquity, profound symbolic works are trivialized by being reduced to functional annoyances. Blippy versions of Beethoven's "Ode to Joy" let us know that our iPhone has just received a tweet. In this kind of world, kitsch is defense of depth. The average visit to a web page is seven seconds. Is it any wonder that we have become symbolically tone-deaf?

Jung's Solution

Jung believed that to promote and justify a life that gives value to a process of involvement with symbolic contents, we need to assert the meaning and purpose of symbols in a new way. The natural attraction of symbols that was experienced in the religious life has been very much denigrated by our technological turn of mind, which in no way can incorporate the truths of complex symbols about the human world. This new approach that Jung promotes suggests that we need to be conscious of the symbolic process itself, and its value to humanity. Though we naturally resonate with symbolic contents, in our new relationship to them, we must not only resonate, but learn a conscious process of understanding them. Jung stated that it was his . . . “goal to help people think symbolically once more.” He believed that the formation of symbols promoted the development of that which is best in humanity. He stated that. . .”the prime task of the psychotherapist must be to understand the symbols anew. . .”⁴¹

Symbolization is Relational

Human beings naturally symbolize. That is, there is a natural process that takes raw data at the meeting of self and world and makes it the stuff of experience. It transmutes episodes into representations. Therefore, the generation of experience and the representative process is relational.

We not only create or find these internal symbols, but, if every artistic and cultural artifact of human history is any clue, we have a natural urge to convey them, to have them be received by others. When we externally manifest our symbols, these can be ideas, stories, pictures, statues, dances, buildings, rituals, etc. The artist, writer,

philosopher or religious adept plumbs their own depths, and finds an expression or apt manifestation of a symbol, or set of symbols. The hero returns to the world with this boon and offers it to humankind.⁴² When the observer encounters this symbol, they are coming into contact with a mirror of their own symbolic process. The artist manifests in concrete form what is symbolically available within us all. The realized symbol resonates with our internal world. The symbol hero travels inward to bring a symbol into its most vivid, complex, individualized manifested form. To the extent that the person is successful, the symbol has a compelling quality, and can speak universally. The observer then has material to explore. The power of the symbol provides an experience for the observer. This experience becomes a source of reflection for the participant and catalyzes the generation of their own symbolic response. This contributes to the discovery and comprehension of our human essence. In other words, when I watch a great movie like “The Bicycle Thief,” I learn something about myself and the human condition. This leads to my own thoughts and responses which I convey in my own symbolic way, though perhaps less magnificently than Vittoria De Sica, the maker of the film.

It is in this way that the symbolization process, not only in its inward generations, but in its inevitable outward manifestations, is relational. It is through an encounter with the symbolic representations of others that we discover our selves. As Gadamer put it, “Self-understanding always occurs through understanding something other than the self, and includes the unity and integrity of the other.” In understanding the human, understanding occurs in a relationship to what is being understood.⁴³

The specific art of this interrelational aspect of the symbolization process is how I define hermeneutics, a term which I will soon explore in detail.

This search for the external manifestation of what is known but has not yet been articulated as a passageway into our own phenomenology is congruent with the notion of the lost heart. We have lost touch with our essence, the heart is lost, because we have simply gotten out of contact with our own internal symbols, the part of us that comprehends, through a process of symbolization, essences. It is our symbolization process that searches for, and captures to some extent, that which is essential. The heart longs for depth in the sense that we are searching for externally manifested symbols to awaken, stimulate, and foster our own complex symbolization process. A complex, deep symbol brings us into contact with the richest, most profound aspects of our being.

Human Truth, the Symbolic, and the Complex

In order to reveal the human condition, a means must be utilized that can express what is complex. Complexity is conveyed through yantric symbology. These contents can be held in images, artifacts, or stories that can hold opposites simultaneously. Symbols do not provide linear signs but are rather rich in connotation. They connect to a multitude of rich associations. They convey with metaphor. Pregnant, yantric metaphors open us to deep meaning. In cliché terms, one picture is worth a thousand, or more, words.

For example, my daughter painted a picture of dark clouds raining onto a growing beautiful flower. Without aforethought, when I look at this image I give it symbolic meaning. It says to me that for beauty to emerge we must endure sacrifice and hardship. Pain and beauty are intrinsically linked. We must suffer the difficult to achieve great ends. We must have faith to endure that there will be a reward for our efforts even when they are not apparent. "April showers bring May flowers".

For another example, we can say there is no way that I will be able to solve this problem of human suffering. The evidence that I can point to in order to validate this claim is that no one has solved this problem yet. My evidence for that is that our world is still filled with violence, injustice, personal and family suffering. Nevertheless I am going to join this search, and I will not let the apparent impossibility of the task dissuade me. I will claim that this expresses something noble and central about the human condition. The evidence that I will use to support that claim is symbolic.

I will refer to the story of Moses. In that tale, Moses was led to the threshold of the Promised Land, but he was not permitted to enter. If we allow ourselves to encounter this text not as historical fact but as a genuine myth, it provides us with a yantric opportunity. We ask: what is it in it that can lead us to universal knowledge and wisdom? The question isn't whether Moses entered the Promised Land or not. We are captured by the utterance because we intuit that it has symbolic value and metaphorical meaning. It can illuminate something about the human condition with an emotional quality that captures a truth of human existence. Such truth needs to be felt as well as understood for it to have resonance, meaning, and impact.

When we enter into this symbolic realm we know that there is no one right answer. We cannot find the singular, sign-like one-to-one correspondence meaning of the utterance. By utilizing the processes of informal logic, we can help illuminate one particular meaning in a convincing and compelling way. This way of creating an argument can be used to bolster and support a conclusion in a way that facts cannot. The claim that I will make is that this part of the Moses story conveys that what is true for me in this book is true of all noble human effort. Though we know we will not be able to

achieve our ideal aims -- I know I won't be able to solve the problem of human suffering – it is our human task to aspire and try. This tells us something universal about humans: we have the capacity to see an ideal.

We have the natural capacity to imagine something better than what is, to long for that thing, and to go after that thing, but we are limited, individually, in our capacity to achieve that thing. We can also say that it is an inherent and noble part of human nature to want to transcend our conditionings, knowing that we are doomed to failure. This is part of what makes people both mad and beautiful. This can lead us associatively, to other similar metaphors. The ironic version is the story of Ahab, in *Moby Dick*. In that story, the captain is driven mad by his inability to conquer nature. He fights with all his will despite the certainty of doom.

The hero leads humanity towards the Omega Point, as Teilhard de Chardin would refer to the ultimate achievement of human development⁴⁴, but we can only reach it collectively, not individually. As Reinhold Niebuhr tells us, our efforts need to be suffused with faith, for we will never see the fruits of our labors.⁴⁵ Now I can give further evidence of all this; this is the story of history. But the symbolic narrative comes closer to expressing the universal. It is resonant in multiple directions. When we read that God said to Moses, “I have let you see it with your eyes, but you shall not cross over there,”⁴⁶ this has infinite resonances. It includes grief, awe, and emotions that can hardly be named. We identify with Moses, he is us, and he is something wholly other and holy.

In this sense, what is resonant is beautiful because it captures an ideal quality. It is inspirational, aspirational. In fact, the ability to imagine an ideal and not be able to achieve it may capture the essential feeling of what Kant called “the sublime” in art.⁴⁷ It

is not the correct way to think of something as much as it is the best way to think of something. It makes sense, as a reflection of human nature. It is value laden and attempts to answer the question of the right way to approach a question.

The rich associative matrix of dialectical mind in encounter with a world of symbolic yantras reveals the truth of the human condition. This place where the impossible unites with the aspirational is what Jung would call the “transcendent function” of the psyche, by which all dualities are transcended by a third, unifying archetype.⁴⁹ This leads us to an acceptance of the mystery which in one way can be defined as the image of traversing the unbridgeable distance between what can be conceived, what can be represented and known, and what we can be imagined, but never realized.⁵⁰

Expanding Scholarship from Knowledge to Wisdom

The point of writing this kind of work is to expand knowledge. In agreement with the contemporary philosopher, Richard Rorty, this quest is not an end-in-itself, but to promote some advance in the cause of human development.⁵¹ As my subject matter is the human being, a further hope -- though one that would not necessarily find a place in a typical work of this kind -- is to increase wisdom. This expands the purpose of the scholarly work from one of knowledge, the accumulation of facts, to wisdom, or a complex understanding of humans in their environment that leads to the best life.

As neo-Platonists, mystics, post-modernists and quantum physicists would agree, we now understand that it is impossible to come to any eternal and fully proved truth. Even more conventional scientists agree that we can only approach the highest degree of

probability. The more complex the system, the more likely it is to have a degree of freedom. The higher the degree of freedom, the less possible it is to be certain. This knowledge returns us to search for transcendent wisdom rather than antecedent cause and control.

The problem and possibility for humanity is that we live in a world of ideas. To the extent that we are bound to our ideas, we are not free. To the extent that our ideations, our symbols, are rigid, stereotyped and narrow, to that extent we are determined. With this understanding, even the categories of philosophy deserve skepticism.⁵² The ultimate meaning of the symbol, Campbell tells us, is, paradoxically, as a representation of the unknowable. In this the meaning of the symbol instructs us to free ourselves of attachment to any sort of meaning whatsoever.⁵³

The way to grow in wisdom is to accept the possibility that what we think and believe is wrong. This is the essence of the dialectical, Buddhist, and cognitive methods. In fact, the essence of wisdom dispenses with the hubris of science and the project of knowing per se. It recognizes that wisdom begins with Nicholas of Cusa's "sacred ignorance,"⁵⁴ the knowledge that we cannot be certain of what we know.

One of the main premises on which the cognitive therapeutic endeavor is based is the invitation to the client to entertain the possibility that what they believe is not true.⁵⁶ The goal is to, as the Romantic poet, John Keats put it, achieve "Negative Capability, that is, when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts . . ." ⁵⁷ If everything that my clients believed was true, for example -- that they would get AIDS from a haircut; that there is not one good man 'out there'; that they are permanently broken -- then there would be no need for, or purpose in, psychotherapy. Therapy cannot change

reality, except to the extent that that reality is created by someone's psyche; or created in the space between psyches. Therapists deal with the realm of fantasy.⁵⁸ We deal with the distortions inherent in a limited meaning-making process.

Implied in this request to our clients to question their beliefs, is to suggest that their representative constructions are self-limiting. This would suggest that all of us distort in the process of interpreting our perceptions. This means that the question of an absolute truth is moot. What we want to continuously develop is a richer meaning-making capacity.

The process of a dialectical-dialogical process of a conversation of symbols and their interpretation is to free us of being bound to an idea. It is through our capacity to continuously differentiate, delineate, and complexify our ideas that we can find growth and freedom. This suggests a method of growth that is the psychological equivalent of the cause of post-modernism. Post-modernism is a radicalization of modernism. Modernists somewhat naively questioned all accepted forms. Post-modernists attempt to apply that avant-garde principle of questioning all forms to all aspects of thought, culture, and life.

Modern thought tells us that an intellectual work of research cannot prove anything, certainly not in the realm of the complex human. Therefore, I propose a modified purpose for this work. The purpose of this book will be to add to an ongoing conversation. The conversation that I am joining in this work is to illuminate the human condition. This conversation is a conversation of symbols. We encounter the complex symbols of others and in that mirror see ourselves. This leads us to generate our own yantras. We express them and we explicate them. They are seen by others who then see

themselves and the universe mirrored back. In this way the symbolic conversation advances the evolution of wisdom.

Instead of the purpose of research being simply to know, the scholarly work as conversation is a means of expression. It is a way of conveying one's experiencing and the meanings correlated to such experiencing to add to this interrelational manifestation of truth.

Wisdom emerges from comprehending how people interpret their worlds.⁵⁹ Scientific method and empiricism is limited in revealing the truth of the human experience. A pathway through to other aspects of truth is opened by the recognition of the human organizing principle of symbolism, which provides both material and method for understanding people, as well as a means of self-cultivation. This requires a return to the phenomenological processes of the East because to know humanity requires us to know ourselves.⁶⁰

In order to expand knowledge of the human, we must return to rhetorical principles, and the methods of informal logic, which implies an ongoing conversation in search of human truth. In order to expand our knowledge of humanity we need a return to humanism,⁶¹ or the belief that the best way to understand humanity, and come to know and live from an ethical core, is through the accumulated cultural history of people.

Those who have self-cultivated their meaning-making ability to the utmost through this phenomenological/dialogical process of an immersion in symbols have the virtue of wisdom.

Rather than the scientific view that there is one correct solution to a problem, one singular, non-contradictory truth that can be proved, the human sciences transcend the

insights of discursive, empirical science by a return to a humanistic tradition of knowing
by knowing the self and the heart.

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CHAPTER 3 THE HEART OF HERMENEUTICS

The evidence we have to know the truth of human experience is not scientific data because the subjective aspect of experience is not empirical. That is, it is not open to the senses. We cannot see what another person is thinking or feeling. Beyond our own self-exploration, the only way to ascertain the quality and meaning of human experience is through the reports of other individuals. However communicated, whether consciously or not, whether written, visually represented, said or done, we can consider these reports as “texts.” The discipline concerned with the art of understanding and interpreting texts is *hermeneutics*. The way to understand the human through the experiential reports of others is through the process of hermeneutics.

Definition of Hermeneutics

My primary source of information about hermeneutics comes from the work of Hans Gadamer, whose book, *Truth and Method*, is a core text on this subject. He examines the history of the theories of hermeneutics and proposes his own.¹

As Gadamer notes, hermeneutics is applied in “those situations in which we encounter meanings that are not immediately understandable but require interpretive effort,” usually in regard to a “text” in its broadest definition.² As this book finds its inspiration in, and is focused around, a particular text -- the quote by Mencius -- the primary method of this exploration will be a hermeneutic one.

Not only will this be the method employed, but I will also show that this method is intrinsic to the message that I am trying to convey. The process of hermeneutics is part of the answer that this work proposes. Hermeneutics, I will show, is a method of finding the heart. In the writing of this work and participating in a process of hermeneutics, I engage in the work of finding my own heart.

The name hermeneutics may come from the god, *Hermes*, otherwise known as *Mercury*. Hermes brought messages from the gods to mortals. He was the god of initiation and the guide into the mysteries and the highest order of truth.³ This is to suggest that the immersion into, and interpretation of, ancient texts is a central means for discovering the highest order of truths of a universal nature. It is a way of finding the essence of things. Hermes was also the bringer of dreams⁴ and we will see that the symbolic content of dreams can also be considered an obscure text that requires interpretation and has the value of illuminating universal truth.

The hermeneutic process is based on the assumption that life has coherence and a unity of meaning that can be found.⁵ This idea is at least as old as the Greek founder of science, Pythagoras, (570-495 BCE)⁶ and was held by his contemporary Confucius on the other side of the world, who said, “. . . my doctrine is that of an all-pervading unity.”⁷

One central location where this unity of human truth can be found is in the accumulated artifacts of culture and history. This is the repository of our greatest wisdom, insight, and expression of humankind. As we have explained, a central means of coming to know the self and humanity is through a relationship with the symbolic. The artifacts of the past are one of our primary sources of the symbolic and therefore are a primary means of coming to know what it means to be human. The cultural products of

the past are “an inexhaustible source of possibilities of meaning. . .”⁸ because the symbolic is our source of inexhaustible meaning.

In the sense that the products of the past can illuminate our path through the process of hermeneutics, it is a *sankofa*. Sankofa is an *Akan* word used by the people of Ghana to mean going back to the past to take what can be helpful in creating the future. The symbol for this is called *Asante Adrinka*, and is, interestingly enough, represented as a heart.⁹

To understand humanity we need to penetrate the works of those who have traveled the great journey of self-understanding before us: the wise and the artist.¹⁰ We examine the texts of the wise and creative because they have a truth in them to be discovered. For us to enter into and comprehend facets of the endless meanings in these symbolic works requires a revealing. Such is the work of Hermes. The process of hermeneutics is to unearth the hidden truth in the obscure text.¹¹

How Hermeneutics Have Been Used Historically

In order to illuminate my justification for using, and understanding of, the hermeneutic process, I will provide a short overview of some of the historical uses of hermeneutics and a few of the historical figures who proposed theories of hermeneutics.

In the ancient Greek world, the word hermeneutics was first used in its meaning of interpretation by Aristotle.¹²

Throughout early civilizations, the method was used as *exegesis*, to elucidate the revealed truth in sacred texts.¹³ In early Christianity, St. Augustine (354 – 430) was a significant figure in the development of exegetical hermeneutics. We will see later that he

was also a central figure in the theory of the heart. As such, he is a bridging figure in the concepts that unify this work.¹⁴

The Chinese philosophy that inspires this work is based on a devotion to hermeneutics. Mencius interpreted Confucius, and Confucius considered himself, above all else, to be a hermeneuticist, being a “transmitter” of far more ancient works.¹⁵

Central to the development of hermeneutics in the modern West was the attempt to bring the human sciences to the same footing as the physical sciences. Wilhelm Dilthey, (1833 – 1911), developed a technique that was intended to be a scientific method that could produce validity in the social sciences. In this iteration the method aimed to remove the subjectivity of the interpreter in order to ascertain truth by arriving at an understanding of the author’s intent. As a man who believed in the primacy of scientific method, he attempted to create a means through which the human world could be understood with the same rigor as the natural world was understood and described through science. Dilthey's view of hermeneutics is for the interpreter to go further than to understand the text, but to understand the other person, as they understand themselves.¹⁷

Gadamer’s Views of Hermeneutics

Gadamer disputed Dilthey’s viewpoint. He evolved hermeneutic theory by recognizing that removing the subjectivity of the interpreter was not only impossible but also counterproductive.

The point of the hermeneutic enterprise was to discover the questions asked by the author and, in an encounter between the text and the interpreter, to reveal new meanings, understandings of, and answers to, those questions. Gadamer posited that

understanding is not reconstruction but mediation. To quote: “The view that hermeneutics is concerned with the reconstruction of the past world in order to understand the object from the past is . . . as nonsensical as all restitution and restoration of past life.”¹⁸ What this means is that hermeneutics is a process whereby the past and the present interact.¹⁹

Dilthey’s approach to hermeneutics was developed to avoid the risks and perils of subjectivity, which can lead us into illusion and be used to manipulate through sophistry. Hence it is important to validate our felt experience to whatever extent possible by scientific means.²⁰ From this perspective, where subjectivity is seen as a problem, in order to understand the text we need to become as objective as possible. This is done by eliminating the extraneous and controlling for variables.

However, with the realization that we have no ultimate way of validating our subjectivity, Gadamer turns this limit into a positive in the sense that a new aspect, dimension, or perspective of meaning can be revealed through the encounter of the ancient text with the new subjectivity. It is in this encounter that the creative exists. Truth isn’t revealed singularly in a linear exposition, but is rather revealed over time in the continuous new reinterpretations that emerge as each earnest individual brings his unique perspective to the task. As he put it, “Here ‘repetition’ does not mean that something is literally repeated--i.e. can be reduced to something original. Rather, every repetition is as original as the work itself.”²¹

Because the text is symbolic, and because the symbolic is representative of the quality of the nature of the universe and the individual person, there is no limit to the meanings that can be found in it. By definition, a symbol is something that does not have a sign-like singular correspondent meaning. Therefore no one true meaning can be found

in a symbolic text. As Gadamer put it, “In view of the finitude of our historical existence, it would seem that there is something absurd about the whole idea of a unique, correct interpretation.”²²

Rather, each text contains infinite implications. This being the case, the goal of the hermeneutic enterprise, like the project of finding the heart, is never complete. It is not merely a process of eliminating error to come to a core reality, but rather the endless revealing of more and more facets of an incomprehensible whole.²³

From the Jungian point of view, psyche, whether in the personal sense of the sealed, private world of the individual, or the collective psyche that the individual psyche provides a point of access for, can only be understood hermeneutically. It cannot be apprehended directly. It can only be known through its reflections, or projections. The psyche is “projected” onto the text, whether this is something written, done or dreamt. Jung saw the text as a psychological fact; it is representative of the structure, nature, and dynamic of psyche. The “interpretation” of the text is not to reveal its one true meaning, or the intention of the author, but rather to understand something of the structure and dynamics of psyche. In this sense, behavior, too, can be seen as text, as a living out of psychic pattern, structure, and dynamic. The text is an artifact of psyche and as such reveals psychic facts that can be understood.²⁴

Hermeneutics penetrates the secrets of what it means to be a subjective human. The starting point in a dialectic process is not some demonstrative axiom. We do not start with some fundamental truth. Rather we start with an assertion, an argument, a point of view. A hermeneutic text can be a point of origin for a dialectical process. Rather than

trying to prove or disprove, this enterprise provides the possibility of generating new thinking.²⁵ We can use the text to illuminate, reveal, or penetrate.

This parallels Mencius's notion that the object of self-cultivation is the finding of heart. If we understand ourselves to be an obscure text, and the heart to be our truth, or essence, then finding the lost heart means comprehending the hidden truth within the self.

Hermeneutics brings these two concepts together. The process is not ultimately to understand a text, but to reveal the human through an authentic encounter with the other, the creator of the text. Though this poses tremendous difficulties, it can be accomplished. It requires a quality of imaginative and creative empathy that is the sine qua non of heart and transcends a merely concrete rational, analytic process. In this sense, hermeneutics is an art. In "transforming oneself into the other," we achieve not only understanding, but a comprehension of, and therefore transformation of, the self.²⁶

Mencius's view of hermeneutic interpretation squared with the empathic heart approach of Gadamer. As Mencius defined the hermeneutic encounter, ". . . in explaining an ode, one should not allow the words to get in the way of the sentence, nor the sentence to get in the way of the sense. This right way is to meet the intention of the poet with sympathetic understanding."²⁷

The Full Meaning of the Text, as a Symbol, is Inexhaustible

When we are beginning with a text, a search for the meaning as the author intended it limits the full meaning of the text. As Jung and others have now shown, it is quite possible that the author himself did not know the full meaning of the text. Does the artist ever really know what they are doing?²⁸ The goal for understanding a text is not to

discover the author's meaning. For, “since men cannot be aware of everything, their words, speech and writing can mean something that they themselves did not intend to say or write,” and consequently “when trying to understand their writings, one can rightly think of things that had not occurred to the writers.”²⁹

If we use music as an example, one can analyze a work to find its harmonic structure. We can make sense of the passage of the music from one chord or tonal region to another, and how the notes that don't fit into the most obvious patterns do fit into more obscure ones. But the creator is not interested in this meaning. This is discovered after the fact. The composer only hears the music, not the abstracted symbolic sense.³⁰

Equally, it is obvious that writers, operating to whatever extent unconsciously, will have mythic, symbolic contents to their work that they are not focused on,³¹ but that can be seen by the keen observer after the fact.³² Dostoevsky might say that he was simply writing a book about a family in *The Brothers Karamazov*, without placing his tale of patricide in the history of mythic structure and what this means on the deepest layers of the collective psyche.

Trying to figure out what the author meant is impossible because in the singular utterance so much is left out that the author has in his mind, and longs to express, but can't be held in their few delimited words.

Therefore, all utterances have infinite layers of meaning that may not be in the consciousness of the utterer. There are an infinite number of ways of expressing any particularly complex insight, and so no rendering captures the whole of the concept.

As profound symbolic texts or yantras are complex and multi-determined, the hermeneutic process is one of an unending revealing. Discovering the final meaning is not the goal but participating in this endless process of unfolding is.

One never comes to the end of meaning as one never comes to the end of a conversation. The end of a piece of music feels final, especially if it is tonal. But all that has been said "about" that key has not been said. When the next piece of music begins with that same C Major chord, the conversation begins again. Each utterance is surrounded by all that has been expressed and not been said. It conveys a totality in its limitedness, but it is merely one part of an infinite whole. As Gadamer said, "Understanding always means understanding differently, newly."³³

The task of interpretation is necessary because the original text is symbolic, which is evocative, but can never be fully expressed because it has endless ramifications. The challenge is to extrapolate symbols into discursive description without losing this evocative power.³⁴ The paradox of hermeneutics is that it puts into words what cannot be completely conveyed in words.

This is another way of defining the result that a book like this endeavors to realize. The process is one of continuing symbolic delineation and differentiation, an attempt to more fully capture and express essential human nature in symbolic form.

Hermeneutics is an Intersubjective Process

Rather than seeing the text as a thing in itself that encapsulates a meaning to be revealed, the text has no existence or meaning without the interpreter. This is true even if the reader is the author. As the great American writer, William Faulkner, said, "I never

know what I think about something until I've read what I've written on it."³⁵ Our understanding of our own texts keeps shifting because we bring a new self to every reading.

Symbolic manifestation happens dialogically, as we bring to light interior experience. When we reveal something in a conversation, the listener can express our thoughts in other words that capture the essence better than we did ourselves, leading us to say, "Yes this is what I meant!"³⁶ This power is central to what the effective therapist brings to the therapeutic relationship.

Through the relief of the other to the self, we are confronted with the not-I, with what Jung called the *shadow*, defined as the parts of ourselves which we reject and of which we are therefore unaware. In this way material is brought to consciousness. The unknown becomes known.

The text exists intersubjectively. In an encounter with an historical text, there is a confrontation between the utterances of an individual who is embedded in a culture from the past, and we, the interpreter, who is embedded in our present-day culture.³⁷ We cannot be that person, or live in their world, or their moment in history. We can never return to any other moment in time and so we must accept that not only is the experience of another completely unknowable in a pure sense but that intrinsic to the interpretation is that we will misunderstand the meaning of the creator because we cannot fully enter their historical, conditioned, subjective context.³⁸ Rather than seeing this as a limitation, this is a good that leads to deeper revelations of truth.³⁹ As Gadamer put it, ". . . we have a new experience . . . whenever the past resounds in a new voice."⁴⁰

A higher order, synthetic understanding comes from the collision of two historically determined unique viewpoints. The text does not simply illuminate through its content, but it is in the encounter that we find ourselves and therefore find universal truths about humanity.⁴¹ Every new relationship reveals new meanings.⁴² As such, there is no final reading of the text. It is in the relation of the experiencing subject to a text that truth continuously emerges.

Central to the process of hermeneutics is keeping ourselves open to what is not us. Such true meeting occurs when we fully grasp and accept both existential otherness and the interdependence of existence. This is the place where you are wholly separate from me and I am with you. This complete comprehension of the nature of relatedness leads to the realization of the Mencian golden rule; when we have our hearts, we treat others as we would treat our ideal selves.⁴³

As compared to the view that the aim of hermeneutics is to fully grasp the intrinsic meaning of the text as it was intended by the creator, instead we find that the value of the experience comes from the meeting between ourselves and this ancient source. It is in the meeting with this strange and mysterious other and the taking of that other into the self that we find the profound and resonantly beautiful.⁴⁴

Gadamer's hermeneutics stands firmly alongside contemporary intersubjectivity theory. In this view, insight does not emerge from the trained observer, but rather meaning only exists in the relational space between people. The purpose of behavior is symbolic and as such is intended to be seen in order to be understood. The possibility of transformation occurs because new meaning grows in the intersubjective. In fact, in this view, the intersubjective is the only place that is.⁴⁵

Hermeneutic Method and the Meaning of the Interpreter

A lesson of the dialogical therapeutic technique is to teach people how to enter the world of the other. One of the validating criteria in this process is the assent of the speaker that the listener has understood. In hermeneutics, we do not get such agreement. We interact with a text but not with the person. The interaction cannot evolve through a process of advancing co-understandings. If we ask the question, “do I get you right?” We do not get an answer. Therefore, the process is different. We can never get validation that our understanding is correct.

As much as we can imagine the symbol creator’s response to our perspective, we are finally left with our own interpretations. As much as we can never truly enter another’s experience, in this process we are left with our unique viewpoint. Our interpretation then, is the realization of our singular subjectivity through our own, new symbolic formation.

As Gadamer stated, understanding is not reconstruction, but mediation.⁴⁶ Not only is this mediation of bringing the past into the present, but there is also the mediation between the text and the interpreter. Understanding is an event where the interpreter brings his or her own constructed world into the relational matrix. This means that we always bring our projections into the mix.⁴⁷

The creative event happens when, with the greatest possible awareness of the ways we distort through the meaning-making process, we encounter the unique, psychological, subjectively created symbol of the other. It is in this clash of limited

subjectivities that a third perspective is born.⁴⁸ This new manifestation is a creative synthesis born of the coming together of two unique perspectives.

Since the complex symbol holds infinite aspects, the goal of the hermeneutic interpreter is to reveal the aspects that emerge from the juxtaposition of the text and the individual interpreter's perspective. This combination reveals unique aspects of the symbol. The interpreter's bias is the necessary condition to illuminate more and more of the meaning of the text.

Certainly it is part of our task to know as well as we can our own conditionings, assumptions, and projections that we bring to an interpretive encounter.⁴⁹ At the same time we must admit that we cannot know our own bias, because we operate from the inside of it. The way to make the most of this situation is to bring a multitude of perspectives to the symbol. When we compare our own perspective with the perspective of others the text takes on a dimensionality. We can see it from several angles at once. It becomes something more like a hologram, rather than a photograph. When a picture is taken from several different perspectives, we can see more of the whole object. So the hermeneutic process is not only the encounter of a particular individual and a text, but a participation in a tradition and process of hermeneutics. An endless series of projections, or interpretations, are brought to bear in the new encounter to create an ever enriched complex vision of meaning.

The method of hermeneutics then, includes a devoted reading of the text, an understanding of the surrounding textual context, a reading of the other interpretations of the text, enriched meanings provided by other, related symbolic material, including other human narratives, and finally the deeply found perspective and experience of the

interpreter. Though any individual's comprehension will always be incomplete, shot from this many angles, the symbol comes to life and reveals more of its secrets.

This process of involvement with the text is to uncover and participate in its complexity. As described in the section on ways of knowing, it is the complex nature of advanced self-regulating systems that make them inappropriate for an analytical, reductive, mathematical explanation. This hermeneutic dialectic increases complexity as it aims to carry the richness of truth itself.⁵⁰

Dilthey's form of hermeneutics operated from the assumption that the text had a particular meaning, and it was the task of the interpreter to find that actual meaning of the text. His view was that a rigorous process was required for a reconstruction of the writer's world, so that there could be an understanding of an historical context and its attendant meanings as they were held at that particular time and place. It was understood that the words of the writer meant something very different to the interpreter than they meant to him, and our task was to come to know what they meant to *him*.

Gadamer's insight recognizes that we bring our own historical perspective of understanding that we cannot eliminate as we approach any text. There is no way that we can understand what the writer was saying from his perspective. Even if such a thing were possible, it could not capture the full meaning of the text because it would limit the meaning to one thing, which is not the nature of symbol. If we are all in search of the writer's one meaning then all we are left with is an argument and an endless disagreement that leads to the negation of all possibilities. This presupposition of a singular meaning held by the writer leads to a dialectic that would result in each

interpreter to state, “you are wrong, and I am right,” until the next interpreter came along and said, “no, you are wrong and I am right,” ad infinitum.

From the synthetic heart perspective, you are right *and* I am right. The obligation of the interpreter is to come to the deepest understanding possible for *them*. We want to form the clearest gestalt, or symbol, in response to the text. We want to hone most profoundly *our perspective*. Perspective, intrinsic to the meaning of the word, means a broad relational understanding. We develop the broadest possible perspective by bringing the greatest breadth of influence to bear, the deepest self-understanding, and the greatest recourse to that which is both agreed upon within our culture and to whatever extent possible, proved.

Perspective is the ability to hold multiple viewpoints at once. By looking at the text from every available angle at once we take something flat and make it rise from the background as a strong and three dimensional figure, or gestalt. To make an enriching contribution to the understanding of the yantric text, and so illuminate the human condition, we need to have the most fully realized perspective possible.

To hold multiple viewpoints simultaneously also means having the ability to embrace paradox, which is central to the work of symbolic consciousness. This is part of what makes it possible to penetrate and grow from yantric material.⁵¹

Our aim in this process is to enter every perspective imaginatively. This is achieved by discovering how every interpreter is correct and their viewpoint true. In so doing unity is found within diverse meanings. This reunites what has been separated.⁵² This unitive approach is found in the Chinese philosophy which influences this work.

Their orientation was synthetic rather than agonistic and syncretically incorporated each new insight into an endlessly developing system of thought and view of existence.⁵³

In the old riddle, a group of blind people touch an elephant. Each person describes it from the place that they touch the beast. We will come to know the elephant if we can touch it in every possible place. It is in and through multiple juxtapositions that reality reveals itself.⁵⁴

Hermeneutics and Bildung

A core concept in the Mencian text is self-cultivation. Central to self-cultivation is the practice of hermeneutics. Confucius's and Mencius's work was hermeneutic and the interpretations of their texts have continued to the present day. This work follows in that tradition.

The purpose of the Mencian hermeneutics was for the interpreter to come into relationship with those who had achieved the greatest degree of self-development, the ancient Sages, so that they, too, could achieve this cultivated fulfillment. Hermeneutics was understood as a primary means of self-cultivation. The texts were an example of the Sage's personal progress toward realization, and were used as the vehicles for the interpreter's process of growth. In this sense, hermeneutics is experiential.⁵⁵

A process of hermeneutic exploration, where we bring multiple symbolic perspectives to set against the text, leads to our own psychological development, because it aids in the process of complexification and differentiation of our own perspective. In this sense a devoted immersion in a hermeneutic process is therapeutic.

This Confucian concept that the texts of the sages could be used as a vehicle for

self-realization emerged independently in 18th century Europe with the hermeneutic work of Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744-1803) considered “a philosopher of the first importance.”⁵⁶ Rather than trying to find human truth through replicating scientific method, he believed that the purpose of an immersion in culture, in part through textual hermeneutics, was not only to understand what it means to be human, but to cultivate the human. This is where method and aim merge. Not only are we using hermeneutics as our method of exploration in this work, but this process serves the aim of self-cultivation. For the Chinese this process of individual development, and the effects that this could have on society was the *raison d'être* of the hermeneutic process. Gadamer agreed. As he put it, “The concept of self formation, education or cultivation, which became supremely important at the time, was perhaps the greatest idea of the 18th century.”⁵⁷

The German word for this process of self-cultivation and human development through a participation in culture is *bildung*.⁵⁸

Bildung corresponds to Mencian self-cultivation in that both address the proper way to develop one's innate potentials. Bildung involves not simply an intellectual exercise but the participation of the complete person in the process of self-development that leads to a realization of ultimate character.⁵⁹ This ancient view was also promulgated by the contemporary Christian theologian, Rudolf Bultmann (1884-1976) who believed that myth should be interpreted existentially, that is, through a lived engagement with the demands that the text makes for a certain kind of living.⁶⁰

A central appeal of the text is that when we encounter it we respond to it as if it captures a truth that had up until that time been just beyond our grasp. The text is both familiar and unknown. There is something about the wisdom that is universal and yet it is

captured in a way that comes from a distanced time and place. Hermeneutics arises in this place between the text's strangeness and its familiarity to us. The hermeneutic encounter with the ancient text is like uncovering what was at one time known, but has become obscured by manifestation. Again, this is like Plato's anamnesis.⁶¹

In this sense *bildung*, or self-cultivation through an immersion in culture, does not add something new to us, but is rather a process of the revealing of knowledge previously possessed. Gadamer posits that hermeneutics, as a core method of *bildung*, is the ". . . rediscovery of something that was not absolutely unknown, but whose meaning had become alien and inaccessible."⁶² It is a means of recognizing the significance of what has become ignored.⁶³ This runs parallel to the Mencian statement that "when people's dogs and chicks are lost, they go out and look for them, but when people's hearts, or original nature are lost, they do not go out and look for them."⁶⁴

The process of *bildung* in this sense is not simply an absorption and adoption of a past viewpoint, but rather, through the unique encounter between the universal artifacts of culture and the individual in their time and context, the individual finds and manifests the unique within themselves. This finding of something essential that had become hidden is another way of describing finding the lost heart. Here we find the unity of Gadamer's hermeneutics and the Mencian concept. The yantric text represents what we are, and the discovery of the text and its exploration is what leads to the reconnection to that source. If the heart is the ultimate text, the hermeneutic process of self-cultivation has as its aim the rediscovery of what has become alien, inaccessible and insignificant: our own essence. Finding the lost heart consists, in part, in an immersion in a process of hermeneutics, which is one way of defining self-cultivation.

This concept of *Bildung* connects to a transcendental humanism that is central to an understanding of heart. The process of *bildung*, or self-cultivation, is a process that leads to self-realization, the manifestation of what the Indians in the Upanishads would call *Atman*, the ultimate within the heart. Gadamer tells us the Latin equivalent of this process is the word *formatio*.⁶⁵ Jung refers to this as the process of *individuation*.⁶⁶ In this sense, *bildung*, and the hermeneutics that is a part of it, is a participation in the life of complex symbols, or yantras, that have as their core purpose revelation of universal truth in the pursuit of human realization. Later on, we will discover how this view resonates with Mencian philosophy and the universal meaning of heart.

The transformation that we seek through the process of self-cultivation is manifestation into true being. As the phenomenological process of self-exploration involves a heroic search for the universal symbol, what we find through self-cultivation through an immersion in yantric symbol is that our essence becomes clearly delineated, and increasingly freed from the distortions of our conditioned existence.⁶⁷

The symbolic process of representation is in and of itself transformative. The manifestation of a symbol represents a comprehension of essence that can be shared with an observer. In this sense, “. . . the presentation of the essence . . . is necessarily revelatory.”⁶⁸

This capacity to recognize the essential through symbolic consciousness, which is the aptitude of the heart, is what the archetypal psychologist, Robert Moore (b. 1942), calls “appreciative consciousness.” This is the unique magic of the artistic sensibility.⁶⁹ The artist allows us to see through his eyes, and then we share in this ability to see the true in the ordinary, which is intrinsic, but hidden, in us all. This is exquisitely realized in

the film *American Beauty*. In one scene, the protagonist videotapes a garbage bag being buffeted by the wind. Seen through his lens, this banal image becomes redolently beautiful.⁷⁰ This allows us to approach a consciousness that transcends the limits of perception, unencumbered by a stereotyped symbolization capacity. This ability to apprehend the “unique, indestructible value of every phenomenon” brings us to the level of cosmic consciousness.⁷¹ This is the symbolic meaning of the ancient Indian text the *Bhagavad Gita*. The god shows the adept a scene of terrible destruction and finds the operation of the divine principle within a moment of incomprehensible fear and horror.⁷² When we open the doors of perception, we manifest the holy.

The vividly realized figure of gestalt formation becomes, then, the way that we truly find our hearts, the way we come to know, and be, ourselves. “The clear, full, lived insight is the very pith of being made visible and transparent to itself.”⁷³

This is the motion toward which the evolving universe is developing. The universe is now penetrating its own secrets and is conscious of itself. As Chardin expressed it, the universe has now developed to the point where it is watching itself evolve.⁷⁴ As Gadamer put it, “life thinks and thought lives.”⁷⁵

The goal of interpreting text is the development of our own capacity for singular expression so that with our own creations we can manifest some aspect of universal truth ourselves.

Tai Chen’s Hermeneutics

Conceptions of the hermeneutic process have their own dialectic. That is, its methods and theories swing first in one direction, and then a correction is made by

bringing it to the opposite direction. As we explored some of the history of Western hermeneutics, one pole was that understanding came from an analysis of the meaning of texts as the author intended it. Here the belief was that the only way to avoid mistakes and misunderstandings was from the most rigorous analysis. In the mystic approach, the opposite pole was the immediate, intuitive, transcendental understanding, which can emerge from a more spiritual or meditative path. This had its advantages over the coldly detached non-heart oriented approach of the strict exegesists. One could enter the text fully and be transformed by it. But this immediate experience had its dangers. One could be bamboozled by one's own gauzy revelations, ungrounded in substance.

One of the great hermeneutic interpreters of Mencius's writings who struggled with this problem was Tai Chen (1724-1777). His most significant work was called the *Meng Tzu Tzu-i Shu-Cheng*, translated as *A Study of the Meaning of Terms in the Mencius*.⁷⁶

Tai Chen mistrusted the scientific approach. Suspicious of short cuts and instant conversions, he also doubted the revelatory. He began in agreement with Confucius's basic premise that the only way to honor our essential nature is to follow the path of study.⁷⁷ However, his aim was to synthesize both the immersionary and the revelatory approaches.

Much like the much later discoveries of philosopher and psychologist William James (1842- 1910) on spiritual transformation in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*,⁷⁸ and writer Arthur Koestler's (1905-1983) research on creativity in *The Act of Creation*,⁷⁹ Tai Chen understood that immediate breakthroughs emerge after an

immersion in passionate work. He worked hoping that the unifying wisdom beneath and behind his analysis would be ultimately revealed to him.⁸⁰

As a result he brought a great rigor of scholarship to the process to eliminate logical error. At the same time he presaged the modern view that the truth is revealed through a devotion to self-exploration. In this sense, the Mencian hermeneutic process, as developed by Tai Chen, is a phenomenological one, where phenomenology means a process of finding truth through an examination of one's own consciousness.⁸¹

In honor of this understanding, Tai employed his meditative, or insight path, as a way of phenomenologically entering the text, clearing away the detritus of well-meaning but distorting and beclouding commentary and understanding. This resulted in a philosophical advance derived from a discovery of an aspect of the eternal truth revealed in the profoundly perceived original text.

Through our own process of self-cultivation we bring ourselves fully to the text and reveal dimensions of it that could not be expressed or discovered in any way but through us. This involves a process of bringing heart and mind to the text, of thinking and feeling into and through a text. In this view, the cold attempt at finding accurate meaning is an illusion that can also lead to mistakes; mistakes of narrowness and unconscious projection.

Tai's method of personal development and the deepest comprehension of the laws of the universe and human nature came from a lifetime of work of exploring his own nature with the mediating structure of the complete Mencian text. It is through this devotion of a lifetime that the truth emerges. As elucidated in the wisdom text, the *Ta Hsueh*, "Thus it is that the hidden subtleties of things are ultimately revealed, for their

true form cannot long remain obscured.”⁸² As contemporary a thinker as philosopher Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) agreed. He believed that to come to an apprehension of essential being one had to cultivate a capacity for receptivity and listening through repeated practice over a lifetime.⁸³

The Confucians believed that a continuous meditation on the text will lead in the end, into a personal immediate expression.

Embracing Impossibility

As we have established, a yantric text has no singular, certain answer. Our task in life is to cultivate an openness to the questions that the text makes possible, and a willingness to engage the possible answers that wouldn't otherwise emerge.⁸⁴ But these answers are at best partial. As we follow the way of Hermes toward a comprehension of the human we recognize that “. . . understanding is provisional and unending. . .”⁸⁵

The only thing we can know, Socrates proved, is that we cannot know. The proponents of science, beginning with Aristotle, claimed this was a problem of method. The demonstrative method, they believed, through empiricism, can lead to knowledge. However, though knowledge is necessary for self-realization, it is not sufficient. In order to embody our essence, we need to accept the impossibility of full realization.

Wisdom accepts the paradox of the limits of our knowledge and the willingness to continue anyway. Being doomed to fail individually in this historical moment, as we are in any noble pursuit, does not destroy our faith in the purposiveness of our quest. It is in the striving in the face of certain failure that we are defined as human and we find our success. As the existentialist author Albert Camus (1913-1960) said, “The struggle itself

toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy.”⁸⁶ Even if our given task is to stumble to a dead end, to meander down a false way, to make the wrong turn, to fight a misguided mission, to attempt to prove a deluded belief, we still advance the knowledge of the world, because it is through the process of creative mistake making that we find our way to the truth.⁸⁷

No matter how refined or illuminated our view on the text is, it will be distorted to some extent. This distortion adds the particularity of our individual viewpoint, which then becomes another facet to add to the whole for later explorers to find. Through the process of *bildung*, or self-cultivation, we make our contribution to a cultural history, from which some later observer will be able to add their own discovery to ours and gain an even clearer vision of the whole of truth.⁸⁸ In a sense, it is our failure of interpretation that is our contribution to a hermeneutics circle.

There is no certainty. But still we must choose. We must live. We must make the best possible guess. As Tillich said, to advance the cause of human self-revelation, we must have “the courage of risking an almost unavoidable failure.”⁸⁹

True growth comes from the process of questioning what we believe to be true. Our opportunities for learning lie in having the imagination to confront the parts of a mysterious text that we don't understand, disagree with, consider unimportant, find too difficult, or simply overlook. The possibilities of perception are infinite and our growth comes from seeing what is there but hasn't been noticed. We can only do this if we surrender the position of the knower. The courage of understanding is the willingness to begin with the shameful admission that we don't know. It takes a tremendous amount of self-confidence and self-assurance to wholly embrace the position of the not-knower. As

the mystic Nicholas of Cusa tells us, it is by entering the sacred darkness that we sense the presence of Inaccessible Light.⁹⁰ This is why we both love and revile Socrates. Did he really have the courage to reveal this truth about himself -- that he didn't know -- or was he just ironically mocking us?

All any of us have is our unique perspective, our individual symbolic construction and world of illusion, which we can continue to enhance, articulate, validate and hone. In the end, our goal is not to prove something true. Rather it is about revealing, asserting, and communicating in the most impactful way through the manifestation of our own delineated, differentiated figure-symbols. As the great transcendentalist American essayist, philosopher, and poet, Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803 –1882), said in his timeless essay, *Self-Reliance*, “Trust thyself: every heart vibrates to that iron string,”⁹¹

And so I write this to the end of making my unique, creative contribution to the sum of human knowledge with the certain glee that I will fail. And my only hope is to do so as gloriously as I can muster. To -- as the prayer written on the wall of Mother Theresa's room states – “do it anyway.”⁹²

This willingness to engage in the impossible, that is, to engage in the hermeneutic encounter, which is a core element of *bildung*, or self-cultivation, is both the method of the work and the answer to the work. The answer is in the process or the doing. Finding the heart involves a total intellectual, moral, and emotional devotion. This is what makes up the self-development of cultivating the divine within us. This book, and the continued work that will follow throughout my life, is my symbolic product. It is in and of itself a way of *Bhakti Marga*, which is described by Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902), a teacher responsible for awakening the western world to Hinduism, as "the path of systematized

devotion for the attainment of union with the Absolute."⁹³ The writing of this work is an act of devotion, an example of my commitment to working on myself every day in the service of manifesting my purpose and meaning. This commitment, in part, is to explore the meanings and wisdom found in culture, that which has been passed down through the ages. Finding the heart occurs, in part, through an immersion in the products of our world culture -- that is, in art, tales, wisdom texts and science -- that are our finest symbolic representations of human truth. This is complemented by a devotion to self-exploration, creativity, immersion in nature, meditation on the divine, and relationship.

Augustine's Three Phases of the Hermeneutic Process

As Gadamer noted, all texts are embedded in history. In the same way, everything in the universe is embedded in a web of relationships. If we can imagine this spatially, then we are also embedded in a web of time, extending both backwards and forwards. Our web, therefore, is not in the nature of a plane that is extended across relationships but is three-dimensional, extended in depth through interrelatedness and time. This concept was captured in the *Avatamsaka Sutra*, one of the most influential teachings of Mahayana Buddhism. In this work there is the notion of *Indra's Net*, an endless web of jewels where every jewel is connected to every other, and each jewel has endless facets that reflect everything else within the web.⁹⁴ We cannot remove ourselves from this web, and this is one reason that a scientific approach to the understanding of the human experience is impossible, where the scientific method is dependent on removing an object from its web of relations and history to the greatest extent possible. We must begin our approach to understanding with an acceptance of this "em-webbedness".

When we use the metaphor of a three-dimensional web of interconnections throughout endless time, we recognize that there is no center to this web. This conforms to the Buddhist view, that there is no such thing as a singular self.⁹⁵ Yet, we can now imagine something of the nature of the cosmos that is revealed through this awareness. The universe is expanding outwards from any point within it⁹⁶ -- and so, though there is no center, every point is a center, from which the web expands. This paradox, of centerlessness, and infinite centeredness, was revealed in the sacred geometry of the mystic Nicholas of Cusa⁹⁷ and intimates a revelation about the central metaphor of this work, the Heart.

In order to bring this work into time, manifestation, materiality, or the sequence of events, we choose a vantage point, center or perspective from which to look. In writing a book, which we execute with the linear, discursive mind, we need to begin our journey from some beginning point. The story must begin somewhere. In this instance this writer chooses the Mencian text.

Why this text? A text's evocative power comes from its complex symbolic nature. Its connotations transcend the words of the text. When this power can reach across vast expanses of time, it means that the text has the possibility of being considered a wisdom text, one worthy of hermeneutic penetration. The reader's emotional connection to the text, the curiosity that it provokes, indicates the formation of an attachment between the reader, the text, and its author. It is something in the text that tells us we are not simply encountering experience but rather truth. It is this bond that motivates the hermeneutic enterprise. This leads the interpreter to an interest and connection to the context from which the text springs.⁹⁸

This discovery of the captivating text is the first stage of three that St. Augustine defined for the hermeneutic process. Augustine's alternative to the scientific approach is one of discovery, exploration, comprehension, and personal manifestation.

The hermeneutic process, as laid out in his *Confessions*, was for Augustine one of personal and spiritual growth. Augustine's pattern of personal and spiritual growth began with his recognition of the divine law written on the heart through the discovery of a yantric text in the Bible, continued with a heart-centered reading of Scripture, and culminated in his new role as an author writing from his own heart to edify others.⁹⁹

The first stage in this process is one of discovery. It is the intuitive revelation that comes from the encounter with the text.¹⁰⁰ This was a central element in the Augustinian myth, where he was converted upon reading a text.

Augustine's second phase of the Hermeneutic process is one of exploration in which we examine the text in its hermeneutic web: where it came from and how it emerged and evolved out of a web of history. In this stage we explore how the text extended its influence on others throughout space and time. We discover what has been said and understood about it.¹⁰¹ The goal is to uncover how this text, emerging at this moment in human development, was and is a reflection of something pan-psychical, something collective, something archetypally emergent. The true wisdom text, the emergence of a new complex symbol, or yantra, reveals something that happened in the collective psyche at its emergence that changed the realization of the universe. Our goal is to discover, as it is in all symbolic interpretation, this universal truth.

As we dip into the waters of its history, we discover that every complex symbolic utterance is embedded in an infinite web that extends backwards into the murky past

when history began and before. The source of the Mencian text's inspiration cannot be found, because it leads into opaque pre-history. The utterance has been interpreted over the last 2300 years, and continues to be considered to the present moment. The symbol of the heart extends either through direct influence or that mysterious process of archetypal psychic emergence across the world, throughout virtually every culture. Such is the potency, meaning and universality of the symbol, image, and metaphor of the heart.

The third part of Augustine's process is one of comprehension. In this we face the challenge of manifesting our own symbolic product directly. Having accepted the reality that we can never know all that is known, we are still called to create our singular vision. The final stage is producing our own creative interpretation of the text.¹⁰² As Kant told us, we must have the courage to make use of our *own* understanding.¹⁰³ As Emerson put it, "And truly it demands something godlike in him who has cast off the common motives of humanity and has ventured to trust himself for a taskmaster."¹⁰⁴

Thus we have a definition of the hermeneutic process and the process of self-cultivation which results in a personal manifestation. First is the intuitive, mystical experience of the heart in the fresh discovery and encounter with the yantric symbol. Then there is the historical conversation and listening to the revealed facets of the endless meanings derived from the universal symbol. Finally, there is the interpretation, the bringing forth of our own symbolic manifestation from our own heart. In this we write our own book of the heart in order to penetrate the surface approximation, to go to the core, to find the deeper sense. This possibility is open to those that devote themselves to the task.

Inspired by the discovery of the Mencian text, this work represents the research that has led to a heart-centered understanding of what others have understood about the heart, and finally to discover and write my personal view of the heart from my own heart.

The method of understanding human beings is a phenomenological-dialectical immersion in the symbolic products of those who have made their own most penetrating phenomenological-dialectical immersion through an encounter with symbolic product. This is the hermeneutic circle, where we interpret the meanings of the symbolic products, or texts, of those who have interpreted the meanings of symbolic products, or texts. We come to know ourselves and humanity in general, in part, through a relationship with those who have come to know themselves and, therefore, humanity, most deeply.

In order to understand psyche, and the human condition, we need to engage in a continuous dialogue with this level of the symbolic, using the light of our individual perspective embedded in an historical moment, to reveal and illumine fresh facets of an infinite jewel.

Psychotherapy is a Hermeneutical Process

The process of self-knowledge, which is central to the psychotherapeutic enterprise, entails a hermeneutic process, as the meaning of our actions, experiences and reflections is obscure and requires interpretation. This is reflected in French psychoanalyst and theorist, Jacques-Marie-Émile Lacan's (1901 –1981) view of the mind as a "unique and cryptic text."¹⁰⁵

When we come to understand hermeneutics, we come to understand the process of psychotherapy. A person comes to us with a history, and we come to them with our

history. We come with our projections, and they with theirs. Out of this we construct meanings. We plunge together into the depths of the person. We seek to discover and understand their particularity, how they see things, how they are influenced by their histories, how their story has created them. We seek to get the picture. The truth is unknown to them and to us and we engage in a process of endless discovery. We have an opportunity in the ever expandable nature of the heart, to imagine forward, to find and realize our essential nature. The more we find the more we are and the more we become.

The hermeneutic opportunity of a devoted immersion in the wisdom works and cultural products of the best of humankind through an engagement in discovery, exploration, comprehension and expression is a model of psychological growth that includes and transcends the therapy process as it is currently defined.

The human stories of my clients are also yantric, complex symbols. They, too, in the later volumes, will serve as evidence to support the claims of this work.

Endnotes

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 - ²¹. Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 122.
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- ³⁹. Ibid., 285.
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- ⁷². Juan Mascaró, trans. *Bhagavad Gita* (London: Penguin Books, 1962), 26.
- ⁷³. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 211.
- ⁷⁴. De Chardin, 206.

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- ⁷⁵. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 211.
- ⁷⁶. Tai Chen, *Explorations in Words and Meaning*, trans. Ann-Ping Chin and Mansfield Freeman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).
- ⁷⁷. Tai Chen, 32.
- ⁷⁸. William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1961), 175.
- ⁷⁹. Arthur Koestler, *The Act of Creation*. (Hammondsworth: Penguin, 1964).
- ⁸⁰. Tai Chen, 33.
- ⁸¹. "Phenomenology," *Wikipedia the Free Encyclopedia*
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phenomenology_%28philosophy%29 (Accessed January 7, 2010).
- ⁸². Plaks, 33.
- ⁸³. Armstrong, *Case*, 279-280.
- ⁸⁴. Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, xxi.
- ⁸⁵. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 190.
- ⁸⁶. Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*
<http://www.nyu.edu/classes/keefe/hell/camus.html> (accessed March 25, 2010).
- ⁸⁷. Bronowski, 110-111.
- ⁸⁸. Huang, 10.
- ⁸⁹. Tillich, 2.
- ⁹⁰. Hopkins, 680.
- ⁹¹. Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Self-Reliance" in *The Oxford Anthology of American Literature* ed. by William Rose Benet and Norman Holmes Pearson, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1938), 462.
- ⁹². "Mother Theresa: Do It Anyway," *The Prayer Foundation*,
http://www.prayerfoundation.org/mother_teresa_do_it_anyway.htm (accessed January 13, 2010). The following is the text attributed to Mother Theresa:

People are often unreasonable, irrational, and self-centered. Forgive them anyway.

If you are kind, people may accuse you of selfish, ulterior motives. Be kind anyway.

If you are successful, you will win some unfaithful friends and some genuine enemies. Succeed anyway.

If you are honest and sincere people may deceive you. Be honest and sincere anyway.

What you spend years creating, others could destroy overnight. Create anyway.

If you find serenity and happiness, some may be jealous. Be happy anyway.

The good you do today, will often be forgotten. Do good anyway.

Give the best you have, and it will never be enough. Give your best anyway.

In the final analysis, it is between you and God. It was never between you and them anyway.

⁹³. “Bhakti,” *Wikipedia the Free Encyclopedia* <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bhakti> (accessed January 8, 2010).

⁹⁴. “Indra’s Net” *Wikipedia the Free Encyclopedia* http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indra%27s_net, (accessed March 12, 2010).

⁹⁵. “Anatta,” *Wikipedia the Free Encyclopedia*, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anatta>, (accessed January 8, 2010).

⁹⁶. “Big Bang,” *Wikipedia the Free Encyclopedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Big_Bang (accessed January 8, 2010).

⁹⁷. Nicholas of Cusa, 63.

⁹⁸. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 295-297.

⁹⁹. Eric Jager, *The Book of the Heart* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000),

29.

¹⁰⁰. Ibid.

¹⁰¹. Ibid.

¹⁰². Ibid.

¹⁰³. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 271.

¹⁰⁴. Emerson, *Self-Reliance*, 469.

¹⁰⁵. Jager, 162.

CHAPTER 4 THE HEART OF TALES

I have made an argument that wisdom texts are a prime source for understanding human nature. Not only are the symbolic products that these writers have brought forth objects for reflection, but their lives are also complex symbols that can provide us with a source of contemplation. Because of this I will use such texts as evidence to support my claim.

I have also made the argument that for complex systems to be understood there needs to be a multiplicity of symbolic sources to illuminate the multi-dimensional nature of self. To add this perspective, in addition to wisdom texts and the stories of my clients, I will use myths and fairy tales as an additional source of complex symbols.

The following is a justification for the use of myths and tales in this way. In order to do this, this section includes a brief survey of how myths and fairy tales have been understood in the literature.

Myths and fairy tales are suited to the purpose of this work because they are a primary source of yantric symbols. That is, through their contemplation, one finds access to the means of self-realization. Another way of defining yantric symbols is that they represent what Carl Jung would call archetypes. What is an archetype? In order to understand archetypes, we need to understand where the concept emerged from.

Before the advent of the scientific age, cultures primarily valued mythos as a means for understanding people's place in the universe.¹ Through the developments of

science in the age of the enlightenment, we moved away from a participation in this ritualized, symbolic life.² We lost touch with our “participation mystique.”³ As a result, we began to lose contact with a primary source of communing with deeper layers of reality.

The more sensitive among us knew that this was a loss of something vital. This resulted in the advance of the Romantic Movement in Europe.⁴ As Europeans lost their folk-rootedness, they craved this connection to what they understood to be a primary source of wisdom. This group of people became entranced with, and curious about, the meanings of the folk tales that existed all around them, whose origins and meanings remained a mystery, because they saw these tales as a connection to an older and deeper way of apprehending reality.

Influenced by Herder (1744-1803), the philosopher of *bildung*, this led the brothers Jacob (1785-1863) and Wilhelm Grimm (1786-1859) on a search for this ancient source. They were the first significant collectors of tales and published them in the book *Grimm's Fairy Tales*, which became a huge success.⁵ The Grimm's search was not merely historical or nostalgic. They saw it as an act of *sankofa*: “. . . not only did we seek something of consolation in the past, our hope, naturally, was that this course of ours would contribute somewhat to the return of a better day.”⁶ The Brothers Grimm spearheaded the movement of the gathering and cataloguing of indigenous folk tales.

Before there was the availability of contact between world cultures, we lived in a naïve world, constrained primarily by the boundaries of our own areas. People were immersed in their own cultural artifacts, including stories. As Europeans grew toward an industrialized society, this not only led to a sense of primary alienation, but also afforded

the opportunity to be exposed to the cultures of others. As a result, their perspective broadened. By the turn of the 19th century, this combination of a romantic longing for an original source and the possibilities of extended research led scholars to collect folk tales and myths from their own and other cultures. The Finnish Folklore School began a movement that has led to the collecting and categorizing tales from every corner of the globe.⁷

As every culture has its myths and folktales, these works were a significant source of information about cultures beyond the European in what became the burgeoning field of anthropology. Anthropology involves the study of the artifacts of cultures so that we can gain an understanding of humanity as a whole.⁸ Thus emerged a systematic exploration of the tales and other symbolic materials from around the world.

Once we gained the capacity to gather information from even the remotest cultures, a striking discovery was made. Researchers found that every culture had virtually identical themes and motifs in their mythological creations and folk stories. This led to the insight that the stories of their own cultures were not the only truths, but that these were simply stories in a world of stories.⁹ For example, the Jesus story of death and resurrection has been told in countless variations throughout human history in endless locations. These stories include The Egyptian Osiris, The Babylonian Tammuz and the Greek Adonis.¹⁰

Researchers began to ask two basic questions: how did it come to be that myths and tales share such similarities, and what is the meaning and purpose of these stories?¹¹ There have been many explanations for these similarities, and I will give a short review

of them here. This will lead us to the development of the concept of archetype, which is intrinsic to my overall approach to the subject matter of my work.

Theories of Myths and Tales

One theorist, the philologist Theodor Benfey (1809-1881), is representative of a group who believed that myths emerged from a common location and spread physically and geographically until they were universally disseminated. This theory contends that myths have a common root and the stories simply varied through time and movement.¹²

Extensive research has shown that this notion has a degree of validity.¹³ Over the millennia people have migrated across the globe. However, the likelihood that myths from places as far flung as the center of Africa, Japan, Australia and the northernmost regions of Canada all emerged from a central location, whether it is Sumeria, Egypt or India stretches credulity.

Other theorists believed that myths did not emerge from one location, but from a handful of locations in the murky past, and these migrated over time. This unproven but somewhat plausible possibility does not explain the similarities found throughout the multiple places of origin, nor can it explain similarities found in places that in all likelihood did not have contact.

Though it is certainly true that stories travel and there are common geographical roots to many variations of tales, as the great psychological researcher of myth, Otto Rank, points out, this does not answer the question of why they emerged in the first place, and their meaning.¹⁴ If these stories do travel, what makes them so compelling that people would find them of interest from place to place? What has kept these stories alive

for such a long period of time? What do these stories reveal? If the stories did not emerge from some central location, how do they have such commonalities? What are the purposes of these stories?

To summarize the views on this question, I will quote Joseph Campbell, one of the world's great interpreters of myth. He said,

“Mythology has been interpreted by the modern intellect as a primitive, fumbling effort to explain the world of nature (Frazer); as a production of poetical fantasy from prehistoric times, misunderstood by succeeding ages (Muller); as a repository of allegorical instruction, to shape the individual to his group (Durkheim); as a group dream, symptomatic of archetypal urges within the depths of the human psyche (Jung); as the traditional vehicle of man's profoundest metaphysical insights (Coomaraswamy); and as God's revelation to His children (the Church). Mythology is all of these.”¹⁵

As these tales had an uncanny power, some believed that they had a spiritual dimension. It was postulated that the tales came from an esoteric tradition, and held the wisdom of a faith that was chthonic, closer to our roots.¹⁶

As the Jungian interpreter, Marie-Louise Von Franz, pointed out, there was a school that believed that, “. . . myths were the symbolic expression of deep philosophical realizations and thoughts, and were a mystical teaching of some of the deepest truths about God and the world.”¹⁷

Sir Edward Burnett Tylor (1832 –1917), was an important English anthropologist who asserted that, parallel to the humanist view of Mencius and the one asserted in this work, humankind has unlimited potential that requires cultivation to realize.¹⁸ He is representative of the group who believed that myth was utilized as a means to explain the world. In this regard, *mythos* has been replaced by science, or *logos*.¹⁹

One common theory about the similarity in mythic themes is that the symbols in the stories represent the workings of nature. The figures in the tales represent the sun, the

passage of the seasons, the phases of the moon, the cycles of growing. Each night the sun dies and each morning it is born again. Winter comes to be replaced by spring. The myths speak in anthropomorphic form about the cycles of decay, death, and renewal we find in nature. One representative theorist named Siecke, cited by Rank,²⁰ claimed that the only explanation for a particular cycle of myths, known as the hero myths, is that they are lunar. That is, they describe the waxing and waning of the moon.

The explanation that myths represent the motions of nature has an aspect of truth. However, a fundamental argument against views like his are that they represent again the reductive “nothing but” theory.²¹ In this view, the symbolic text is “nothing but” a representation of one particular thing.

As we have discovered about the nature of complex symbols, they do not have one sign-like meaning. Like any text of depth the myth or tale provides a means for a process of discovery. In this sense, every interpretation of a fairy tale, dream, or myth is correct in its way. Every interpreter’s viewpoint is simply an encounter with one aspect of a symbol, the whole of which we are incapable of comprehending.²²

We each get so entranced by the contents of our own psyche, which enters into a particular relationship with the symbol, that the meaning of the story becomes completely “obvious” to us. Our job is to enter and reveal this facet as convincingly as possible, and to invite people to see things from our perspective, but we must keep the awareness that no explanation is ever the entire truth. Any explanation of symbolic content that claims to be the only explanation is intrinsically wrong.

Rather than the stories representing nature, nature represents the deeper structures of reality. Nature can be looked at as a symbol as well, and so we find universal

principles, laws, and qualities in it. The tales do not tell in allegorical form the workings of physical nature. Instead, we use the patterns of nature to understand a larger pattern, which Mencius called the “Heavenly Mandate.”²³ What the wise of the past understood was there was no essential difference between the patterns of the sun, the patterns of human existence, the patterns of universal truth, and the patterns of our inner world, or psyche. Nature is one pathway to this understanding and this is what is conveyed in the tales if we know how to read them.

In other words, if it is a universal truth that nature operates in a cycle of death and renewal, and this is symbolically represented in the death and resurrection of the hero, the hero is not a symbol of the passage of the seasons. Rather, it is representative of a universal principle that is true in nature, in human nature, and in our inner world.²⁴ It is the universal truth that we find represented in many forms. As this pattern of birth, growth, decay, death and renewal is universal, it is represented in yantric symbols, because these symbols contain the secret workings of the universe and human nature.

Fairy tales and myths were important in early cultures because they were ways of conveying universal truths that humans began to uncover as they observed and participated in the ways of nature. As we understood the courses of nature, these truths were represented in story form. We began to understand our own relationship to nature and how we fit into these patterns. We saw that the truths we observed were universal ones and applied to people as well as plants and the heavens. Philosophers saw the ways that the seed, the plant, and the person could be cultivated toward optimal realization or, through a lack of proper cultivation, became vitiated. The stories told about our own

participation in this process. We learned through the stories that we could cultivate ourselves; that despite the dangers posed to our own development, we could overcome.

Campbell shows that the archetypal structures and images of symbolic tales emerged with this advance into agriculture. Does this mean that they are not universal to the human but are simply representative of a certain stage of human development to be discarded with the change to modernism? No symbol represents the totality of the essential. Each stage of human development manifests its own symbols in all of our cultural forms. These reveal the insights most relevant to that time and place in the long sweep of history. Such may define the difference between the archetypal, as something vastly prevalent but historically bound, and the existential, as something true for humans *per se*.²⁵

Another school of thought held that myth is a verbal description of ritual. Scholar and minister, William Robertson Smith, (1846-1894)²⁶, James Frazer (1854-1941), a social anthropologist and author of a classic work of comparative religion, *The Golden Bough*,²⁷ scholar FitzRoy Somerset, 4th Baron Raglan (1884 – 1964)²⁸, the author of *The Hero*, and folklorist Jessie Weston (1850-1928), author of *From Ritual to Romance*,²⁹ all argue for the myth-ritualist theory that myth and ritual are inextricably linked.³⁰ Of these theorists, Robertson Smith was the strongest advocate of the view that myths were a mere explanatory accompaniment to ritual, the center of spiritual life in ancient cultures. In their view, these stories serve a pre-religious function where these stories pre-figured creed.³¹

The rituals that Raglan points out that correspond to these stories include the reinvigoration of the community through the symbolic death of the hero/god.³² In this

sense, ritual served a mediating function, and myths corresponded to this purpose. The ritual symbolically enacted life's movement and direction. Rituals helped provide a context for, and made sacred, experience and therefore helped people find purpose and meaning in their acts. It helped organize experience. Its aim was to align behavior along lines that represented the universal laws of nature. Certainly ritual and myth emerge from the same ground, and so clearly have a relationship. Myths and tales work toward the same end.

The act and the story were related means of representing these eternal truths. For example, in ancient cultures, the universe was viewed spherically, with the ultimate at the center. Time was not conceived as moving in a linear progression, but rather in a circular way with a continuous return to an original beginning. At the center of the human was the heart and within the heart was the divine. At the center of the town was the temple. At the center of the world was the world tree. In the center was found the essential. Rituals were created to align to this *anthropocosmic* structure.³³ Ritualistically, the king represented this divine center on Earth. If the king was healthy, all would grow in the kingdom. There was a relationship between the alignment of the earthly representative of the divine with divine principle and the fruition of the land and its people. Myths of journeys to the center, or of lands bewitched because of the illness of the king, represented this understanding of the necessity to align with cosmic forces for self-fulfillment and societal order.

The struggle of the hero in the tale and in ritual to overcome great obstacles to, let's say, "heal the king" posits the same mystico-religious-esoteric-symbolic view whether it is to be found in the myth or ritual. Again, the criticism of this myth-ritual

view is the “nothing but,” argument. We cannot say that tales are nothing but narrative versions of rituals. Rather, each serve the same purpose within their own realms, and draw on the same material. Both ritual and myth are symbolic manifestations meant to express the complex truth found within the subjective self and in the objective world.

In fact, ritual and tale emerge from the same common source, the capacity of the human psyche to represent the truths of dynamic, relational life in the only way possible, through complex symbol. This representational faculty transcends empirical observation. It is the product of our capacity to extrapolate, to imagine.³⁴ It makes concrete what we cannot *think*.

The ritual, which deeply satisfied, was a way of maintaining and deepening a relationship with the aspects of ourselves that transcended our personal identifications.³⁵ Stories did this too. Fairy tales did this in the simplest ways, and could appeal to the greatest number of people, including children, who could apprehend its lessons at their own developmental level. As always, the stories were fascinating on infinite levels. Where for a grown up a story about a child beating a giant who hoarded gold could mean a battle within the self for self-realization, for the child it could mean that they could overcome great external forces. It could teach the child that they could develop their cleverness and aggression to win what they wanted in the world.³⁶

A large movement of interpreters, including the modern theologian Rudolf Bultmann and his student Hans Jonas, rejected the ritual view. They believe that myth has deeper functions of its own. They serve an existential purpose, revealing the place of human beings in the world.³⁷ In their view, myths serve as yantric symbols. As such, they amplify our experience of the world. They touch us emotionally. They speak to the core

of our being. We enjoy them and we resonate with them for a reason. They help us master the mystery in which we find ourselves. They describe the struggles we all face. They make mundane experience sacred.

The Symbolic Interpretation of Tales

As there were theorists who focused on the origin and derivation of tales, and others focused on their function and purpose, a whole school of researchers focused on the symbolic interpretation of the tales.

In the age of the psychological interpreters of myths and tales, those that stand out in terms of defining a structural method for interpreting stories are Sigmund Freud, Otto Rank, Carl Jung, Joseph Campbell, Marie Louise Von Franz and Bruno Bettelheim.

Some of these people believed the tales were naively symbolic. That is, they represented the inner workings of psyche, but served no purpose other than the spontaneous representation of one's inner workings.

For some, these tales serve a higher function. They are meant to be interpreted as part of a hermeneutic conversation. They are means for self-understanding and cosmic development.

Campbell states that the psychological understanding of tales reveals the biological roots of our symbolizing nature. In his view they are natural phenomena whose origins and primordial meanings are inscrutable and serve the biological function of psychic maturation.³⁸

I will now examine some of the prime symbolic interpretations of fairy tales and myths. There have been many excellent studies made on comparing interpretive theories

of myth and fairy tale, and that is not the purpose of this study, so I will limit myself to a certain few which have received a great degree of prominence.

Most famous among the early explorers of the psyche in the post-world-culture era who used stories to explain the human was the Viennese inventor of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud (1856-1939). His use of the Oedipus myth was central to his entire corpus, and this myth named, from his view, the primary human psychological complex. Through an interpretation of this story, Freud posits that the child is, at root, a system of instincts or drives. The most significant of these are sexual and aggressive. In his interpretation of the story, the male child wants to have a sexual relationship with his mother and kill his father. Civilization puts a thin veneer over these fundamental drives. The result of the civilizing effect of repression on these drives is neurosis, the problem of civilized man. It is because the child needs to cover over this primary instinctual being that he develops symptoms.³⁹

The anthropological work of comparative mythology began in the late 19th century. One particular area of interest was the “hero myth,” a story structure that has existed in almost every culture. It is within this story pattern that the Jesus story stands as a prime example. Students of this form included Edward Tylor, Johann Georg von Hahn, and Russian folklorist, Vladimir Propp.⁴⁰ The Oedipus story is also part of this cycle that has been subject to extensive interpretation. A fresh interpretation of the cycle of hero myths will find a prominent place in my later work, “How the Heart Gets Lost.”

Robert A. Segal has done tremendous work in bringing together the history of the exploration and understanding of these myths and tales in books such as *In Quest of the Hero* and *Theorizing about Myth*.⁴¹ Segal’s own view is that myths are purposeful: they

help us solve the problems of life. They work against the forces that create life's problems, and help us solve them, instead.⁴²

The most influential interpreters of this hero cycle of myths, Segal states, were Otto Rank (1884-1939), who interpreted from a Freudian view; Joseph Campbell (1904-1987) who was considered by others to be Jungian, although I see him equally falling into the Freudian and object relations school; and Lord Raglan who followed the ritual/myth theories of Frazer.⁴³

Freud anticipated Jung in seeing the connection between the myth of Oedipus and his own dreams. In this, the Freudian follower, Otto Rank, supports the notion that myths and tales emerge from the same source as do dreams, because he finds, as any explorer will, common contents there.⁴⁴

Rank quotes Freud's statement about the Oedipus myth as one of the earliest examples of an investigator identifying the story in the myth as symbolizing a truth about all of humanity. Of course, the truth Freud finds is not complete, but the one that resonates most strongly for him.

“His fate moves us only because it might have been our own, because the oracle laid upon us before our birth the very curse which rested upon him. It may be that we were all destined to direct our first sexual impulses toward our mothers, and our first impulses of hatred and resistance toward our fathers; our dreams convince us that we were. King Oedipus, who slew his father Laius and wedded his mother Jocasta, is nothing more or less than a wish-fulfillment--the fulfillment of the wish of our childhood.”⁴⁵

With Freud as his inspiration, Otto Rank wrote one of the great works on myth called, *On the Myth of the Birth of the Hero*. In the beginning of his book he reviews the central theories of myth prevalent at the time of the writing of his book, which took place in central Europe at the turn of the century. Of note was an Adolf Bastian whose view

presaged Jung's view. Bastian posited that myths emerged from a common way that the mind works and manifests contents. This would explain why the same images, themes and stories would emerge from all times and places. He called this the "Idea of the People,"⁴⁶ or "Elementary Ideas."⁴⁷

Later in the century, Bruno Bettelheim expanded on the Freudian approach in his seminal work on fairy tales, *The Uses of Enchantment*.⁴⁸ Bettelheim says that fairy tales are a way to help anxious children cope with the world. He tells us that fairy tales give a child access to the deeper meanings of life, and their purpose is to help the child develop the resources they need to deal with their difficult inner problems, which Bettelheim sees as emerging from the Oedipal dilemma.⁴⁹ As he is interpreting these stories from a Freudian viewpoint, he misses the aspect of the stories that help the child develop the inner resources that they need to deal with their outer problems as well.

Bettelheim uses the language of Freud -- the id, superego, and ego -- to describe the processes revealed in fairy tale. He sees us as having a dual nature, and that the task of maturity is to integrate these different aspects of our nature. He states that fairy tales help by illuminating this process and showing us a way to fulfill these tasks of maturation.⁵⁰

As a great explorer of world rituals and texts, when Carl Jung discovered the similar products of human beings in their works in every culture, he developed his concept of archetype.

Jung posited that there are universal attributes of the psyche that are complex agglomerations of motivations, beliefs, emotional tendencies, patterns of growth and development, forces, energies, thoughts, imaginings, actions, and relational dynamics

which operated largely out of the awareness of the individual. These common human patterns had their origin in the collective history of humankind. They represented a kind of evolutionary inheritance which has developed over the course of countless generations. These he called the archetypes.

Jung stated that archetypes are what make up the contents of what he called the collective unconscious. What this means is that there is a strata of the psyche, the subjective world, that is not known to us, but that is common to us all. As we cannot know the archetypes directly, we can only know them from their symbolic elaborations. These we find in dreams, myths, and fairy tales. Jung uses the notion of archetype to assert that “myths are first and foremost psychic phenomena that reveal the nature of the soul. . .”⁵¹ We do not encounter the complete unconscious content, because in its symbolic manifestation a discursive limitation is placed upon it. Once we translate the unknowable into the knowable it becomes delimited.⁵²

In Jung’s usage, archetype is a patterned structure within the psyche that is more or less given through a cultural/genetic/evolutionary heritage and is common for all of humanity. These structures are kinds of universal ego-states, quasi-autonomous partselves, or personalities that are sub-wholes within the larger system of the self. Jung called them a “psychic organ,” which we create a relationship to, through how we understand it.⁵³

For example, Jung refers to the archetype of the *shadow*. It is normal for the psyche to split. This means that certain contents of our being are, or become, hidden from awareness. The result is that these hidden contents take on a kind of identity within the psyche, with particular characteristics and ways of influencing our lives. The images that

adhere to this unknown part of the self have become common through the development of the human psyche. Jung called these hidden aspects of the self the “shadow.” He refers to this as an archetype, a predictable component of the human psyche, with its own destiny, and relationship to the total self. Because everyone has a “shadow,” and the images that the human imagination has used to represent this aspect of self are within a common language, he calls this archetypal.⁵⁴

As an archetype is something that transcends our linear style of thinking, there is no singular, clear, or final definition of the term. Every interpreter influenced by Jung had their own addition to make to the description of archetype. Marie Louise Von Franz, a follower of Jung, states that, “. . . the archetype being the structural basic disposition to produce a certain mythologem, the specific form in which it takes shape being the archetypal image.”⁵⁵

She went on to say, “. . . the archetype is not only an "elementary thought," but also an elemental poetical image and fantasy, and an elementary emotion, and even an elementary impulse toward some typical action.”⁵⁶

When Jung referred to the archetypes he meant that our psyches are structured in certain basic forms and organizes our experience in relation to those basic forms. The archetypes are the material out of which we create our complex yantric symbols. The archetypes pervade our world. We project these inner structures onto our experience, and so we only see them as experience, not as the forms that give our experience a certain meaning and shape.

For example, we all possess the archetype of “mother.” Mother has particular meanings, culturally and individually, but it also has meanings that appear to exist for

everyone. None of us has to learn what mother is or means on an archetypal level.⁵⁷ We find out what these basic units of interpretation mean through our encounter with symbolic stories. We come to know the meaning of these archetypes, these basic psychic units or structures, through their projections. We learn about them most clearly through vehicles like myths and fairy tales. These stories, the Jungian interpreter Marie Louise von Franz would say, are the purest representatives of the parts of our psyche of which we are unaware, what she would call the unconscious. For example, those that have explored the archetype of mother, have noticed through the tales that mother can be represented in a good way or a bad way. Therefore, it is assumed that we have within our psyche a working structure not only of mother, but of a good mother and a bad mother.⁵⁸ We find this theory corroborated by object relations theorists.⁵⁹

In the object relations theory, as young children we do not have the capacity to integrate our own disparate behaviors or those of whom we are attached to. Our psyche manages this by creating split representations of self and other. We internalize a “good” and “bad” self and a “good” and “bad” other. As the psyche develops it integrates these aspects so that we can hold that we and others are made up of many aspects. However, the residues of these structures live on in our psyches. Archetypal psychologists will point to stories like Cinderella, with its evil step-mother and helpful fairy to support this view. We will explore this concept in much greater depth in a future work.

We can find the archetypes in all of our symbolic products, including myths, literature and all art, sacred and profane. One reason these basic psychic structures, which have a complete influence over our existence whether we know it or not, are inaccessible to the conscious mind is because they are non-dual wholes that contain opposites.⁶⁰ We

think discursively; that is, we think linearly where one word follows another. Our analytical mind divides, separates, and can only think of one thing at a time.⁶¹ Archetypes and the functioning of our psyche transcend our reasoning mind. Researchers are now observing that the right prefrontal cortex operates in totalities that include paradoxical opposites.⁶² This part of the brain probably corresponds to the part that relates to the images and stories that reflect archetypal contents. Archetypes are not this or that; they are this and that. They are also dynamic, that is, they change through relationships in time. That is why they are more aptly conveyed in story. This is the reason we respond to story. Because archetypes are not fully graspable by the conscious mind, there is no end to exploring them. Their meanings are infinite. The deeper we look, the more we find. As the symbol and the archetype are rooted in the pre-verbal origins of humanity, with the deepest penetration their meanings fade back into obscure mystery.⁶³ Even the definition of archetype is slippery and impossible to grasp. An exploration and elaboration of archetype requires a phenomenological-hermeneutic process, using dream and tale as text and symbol. This requires an oscillation between a deep listening to the source and a deep listening within the self.

Jung contends that the reason we find such similarities of themes in stories is because they reflect these archetypes. In other words, these similarities have little or nothing to do with our experience in the world, but are purely reflections of our inner life. In this way, he parallels the views of Freud.

The great Jungian analyst, author, and interpreter, Marie Louise von Franz (1915-1998) agrees that the similarities in myths and fairy tales are a reflection of them being

representative of the collective unconscious. These stories can then be used as a way into regions of the self that are otherwise inaccessible. She said,

“Fairy tales are the purest and simplest expression of collective unconscious processes. They represent the archetypes in their simplest, barest, and most concise form. . . .They afford us the best clues to the understanding of the processes going on in the collective psyche. . . .They mirror the basic patterns of the psyche most clearly.”⁷¹

Von Franz stated that, “. . . all fairy tales endeavor to describe . . . the Self, which is the psychic totality of an individual and also, paradoxically the regulating center of the collective unconscious.”⁷²

Jung believed that the psyche is always attempting to find balance and harmony between its competing parts. Dreams, myths and tales, and the symbols they contain, he believed, are compensatory. Their aim is to correct for some imbalance between inner, archetypal forces. Von Franz saw the stories as an attempt to rebalance the psyche to reown, to incorporate, or make conscious, the disowned, and therefore undeveloped, parts of the self in a quest for wholeness.⁷³ Looking through her lens, she sees the stories as an attempt to rebalance the psyche toward the feminine principle, stating that the intuitive symbolic message of the tales are that we have grown too concrete as a culture. In this she makes a kind of Faustian interpretation of the entire history of civilization. We have grown out of balance as we have moved toward the literal, the scientific, the technological, the logical and the discursive.⁷⁴ There is certainly a profound truth in her view. The question is whether this is inherent in tales that originated long before the scientific era. This may be the particular spin that von Franz adds to the symbolic interpretation, giving it relevant meaning to the current situation.

In their shocking discovery that there was an inner life, these pioneers of the psyche may have overcompensated by giving too much weight to it. They denied in part the real experiences of people, and leaned toward the views of the Hindus, who saw all manifestation as illusion, as simply the creation of mind.⁷⁵ In this sense, they tended toward the idealist end of the philosophical spectrum.

Certainly our way of organizing our experience of the world goes far in determining our experience of it, and deeply influences the way our lives play out, but the pure belief that the world is simply the creation of our mind is itself a creation of mind that can serve to protect us from many harsh facts about existence. In this way, Freud, who theorized that people's stories of abuse were projections of their Oedipal drives, denied the realities of the abuse of children and the trauma that results, which are central to the suffering of humankind.⁷⁶ Jung emphasized that stories -- as symbols -- told us psychological facts. They revealed our inner workings less than facts about the world out there.⁷⁷ Subsequently, we have come to understand that we exist in relation intrinsically. We do not exist without an environment and other, and the construction of our world occurs at the boundary between inner and outer.⁷⁸ Stories and their symbols, from this perspective are not merely reflective of psychological facts, but rather experiential ones, where experience means the place where inner and outer meet.⁷⁹ Campbell confirms this sociologically. In his essay, "The Symbol Without Meaning," he asserts that a certain set of archetypal imagery that pervades our contemporary imaginary world emerged with, and reflected, man's advance to an agricultural society.⁸⁰

The Jungian interpretation is that the struggles represented in tales are the struggle between forces and elements within the psyche. The stories are an expression of the

development within the self. This is true, but only in the sense that the self, too, is a system. It also symbolizes the process that goes on in systems at every level. The struggles in tales also represent the processes of tension in all of nature's systems, whether they are dyadic, social, political or universal.

As the Jungians believe that myths reveal the common contents of the psyche, they would say that by focusing on personal experience in our interpretation of fairy tales we lose the sense of the archetype-in-itself, the core energy of the archetype.⁸¹ As we live lives of personal experience, the archetype and the personal are not so easily divided. Our personal histories, our individual woundings that lead to a loss of heart, for example, are our individual weave in a universal story.

A towering figure in myth interpretation was Joseph Campbell (1904-1987) whose book, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* has influenced untold readers including this one. Campbell not only bridges Freud and Jung in this great work but he adds his unique view to this subject of endless fascination.

Campbell saw no contradiction between the theory that myths were widely disseminated through migration, that they represent Bastian's "universal ideas" intrinsic to the human psyche, and teach, as Hugo Winkler put it, "an everlasting reiteration of unchanging (universal) principles. . ."⁸² For Campbell, myth is an indispensable source of eternal wisdom about the nature of human beings and ultimate reality.⁸³

As myth is one of the earliest manifestations of the symbolic realm, all cultural expression comes out of a mythic framework. Campbell states that myth is the vehicle for the expression of the "inexhaustible energies of the cosmos."⁸⁴

Myth is one of the purest ways of apprehending that which transcends the limits of our reason and brings us to the core truths of existence. Myth is within us as “spontaneous productions of the psyche”⁸⁵ representative of the source from which it emerges. Hence they are prime examples of yantric symbols, worthy of hermeneutic participation. Such explorations can translate what appears in the symbolic clothing of myth to that original source of transcendent meaning.

Not only are the inner contents of one’s being revealed in these sources, but so, too, the natural order of the process of development. Human nature is a process that is embedded in the processes of nature and is developmental in contour. Entelechy implies an unfolding, a becoming. The symbol is not a static thing. It is a story. This story of human development, from symbiosis to separation, of loss and autonomy, of a struggle for power, the struggle of the old against the new, of the status quo and change, of developmental growth and that which runs counter to it, beginning with the ambivalent relationship between children and their parents and continuing with the struggle between the child and all of society, all this and more, is played out and portrayed in myth.

Campbell stated that,

“(The myths give) symbolic expression to the unconscious desires, fears, and tensions that underlie the conscious patterns of human behavior. The psychologist can . . . rescue for the contemporary world a rich and eloquent document of the profoundest depths of human character. Exhibited here, as in a fluoroscope, stand revealed the hidden processes of the enigma *Homo sapiens*. . . We have only to read it, study its constant patterns, analyze its variations, and therewith come to an understanding of the deep forces that have shaped man’s destiny and must continue to determine both our private and our public lives.”⁸⁶

Campbell states that “(Myths) . . . bring into play the vital energies of the whole human psyche.”⁸⁷ In *Hero* he expands generously on the Freudian hero myth. Where Freud focused on the act of murder, and Rank focused on the birth of the hero, Campbell

focuses on the hero's adventure. He recognized that every culture has a mythic and ritual structure that, though it has innumerable forms, tells a common story. This is a story of realization through symbolic death and renewal, both intrapsychically and culturally. Each human being grows through a process of withdrawal from a known way of being, a trip through the world of the unconscious and a return with the eternal wisdom of the universe. This clearly corresponds with my vision of yantric hermeneutics, where the process of self-realization comes in large measure through the use of symbols as a vehicle for a phenomenological process. Using the text as lantern, the individual goes on an adventure into the self, discovers the truth there, and brings it back in the form of their own symbolic product as their gift to humankind for the developmental use of all.

Campbell saw myths as providing a symbolic image of the great chain of being, the cycle of life. He also saw them as a means of "harmonizing human beings with the cosmos, society, and themselves."⁸⁸

Campbell relies on the Freudian model when he encounters the stuck places that individuals run into in their development. In his telling of the cosmic tale and struggle, he relies on an intrapsychic model. Campbell describes this from within the developing individual. This is the hero's journey from the inside out. He talks about the hero's image of the mother or father, per se, but not the interactional model of what actually happens between parent and child. He looks at the problems of the hero from an intrapsychic perspective rather than a relational one. He does not include the perspective of parent as former hero, and the parent's influence on the developmental struggles of the child. This is the limitation of all of these interpreters. They leave out the contribution of the parent, and what actually happens in these primary relationships.

Campbell states that the achievement required by the mythic tale for our own fulfillment is to renounce the mother and come to peace with the father. He sees this in a unipolar, internal way. What Campbell does not mention is that this achievement is relational. It requires sacrifice on the part of both parents as well. It is a developmental achievement not only for the child, but is one that is demanded of the developing parent, too. The mother must sacrifice the symbiotic bond with the child, and the father must sacrifice the kingdom, dominion, and his power to the child. This task for the parents includes them moving toward a mature relationship with each other. Karen Armstrong tells us that this notion of sacrifice of the old for the new was a central insight of the Axial Age, the time of the development of our great spiritual systems.⁸⁹

From this perspective, Campbell accentuates the inner problems of the individual's struggle with the undeveloped, infantile, aspects of their being, rather than the interactional paradoxes between the parent -- where the parent has their own struggles with their inner child -- and the child who is destined to become the hero.

This struggle of the achievement of maturation, and separation from mother to form autonomous, mature relationship is told in myths and in dreams. We follow our destiny willingly or are dragged into it. When we resist the natural flow, the unconscious causes us trouble. Nevertheless we perceive the pull into the new as dangerous because, as Campbell put it, "they threaten the fabric of the security into which we have built ourselves and our family."⁹⁰ However, we are compellingly drawn to the images in our dreams and the stories we encounter because they promise the adventure of finding the heart, or realizing our essence, which in part is a story of what Jung would call "individuation."⁹¹ Each of us faces a crisis, which the stories foretell. On one hand we

have the promise of fulfilling our potentials; on the other is the terror of what we have to sacrifice to achieve this. It is this crisis as lived out in our own lives, which the stories foretell, which provides us with the path of realization.⁹²

Campbell defines in detail the important stages of this journey and struggle and notes the importance of the guide. Even though Campbell posits the origin of the struggle as intrapsychic, he recognizes that the solution is interpersonal. This is the purpose of the therapist. As therapy is a phenomenological process, it is one in which the therapist leads the person into themselves. The therapist is symbolized as the wise old man, guider of souls, hermit, holder of the lantern, knower of the esoteric wisdom, who assists “the hero through the trials and terrors of the weird adventure.”⁹³

Whereas the ritual-mythic interpreters would say that myth is the narrative of ritual, Campbell turns this around. He states that ritual is lived myth. The content of myth is concerned with the symbolic enactment of the processes of death and regeneration, in other words, growth and transformation. It is a way of leaving behind the old and becoming the new. In my view, both myth and ritual emerge from the same source. Both are functional symbols that arise spontaneously for the sake of the universe discovering and becoming itself.

As Campbell stated it, “It has always been the prime function of mythology and rite to supply the symbols that carry the human spirit forward, in counteraction to those other constant human fantasies that tend to tie it back.”⁹⁴

We are neurotic, that is, we have a hard time growing up, moving through the stages of archetypal development laid out in the stories, in part, because in our current culture we lack a ritual container for symbolically embodying this process. We are not

sufficiently brought through the stages through the education of enactment provided by the elders of our culture who have traveled their own symbol paths and brought back the boon. As Campbell put it,

“ . . . we find today, after some five hundred years of systematic dismemberment and rejection of the mythological organ of the species all the sad young men, for whom life is a problem.”⁹⁵

The moving images which demand of us that we grow will emerge in myth, ritual or dream. If they have no means of expression, or if we do not have a relationship to them, they will manifest as symbolic symptom, because they must come out. The symptom is a symbol that our energies remain locked. This “mythological organ,” that mediates symbol, Campbell agrees, is the heart. In other words, in our technological world where mythos is denigrated, not having a well developed ‘mythological organ’ is another way of saying that all too many of us end up having a lost heart. When we remain in psychological childhood, though it is easy and pleasant, we always pay a price. There is always dysfunction, symptom, unhappiness. This parallels the Mencian view that with proper cultivation anything will grow. Without cultivation we become vitiated.

Though Campbell’s story is one that we can all appreciate, it is a story of the genuine hero, the ideal. The ultimate story that he reveals is one of a journey toward a spiritual awakening, of returning to a place of oneness from a place of separateness. Here he sees the story as addressing the existential layer of our estrangement from essence, which emerges from our manifestation in physical form. The union that the hero seeks and achieves is *nirvana*. Though contemplating this ideal is necessary for our individual growth, the comprehension or achievement of this spiritual ultimate is something far beyond the average person.

Though Campbell does note in general terms that the hero's journey is a model for our own lives, he describes the advanced stages of a transcendental process that far surpass the moral struggles of every-day life. He notes that in the therapist's office the mythic tale emerges in dreams, but does not appear that interested in the ways that people's stories are, in their specifics, a living through of what happens when we get on the path or refuse the call. He looks at the archetypes of the bad/good mother/father, but not at how those introjects are created in their articulated specifics through the experiences of our individual lives. But this is not his purpose.

In my view, an inquiry is necessary into what the symbols of tales reveal about the consequences of our individual stories of wounding and how this creates narrative patterns that result in our life's problems. The possibility of development revealed in the tales is only one half of the equation. In order to grow, we must begin with an understanding, which the tales can reveal, of what *prevents* our growth and development. This is the addition I aim to make in my complete work. .

Campbell discusses the hero myth as a representation of the process that leads to the highest spiritual development, something that is potentially available to all, but is lived out uniquely by the hero. Most of us, he claims, lack the courage or conviction to answer the call.⁹⁶ Here the hero is not us, but the exceptional, by definition. He is describing the way to transcend duality and the material plane and to even go beyond nothingness to apprehend the great unknowable all. Though this ideal can serve as an inspiring ever-receding endpoint, this is not usually the concern of most of us, nor can it be the only answer to the problems of living that we all face.

On the Purpose of the Tales

Fairy tales help us to cultivate our imaginative faculty. Along with thinking, feeling, acting and connecting, imagining is one of humanity's essential potentials. Imagining serves a multitude of functions. As one of our great potentials this aspect of our being requires cultivation for an optimal realization. There is no better source for cultivating our imaginations than stories and no better stories for this purpose than fairy tales and myths. Through connecting to these sources we feed our creative and moral aspirations. This is a necessary balance against our cognitive aspect. As science now supports, thought without intuition and emotion leads to poor decisions.⁹⁷ An immersion in story helps develop the parts of the brain that can foresee the future. They foster the development of our capacity to envision, which is central to achievement in life. They develop our capacity for seeing into the world in depth, and enable us to fully appreciate our world and ourselves.

Without this cultivation, we end up wanting simple prescriptions for our lives, but this is not the way that life works. We over rely on the parts of ourselves that we identify with and of which we are aware. We don't see the elf or fairy in the forest. We do not trust in the mysterious and half-seen. We lose hope in the possible. We lose spiritual consciousness, the faith in the power of that which we cannot know directly. We lose the humility of recognizing that there are unknown, and perhaps wiser, parts of the self than we know.

When we deny these aspects of ourselves, they take on a life of their own, and they impact our lives in negative ways. They turn into our problems, because they are trying to catch our attention to let us know that we are ignoring essential aspects of

ourselves. Our problems lead us to look for solutions and if we are lucky we find the source in tales.⁹⁸

Myths and tales are expressions of the place where the macrocosmic and the microcosmic meet, where the inner and outer meet, where the personal and the universal meet, where the individual and the relational meet, where the symbol and the dynamic meet. The story is a dynamic symbol. It is a symbol in space and time. It is a natural human function to symbolize, to render the inexplicable, to describe what cannot be seen or rationalized. We intuit the existence of, and are driven to organize, the non-discursive, non-linear, unknowable, whole, complex, paradoxical, non-dual, patterned, archetypal and essential into forms we can comprehend. Comprehension is an apprehension of a whole that transcends mere understanding. It is understanding as a whole experience. Symbolic story-making is an attempt to put this “non-languageable” experience into comprehensible form. We do this in the only way we can, with our discursive, word-oriented, dual, dialectical, understanding mind. We “throw out” what can’t be expressed into some symbolic form so that we can then “take it back in” and in so doing expand our comprehension of truth.

In recognizing patterns we intuit the working and functional web of universal law and its hidden essential structures. We are compelled to represent them in an attempt to master them, to live in harmony with them, and to revere them. This is what imbues our existence with substance and depth. It is the root of fulfillment, happiness, and meaning. Meaning is existence with dimension. One part of this is experiencing an embodied connection to the reality that we are a part of a great weave of being.

If we learn how to listen to these stories, by providing us with a model of healthy human development, they can guide us at every stage throughout our lives. Clearly they tell us something of tremendous importance to our own daily lives.⁹⁹

For Joseph Campbell, the myth is the central guiding lodestar of life. These stories inhabit a pattern of living that we must adhere to. By revealing this basic pattern of existence, they show us how we need to live so that we are in alignment with this natural pattern. We are unhappy, the stories tell us, when we do not live in alignment with this natural pattern. Myths and tales help us to master the existential struggles of living. The ultimate function is to provide us with a road map for our own lives.

The tales tell us that we have lost contact with the essential. In this, the stories provide us with validation. They tell us that our pain, fear, and struggles are comprehensible. Whether we are reading about Dante lost in the dark wood, Cat-Skin the princess who ends up living in rags under the staircase, or the characters in the Wizard of Oz searching for home, brains, heart and courage, the stories let us know that we are not alone in this struggle of trying to regain our essence, from which we have become estranged.

The stories show us that there is a way through and out. The infantile wish for the quick and easy way is not to be, but the stories tell us that wisdom and direction are available for us. We are shown the goal and the way to get there.

Myths and fairy tales describe an aspect of truth unavailable to our logos, in the contemporary sense of the word. They speak the realities that we have a difficult time incorporating consciously about ourselves and our relationships. They speak to this truth on an existential, archetypal, and personal level.

Campbell tells us that the tales help us face the darker aspects of existence that he claims are existential givens within our being. He states,

“Generally we refuse to admit within ourselves, or within our friends (or parents, or heroes), the fullness of that pushing, self-protective, maladorous, carnivorous, lecherous, (murderous) fever which is the very nature of the organic cell.”¹⁰⁰

I would put this differently. A relationship to the symbolic realm of tales helps us incorporate the reality of woundedness and the terrible consequences we have of living in a lost-hearted world.¹⁰¹ As Bowlby asserts, frustration is not intrinsic, but comes from the lack of optimal relationship.¹⁰² The very nature of the organic cell is its optimal potential, which is to promote not only its own survival, but the harmonious fruition of the whole.

Post-modern theorists struggle with the problems of the subject/object split. We can neither find a pure objectivity fully removed from our subjectivity nor can we fully embrace a pure idealism that makes “out there” the pure creation of our psyches.¹⁰³ We now see the individual psyche as part of a larger interactional, relational system. The discrete, individual psyche is merely one sub-whole in a larger structure of psyches bound together through relationship and attachment cathexis. This is in harmony with Jung’s view of the “anima mundi.” From this perspective, I posit a broader definition of archetype. In this view, I would say that an archetype is an interactional pattern that is given within the human psyche. The patterns of perception, affect, cognition and behavior are intrinsically *in relationship*. There is not only a mother archetype as it is represented within our own psyches, but a mother-relationship archetype, that exists between parent and child. There is a father-relationship archetype. Within the personal characteristics of the unique individual narrative of the relationship between parent and child, there are common structures that have evolved as the psyche and these

relationships have evolved. Fairy tales and myths are not only projections of presumably “inner” material, or the world of our psyche, but describe these archetypal relationships. These archetypal patterns live somewhere between the existential and the personal. Existentially we all face the realities of life and death. Personally, we suffered a particular kind of wounding with our particular father. For example, our father may have beaten us. Archetypally, as we will see when we explore this theme in greater depth in my future writing on how we lose the heart, the father may behave this way because he is threatened by the power of the son which represents the loss of his own power. This archetypal layer is illuminated in abstract terms in the tales. They teach us, beneath all of the endless personal variations, each of which condition us in particular ways, the archetypal structure or sub-strata, that motivates our patterns of interactions with those most important in our lives.

The archetypal parent/child pattern is an admixture of love and fear, attachment and threat, support and shame, obedience and rejection. In focusing on the destructive aggressive and libidinal drives of the child, Freud and his followers did not recognize their own projections. The parent projects his or her own destructive impulses onto the child. The child is simply doing what it needs to in order to survive. The child has a natural developmental urge to become master of its world. This is the way it should be. The wounded parent is the one who interprets this in a destructive way.

Fairy tales are profoundly serious because they address our deepest existential dilemmas. They aim to answer the question of how to have, as Paul Tillich calls it, the courage to be, in the face of the existential anxieties of the threat of non-existence, insignificance, and moral failure. As Bettelheim said,

“The fairy tale takes (our) existential anxieties and dilemmas very seriously and addresses itself directly to them: the need to be loved and the fear that one is thought worthless; the love of life and the fear of death.”¹⁰⁴

The answer that fairy tales provide, the truth, is also one that we would rather not hear. This is why this message needs to be conveyed in disguised and apparently trite form. The only way out is to overcome impossible obstacles. We long for the easy answer, but fairy tales are never so childish. They tell us that we can only get what we want through humble effort. The promise of the tale is that if we face our dragons we can win the kingdom.

All too often, contemporary life is structured to avoid these existential problems. This avoidance, which is driven by our fear of struggle, ends up causing us endless suffering. We fear that we do not have the wherewithal to face the challenge. Because those of us with a lost heart have distorted thinking, we do not see the real problem facing us. Instead, we are consumed with shame, believing that we cannot do anything about our problems because of some intrinsic flaw. We prefer to see things in this way than face the awesome responsibilities of existence, and we end up with relentless frustration as our prize. When the tales speak of whole kingdoms being turned to stone, they warn us of this terrible outcome, if only we will listen.

The stories tell us that inside of us we are king or queen. Our destiny is to rule over our own lives and take responsibility for others and our planet. They provide an explanation for how we lose touch with these aspects of ourselves in the first place and provide the means and method for rediscovering our powers and potentials. As the legend of King Arthur tells us, the time comes when it is necessary for us to pull the sword out of the stone, to do the impossible and what only each of us as individuals can do. With

that, we emerge into adulthood and claim our adult responsibilities with all the difficulties that this entails, because we have the power to do so.

Exploring tales in depth is one method of *bildung*, of using the works of culture to find the lost heart. This is a central message of the stories: each of us must go on this journey ourselves to find the treasure. We must devote ourselves to a process of exploration and discovery. We must go into the cave, under the sea, to the top of the mountain, or to the end of the world, to find what we are looking for. That is, we must penetrate beyond the surface to find the truth.

Grownups need to read myths and fairy tales because, as G. K. Chesterton and C.S. Lewis felt, these stories are "spiritual explorations" and hence "the most like life" since they reveal "human life as seen, or felt, or divined from the inside."¹⁰⁵ As Schiller said, "Deeper meaning lies in the fairy tale of my childhood than in the truth that is taught by life."¹⁰⁶

The stories teach us how to be what we are meant to be, how to fulfill our greatest potentials, in a world that hurts us by stultifying and vitiating our greatness and capacity for love. This is our greatest spiritual challenge, and the one that fairy tales address. It is not a battle against our lowest nature, as the Freudians would have it, but a struggle for our highest. This insight, embraced by Jung, was one point of his departure from Freud. What Bettelheim said for children is equally true for us as adults:

"Fairy tales, unlike any other form of literature, direct the child to discover his identity and calling, and they also suggest what experiences are needed to develop his character further. Fairy tales intimate that a rewarding, good life is within one's reach despite adversity -- but only if one does not shy away from the hazardous struggles without which one can never achieve true identity. These stories promise that if a child dares to engage in this fearsome and taxing search, benevolent powers will come to his aid, and he will succeed. The stories also warn that those who are too timorous and narrow-minded to risk themselves in

finding themselves must settle down to a humdrum existence -- if an even worse fate does not befall them.”¹⁰⁷

As yantric symbols, myths can be used by adults the way they have been used traditionally for centuries in Hindu cultures. People who were faced with psychological difficulties were given a folktale to study. Through this meditation the person would come to understand the nature of his or her difficulty and point the way to a solution.¹⁰⁸

This concept that our lives are saved by fairy tales is conveyed in the cycle of stories known as *The Thousand and One Nights*. It is in Scheherazade's telling the king innumerable stories over the course of years that finally saves both of them from death and despair and leads them to find their hearts.¹⁰⁹

This cycle of stories tells us that no one telling or no one story can provide the solution. So it is with us; we need to continuously search and study. We must work on our own life everyday in every way, and in this way the solution will be found. The path to self-cultivation includes the study of mythic tales. They are part of the cure. By contemplating these stories deeply, repeatedly, with devotion, we can find the answer to our insoluble dilemmas.¹¹⁰

The stories provide a solution, but they speak to an ongoing struggle. This struggle is archetypal. It is a constant struggle to realize our potentials against the forces that hold us back. It is a struggle that every generation goes through, that humankind is going through, and is slowly being solved over the course of epochal spans of time. Though the solution is hidden in the weave of all the stories, it is one that is only in process of being worked out in fact, and so is far from complete. We continue to repeat this painful process because we have yet to fully integrate this knowledge. This is why we need to read these tales over and over again, and why we need to have a renewal in

every generation back to these stories, to remind us of where we need to head. We are living out the problem over and over again, but if we do not enter the legacy of tales, we live this out unconsciously, and do not realize the nature of the story we are living out.

This problem of human estrangement is not one that needs to be lived out forever. It is not existential in that sense. It is not intrinsic in our makeup. As Campbell makes abundantly clear, archetypes are not eternal. They appear and change slowly, transforming along with grand sweeps of human development.¹¹¹ In fact, the archetype represented in tales is the opposite of hopelessness. The stories represent the archetype of the struggle to live out what we are meant to be. The stories deal with problems that are common because they have yet to be worked out by humanity. They reflect a problem that has yet to be solved, but can be solved. We know the solution and have always known the solution, but we have not yet been able to live out this solution. The fact that there is a solution to problems that seem impossible to solve is a central message of the tale. It tells us that our role is to search for the solution to impossible problems, and if we do, we will find them. The hero is the person who finds solutions to impossible problems. Yet even the hero's achievement is incomplete. The solution does not exist for anyone of us individually, unless we define the struggle *as* the solution. The solution is something that requires faith, as a collective possibility outside of our comprehension.

The stories tell an archetypal tale. It is the struggle to thrive in a world of danger, to overcome the multigenerational wounds passed down from parent and adult world to child, to unify our divided nature which is the result of such wounding, and they show the way to harmonize with universal law to become all that we are meant to be and in so doing, heal the world.

These dynamic symbols are not simply in our stories or even just in our dreams, or in any text, but in every manifestation of living. We find them in our repeating patterns of behavior. We live symbolically. We express inexpressible stories in everything we do. We live out mysteries that we call problems. We can't find love or we fail in work. Things don't go the way we want them to and we don't understand why. But if we learn how to listen, by studying our own lives as if they were fairy tales, Hermes, messenger of the gods, brings us the messages from beyond that we need to hear.

We need to read mythic tales and learn how to enter their symbolic world and interpret them so that we have an entranceway into the symbolic tale that is our own life. We must learn how to interpret our own lives just like we do the tales. Both reveal the same processes and point to the same solutions. The way to discover the answer to our problems is to enter ourselves the way we enter the story. We need to engage in a phenomenological-hermeneutic process. This means we need to go into ourselves, which is exactly what the stories tell us to do. We look inside, and with patience we wait. If we listen carefully, something eventually bubbles up to the surface. We feed ourselves with everything we can from the outside to awaken our inner guide, and then we turn inward and hope for communication. We go to the castle, and meet the princess in the castle's most interior room. We have an encounter with a symbol, whether this is a story, words of wisdom, or the strange behavior from our own lives. When we find the symbol emerging from within, when we encounter our own story, we find the universality in our individuality. We find a pathway to our heart. In the encounter between the symbol and the reader, the listener, the teller, the receiver, in that third place or result of where the two come together, there is a new revealing of an aspect of meaning of that dynamic

symbol. Our stories begin to make sense. Rather than being a victim in the tale we are now a participant.

The point of understanding ourselves is to recognize that we are representative of a universal structure and movement. To understand ourselves is to understand everything.

Both story and ritual attempt to return us to an original time and a central place that represents the essence of all things. This essence is oneness. The stories are the story of our attempts to reunify with the All. This is what it means to be brought back to our heart. The heart is, as we are told in the profound ancient source of Indian wisdom, *The Upanishads*, the “home of Atman,” the one.

What might be the evolutionary purpose of our capacity for imagination, for the natural formation of complex symbols? Perhaps the bio-evolutionary purpose of the symbolic faculty is to promote the development of the universe. Evolutionary science teaches us that nature is not interested in the fate of the individual. Perhaps even more than the preservation of species, and even more than the preservation of life in general, nature is invested in the continuous *development* of life. Recent research shows that our altruistic aspect gives the lie to self-preservation at all costs. Despite this, we are addled by selfishness. We are also filled with anxieties of the unknown that go against the forces of change. Nevertheless, willy-nilly, over the span of endless spans of time nature grows, and in one small corner of the universe, has grown in the direction of love and imagination. The symbolic faculty is found in the synthetic, hyperassociative, meaning-making part of the brain, which is its most recently developed part. This capacity is unique to humanity. No other species imagines the way we do, or gives semantic meaning to events that we can then draw on to create our futures. This imaginative

faculty pervades all of our abilities and is the basis for science itself, for science requires us to see what isn't apparent. It takes a tremendous act of imagination to conceive that the sun is not moving through the sky, but that we are the ones who are revolving. Our symbolic faculty is the human butterfly, the most recent evolutionary development, and the loveliest. The perception of beauty is nature's most recent innovation and beautiful itself. Nature is not only developing in the direction of function and "performativity," but flowers and butterflies tell us it is developing in the direction of the beautiful. Our capacity for metaphor and analogy is error-filled and mistake-prone and can lead us into tremendous pain. In its worst forms it can lead to harmful delusions and psychosis. On the other side, our capacity for seeing the universe in a grain of sand, for recognizing patterns and forever forming new connections is leading us inexorably to recognizing the grand patterns of the entire cosmos and the human place in the grand weave. This pulls us toward the apotheosis of a oneness with the All, not in unconscious symbiosis, but through aware, appreciative love.

The Aim and Method of this Book: A Yantric Hermeneutic Journey

In summary, the purpose of my work is to aid in the growth and development of human fulfillment and the growth of the cosmos.

The intent of this work is to unearth the harmony between the worlds of wisdom, myth, and psychological understandings of human nature. In that harmonization of finding the common in the disparate we can discover truth.

It is in this search for connection of these spheres that I live out the Confucian premise that there is a unifying thread to my view of the individual, the relational, the social, the political and the cosmic.

This study aims to reveal a facet of the truth of psyche and the human condition through an encounter between the particular symbolic wisdom text of Mencius and my unique viewpoint.

The method of this hermeneutic exploration, the subject matter of the heart, the mode of psychotherapy that I practice, the universal quest for oneness and wisdom, the stories and myths that emerge from the darkness of the past, the discoveries of science, and I, share infinite parallels.

The uniqueness of this study will emerge from the facet of truth revealed through this bringing together of these multiple viewpoints.

Endnotes

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- ¹. Armstrong, *Case*, xi.
 - ². Morris Berman, *The Reenchantment of the World*, (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 1981), 67- 70.
 - ³. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. by Douglas Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), xix.
 - ⁴. “History of the Romantic Movement” *History World*, <http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?historyid=aa73>, (accessed January 8, 2010).
 - ⁵. Marie-Louise von Franz, *The Interpretation of Fairy Tales* (Boulder: Shambhala, 1996), 4, 6.
 - ⁶. Wilhelm Grimm quoted in Joseph Campbell, “The Fairy Tale,” in *The Flight of the Wild Gander*, 3.
 - ⁷. Campbell, “Fairy Tale”, 6.
 - ⁸. “Anthropology” *Wikipedia The Free Encyclopedia*, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anthropology> (accessed January 13, 2010).
 - ⁹. Jung, *Archetypes*, 45.
 - ¹⁰ James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough* (New York: Collier Books, 1922), 449.
 - ¹¹. Otto Rank, *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero*, sacredtexts.com, originally published 1914, <http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/mbh/mbh01.htm> (accessed December 29, 2009), 5.
 - ¹². Rank, 4.
 - ¹³. Campbell, *Gander*, 28
 - ¹⁴. Rank, 6.
 - ¹⁵. Campbell, *Hero*, 382.
 - ¹⁶. Von Franz, 4.
 - ¹⁷. Von Franz, 6.
 - ¹⁸. “Edward Burnett Tylor,” *Wikipedia the free encyclopedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward_Burnett_Tylor (accessed December 29, 2009).
 - ¹⁹. Robert Segal, *Theorizing about Myth* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999), 39.
 - ²⁰. Rank, 7.
 - ²¹. William James, *Pragmatism, A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking: Popular Lectures on Philosophy* (London, New York, Bombay, and Calcutta: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1907), 16. Posted on http://www.archive.org/stream/pragmatismnewnam00jameuoft/pragmatismnewnam00jameuoft_djvu.txt (accessed December 29, 2009).
As James stated this view, “The romantic spontaneity and courage are gone, the vision is materialistic and depressing. Ideals appear as inert byproducts of physiology; what is higher' is explained by what is lower and treated forever as a case of 'nothing but' nothing but something else of a quite inferior sort. You get, in short, a materialistic universe, in which only the tough-minded find themselves congenially at home.”
 - ²². Carl Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 38.

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- ²³. In this sense, nature can be considered a yantric text available for interpretation. If we travel down this mystical path we would conclude that all physical manifestation is the symbolic product of the godhead.
- ²⁴. Jung, *Archetypes*, 6.
- ²⁵. Campbell, "Symbol," 93-125.
- ²⁶. "William Robertson Smith" *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Robertson_Smith (first accessed December 30, 2009).
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- ²⁸. "FitzRoy Somerset, 4th Baron Raglan," *Wikipedia The Free Encyclopedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/FitzRoy_Somerset,_4th_Baron_Raglan (accessed January 11, 2010).
- ²⁹. "Jessie Weston," *Wikipedia The Free Encyclopedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jessie_Weston, (accessed January 11, 2010).
- ³⁰. Segal, *Theorizing*, 4.
- ³¹. *Ibid.*, 37.
- ³². *Ibid.*, 131.
- ³³. Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, trans by Willard Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 12-27; Eliade, *Yoga*, 235-236.
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- ³⁵. Jung, *Archetypes*, 5.
- ³⁶. Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment* (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), 8.
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- ³⁹. Sigmund Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, trans and ed by James Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1977), 256-257, 418-419.
- ⁴⁰. Segal, *Hero*, vii.
- ⁴¹. Robert A Segal ed., *In Quest of the Hero*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990); Robert Segal, *Theorizing*.
- ⁴². Robert Segal, *Theorizing*, ix.
- ⁴³. *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁴. Rank, 10; Jung, *Archetypes*, 5.
- ⁴⁵. Rank, 9.
- ⁴⁶. *Ibid.*, 4.
- ⁴⁷. Joseph Campbell, "Bios and Mythos," in *The Flight of the Wild Gander*, 31.
- ⁴⁸. Bettelheim, 4.
- ⁴⁹. *Ibid.*, 4.
- ⁵⁰. *Ibid.*, 77.
- ⁵¹. Bettelheim, 6.
- ⁵². Jung, *Archetypes*, 4-6.
- ⁵³. Jung, *Archetypes*, 160.
- ⁵⁴. *Ibid.*, 20-22.
- ⁵⁵. Von Franz, 8.
- ⁵⁶. *Ibid.*, 9.

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- ⁵⁷. Ibid., 75-101.
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- ⁵⁹. James F. Masterson, *The Narcissistic and Borderline Disorders: An Integrated and Developmental Approach*, (New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1981), 108.
- ⁶⁰. Jung, *Archetypes*, 22.
- ⁶¹. Fritz Perls, *Ego, Hunger and Aggression* (Highland: The Gestalt Journal Press, 1992), 3-16.
- ⁶². "A Guide to Brain Anatomy, Function and System," *While You Are Waiting*, <http://www.waiting.com/brainfunction.html> (accessed January 14, 2010).
- ⁶³. Campbell, *Gander*, xii.
- ⁷¹. Von Franz, 1.
- ⁷². Ibid., 2.
- ⁷³. Ibid., 43.
- ⁷⁴. Ibid., 98.
- ⁷⁵. "Maya," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maya_%28illusion%29 (accessed January 14, 2010).
- ⁷⁶. Van der Kolk, 7.
- ⁷⁷. Campbell, "Mythos and Bios," 32.
- ⁷⁸. Perls, *Gestalt Therapy*, 3.
- ⁷⁹. Ibid.
- ⁸⁰. Campbell, "Symbol," 55.
- ⁸¹. Von Franz; Stromer, personal communication, March 10, 2010.
- ⁸². Campbell, "Fairy Tale," 22-23.
- ⁸³. Campbell, *Hero*, 5.
- ⁸⁴. Ibid., 3.
- ⁸⁵. Ibid., 15.
- ⁸⁶. Ibid., 256.
- ⁸⁷. Ibid., 257.
- ⁸⁸. Segal, *Theorizing*, ix.
- ⁸⁹. Armstrong, *Case*, 6.
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- ⁹¹. Carl Jung, *The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche*, "On Psychic Energy" (1928) (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), 111.
- ⁹². Von Franz, 95.
- ⁹³. Campbell, *Hero*, 9.
- ⁹⁴. Ibid., 11.
- ⁹⁵. Campbell, "Mythos and Bios," 41.
- ⁹⁶. Stromer, personal communication, March 11, 2010.
- ⁹⁷. "Positive Affect in Decision Making," Alice M. Isen in *Research on Judgment and Decision Making: Currents, Connections and Controversies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 510.
- ⁹⁸. Bettelheim, 7.
- ⁹⁹. Ibid., 12-13.
- ¹⁰⁰. Campbell, *Hero*, 121.
- ¹⁰¹. Bettelheim, 7.

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- ¹⁰². Bowlby, *Attachment*, 256.
- ¹⁰³. Rorty, xxvii.
- ¹⁰⁴. Bowlby, *Attachment*, 10.
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- ¹⁰⁶. Friedrich Schiller “Good Reads” <http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/show/45404> (accessed March 29, 2010).
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- ¹⁰⁹. Anonymous, *The Arabian Nights*, (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1946, 1974), 3-14, 327.
- ¹¹⁰. Bettelheim, 88.
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PART TWO: THE HEART OF MENCIUS

CHAPTER 5 CONFUCIANISM

To remind the reader, the text of Mencius that I will explore is:

“Pity the man who has lost his path and does not follow it, and who has lost his heart and does not go out and find it. When people’s dogs and chicks are lost they go out and find them, but when their hearts - or original nature - are lost, they do not go out and look for them. The principle of self-cultivation consists in nothing but trying to find the lost heart.”¹

I have chosen this quote as the inspiration for my exploration because of the statement’s tremendously evocative emotional resonance that speaks directly to me across the span of millennia. I believe that within this statement there is to be found a fundamental truth about human nature and the human struggle. This powerful yantric utterance has stood the test of time and is considered by many of the world’s most credible students as worthy of hermeneutic study. As Gadamer stated, works worthy of this kind of study are those that are considered “classical.” In this sense, “classical” means that “the duration of a work’s power to speak directly is fundamentally unlimited.” This quote’s power comes in part from its spare, abstract nature. As Schlegel put it, “A classical work . . . is one that can never be completely understood. But it must also be one from which those who are educated and educating themselves must always desire to learn more.”²

Gadamer’s viewpoint is that the hermeneutic enterprise is one of “. . . finding the right questions to ask. . .”³ that are inherent in the text. Respecting this approach, the questions that I believe Mencius was asking and that I will aim to add my perspective on

are: What is the heart? What does it mean to have a lost heart? How do we lose the heart? What is self-cultivation? How do we find the lost heart?

In order to answer these questions I will begin with a survey of the Mencian philosophy. In order to do this, we will need to come to a basic understanding of the philosophy of Mencius's inspiration, teacher, and avatar, Confucius.

Who Mencius Was

A young man who was born in Shanghai, raised in Hong Kong, and presently lives and works in New York, told me in a recent conversation that he had never heard of the book of Mencius, or the other immortal Chinese classics, the *Ta Hsueh* or *Chung Yung*. He had heard of Confucius, but said that most people, especially the young, had no interest in these things. He told me that the Cultural Revolution in China between 1966 and 1978 was, in part, about a rejection of traditional Chinese culture and wisdom, because it was "not good for China." The language of these ancient texts he likened to ancient Greek or Latin. Only a certain class of scholars would be interested in those works. He said that now people were interested in getting jobs but that as conditions improved, and as people had more leisure time, they would be able to show more interest in this history and culture. Confucius was not so much rejected, but was seen as of only historical interest. People saw his ideas as irrelevant.

Things were not so different in Mencius's day. Though Mencius was received at the courts of the leaders of his time, his recommendations -- which were derived from Confucius and from Confucius's teachers -- were wholly rejected as being impracticable.⁴ The leaders of his day saw his ideas, which came from a time more than 700 years before

his time, as strange as his ideas seem to us today. And yet his vision endured. Even today, in 21st century America, when people hear his words, they nod with recognition at the beauty of his wisdom. This proves one of Confucianism's main points: when you live according to the Way, that is, in accordance with the laws of the universe, then your words will be a reflection of truth, and will prove to be eternal.⁵

Mencius, the author of my quote, lived from approximately 371BC to 289BC. As such, he was a contemporary of Aristotle.⁶ Along with Confucius, Tsengtse and Tsesze, Mencius was one of the creators of the philosophy known as Confucianism.⁷ Many of the details of the lives and the roles that these men played in the development of Confucianism are open to dispute. What is without question is that throughout Chinese culture Mencius was considered to be only second to Confucius in wisdom and sagacity. Mencius has been read for 2300 years, and continues to influence those who encounter him to this day.⁸

It is believed that he studied with disciples of Confucius's grandson.⁹ Mencius was seen as the legitimate successor of Confucius and his writings are renowned as the primary philosophical treatise in Chinese history.¹⁰ Mencius added a depth to Confucianism that it did not previously possess.¹¹ It was said of Mencius that he "was the purest of the pure in the interpretation of Confucius." Win Yutang, translator of the canonical works of these Chinese philosophers, considers his writing to be the most important Confucian text.¹² He was also considered to be the best writer of the Chinese philosophers.¹³

By the 1st century of the modern era, the Imperial Court of China had designated "Masters of Learning" to devote themselves exclusively to the study of Mencius's writings. His works received canonical recognition in the 12th century.¹⁴

Confucius and Mencius, separated by hundreds of years, both lived in times of social chaos and constant warfare.¹⁵ Mencius, like Confucius, aimed to hold office in the courts of the city-states, educating the leaders in order to bring their philosophical beliefs to bear, which, they believed, would return peace and prosperity to a decadent land. Mencius's ideals were incompatible with the political sensibilities of his time, and so were rejected by those rulers. Neither he nor Confucius were able to achieve their aims in their lifetimes.¹⁶

The time of Mencius saw the almost complete decline of feudalism. There were more wars on an ever-increasing scale. China was unified and came under the influence of Legalist ideas. Legalism was a response to a growing moral cynicism. Man was viewed as intrinsically bad. Humanity was seen to be purely egoistic and motivated solely by the thought of reward and punishment.¹⁷ Therefore, men needed to be controlled by law. This represented a dialectical movement away from the humanistic views of Confucius which asserted man's intrinsic goodness and the need for self-cultivation, rather than the imposition of external law, as the path to societal harmony.

Mencius's return to, and development of, Confucius's approach clearly rode against the tide of his time as he even more strongly and clearly asserted his view of man's goodness. In this sense, this writer feels an affinity for Mencius in this time.

Confucianism remained for the first few centuries of its existence a local and obscure movement. It was not until after the establishment of the Empire at the close of the 2nd century BCE that its influence began to spread.¹⁸

There were many other religious and philosophical streams that flowed across the Chinese landscape at that time.¹⁹ Confucianism eventually dominated over those other streams and became the central philosophy of the East for over 2000 years.

Confucianism, in part, became so prevalent because of its practical and humanist nature over more mystical approaches, including Taoism and Buddhism.²⁰ At the same time, in the Eastern mind, there was not such a strict agonistic relationship between these philosophies. The way of the Chinese was to incorporate and synthesize these many views rather than to reject all in favor of one's own, as Western history has largely seen. Each borrowed from the other and grew as a result. Confucianism had its concept of the tao, and Buddhism had its moral prescriptions in the Eightfold path. Nevertheless, for over a thousand years which ended only in the last century, the *Four Books*, the central written works of Confucianism, including the writings of Mencius, were read by every student in China in their first years of school.²¹

Confucianism and Hermeneutics

Confucianism begins with a love of learning. In the book of Confucius's collected aphorisms, called *The Analects*, the very first quote is, "The Master said, 'Is it not pleasant to learn with a constant perseverance and application?'"²²

Confucius gives us the central answer to his approach to life and self-cultivation in this first sentence. The sum of the wisdom of Confucius is that there is no greater

pleasure than a lifetime of learning. Like for his compatriot half-way around the world, Socrates, the object of learning was not the gathering of facts in order to control, but the development of the individual.²³ In Plato's approach,

“ . . . He throughout assumes that education does not implant in the mind something extraneous which it did not before possess, such as mere information, or habits of conduct imposed by an alien authority. Education, he teaches, helps the soul to realize its true nature.”²⁴

This approach to life was also followed by Mencius, who said, “Learn widely and go into what you have learned in detail so that in the end you can return to the essential.”²⁵

Mencius's approach to wisdom and personal development, which he derived from Confucius, was part of a long hermeneutic tradition that began long before his birth and has lasted till this day. For Confucius, learning consisted in hermeneutics, in studying the ancient texts of his day. He stated that he was not the inventor of his philosophy. To quote, “I merely try to describe (or carry on) the ancient tradition, but not to create something new. I only want to get at the truth and am in love with ancient studies.”²⁷

These original texts, mainly, though not exclusively, from a Chinese dynasty called the western Chou (11th – 8th century BCE), were thought to portray an ideal state of society, a halcyon era, from which the China of the Confucianists days had seriously declined. The Confucian plea was essentially for a restoration to this past condition.²⁸

Confucius used this time of the early Chou as his example for the way people should live. The sages of that earlier era may have been the originators of the humanistic philosophy of self-examination that became the basis for Confucius's philosophy. By interpreting the ancient texts and redefining old words, he created a theory of politics,

ideal government, and a code of ethical behavior, which he believed should inform the regulation of all relations in life.²⁹

In fact the work of hermeneutics and the reverence for the wisdom of forbears was something that Confucius found in those he aimed to imitate. The sages Confucius followed were already a part of a tradition of studying ancient wisdom. As he said, “A transmitter and not a maker, believing in and loving the ancients, I venture to compare myself with our old P'ang.”³⁰

As Confucius and Mencius looked back hundreds of years before them to a time which must have seemed as ancient to them as their time is to ours, and as his forbears looked behind them, we look back thousands of years to their time. In this way, we continue the timeless tradition of going back to origins to find essential wisdom and understandings.

The books that Confucius revered, studied and compiled were part of what ended up being called *The Five Classics*, or *Ching*. These texts, as James Legge (1815 – 1897), the seminal interpreter of Confucius’s work in English, put it, “are the five canonical Works, containing the truth upon the highest subjects from the sages of China, and which should be received as law by all generations.”³¹

The first three of these classics, the *Book of Songs*, the *Book of History* and the *Book of Changes (I Ching)*, were studied by Confucius. The fourth, *Spring and Autumn* or *Ch'un Ch'iu*, a chronicle of events extending from 722 BCE to 481 BCE, was a history probably written by Confucius.³² The fifth book of the five classics, the *Book of Rites (Liki)* was composed after the life of Confucius from around 200 BCE to the beginning of

the modern era. It is a collection derived from many different sources.³³ It included very specific directions for endless ritual behaviors.

Confucius devoted his life to the study of these texts because he was in concord with Gadamer's insight that the past is a source of inexhaustible symbolic content for self-discovery. He believed that in the sincere study of ancient texts one finds true knowledge. The classic texts were his best guide to understanding himself. This could be seen in the remark, "All Six Classics serve as comments on me."³⁴

The wisdom of the Confucianists found their final organized and written form in what are known as the *Four Books*, or *Shu*, where shu means writings or books, or literally, "the pencil speaking."³⁶

The history of the texts leaves their authorship, the time of their writing, and their authenticity all open to dispute. That there was a Confucius, his disciples, and 2500 years of scholars who have examined and commented on these texts throughout the world is not in doubt. And the texts, in their current form, have been read by millions. But this only shows that the universal wisdom held in the texts transcends any particular author, or time in which they were written. Like all great works of art, they transcend the personal. Such is the nature of hermeneutics as we now understand it. Meaning is infinite and emerges throughout time and place. The text as exemplar is inspiration. And though Confucius is identified as the central figure in the creation of these wisdom texts, Confucius himself claimed only to be a transmitter and not a creator. The original source of these works will never be found as they emerge from the murky depths of early, and pre, history.

However, it is believed that the first of these four books is the one most directly associated with Confucius. It is called the *Lun Yu*, or *Digested Conversations*. It is more commonly known as the *Analects of Confucius*, a compilation of his statements.³⁷

The next book, the *Ta Hsueh*, or *The Highest Order of Cultivation*,³⁸ or *The Great Learning*, is thought to be recorded or composed by Confucius's disciple Tsengtse (505-436 BCE).³⁹ This book was considered the first of the four books, and was the first studied by all Chinese students, beginning at the age of 7 or 8. The Sung (960-1279) Confucianist Ch'eng Yich'uan, said, "This *Ta Hsueh*. . .constitutes the gateway through which beginners enter into the path of virtue."⁴⁰ The third is called the *Chung Yung*, or *Doctrine of the Mean*,⁴¹ or *The State of Equilibrium and Harmony*.⁴² Its composition is ascribed to Tsesze, the grandson of Confucius (483 BCE -?). The fourth book is called, and contains the works of, *Mencius*.⁴³ These three works, composed by Confucius's closest disciples, Tsengtse, Tsesze, and Mencius, advanced Confucius's basic insights into a higher order of philosophy.⁴⁴

These four books were ultimately structured by the Sung scholar Chu Hsi (1130-1200). At that point, and for the next 800 years, these four books made up the essential texts of Chinese education.⁴⁵ These writings were recognized as the highest authority in China for all that time.

These four classic books of philosophy are the heart of Chinese wisdom and embody the wisdom of the heart. As yantric symbols worthy of an endless hermeneutic enterprise of self-cultivation they reveal the nature of the heart.

The Confucian hermeneutic tradition continued over the past two millennia. Included in this has been the study of the *Mencius*. The greatest Mencian interpreters

themselves are revered as sages, including such figures as Wang Yang Min (1479-1529) and Tai Chen, among others. Clearly, the attention paid to this text shows the profound impact and influence this man and his writings have held over highly discriminating individuals.⁴⁶

Endless seekers have immersed themselves in these texts and added their gloss in the search for truth and inner harmony. In exploring them ourselves, we enter the great hermeneutic circle of finding the lost heart.

The abstract and spare quality of the Chinese language of Confucius and his disciples leaves much to the translator and interpreter in a search for meaning. Confucius cared deeply about the correct meaning of words, and, like Aristotle, believed that this was the road to true knowledge. However, his language did not have the precision, or the grammatical subtlety, to insure precise meanings. On the other hand, this vagueness, or openness, aids the hermeneutic process when it is understood as a process of bringing ourselves into the text to inspire new understandings. Confucius himself said that he only provided one leg of a stool to his students and expected them to find the other three. He was purposely spare in his explanations. This approach supports our view of hermeneutics and the heart as a pathway to true wisdom. Our hermeneutic method is one that approaches a text as an open vessel, as a point of entry, as a stone dropped into a pond. It is a way into the endlessly expanding depths of truth. The purpose of the enterprise is to enter into meaning in depth.⁴⁷

Similarly, we do not appreciate Mencius because of his capacity for argument. We appreciate him for the universal, symbolic quality of his conclusions. These are

virtually oracular statements that stimulate thought and argument. They are not meant to prove, but to stimulate the thought of the recipient.

Confucianism and the Ideal

The Confucian goal was to bring peace to the world.⁴⁸ In order to create the conditions for an improved social order, the Confucianists worked to imagine what an ideal society would be like and how to achieve such a thing.⁴⁹ In order to understand this Confucian project, we need to understand normative thinking. Normativity is imagining what a thing ought to be in the sense of being the best that it can be. In this it combines idealism with pragmatism.

As we have established, we think dialectically. That is, we conceptualize imaginatively. When we observe something, it is in the nature of the imagination to conceive that which does not exist. We can imagine worse and better. If we can imagine better, we can imagine best. That is, if we can think of a thing, we can think of its ideal manifestation. If we apprehend a thing, we can conceptualize ultimately. This capacity to imagine in ultimates is ethical thinking. All conceptions of god are the result of our capacity for dialectical-ethical thinking.⁵⁰

If we can imagine the best, the realization, the ultimate of a thing, we are then propelled to act towards the realization of that ultimate. If we can imagine ultimate love, we aspire toward that quality of love. That desire leads us to work toward the achievement of that thing. As it is put in us to be able to imagine a better self or world, this must be a reflection of our intrinsic being. We are Promethean. In Greek mythology, Prometheus was one of the Titans, a gigantic race, who inhabited the earth before the

creation of man. He and his brother Epimetheus were given the job of making man, and providing him and all other animals with the faculties necessary for their preservation. Prometheus took some earth, and kneading it up with water, made man in the image of the gods. He gave him an upright stature, so that while all other animals turn their faces downward, and look to the earth, he raises his to heaven, so that he gazes on the stars.⁵¹ This myth conveys that we are aspirational beings.

The Confucian project was a normative one. In one sense, Confucius's intention was not to imagine an unattainable, utopian ideal, but one that could be realized practically. At the same time, Confucius worked on things despite the unlikelihood of their realization. Even what appeared personally unattainable in the moment represented something that had existed in an ideal, original time. This exemplary and original time and place represents what is essential about humanity and existence.⁵² To live in accord with this ideal is to live in accord with the *Tao* or the *Way*, which is the intrinsic movement and direction of the universe.

Jen

Confucius's most distinctive contribution to Chinese thought is his exposition of the concepts of *jen* and *yi*. The concept of *jen*, like all of the great concepts held in the character language of Chinese, has multiple meanings. It has been translated in English as benevolence, human-heartedness, goodness, love, altruism, and humanity. It represents the ultimate realization of the human. In this sense, perhaps the best translation is *humane*.⁵³

Yi is often translated as righteousness. However, this too, does not capture the full sense of the word. Yi can refer to right action, to the person who does the right thing, and to the thing that a person ought to do. Although jen and yi are central to Confucius's teaching, jen is more fundamental. As the totality of moral virtues, yi is rooted in jen. As we shall see, jen and yi figure prominently in Mencius' teaching as well. The difference is that for Mencius, jen is original in the person, while for Confucius, jen is potential in people.⁵⁴

The means for realizing the goal of a perfected society was to imagine and define the nature of jen, where jen meant the ideal person. Then, it was necessary for there to be a practical way for people to live out jen. If one manifested jen, one was living according to the Tao or Way. This ideal person corresponds to the Greek notion of *arêtes*, or the profound man. The Greek concept also sees the ultimate person as one who lives out their highest intrinsic nature. One definition of jen, and *arêtes*, is the willingness to live out of our essential being at any cost.⁵⁵ The ideal of moral development was the achievement of Tillich's "courage to be."

The central question for Confucius and those around him was a normative ethical one: what constitutes the superior man?⁵⁶ Their answer was the accomplished scholar, the Sage. Learning was not intended for intellectual purposes, to expand what people know; it was to cultivate optimal character. A central part of that character is integrity; or congruence between one's deeds and intrinsic moral nature.⁵⁷

Much of the conversation in the *Analects* revolves around the question of the definition of jen. In one example, "Tsze-Kung asked what constituted the superior man.

The Master said, 'He acts before he speaks, and afterwards speaks according to his actions.'"⁵⁸

The virtue, the integral quality of the person, is what is of significance. In the first of two other examples, "The Master said, 'The superior man, in the world, does not set his mind either for anything, or against anything; what is right he will follow.'" And the second "The Master said, 'The superior man thinks of virtue; the small man thinks of comfort.'"⁵⁹

In the *Central Harmony*, jen is described as follows.

"It is only the man with the most perfect divine moral nature who is able to combine in himself quickness of apprehension, intelligence, insight and understanding – qualities necessary for the exercise of command, magnanimity, generosity, benignity, and gentleness – qualities necessary for the practice of patience, originality, energy, strength of character and determination – qualities necessary for the exercise of endurance, piety, noble seriousness, order and regularity – qualities necessary for the exercise of dignity, grace, method, subtlety and penetration – qualities necessary for the exercise of critical judgment."⁶⁰

Confucius anticipated Mencius's concept of heart as essence in his notion of jen. He stated that jen consisted in the realization of one's authentic nature, which corresponds to Mencius's idea that the goal of life was finding one's heart, or original nature. This development of jen, of the actualization of entelechy, was meant to result in the reestablishment of society along moral lines in harmony with universal law. This development towards jen was a self-development, and resulted from the efforts of the individual. Confucius said, "True manhood consists in realizing your true self and restoring the moral order or discipline. To be a true man depends on yourself. What has it got to do with others?"⁶¹

Confucius's approach to achieving ideal personhood was to work toward developing certain virtues. Confucius understood that perfection was impossible, but it was cultivation in the direction of jen that was important. He said,

“Humility is near to moral discipline (or li); simplicity of character is near to true manhood; and loyalty is near to sincerity of heart. If a man will carefully cultivate these things in his conduct, he may still err a little, but he won't be far from the standard of true manhood (jen). . . .”⁶²

What was important was integrity rather than temporal success. “The superior man understands what is right; the inferior man understands what will sell.” and, “The superior man loves his soul; the inferior man loves his property. . . .”⁶³

Ethics did not consist in conforming to an external doctrine. The aim was the development of the self so that the intrinsic sense of what was right would naturally emerge from the person. “The superior man lives his life without any one preconceived course of action or any taboo. He merely decides in each instance the right thing to do.”⁶⁴

Confucianists believed in the intrinsic positive potential of humankind. Being the ideal person did not require transformation, but simply being that which we actually are.⁶⁵ Jen was something that . . . one “searches for” . . . within.⁶⁶

This philosophical approach to life promised that every individual has the potential to be a sage, if one simply followed the precepts of self-cultivation. The goal could be found in the ideal person as exemplified by the sages of old, not in god. This is exemplified in the central Confucian view that “the measure of man is man.”⁶⁷ This is a universalistic, democratic view, believing that every person has the inherent potential within the heart to reach and realize the ideal.⁶⁸

As Lin Yutang said, “This belief in moral perfectibility from an accessing of what is naturally within the person puts the Confucianists clearly in the core of humanism.”⁶⁹

Mencius states that the heart is that which is universal to us. As we are all exemplifications of the Heavenly Mandate, or universal law, the ability to realize jen is within the capability of even the simplest person. Mencius tells us that we are of equal potential when he says that “all men can be like the Emperors Yao and Shun.”⁷⁰ If we are all human and the sage is human, everyone is capable of being a sage. All that is required is the proper effort toward self-cultivation.⁷¹

As the contemporary researcher of Mencian hermeneutics, Chün-Chieh Huang, states,

“It is this humanistic approach of climbing high from the low and reaching for the distance from the nearby, and of making an easy start in virtue or the development of character that accounts for the great fascination of Confucianism over the Chinese people. . . .”⁷²

Mencius continued the project of developing a conceptualization of the realized person as he deepened the meaning of jen toward the humane.⁷³ In this translation the word for the realized person is “gentleman.” He said,

“A gentleman differs from other men in that he trains his heart. A gentleman retains his heart by means of benevolence and the rites. The benevolent man loves others, and the courteous man respects others. (A gentleman’s worries) are of this kind. Shun was a man; I am also a man. Shun set an example for the Empire worthy of being handed down to posterity, yet here am I, just an ordinary man. That is something worth worrying about. If one worries about it, what should one do? One should become like Shun. That is all. (He acts benevolent, he acts with respect.)”⁷⁴

Mencius said, “The compasses and the carpenter's square are the culmination of squares and circles; the sage is the culmination of humanity.”⁷⁵

Here, Mencius points to technology as proof that there are inherent principles in nature that can be fully realized by our understanding of them. If we understand circles and squares, we can utilize this knowledge to realize the potentials inherent in these

abstractions. In the same way that the inventor explores nature to realize the potential inherent in it, the sage does the same with himself. He looks for the inherent nature that, when understood, can be fully realized, far beyond what nature provides.

The measure of having the heart, of being what we are meant to be, of embodying the virtue of jen, is reflected in our experience in the world. Problems in life are the result of our own moral imperfection, the extent of our distance from the Heavenly Mandate and essential nature. Mencius asserted that,

“If others do not respond to your love with love, look into your own benevolence; if others fail to respond to your attempts to govern them with order, look into your own wisdom; if others do not return your courtesy, look into your own respect. In other words, look into yourself whenever you fail to achieve your purpose. When you are correcting your person, the Empire will turn to you. The Odes say,

Long may he be worthy of Heaven's Mandate,
And find for himself much good fortune.”⁷⁶

The sage was not only the repository of this wisdom about the nature of this ideal but was meant to be a living embodiment of jen. Once understood, the goal of life was to realize the virtues of this ideal person. If the sage embodied these qualities this provided the best teaching for others.⁷⁷

Both Confucius and Mencius were exemplars in this regard. The *Analects* and the *Mencius* are in large measures records of who these men were and how they lived their lives. For Confucius, like his contemporary Socrates, one of his most endearing qualities was that, in the face of his superiority, he remained humble. What these men embodied was not some transcendental realization that none of us would achieve, like the nirvana of Buddha, but were real people who aspired and worked against their own limitations. As Confucius said, “In letters I am perhaps equal to other men, but the character of the superior man, carrying out in his conduct what he professes, is what I have not yet

attained to.” and, “If some years were added to my life, I would give fifty to the study of the (I Ching) and then I might come to be without great faults.”⁷⁸

Confucius admitted that throughout his life he continued to struggle with the emotional and psychological issues that every modern person shares. He recognized that transcending these problems marked a person’s optimal development, but he himself had not reached this level. “There are three things about the superior man I have not been able to attain. The true man has no worries; the wise man has no perplexities; and the brave man has no fear.”⁷⁹

He saw that intellectual achievement was easier than finding the heart. “In the study of literature, I am probably as good as anyone, but personally to live the life of the superior man, I don't think I have succeeded.”⁸⁰

Yet, his greatest accomplishment, and that for which he is a model for us all, is that he never ceased from striving to become all that he was meant to be. “As to being a sage and a true man, I am not so presumptuous. I will admit, however, that I have unceasingly tried to do my best and to teach other people.”⁸¹

It was written that Mencius went further than at least what Confucius admitted to. It was said of Mencius that he . . . “dwells in” . . . jen.⁸² Mencius’s writings have had such enduring value because he lived his life according to the principles he promoted and so he is the model for their truth. His work is worthy of being considered yantric, because in it he approaches our essential, and universal, nature.⁸³ As Huang puts it, “. . . Mencius serves as our eternal longing, and ever present conscience, clutched nostalgically in every suffering bosom, as a noble precious ideal of every thoughtful individual of every generation.”⁸⁴

As the contemporary Mencian scholar, Mou Tsung-san (1909-95) described, our common age holds everything in common with the time that Mencius lived in, and his example is as important today as it ever was.

“The contemporary age of ours filled with nothing but evil is in dire need of Great Passion and Great Understanding. Great Passion is the fountain of life and value, and serves to cultivate and broaden our life. Great Understanding shall guide us toward where problems lead us toward their solutions. Both shall result in our Great Actions. Mencius combines in his person both Great Passion and Great Understanding, and thereby embodies life's Great Actions. . . .”⁸⁵

Mencius and Goodness

A central question as to the nature of human beings is whether we are essentially good, bad, both, neither, or something else.

The argument has been held throughout history among thinking people everywhere. This work cannot begin to engage in this argument or present the great variety of views on this question in anything approaching comprehensiveness.⁸⁶

Nevertheless, we will explore the central Mencian view, which is the goodness of human nature.⁸⁷

Mencius’s assertion that we are intrinsically good was based on the premise that we all have the intrinsic capacity to distinguish right from wrong and there is something central within us that approves of the right, irrespective of what we choose. If we happen to choose the wrong, we disapprove of our own action and feel a sense of shame.⁸⁸

The view that we are essentially good is a humanistic one. We have all we need within us to realize the good and so we are in essence good. This movement toward the realization of the good is the natural one. To quote Mencius, “Human nature is good just like water seeks low ground.”⁸⁹

As moral nature is integral, Mencius disputes that we must destroy the human spirit to form a good person. Instead, evil is a corruption of our original nature. As the Sage said, “. . . must you mutilate men to make him moral?”⁹⁰

The issue of human goodness is taken up in Book 6 of the *Mencius*, which was considered by Lin Yutang as “the most important and representative one.”⁹¹

This book begins with one of Mencius’s philosophical competitors, Hsun Tzu (312-230 BCE)⁹² raising the notion, in contradistinction to Mencius, that human nature is bad, rather than good. Hsun and Mencius argue this point and then address the question of whether human nature is neither good nor bad. Then they ask whether moral behavior arises as the result of something interior or as something imposed.

Hsun Tzu argues that man is a victim of his appetites. He saw desire as the source of conflict and man needed to be controlled by outward regulations to control his lustful nature.⁹³ Hsun Tzu believed that we needed to be trained, or domesticated, to go against our nature.

The belief that appetites are intrinsic to humanity was widely accepted during the time of Mencius. This is exemplified in a statement by his contemporary, Kao Tzu, “Appetite for food and sex is nature.”⁹⁴ This would parallel the view of Freud, who saw all of human motivation, and nature, in the erotic, or appetitive. The Confucians do not deny desire; they simply see it as a source of good instead of evil. Desire is the root of morality, not its impediment. We have desires, but this is not our totality.⁹⁵ The Mencian view trusts in the human capacity for self-regulation and sees the imposition of external controls as the cause of problems.⁹⁶ This imposition leads to a division within the self. Goodness emerges from an inner integrity where desire and the right are unified.

For Mencius, licentiousness does not prove man's essential nature. Rather, it means that one's incipient morality had been lost. This morality cannot be destroyed, and this, too, proves its essential character. It can be found.

Mencius answers,

“If you let them follow their original nature, then they are all good. That is why I say human nature is good. If men become evil, that is not the fault of their original endowment. The sense of mercy is found in all men; the sense of shame is found in all men. . .”⁹⁷

Goodness and Desire

Mencius claimed that the unique aspect of human nature consisted of something more than desires and appetites. Nevertheless, as compared to Buddhists who believed that it was our task to eliminate attachment to desire, Mencians believed that desires are part of our essential nature and the proper thing to do with them is cultivate them. The greatest explicator of this theory was the Mencian hermeneuticist, Tai Chen. Tai asserts the theory that our desires are not to be separated from, but are an intrinsic part of, our nature.

Principle, or universal law, and energy, or ch'i, which manifests in us as desire or what Jung would call libido, are not separate. Here the intrinsic energetic component of humanity is magnetic, or cathectic. That is, it fosters attachment. A healthy eros, or energetic being, includes desire and attachment.

Desire is part of the flow of universal energy, known as ch'i, and is part of the Tao. As desire and appetite are part of our original nature, our goal is not to find some way of separating from desire so that we can be good, but rather to find that thing that will enable us, allow us, and free us, to develop these capacities optimally. In this sense

the goal is to realize our highest potentials and be what we are. Mencius suggests that when we self-actualize through, in part, a realization of our desires, we are then capable of giving to others. When our needs are met, we are generous. Our acquisitiveness turns into a willingness to share.⁹⁸

When we are connected to our hearts, our needs and desires are in accordance with what is best for us and the cosmos as a whole. We are in harmony with our own and universal nature, and so what we want to do and what we should do are one. In this situation, our needs can find satisfaction because there is an actual correspondence between desire and need and the kinds of satisfaction available to us in the world. When our desires emerge from our essential nature, then we are capable of experiencing satisfaction, because satisfaction only comes when our essential nature is affirmed through an attendance to its needs.

By learning to love ourselves and give ourselves what we need, we learn to extend this love and giving to all. Tai posits that this is the beginning of human benevolence. If our actual needs are met we develop generosity of spirit. When our needs have not been met, we spend our lives trying to get them met and this is what makes us self-involved.

To understand what we are, we must understand the true nature of our needs and desires. To meet these needs and satisfy our intrinsic, essential desires is to find our heart, that is, be what we are meant to be.⁹⁹

This also parallels our contemporary views in psychology, which is that when we suppress, or act out, our emotions this leads to problems. The Gestalt need cycle theory states that health is the adaptive capacity for need satisfaction.¹⁰⁰ As Tai said, “The flood

going all over cannot be clogged up nor can its origin be stopped; dam up desires, and desires will perpetrate evil. Li's job is to regulate desires, not to dam them.”¹⁰¹

Tai claimed that to see attachment, desire, and emotion as wrong, and to suppress them or even transcend them, as the Buddhists or Taoists would have us do, is to destroy one's very human nature.¹⁰² In that sense, this philosophy rejects nothing that is human, including desires and anger. This sets it apart from approaches like Buddhism.

In making the argument for man's badness, Hsun Tzu proved himself to be out of alignment with the Confucian basis, as he viewed morality as something imposed that goes against human nature. In his view people can only act from the good through relentless training. In contrast, from Mencius to contemporary attachment theory, it is asserted that we can be taught to be obedient, but this cannot lead to fulfillment. In fact, this is what results in an ultimate stalemate within the self. This results in the person losing the ability to develop. This means that they cannot live in the Tao. This results in unhappiness and the lack of ability to self-activate and actualize.

In the Mencian view, since we are essentially good, and therefore meant to be good, it is primarily how we are cultivated that will determine whether we realize our essential good nature or not. We all have the capacity for the "taste" of goodness; we all have intrinsic compassion, the ability for fellow feeling, and an innate sense of justice. From the most profound book of Mencius,

“As far as what is genuinely in him is concerned, a man is capable of becoming good,” said Mencius. “That is what I mean by good. As for his becoming bad, that is not the fault of his native endowment. The heart of compassion is possessed by all men alike; likewise the heart of shame, the heart of respect, and the heart of right and wrong. The heart of compassion pertains to benevolence, the heart of shame to dutifulness, the heart of respect to the observance of the rites, and the heart of right and wrong to wisdom.”¹⁰³

Conditioning, or learning, is what takes us away from our heart. When we are wounded in our childhood rearing through a lack of attunement, active shaming, or physical harm, we learn and are conditioned to block the natural capacities of the heart. From this humanistic view, we need to teach, model, and relate to others in such a way that is in harmony with our open, loving, knowing heart, so that our conditioning influence is in harmony with our intrinsic nature. Otherwise, parents are then out of harmony with themselves, and this leads to their children being out of harmony with themselves, and problems ensue.

Poor cultivation keeps us distant from even knowing our original nature. This is what Mencius means when he says “Pity the man who has lost his path and does not follow it, and has lost his heart and does not recover it.” Once we comprehend our hearts, once we understand our nature and realize what it is that we have lost, it is then our obligation to pursue the realization of our potentials through the overcoming of our conditionings which keep us distanced from our natural goodness. This is what Mencius means by self-cultivation. The first and most important means for this cultivation of our goodness is to seek it.

“Benevolence, dutifulness, observance of the rites, and wisdom do not give me a luster from the outside: they are in me originally. Only this has never dawned on me. That is why it is said, “Seek and you will get it; let go and you will lose it.” There are cases where one man is twice, five times or countless times better than another man, but this is only because there are people who fail to make the best of their native endowment. The Odes say,

Heaven produces the teeming masses,
And where there is a thing there is a norm.
If the people held on to their constant nature,
They would be drawn to superior virtue.”¹⁰⁴

The core definition of jen for Mencius is a person being their true self. In order for the notion that we can find a moral ideal within us to make sense, we must believe what is central to Mencius's world view, and his entire approach to the human problem, which is his assertion that man is intrinsically good.¹⁰⁵

As Win Yutang put it,

“The most important ideas in Mencius are, the goodness of human nature, consequently the importance of recovering that original good nature, the recognition that culture or education merely consists in preventing the good nature in us from becoming "beclouded" by circumstances, the theory of nourishing what amounts to an equivalent of Bergson's *elan vital* (the *haojan chih ch'i*), and finally the declaration that all men are equal in their inherent goodness.”¹⁰⁶

As soon as we enter the question of human intrinsic goodness, we encounter the Mencian concept of “heart.” To this Sage, the heart is the source of those very qualities that embody our essence, or original nature, which, is our moral goodness. A full exploration of the Mencian meaning of heart will be found in the next section of this work, “What is the Heart?”

The Mencian Philosophy of Heavenly Mandate

Central to the Mencian philosophy is the principle of the *Heavenly Mandate* or *ming*. The simple meaning of this concept is universal law.

Originally, the notion of the Heavenly Mandate was utilized to describe the fate of empires. This political meaning will be explored in depth in a later section. Simply put, when rulers lived in harmony with universal law, they maintained their dominion. The acceptance or rejection of the people marked the workings of universal law. As Mencius put it, “Heaven does not speak but reveals itself through its acts and deeds.”¹⁰⁷

Mencius expanded the meaning of the Heavenly Mandate to include the fate of each individual. The individual had a personal relationship to the Heavenly Mandate, and the mandate lived within him, in his heart. As hermeneuticist and translator D.C. Lau put it in his work on Mencius, “The individual, too, has his *ming* (or Heavenly Mandate). He, too, is enjoined by Heaven to be moral.”¹⁰⁸

For each of us, the condition of our life reflects the workings of the mandate of heaven. When we grow, flourish, are healthy, harmonious, peaceful and happy, we are living in accordance with the mandate of heaven. When things continually don’t work out for us and our spirits vitiate, corrupt or decay, we are not.

This parallels the ancient Stoic doctrine of the *logos*, (which is almost opposite to the contemporary usage) which they conceptualized as “the meaningful structure of reality as a whole and of the human mind in particular and the natural moral law.” Stoicism was a school of Greek philosophy from the 3rd century BCE which also asserted that virtue came from an alignment between our will and the laws of nature.¹⁰⁹ Like for the Mencians, the process of knowing for the stoics was not for the purpose of acquiring scientific facts but for the purpose of comprehending this universal order that also exists within humankind, which they called the *logos*,¹¹⁰ so that we can live in alignment with it.

The goal of humanity is to live in harmony with the Heavenly Mandate, or universal law. This law lives within the human as common sense. It is seen in the workings of nature and is inherent in the cosmos as a whole.

In order to live in harmony with the Heavenly Mandate, we need to follow the Way, or the Tao. The Way is the way of virtue. That is, when we live to our highest

capacities, which define 'human nature,' we are living in accordance with universal law. When we live virtuously there is harmony within us, within our relationships, in the social sphere, politically and universally. All is right within us and the world. This is the manifestation of the Heavenly Mandate, or the realization of universal law. This is the proof that there is universal law and this result is the working of this law.

The Confucian Synthesis

In contrast to other views, like Taoism, that developed in China around the time of Confucius and competed with Confucianism for cultural ascendancy, Confucianism was humanistic and deliberately not mystic. The Confucian concern was harmony in society, in relationships and individual fulfillment, not things that could not be seen or known. "The subjects of which the Master did not talk, were . . . spiritual beings."¹¹

He cared for human beings on this earth, how we develop ourselves, and how this impacts others and our world. He saw in the workings of human relationships the exemplification of universal law. Confucius and his disciples were not interested in the ultimate fate of the individual soul. He did not discuss what happened after death. Confucius said, "We don't yet know about life, how can we know about death?"¹²

As the Buddha claimed there was no individual ego, his primary concern was with the individual's tie to the illusion of selfhood and manifestation and his goal was to free the individual from the yoke of life. The Confucians, on the other hand, were concerned with the fate and condition of our existence and for the manifest universe as a whole. They saw that for the universe to be in its optimal condition of peace and the good of all, each level of organization had to exist in accordance with natural principle and law. The

individual needed to find his heart, that is, discover within the capacity to know and act from nature, or that which is best, or moral, for the individual. In so doing, he would advance cosmic realization. In this sense, the Confucianists were concerned with the moral fate of the universe. This did not mean obeying some god as an external personified authority and a divinely revealed religious doctrine, with its implications of sin and damnation for disobedience, but rather an understanding of natural law, where morality consisted of living in accordance with that natural law, or Heavenly Mandate. For the Confucians, the integrity of the self, that is, harmonious relations within the self, and relations on all levels of social organization was the key to an ordered, peaceful, organic universe. His method was good relations in intimate relationships, in families, and in the state. The Confucians were ecological and wholistic. They recognized that the health of any part was inextricably bound with the health of the whole, and the health of the whole was dependent on the health of the individual parts. It was those interrelationships, and the natural balance between them, that would lead to the greatest good.

The view that we are essentially good is to suggest that we have within ourselves the means toward goodness. With this view, we can grow, develop and remove the impediments to our full flowering, ourselves. We can self-cultivate. With this inward capacity and the belief in a human nature that reflects a universal nature, we can develop ourselves to the point of becoming in alignment with this universal order. If we believe we are good, then we have the possibility of inner harmony and can live in a world where we participate in self-governance. Mencius devoted his life to promoting this view because he believed that it would do no less than heal the world.¹¹³ To quote Mencius,

“ . . . If upon looking within he finds that he has not been true to himself, he will not please (anyone). There is a way for him to become true to himself. If he does not understand goodness he cannot be true to himself. Hence being true is the Way of Heaven; to reflect upon this is the Way of man. (The Tao is a process of reflecting on natural law and human nature). There has never been a man totally true to himself who fails to move others. On the other hand, there had never been one not true to himself who is capable of doing so.”¹¹⁴

Though Confucianism is pragmatic, and is not considered a mystic approach, Mencius’s humanism is a transcendental one, and can be considered more truly mystic than the approach of the great Taoists, especially Chuang Tzu, who had a pessimistic view of the universe. Mencius believed that humanity could achieve oneness with the universe by perfecting his or her inherent moral nature, which reflected a moral purpose of the universe.¹¹⁵

The mystical and the humanistic join in Mencius, as does the pragmatic and the ideal. They unify in the notion that harmonious relationships reflect the order of the universe, represent its ideal manifestation, and is the key to peace and happiness on Earth. This is all embodied in the Chinese character for jen, which symbolizes the true human being. This character is composed of “two” and “man”, signifying the relationship between people.¹¹⁶

So here we see that the highest development of the individual is identical to his relational development and quality. The measure of an individual is his capacity for good relationship.

The synthetic Confucianists also combined naturalism with humanism. Though Confucius stated that the measure of man is man, and therefore saw humankind as the reference for understanding and the source of truth, they also looked to the processes of nature to show the workings of the universe. For the Chinese philosophers of many

stripes, a central yantra, or complex symbol, for the purpose of finding the central harmony, were the processes of nature.¹¹⁷ These processes were contemplated to understand the higher order structure of the universe.¹¹⁸ Communing with this metaphor led to an understanding of the natural order. This led to the innovations of agriculture. This quest for order was the beginning of science, which meant a penetration beyond surface appearance to the hidden truth of things through experiment. Natural processes were harnessed, and when properly understood, and replicated, led to an incredible explosion of food. By recognizing underlying principles, order was able to be established. Such success through order led to the attempt to apply the ordering principles of nature to social relations. The recognition that when the natural order was not followed it led to a failure of cultivation, led to the assumption that the principle must be applicable to success or failure in human affairs. If things were disordered in human affairs they led to destruction and chaos rather than fruition and life and this indicated that the practices were not in accordance with the principles of nature -- like the results of agriculture. The Confucians understood this in an ecological way. Balance and harmony were the goals, not the greatest exploitation of the soil. As Mencius said,

“When the soil is poor, things do not grow, and when fishing, is not regulated according to the seasons, then fishes and turtles do not mature; when the climate deteriorates, animal and plant life degenerates, and when the world is chaotic, the rituals and music become licentious. . .”¹¹⁹

A core concept of the Confucians was the connection of the cosmic order and harmony in the social order, the family, and the individual.¹²⁰ Order in the cosmos ultimately relied on the self-cultivation of the individual. This self-cultivation led to the full realization of compassion, which eventually would extend to the whole world.¹²¹

The grand Confucian concept saw the connection in all things. Its most profound expression came in its recognition that the ‘unifying thread’ lay in the same principles being applied to the individual, personal relations, social relations, politics, and cosmic harmony. This connection led to the insight that the harmony of the whole was inextricably linked to the harmony of the individual. The path to universal realization was through personal realization. Confucius particularly saw this as a matter of harmonious relationship of parts. This conceptualization unified heart, jen, yi, tao and the Heavenly Mandate. From the “Liki,” one of the inspiring sources of Confucianism,

“When the four limbs are well developed and the skin is clear and the flesh is full, that is the health of human life. When the parents and children are affectionate, the brothers are good toward one another and the husband and the wife live in harmony, that is the health of the home life. When the higher officials obey the law and the lower officials are clean, the officials have regulated and well-defined functions and the king and the ministers help one another on the right course, that is the health of the national life. When the Emperor rides in the carriage of Virtue, with Music as his driver, when the different rulers meet each other with courtesy, the official regulate each other with law, the scholars urge one another by the standard of honesty, and the people unite with one another in peace, that is the health of the world. This is called the Grand Harmony (ta shun).”¹²²

The Confucian project, which was based on an education of heart, or the development of the best within man starting with the felt sense of compassion, shared much with the project of the Enlightenment, the 18th century European philosophical movement and sensibility. In the enlightenment philosophy, unity was found through the development of the capacity for reason within every individual. This, too, was a humanistic approach. Knowledge of the good and true did not come from the doctrines of an external spiritually-revealed authority, but was within each individual discovered through his or her own powers. Like the Confucian project, it was also normative. It aimed at the optimal realization of the individual and society. The cultivation through

education of the power of reason was intended to create a common sense, a harmonious approach to personal and world affairs, leading to the best possible outcome. As Paul Tillich put it,

“The whole period believed in the principle of "harmony" - harmony being the law of the universe according to which the activities of the individual, however individualistically conceived and performed, lead "behind the back" of the single actor to a harmonious whole, to a truth in which at least a large majority can agree, to a good in which more and more people can participate, to a conformity which is based on the free activity of every individual.”¹²³

Form and Relationship

Though Confucius understood that on the highest level the right behavior emerged from a cultivated access to the moral within, or heart, he propounded that the best way to move toward this realization was an adherence to outward form. This outward form consisted of organized relationships. Confucius’s vision of a world of harmonious relationship was inspired by an idealized past. This came from his high regard for what he considered the “original time” of an anthropocosmic feudal order, where the relations between the different hierarchical levels of society reflected a transcendent order. When kings and subjects, husbands and wives, and sons and fathers were in good relations, all were in harmony with the order in the universe.

I speculate that Confucius held a transitional position in the transformation from mythic culture with its conception of circular time -- a never ending return to a prototypical source and the mythic image of a golden age -- to a modern, linear, progressive, historical conception of time. Even though Confucius used the time of the Chou as a mythic exemplar, his goal was for there to be a factual basis to his theories. Confucius, as an aspect of his being a hermeneuticist, was an early historian.

He adapted what he took from his historical studies and turned it into an innovative method. His method of achieving the order from his model was to adhere to the correct practice of ritual and to participate in music.¹²⁴ The principle of ritual order was called *li*. As Lin Yutang defined it, “Li is the principle of mutual respect and courtesy applied to all aspects of life.”¹²⁵

Li represented the social structures that Confucius believed were necessary to promote the kinds of harmony and balance that would lead to the fruition of the good society. Li determined the proper forms of all relationships: between people and the universe; between rulers and ruled; between those in power; between people at work; between marriage partners, between family members; between friends.¹²⁶ These ordering principles were based on Confucius’s understanding of universal law.

Ancient cultures like the one from which Confucius emerged envisioned time and space in circular, rather than linear, form. The goal was to endlessly return to an ultimate time and location from which new manifestation emerged.¹²⁷ Not only was Confucius’s vision derived from the past, and the social structures an attempt to return to a primal structure, but the rituals were a means of symbolically representing, and so returning to, this original, sacred form. The Confucian project of *li*, laden with ritual as it was, was to return to this culture of *ta’tung*, where everyone was in perfect relationship.

This place of harmonic relationship represents the Confucian ideal. This is what results when “the great Tao prevails.” When we are living according to the Way, all elements are in proper relation. For humanity this means social relations, political relations, family relations, personal relations. Each is in their proper role and proper relation to the other. This results in harmony for all and there is no symptomatic negative

manifestation. All is good with the world when all its relationships are proper. All is shared by all.

Like Harville Hendrix, the great relationship theorist, Confucius puts marriage at the center of this optimal society.¹²⁸ The good marriage becomes the standard for all other relations including between parents and children, and even within the self.

At the pinnacle of this system is the marriage between the emperor and the empress. The sacred marriage, the *heiros gamos*,¹²⁹ is a symbol of a universe in harmonious relation between its parts. The model for all other marriages, and the harmony of the universe, was the royal marriage.

The royal marriage became the ultimate symbol of the fertility of the universe. It is in the symbolic coming together of heaven and earth, the Chinese *yin/yang* principle of complementary opposites comprising a greater whole,¹³⁰ that manifestation occurs. The symbol of unity of the opposites leads to fecundity. This ritual marriage is an archetypal symbol that leads to fruition. The coming together of opposites into harmony is a symbol of respect and love.¹³¹

For Confucius, the royal household is the symbolic model, template, archetype, or exemplar for all family relationships. When the royal house is in order, the realm is in order.

This hierarchical system needs to be reimagined in our historical moment. Now that we understand that the universe is a series of infinite centers connected in a non-hierarchical web from which the whole expands, we discover that we are each king, we are each exemplar and copy. We are a model to be copied and a copy of a model. As such, we each have an individual obligation to develop our own relationship skills to the

utmost, as each relationship contributes in web-like form to the harmony of the universe. As we can grow toward this harmonious relational model, this force of love will glow throughout the web and grow spontaneously and exponentially. We must each act as if we are the sacred, royal spouse. From the Liki:

“The ancient great kings always showed respect or proper consideration to their wives and children in accordance with a proper principle. How can one be disrespectful (or show disregard) toward one's wife since she is the center of the home? And how can one be disrespectful toward one's children, since the children perpetuate the family?”¹³²

The same principles adhere to the relationships of the parts within the self. We must order the parts within the self in good relationship, because this, too, becomes representative of our outward relations. Unless we have self-love and self-respect, the universe will not realize its central purpose.

“A gentleman is always respectful or always shows regard for everything. First of all he is respectful, or shows a pious regard toward himself. How dare he be disrespectful or have no pious regard for himself since the self is a branch of the family line? Not to show regard for one's self is to injure the family, and to injure the family is to injure the root, and when the root is injured, the branches die off. These three things, the relationship toward one's wife, toward one's children and toward one's self, are a symbol of the human relationships among the people. By showing respect for his own self, he teaches the people respect for their selves; by showing regard for his own children, he teaches the people regard for their children; and by showing regard for his own wife, he teaches the people regard for their wives. . . thus harmonious relationships will prevail in the country.”¹³³

Confucius conceptualizes relationships of love and respect as the highest moral attainment. Confucius understood that when people are in their proper relations, then the universe is in harmonic order. When the parts of the self are in their proper relations then the self is in harmonic order. What emerges from this harmonic order is beauty and goodness.

Confucius understood how systems operate. Modern systems theory posits that for healthy systemic functioning, it is necessary for there to be semi-permeable boundaries.¹³⁴ This means that there must be coherence within the system, and distinctness of the parts of that system. Confucius understood the importance of these aspects when he said that in order for there to be harmonious relationships between and within individuals they needed rituals and music, because music unites, while rituals differentiate.¹³⁵

Unity and differentiation are the two aspects of interrelatedness. We are all part of a larger whole, and we are all unique within that whole. The point of our development is to differentiate, to become that which we are meant to become, because in that way we optimally serve our function in the whole.

Both unity and differentiation are necessary for optimal relationships. As Confucius said, “Through union the people come to be friendly toward one another . . . and through differentiation the people come to learn respect for one another.”¹³⁶

Friendliness denotes an affiliative feeling that is necessary for trust and growth. Respect denotes an honoring of “differentness”, and a willingness to enter the world of a uniquely centered other with their own needs, desires, natural interests and aptitudes. With too much differentiation, there is too much distance. With too much unity, there is no distinction. Confucius put it this way. “If music predominates, the social structure becomes too amorphous, and if rituals predominate, social life becomes too cold.”¹³⁷

Confucius then posited unity and differentiation in terms of love and duty. Love is what brings us together, duty is what leads to respect for separateness.

Confucius proclaimed that when there is a proper balance of love, music and unity, then there is social peace. When there is a proper balance of duty, ritual and form, then there are proper respectful relations between all people.

“Music expresses the harmony of the universe, while rituals express the order of the universe. Through harmony all things are influenced, and through order all things have a proper place. Music rises from heaven, while rituals are patterned on the earth. To go beyond these patterns would result in violence and disorder. In order to have the proper rituals and music, we must understand the principles of Heaven and Earth. . .”¹³⁸

Confucius recognized that harmonious relations and peace are dependent on good boundary regulations. In his view, these principles were symbolically taught through music and ritual. Culture, in this view, needs to reflect, model, encourage and teach universal law through providing the appropriate symbolic material.

In this sense, finding the heart, or the achievement of one’s own entelechy, is to find one’s appropriate, unique role in the whole. When we are in harmony with the Heavenly Mandate, there is no conflict between our individual desires, what is good for us as individuals, and what is good for the greater whole. Our individual will separated from this larger purpose leads to destructiveness. A total surrender of individual distinctiveness, which can only happen when we go against the movement of development, leads to corruption and decay of our spirit.¹³⁹

Confucian Politics: Social Order Comes From Self-Cultivation

Confucius’s belief that systemic harmony is the means for living in accordance with nature extended to his view of government. As he said, “The art of government consists in making things right, or putting things in their right places.”¹⁴⁰ The same

principles that guide personal relationships guide government. From this view, the motive of good government is about maintaining good relationships. From the Liki,

“To neglect to show respect is to disregard the personal relationship. Without love, there will be no personal relationship, and without respect, there will be no right relationship. So love and respect are the foundation of government.”¹⁴¹

Circling back to the beginning, the Confucian project was originally intended as one of social reform. The Confucian aim was a social order for the maximum good of all the people. The means to achieve this was the cultivation of the individual leaders in order for them to embody the ideal human qualities. Believing in the intrinsic goodness of people, he asserted that if leaders were benevolent then people would be peaceful. This requires, as far as Mencius is concerned, an embodiment of essence. He tells us, “If you can put heart into your practice you would also be able to renew your state.”¹⁴²

Here we return to the original notion of the Heavenly Mandate. The Confucians asserted that the success of the emperor was dependent on his alignment with universal law as it is lived out by the human being. He believed that the Heavenly Mandate, manifest through the heart, expressed itself through the common will, the *sensus communis*. Specifically, if the leader embodied jen, and ruled from a place of benevolence, this would lead to the good of all. This would lead to the assent of the people as an exemplification of the Heavenly Mandate. If the leaders did not live according to the Way, they would lose dominion. The rejection of a leader by its people indicated the workings of the Heavenly Mandate. As Mencius put it,

“ . . . the human heart constitutes a bridge linking man with Heaven, and there is no more infallible indication of the will of Heaven than the reaction to the ruler of the people in their hearts.”¹⁴⁴

And,

“Heaven did not speak but revealed itself through its acts and deeds. Heaven sees with the eyes of its people; Heaven hears with the ear of its people.”¹⁴⁵

Mencius believed that the measure of the leader was the happiness of the people.

If the people were happy it meant that the ruler was living in accord with the Heavenly Mandate. If the people were not happy, it meant the ruler was out of alignment with universal principle.

We will see in the upcoming section how a notion of centerness is the embodiment of essence. For all to be good within the realm, the king had to embody this centerness. Confucius described it thus, “. . . the king sits in the middle, maintaining calm in his heart, a guardian (or symbol) of the ultimate rightness of things.”¹⁴⁶

With leaders committed to a life of self-cultivation, they would be able to access the compassionate benevolence in their hearts, which they would then extend through their realm. This was not only the way to achieve a happy state, but also the means for the individual ruler to realize their ultimate fulfillment. Here again we see the unity between the individual, social, political, and universal dimensions.

“The ancient rulers considered loving the people as the first thing in their government. Without loving the people, the ruler cannot realize his true self, and without realizing or taking possession of his true self, he cannot establish peace in his land; without peace in his land he cannot enjoy life in conformity with the Heavenly Mandate; and being unable to enjoy life in conformity with the Heavenly Mandate, he cannot live a full life (following the natural order of things).”¹⁴⁷

The Confucianists were strongly against tyranny of all kinds. Their humanistic trust in the nature of the people led them to assert that love would result in the willing participation of the people, and that this would be far more effective than coercive techniques. An example of this from the Confucian Analects presages the central

Mencian notion that an alignment with goodness, which is the natural law of the universe, will lead to good politics.

“The duke Ai asked, saying, 'What should be done in order to secure the submission of the people?' Confucius replied, ‘Advance the upright and set aside the crooked, then the people will submit. Advance the crooked and set aside the upright, then the people will not submit.’”¹⁴⁸

Mencius envisioned the ideal of a people-centered world.¹⁴⁹ Effective government was one where the rulers lived in accord with essence, or heart. This essence, in his view, was compassion, an unwillingness to cause pain. As Huang described it, “The spontaneous sensitivity to others suffering lies at the root of being a true king.”¹⁵⁰

Mencius believed that people respond to nurturing care, and not the imposition of oppressive force. The way to gain the assent of the people was to appeal through virtue. To quote, “When people submit to force they do so not willingly but because they are not strong enough. When people submit to the transforming influence of virtue they do so sincerely, with admiration in their hearts. . . .”¹⁵¹

Mencius did not believe in a sacrifice of wealth. Instead, he believed in the simple rule of sharing. If leaders acted from a place of greed, they would suffer. If they shared their largesse with all, where the well-being of all held a primary place over individual advantage, then all would benefit.¹⁵² As Mencius put it, “. . . if you shared your enjoyment with the people, you would be a true king.”¹⁵³

True success for the leader was based on how much of themselves they were willing to give. This required self-cultivation, the development of their innate compassion, which was located in their hearts. With cultivation this innate potential could be expanded to all beings.¹⁵⁴

The ultimate purpose of benevolent government was to promote harmonious relationships within the family. By creating these cultural conditions from above, the family could also operate from their heart of compassion. Ideal politics led to domestic satisfaction.¹⁵⁵

In Mencius's eyes, people's families are the state writ small, and the state is the family writ large. When the state and family are both run according to the heart, and are in alignment with the Heavenly Mandate, both prosper. Both will fail if one or the other is not run according to the universal principle of cultivation and compassion. The state will surely fall if it fails to support family welfare. Brutalizing people's families bludgeons the state to death. Noting the ultimate fate of all tyrannies, history has proved Mencius right.

The way to accomplish the good state was for the ruler to devote his total being to caring for the people and doing nothing else, and thereby finding joy in such nurturing, as parents naturally do for their children.¹⁵⁶

Mencius's view is that caring for others should be at the center of our culture -- not profit or wealth. Rulers should care for their people, parents for their children, children for their parents, partners for each other. The purpose of the state was to create the optimal conditions for this to be possible. The measure of the state was the welfare of its people.¹⁵⁷ The single most important attribute of the great leader was to love those they ruled.¹⁵⁸

In the Chou, Confucian, and Mencian view, the loss of empire was the natural result of living out of harmony with the mandate of heaven. When leaders did not cultivate and live from their hearts, they lived against natural law, that is, immorally.

Inevitably, they would lose their power as a result. Mencius's argument was to convince leaders to live an exemplary life in order to maintain their power. Leaders needed to lead from compassion in order to sustain their dominion.

Endnotes

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- ¹. Yutang, 287.
 - ². Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 290.
 - ³. *Ibid.*, 301.
 - ⁴. Lau, 168.
 - ⁵. Yutang, 126.
 - ⁶. Mencius, *Mencius* trans. W.A.C.H. Dobson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1963), xii.
 - ⁷. Dobson, xi.
 - ⁸. Lau, vii.
 - ⁹. *Ibid.*, 168.
 - ¹⁰. Huang, 6.
 - ¹¹. Lau, xlvii.
 - ¹². Yutang, 275.
 - ¹³. Lau, viii.
 - ¹⁴. *Ibid.*, xi-xii.
 - ¹⁵. Koller, 203.
 - ¹⁶. Huang, 23.
 - ¹⁷. Lau, xi; Koller, 206-207.
 - ¹⁸. Yutang, xiii.
 - ¹⁹. Koller, 203-206.
 - ²⁰. Yutang, 3-4.
 - ²¹. Lau, viii.
 - ²². Legge, 137.
 - ²³. Koller, 197-200.
 - ²⁴. Walter Veazie. *Empedocles' Psychological Doctrine in Its Original and in Its Traditional Setting* by *The Classical Weekly*, Vol. 17, No. 7 (Nov. 19, 1923), pp. 51-53; <http://www.jstor.org/pss/30107786> (accessed March 12, 2010).
 - ²⁵. Lau, 90.
 - ²⁷. Yutang, 161.
 - ²⁸. Koller, 201-202.
 - ²⁹. Lau, xi- xii.
 - ³⁰. Legge, 195.
 - ³¹. Legge, 1.
 - ³². *Ibid.*
 - ³³. Yutang, 44; Andrew Plaks and Xinzhong Yao, *Ta Hsüeh* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2003), vii-viii.
 - ³⁴. Huang, 239.
 - ³⁶. *Ibid.*, 1.
 - ³⁷. *Ibid.*, 2.
 - ³⁸. Plaks.
 - ³⁹. Legge.
 - ⁴⁰. Yutang, 135.
 - ⁴¹. Plaks.
 - ⁴². Legge.

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43. Ibid., 2.
 44. Yutang, 155.
 45. Ibid., 41.
 46. Ibid., 15.
 47. Lau, xxxv.
 48. Huang, 23.
 49. Koller, 197-200.
 50. Rychlak, 427-430.
 51. Thomas Bulfinch, *Bulfinch's Mythology* (New York: Modern Library, 1998), 15-20.
 52. Eliade, *Return*, 49.
 53. Lau, xii.
 54. Ibid.; Koller, 213.
 55. Tillich, 83.
 56. "Normative Ethics," *Wikipedia The Free Encyclopedia*,
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Normative ethics](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Normative_ethics), (accessed, January 5, 2010).
 57. Koller, 212- 219.
 58. Legge, 150.
 59. Ibid., 168.
 60. Yutang, 131.
 61. Ibid., 186.
 62. Ibid., 187.
 63. Ibid., 189.
 64. Ibid., 192.
 65. Carl Jung, *Concerning Mandala Symbolism*, (Zurich, 1950), 77 from
<http://www.netreach.net/~nhojem/jung.htm> (accessed March 29, 2010).
 66. Huang, 19.
 67. Ibid., 6-18.
 68. Tillich, 5.
 69. Yutang, 3; Koller, 203.
 70. Yutang, 21.
 71. Lau, xli -xlvi.
 72. Huang, 21.
 73. Plaks, xv.
 74. Lau, 94.
 75. Ibid., 78.
 76. Ibid., 79.
 77. Yutang, 24.
 78. Legge, 200.
 79. Ibid., 161.
 80. Ibid.
 81. Ibid.
 82. Huang, 19.
 83. Ibid., vii-viii.
 84. Ibid., 102.
 85. Ibid., 234.

⁸⁶. These arguments have continued unabated throughout history. In the Judeo/Christian view we are sinners. After Adam's disobedience we fell and are now irredeemable. For Christians, our only hope is grace and the sacrifice of Jesus which forces God to forgive us and accept us in our fallen state. Our only hope is transcendence of natural law so that God does not condemn us totally for our evil nature. The arguments continued into the Romantic Era of Europe, where a humanist like Charles Godwin believed that man's essence was good, and that if the distortions of parenting and society could be eliminated, people would naturally be good. Malthus, on the other side, believed that man was essentially a sinner. The existential fear is not that we are bad, but that we are neither good nor bad and are anything as a possibility of our own creation.

⁸⁷. Lau, xii.

⁸⁸. Huang, 205.

⁸⁹. Lau, 122.

⁹⁰. Ibid.

⁹¹. Yutang, 275.

⁹². "Xun Zi," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Xun_Zi, (accessed January 15, 2008).

⁹³. Lau, xx.

⁹⁴. Ibid., xiii.

⁹⁵. Ibid., 207-208.

⁹⁶. In our contemporary view, this imposition of external controls is the beginning of toxic shame.

⁹⁷. Yutang, 281.

⁹⁸. Huang, 222.

⁹⁹. Ibid., 223.

¹⁰⁰. "Gestalt Cycle," *The Change Zone*, <http://www.changezone.co.uk/STEVE/gestalt.html>, (accessed January 15, 2010).

¹⁰¹. Tai Chen quoted in Huang, 225.

¹⁰². Huang, 224.

¹⁰³. Lau, 125-126.

¹⁰⁴. Ibid.

¹⁰⁵. Huang, 20.

¹⁰⁶. Yutang, 275.

¹⁰⁷. Lau, 105.

¹⁰⁸. Ibid., xiii.

¹⁰⁹. "Stoicism," *Wikipedia The Free Encyclopedia*, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stoicism> (accessed January 22, 2010).

¹¹⁰. Tillich, 10-12.

¹¹¹. Huang, 201.

¹¹². Yutang, 183.

¹¹³. Huang, 117.

¹¹⁴. Lau, 82-83.

¹¹⁵. Ibid., xlvii.

¹¹⁶. Huang, 19.

¹¹⁷. Koller, 231-248.

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118. Ibid., 206.
119. Yutang, 262.
120. Ibid., 22.
121. Yutang, 23; Plaks, 136.
122. Yutang, 239-240.
123. Tillich, 114-115.
124. Yutang, 14.
125. Ibid., 214.
126. Ibid., 217.
127. Eliade, *Return*, 49.
128. Harville Hendrix, personal communication July, 2008.
129. "Heiros Gamos," *Wikipedia the Free Encyclopedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hieros_gamos (accessed January 22, 2010).
130. "Yin and Yang," *Wikipedia the Free Encyclopedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yin_and_yang (accessed May 18, 2010).
131. Yutang, 220-221.
132. Ibid., 222.
133. Ibid., 222.
134. Craig Anne Heflinger and Carol T. Nixon "Families and the mental health system for children and adolescents: policy, services, and research" *Volume 2 of Children's mental health services*. (Newbury Park: SAGE, 1996), 132.
135. Yutang, 258-261.
136. Ibid.
137. Ibid.
138. Ibid.
139. Ibid., 262.
140. Yutang, 219.
141. Ibid., 220.
142. Lau, 56.
144. Ibid., xli.
145. Ibid., 105.
146. Yutang, 237.
147. Ibid., 223.
148. Legge, 152.
149. Huang, 7.
150. Ibid., 35-37.
151. Ibid., 82.
152. Ibid., 66.
153. Lau, 16.
154. Huang, 38.
155. Ibid., 88.
156. Ibid., 89.
157. Ibid., 90.
158. Ibid., 220.

PART THREE: WHAT IS THE HEART?

CHAPTER 6 THE HISTORY OF THE HEART

The first question that the Mencius text invites us to ask is: what is the heart?

Around the time that the Sage, Mencius, lived, a great stirring was occurring in the hearts of humankind. German philosopher Karl Jaspers (1883-1969) referred to this time as the Axial Age, where axial means pivotal.¹ Masters of wisdom appeared in India and Greece. With the appearance of Confucius and the writers of the Chinese Classics, *The Four Books*, these sages appeared in Mencius's home land, China, as well. It was the time of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Lao-Tzu, Buddha, the Indian writers of the *Upanishads* and the *Bhagavad-Gita*, and Isaiah of the Old Testament, among others. Civilization was flowering. Some of the world's greatest thinking emerged on the nature of the ultimate realities, all contributing to the liberation of the human spirit.

A central contribution of Mencius to this understanding was his notion of heart. But Mencius was not alone in this conception. When we explore the writings of the masters in other cultures, we discover an amazing fact. The symbol of the heart spans the globe. It has been of monumental significance since man could contemplate the ineffable and the existence of the immaterial in virtually every culture, religion and philosophy. From the beginning of conscious man recording his experiences, beliefs, thoughts and feelings in a sophisticated and organized way, he has attempted to convey something essential about himself and the cosmos through the metaphor of the heart. As it appeared

virtually simultaneously with writing itself, we can surmise that this symbolic image emerged with the dawn of thought.

Before reviewing the teachings of our Sage, his forbears and his disciples on the heart, we will illuminate the meaning of this symbol through the use of wisdom texts from this world-history of heart-ideas.

Definitions of the Heart

From earliest times, humankind has located soul, spirit, Self, conscience, thought, feeling, compassion, passion, the eternal and God within this place called the heart.

Though we no longer live in a heart-centered world, the heart remains a numinous symbol, that is, one that has a spiritual quality that appeals to a higher sense. This image pervades our world and still contains many of the meanings that Mencius and other ancient wise ones gave to it. In our exploration of the history of the symbol of the heart, let us begin with some of the contemporary definitions we find in our dictionaries. In *Webster's Revised Unabridged*, some of the meanings include:

“The nearest the middle or center; the part most hidden and within; the inmost or most essential part of any body or system; the source of life and motion in any organization; the chief or vital portion; the center of activity, or of energetic or efficient action; as, the heart of a country, of a tree, etc.”

“Vital part; secret meaning; real intention.”

“The seat of the affections or sensibilities, collectively or separately, as love, hate, joy, grief, courage, and the like; rarely, the seat of the understanding or will; -- usually in a good sense, when no epithet is expressed; the better or lovelier part of our nature; the spring of all our actions and purposes; the seat of moral life and character; the moral affections and character itself; the individual disposition and character; as, a good, tender, loving, bad, hard, or selfish heart.”²

The *Concise Oxford Thesaurus* includes:

“EMOTIONS, feelings, sentiments; soul, mind, bosom, breast; love, affection, passion.

“COMPASSION, sympathy, humanity, feeling(s), fellow feeling, brotherly love, tenderness, empathy, understanding; kindness, goodwill.

“ENTHUSIASM, keenness, eagerness, spirit, determination, resolve, purpose, courage, nerve, will power, fortitude; informal guts, spunk;

“CENTRE, middle, hub, core, nucleus, eye, bosom.

“ESSENCE, crux, core, nub, root, gist, meat, marrow, pith, substance, kernel; informal nitty-gritty.

“COURAGE, cojones, dauntlessness, guts, mettle, moxie, pluck, resolution, spirit, spunk, chutzpah.”³

The Heart in Ancient Civilizations

Historically, the heart was the singular metaphor for what was essential about being human. Besides its physical purposes, it was thought of as the “vital center of being, (the) seat of understanding, memory, and the passions, a sort of microcosm of the self.”⁴

Whether we look to ancient Egypt, Babylon, or Greece, we find that the heart was a sacred symbol. In Egypt it was associated with the god, Horus. In Babylon it was associated with the god, Bel, and in Greece with Bacchus.⁵

Long before Mencius wrote his immortal words, the ancient Egyptians considered the heart to be the core of the soul and the seat of emotion, mind, thought and psyche. When a person died, their heart was weighed in the scales against the feather of *maat*, the principle of truth and justice. If the heart was found to be free of wrongdoing, the person would continue to exist for all time.⁶ The heart was then returned to the body. It was the only part of the viscera left by the Egyptians in the mummy, since it was regarded as the indispensable part of the body in eternity.⁷

We find the heart mentioned in the writings of the Egyptian, *Ptahhotep*, the wise vizier who counseled the Pharaoh over 4000 years ago:

“He who listens is beloved of god,
 He who does not listen is hated by god.
 It is the heart which makes of its owner
 A listener or a non-listener.”⁸

Here we see the intimate relationship of listening and heart. What we will see in our exploration of how to find the heart, and related to the method of yantric hermeneutics utilized in this and future works, is that in order to find the heart, we need to listen within, listen to the words of the great explorers of self, listen to nature, listen to the divine, and listen in relationship to others.

The heart appeared in the Hindu classics, *The Rig Veda*, written as early as 3700 years ago and *The Upanishads* and *The Bhagavad-Gita* which herald mostly from the great awakening of 2500 years ago. These are the classic wisdom texts of India from which its great spiritual understandings flow. They, too, saw the importance of listening as a means of reaching the heart, which is our source of happiness. “When a man has heard and has understood and, finding the essence, reaches the Inmost, there he finds joy in the Source of joy.”⁹

To these writers, the heart is the unknowable place where the universe is realized in the Self:

“In the centre of the castle of Brahman, our own body, there is a small shrine in the form of a lotus-flower, and within can be found a small space. We should find who dwells there, and we should want to know him. And if anyone asks, 'Who is he who dwells in a small shrine in the form of a lotus-flower in the centre of the castle of Brahman? Whom should we want to find and to know' we can answer: The little space within the heart is as great as this vast universe. The heavens and the earth are there, and the sun, and the moon, and the stars; fire and lightning and winds are there; and all that now is and all that is not: for the whole universe is in Him and He dwells within our heart.”¹⁰

The symbol of the heart appeared across the world in Greece in the writings of the immortal Greek philosopher, Aristotle, who lived from 384BC- 322BC. He said that the

soul was located in the heart, which was the “acropolis of the body,”¹¹ the center from which everything flowed. He saw the heart as “the locus of spiritual refinement of the vital spirits, as well as the place where the imagination makes its impression available to the intellectual faculty.”¹²

In other words, our central human capacity for imagination, which is the well-spring of our ability for symbolization, dialectics, and moral thinking, is attributed to the heart.

Though Mencius, a contemporary of Aristotle, was the great Chinese philosopher of the heart, or *hsin*, it was widely considered to be the seat of the intelligence and emotions throughout Asia and is one of the Buddha's Eight Precious Organs.¹³

For the Buddhists, whose doctrines also became popular in the period following the great awakening, the heart was the origin of all: “All things are the result of the heart.”¹⁴

Kundalini Yoga, the ancient Indian science that aims for the development of higher consciousness,¹⁵ conceives that there are a number of centers of archetypal being and potential located within the person called *chakras*. The fourth *chakra*, or *anahata*, is the *chakra* of the heart. The heart was believed to be the seat in the body of buddhic, spiritual consciousness. It is the guiding, and most important, part of the body. Its cultivation leads to spiritual realization and unity.¹⁶ Found in the *anahata* is the divine self, called the *purusa*. Jung says that here you find the self beyond ego, the source of individuation.¹⁷

A classic meditation *mantra*, which is a phrase that is repeated over and over again by the disciple in order to bring about a shift in consciousness, shows the centrality

of the heart in this philosophy, where the meaning of the *mantra* is that the sacred is made manifest in us through our center, our heart. As the contemporary spiritual teacher, Baba Ram Dass (b. 1931) explained it in his inimitable style,

“One of the ways of understanding (the meaning of OM mani padme hum) is that OM means, like Brahma, that which is behind it all, the unmanifest Mani means jewel or crystal. Padme means lotus and hum means heart. So, on one level what it means is the entire universe is just like a pure jewel or crystal right in the heart or the center of the lotus flower, which is me, and it is manifest, it comes forth in light, in manifest light, in my own heart. That's one way of interpreting it. You start to say OM mani padme hum and you're thinking "God in unmanifest form is like a jewel in the middle of the lotus, manifest in my heart." You go through that and feel it in your heart - that's one trip.”¹⁸

The heart held a central importance in the Hebraic tradition, found primarily through the Old Testament of the Bible where it is named over a thousand times. It was defined as being the home of “. . . the innermost self, including conscience, memory, and volition.”¹⁹ In a quote from Deuteronomy which is at least 2700 years old, God says to the Israelites: “these words which I command you this day shall be upon your heart.”²⁰ In a passage from Jeremiah which was written about 600 BCE, God puts the law in his people’s hearts by writing it there: “This is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts. . .” In this sense, the heart is the internal home of the law.²¹

In Easton’s *Bible Dictionary*, the Biblical heart is described as “the centre not only of spiritual activity, but of all the operations of human life.” The heart is the “home of the personal life,” and hence a man is designated, according to his heart, “wise (1 Kings 3:12, etc.), pure (Ps. 24:4; Matt. 5:8, etc.), upright and righteous (Gen. 20:5, 6; Ps. 11:2; 78:72), pious and good (Luke 8:15), etc. The heart is also the seat of the conscience

(Rom. 2:15).”²² Easton makes a point to distinguish the heart in these senses, from the soul.

Significantly, the heart, from the beginning of these Biblical texts, is considered

“ . . . naturally wicked (Gen. 8:21), and hence it contaminates the whole life and character (Matt. 12:34; 15:18; comp. Eccl. 8:11; Ps. 73:7). Hence the heart must be changed, regenerated (Ezek. 36:26; 11:19; Ps. 51:10-14), before a man can willingly obey God. The process of salvation begins in the heart by the believing reception of the testimony of God, while the rejection of that testimony hardens the heart (Ps. 95:8; Prov. 28:14; 2 Chr. 36:13).”²⁴

This is in contrast to the Mencian and humanistic view that avows that humans are intrinsically good. From this perspective, the finding of the heart is a return to a natural way of being. In this view, people do not need to be changed, they need, instead to “become” what they in actuality “are.” In addition, no external intercession by a divine authority is necessary.

As many perspectives can be interpreted in the Bible, this negative view is somewhat contradicted elsewhere in Deuteronomy, where it was stated that it was possible to know and follow the commandments of God because the law was not something that came from outside of us but was intimately connected to who we were. It was as close as the heart:

“Surely, this commandment that I am commanding you today is not too hard for you, nor is it too far away. It is not in heaven, that you should say, “Who will go up to heaven for us, and get it for us so that we may hear it and observe it?” Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, “Who will cross to the other side of the sea for us so that we may hear it and observe it?” No, the word is very near to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe.”²⁵

In the classical Latin world, the word heart was *cor*, where we find the etymology of heart as *core*. In this civilization the heart was a symbol for thought, memory, mind,

soul, and spirit, as well as for the seat of intelligence, volition, character, and the emotions. These meanings passed into the Christian world and the Romance languages.²⁶

We find the metaphor of the heart as the center of humanness in the writings of the early Christian, Paul the Apostle (3-8 – 62-68).²⁷ He saw the heart as the home of a person's thinking, feeling, and acting being.²⁸

Paul suggests an awareness of interiority, a sense of some whole, inmost self. In other words, for there to be an inmost self, there needs to be a concept of a human 'inside,' and a dimensionality to this insidiness, where there is an ultimate location at the center of this interior which he calls the heart. The heart becomes a symbol, the unlocatable location of the ideal, as we naturally are able to conceive of it, and this is in relation to our personal experience which falls short of this ideal.

When Paul says, "I delight to do thy will, O my God; thy law is within my heart,"²⁹ this relates to the Mencian notion of heart as the place where human nature and universal law, where heaven and earth, find their point of meeting.

For Paul, the inner law is exemplified or known through conscience. For Mencius, the universal law that is known through the heart is the exquisite suffering of knowing the suffering of others, or empathy. We can see here the difference in the Paulist Christian view (which is in variance with the teachings of Jesus himself, whose message was unconditional love) which is built on guilt, versus the Mencian humanism, which is built on humaneness, or love.

As Paul connects heart to sin, the main difference between his Christian conception and the Mencian one is the same difference between Mencius and his opponent, Hsun Tzu, who believed that humans are essentially bad. For Paul, we sin,

erasing the knowledge of universal good, or God, and we need to have the heart cleansed. For Mencius, we are good and we lose contact with this original nature as a result of poor cultivation. Mencius believes in an ontological goodness and that our behavior is not a reflection of our essence. For Paul, the opposite is the case and leads to concepts such as badness, conscience, shame and sin.³⁰

The *Gnostics*, a diverse group of religious sects that thrived around 2000 years ago, believed that salvation would come if they found *gnosis kardia*, knowledge of the heart, a state of conscious insight whereby one knows deep in one's heart, that one is “in the world, but not of this world.”³¹

The heart held a central meaning throughout the tradition of esoteric belief systems. In these systems, the heart is the “divinity behind and above and within the physical vehicle . . .”³² To quote from *A Dictionary of Symbols* by Juan Eduardo Cirlot and translated by Jack Sage,

“For the alchemists, the heart was the image of the sun within man, just as gold was the image of the sun on earth. The importance of love in the mystic doctrine of unity explains how it is that love-symbolism came to be closely linked with heart-symbolism, for to love is only to experience a force which urges the lover towards a given centre. In emblems, then, the heart signifies love as the centre of illumination and happiness, and this is why it is surmounted by flames, or a cross, or a fleur-de-lis, or a crown.”³³

The heart had its place in the Muslim world as well. The heart appears hundreds of times in *The Qu'ran*, the central religious text of Islam. The heart is most often referred to as covered, hardened, or diseased and needing to be healed, in the sense of coming to believe in Allah.³⁴ The central symbol for the *Sufis* -- a mystic order of *Islam* which began to emerge around the year 700 CE and became the dominant Islamic

approach for the next 1200 years³⁵ -- is a heart with wings.³⁶ *Hazrat Inayat Khan*, (1882 – 1927) the sect's great leader said,

“If anybody asks you, ‘What is Sufism? What religion is it?’ you may answer: ‘Sufism is the religion of the heart, the religion in which the most important thing is to seek God in the heart of mankind.’”³⁷

The Christian and Medieval Heart

The heart as a metaphor had a tremendous presence and meaning throughout Christian and European Medieval history. In this iteration, as Eric Jager, scholar and author of *The Book of the Heart*, reveals, there was a strong relationship between the heart and the book. The heart was the source of exegesis, or the process of interpretation that led to a comprehension of the divine, or the hermeneutic discovery of meaning hidden in depth.³⁸ This takes us back to the notion that the hermeneutic method of this work is intrinsically related to its theme of heart, and that the realization of the self emerges from the finding of the heart. Here there is no separation: the heart is the book of the self that needs to be read phenomenologically and interpreted hermeneutically. It is an experiencing of the heart that leads to its self-revelation. This offers us a renewed definition of the psychotherapeutic process, where an individual brings their life and inscrutable behaviors to us as a book, for us to open, read, resonantly experience and symbolically interpret.

The heart was thought of by early Christians as the repository of our ingrained habits and our acts. The experience of conscience measured the distance between our acts and God's law. This history of conscience held in the heart is meant to be examined and known as the way to become closer to God's will. This travels all the way back to the

Egyptian concept of the heart's cleanliness from sin being its means for achieving eternal existence.

The early Christian sage, Origen of Alexandria (185-254 CE),³⁹ said that, "Our heart shall be made known to all rational creatures, and all hidden things revealed. . . The books (of our deeds and our conscience about them) are rolled up and hidden in the heart."⁴⁰

The process of a complete reorientation of personality known as religious conversion required not only an examination of the heart and its historical contents, but an erasing of the previous way of being and a rewriting of the story of the self.⁴¹

Ambrose (339-397), a bishop of Milan who is considered one of the four doctors of the Church,⁴² treated the heart as a secret, hidden place that held the concealed quality of the "inner man."⁴³ This parallels Mencius's notion that the heart can be lost, and that without a process of searching, the essence remains out of our grasp.

Of all the early Christians, the most important in our history of the heart was St. Augustine (354 – 430), who "transformed the entire consciousness of the Western world."⁴⁴ The heart was central in his works and a flaming heart is his attribute.⁴⁵

He believed that God himself was within the heart, the place where "truth is loved." He named the heart as the location of one's essential being, saying, "My heart is where I am whatever I am."⁴⁶ He also intuited the lost heart, and the need to find it again as a means of reuniting with the divine:

"Behold where he is: it is wherever truth is known. He is within our very hearts, but our hearts have strayed far from him. Return, you transgressors, to the heart, and cling to him who made you."⁴⁷

If Paul was an early Christian explorer of interiority, Augustine was its greatest exemplar. As Jager puts it, “For Augustine, the inner person and interior life were centered in the “heart,” understood in its biblical sense as the moral and spiritual core of the human being.”⁴⁸ Augustine agreed with the other great explorers of the heart who saw it as the center of thinking, feeling, action, imagination and love. He called it, “the indivisible, authentic center of human life” and “the place of interiority and religious experience, which defines individuality. . .”⁴⁹

The *codex*, the original handwritten books that first appeared in the Western world in late antiquity and were the source of exegetic meditation for those of Augustine’s time on, were also seen symbolically as related to the heart. As a container having an interior and an exterior and as an enclosure that could be opened and closed, the codex embodied notions of the heart’s “visible” and “invisible” parts, its “exterior” and “interior.”⁵⁰

Augustine’s greatest work, his *Confessions*, describes the story of the finding of his lost heart.⁵¹ This culminates in the discovery of the hermeneutic process of self-cultivation which is the core descriptor of the method of this work. It begins with the resonance to a yantric symbol, which he finds in a Biblical quote. Through this revelatory reading he recognizes that this truth exists within him, in his heart. This then becomes the impetus for him to explore truth in exegesis of the works of past explorers of the heart, which for him exist in Scripture. Finally this leads him to go into his own heart and express his own version of the truth of the heart.

Augustine’s penetrating psychological story also shows us the struggle that emerges from the divided and conflicted aspects of the self. To summarize, Augustine

cognitively understood the nature of good behavior and that his behavior was wrong. However, he knew that if he behaved in the good way, it would be hypocritical, because the behavior would extend from an external understanding, and not from the central location of his heart. He could do the right thing, but as the telling cliché puts it, his “heart wouldn’t be in it.” He struggled until he found a way for his behavior to come from his authentic being and therefore without struggle.

Augustine’s final stage of unifying the aspects of his being is in his telling of his story, the third part of his hermeneutical process. This is a process of “recording.” In this remembering, retelling, and making manifest, we see within the word a process of returning (re) to heart (cor). To re-cord is to find the lost heart.

This retrospective self-exploration model is central to the therapeutic one, and was not only followed throughout Western history but is found concretized in the 12 steps of the Alcoholics Anonymous process. We use our own life as the text for interpretation and for contributing to a *bildung*, a cultural legacy of universal development.

This tradition was carried on throughout the monastic and scholastic writings of Christianity in the dark ages. They too, saw the heart as hidden. Central to a process of spiritual development was introspection, which implies a going into an interior self.⁵² We see this in the work of the scholar and poet, Alcuin of York (732-804), who spoke of “the secret chamber of your heart.”⁵³

Like the Indians of the Upanishads, French poet, diplomat, and scholar Peter of Blois (1135-1212) understood that the heart is ultimately unknowable when he said, “Deep and unsearchable is the heart of man, and how can one know it?”⁵⁴

The saints often had visions that included the heart and Christian sects manifested symbolic imagery that included the heart. St Teresa of Avila (1515- 1582) experienced a vision of an angel piercing her heart with a flaming arrow.⁵⁵ A heart with a crown of thorns is the emblem of the Jesuits and their founder, Ignatius of Loyola (1491 – 1556).⁵⁶ The “sacred heart” has widely been an object of devotion from the 17th century, when it became represented by a heart pierced by the nails of the cross and encircled with the crown of thorns.⁵⁷

In contemporary usage, one of the primary symbolic meanings of heart is ardor, either religious and spiritual or profane and sexual.⁵⁸ This second aspect emerged in European medieval times when the heart began to be thought of not only as a place of spiritual discovery, but as the place of erotic, romantic, idealized, secular love. This marked a return to classic themes, from the times of the Romans. Ovid, a pagan writing 2000 years ago in his *Amores*, wrote of the heart as the suffering place of passion.

“That’s it: a slender arrow sticks fast in my heart,
And cruel Love lives there, in my conquered breast.”⁵⁹

This expansion of the concept of heart was begun with Andreas Cappelanus (d. 1188) the author of the treatise “De Amore” or “About Love.” This led to a great explosion in the works of the troubadours and medieval poets. These poets used the heart as a metaphor for the sexual parts of the body, as the heart embodied one’s romantic love and sexuality.⁶⁰

The medieval notion of the romantic heart, as it was first promoted by the troubadours in the 1200’s, is the place of our greatest emotional sensitivity, our compassion transformed into the reverential devotion to another human being taken as the sacred on earth. As such, the beloved is worthy of the highest treatment. That

exquisite emotional quality is the expression of the heart. As the Poet, Sordello, (1200-1270) wrote,

“Love engraved
Your features in an image
Cut deeply into my heart,
And so I’ve handed myself over,
To do whatever pleases you,
Finely and firmly throughout my life.”⁶¹

The heart became interchangeable with the image of the beloved. One possible interpretation of this image is as a representation of the Jungian archetype of *anima*. In Jung’s view the anima is a primary archetype within men. It is symbolized as a woman who holds an uncanny, spiritual feeling. This archetype represents all of the opposite, or feminine, aspects of the male psyche of which the individual remains least aware, or reside in what Jung would call the unconscious. It holds all of the potential for men to grow beyond their masculine ego-identifications. For example, if a man sees himself as rational, concrete, and empirical, the appearance of this numinous, contrasexual figure may represent the need of the psyche to rebalance toward the emotional, spiritual, and subjective. Some classic examples of anima symbols from literature include Dante’s figure of Beatrice, and Ayesha, “she who must be obeyed” from the novel by H. Rider Haggard called “She.”⁶² The erotic object, the loved one, is a projected spiritualized ideal that “resides” inwardly in the heart and gets projected onto the other. The inward possession of idealized love and the outward manifestation in the other are mirror images of the realization of the heart, what we are meant to be.

Contemporary marriage theorist and counselor, Harville Hendrix returns to this romantic ideal. In his view, our own healing comes through a devotion to the needs of our marriage partner. In his innovation, this is a mutual commitment between the partners.

When both partners live from their hearts in this sense, both get their needs met, and both grow maximally spiritually.⁶³ This presumably new kind of spirituality harkens back to this age of courtly love, when there was a secular religion of romantic love. The heart was inscribed with the devotion to the beloved for all the days of one's life.

This notion of the love of the heart brings the sacred and secular together. The interchange between spiritual and erotic love has a long history that continues to this day. For us, the strains of sweet soul music emerged from the cadences of gospel. The love of God or a person is interchangeable in popular music. If we listen, for example, to the music of the popular artist, Prince, we see that God and sex are still kinky bedfellows. Tantric practices, a school of yoga, unite the sexual and the sacred.⁶⁴

With this turn toward the romantic, as we find beginning in Ovid, the heart is a place of suffering. The heart is wounded, broken, lost. As we now see the heart as the home of our most precious aspects, we can understand the lost heart as the protected heart. We put our heart into hiding in order to protect these most elevated aspects of the self: the original, nobly loving, refined, giving, divine, innocent, foolish, aspects of the self, which risk destruction and loss in a lost-hearted world.

The Heart Since the Renaissance

Beginning with the 1400's the practice of finding the heart spread from the monk, troubadour, and saint to the common person. The folk were encouraged to look to their own hearts for their source of spirituality.⁶⁵ All of this suggested a movement toward the humanistic, that is, a looking within oneself, rather than to an outside authority, for the

source of knowing. This suggests a motion toward an immanence theory, an awareness of a divine presence within all materiality.⁶⁶

As we entered the Renaissance, the humanistic project took hold in Europe. The meaning of heart advanced toward the Mencian concept. Men like Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463–1494) who was an Italian Renaissance philosopher and the writer of *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, known as the manifesto of the Renaissance,⁶⁷ Leonardo da Vinci, and Giordano Bruno (1548–1600)⁶⁸ who asserted that the sun was one of countless stars, were among the transcendental humanists who “were inspired by the idea of a participation in the creative process of the universe. In these men enthusiasm and rationality were united.”⁶⁹ The goal of these men became the realization of our infinite potentials. Finding commonality with the Confucians, people were seen as,

“... the microcosm, in whom all cosmic forces are potentially present, and who participates in all spheres and strata of the universe. Through him the universe continues the creative process which first has produced him as the aim and the center of the creation. Now man has to shape his world and himself, according to the productive powers given to him. In him nature comes to its fulfillment. . .”⁷⁰

The doctrine of the individual as the microcosmic participant in the creative process of the macrocosm presented these philosophers with the possibility of this synthesis.⁷¹ This place where the individual and universal merged is represented by the heart.

The philosopher Spinoza, who lived in the 17th century, furthered our understanding of heart without naming it as such. He saw that the essence of a thing was its *conatus*, or striving toward being that which it is.⁷² To put it another way, the striving is the thing itself, for when it goes, so does the thing.

This thing that strives to be what it is, the heart, is the home of entelechy. It is where the blueprint is written and it is the motor for pushing toward realization of one's essence.

For Mencius, our commonality was found in the “taste” of the heart for goodness. This common receptivity to the quality of goodness leads to a universal capacity for compassion, which, when cultivated to its ultimate manifestation, gives one a natural inclination to the right. In the Enlightenment, it was believed that commonality would be found in rationality. Scientific education would bring us to our common source that would lead to the greatest good.⁷³ Such ideas marked the beginning of the end of the symbolic power of the heart and its method of self-actualization. The passion for self-creation as the manifestation of the universal will waned.⁷⁴

This European world of the 17th century saw the ascendancy of empiricism. With the advent of such highly influential British empirical philosophers John Locke (1632-1704) and David Hume (1711-1776) the home of thinking and the center of our being was moved to the head, brain, mind.⁷⁵ The philosophy of Thomas Hobbes (1588 -1679), struck a blow against the humanist view that the individual was the center of morality and goodness. His vision not only moved away from heart-centeredness, but toward a grim view of humanity. In his masterwork “Leviathan,” he promoted the belief that human beings were inherently selfish and destructive and could only be made cooperative through the firm hand of obedience to a strong central authoritarian government.⁷⁶

However, in our dialectical world, the heart view continued to be asserted by an enlightened few. A central critic of the Enlightenment glorification of intellect and reason was the Genevois philosopher, writer and composer, Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-

1778). In precise harmony with Mencius's notion of the human taste for goodness, Rousseau also pointed to the endless examples of a natural sympathy that humans feel for the suffering of others as a proof of their natural, intrinsic moral nature.⁷⁷ He believed that the true philosophy of happiness was not to be found through a process of thinking, but came through listening with our heart, where our virtues were naturally engraved.⁷⁸

Anthony Ashley Cooper, 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury (1671-1713), was an English politician, philosopher, and writer who had a powerful influence on the 18th Century. Like the Confucians, he asserted that man's goal and capability was to find harmony within himself and with the universe. He did not believe, like Hobbes, that we were merely a collection of selfish, egoistical, destructive appetites, but rather our desires were a good part of ourselves and could be in harmony with the whole. He also, like Mencius, believed in what his successors, Hutcheson and Hume, were to call the moral sense.⁷⁹

This moral sense was directly related to the heart by another explorer of the human condition from that time, Friedrich Christoph Oetinger (1702 – 1782) who was a German theosopher. Theosophy is a religious and mystical doctrine that states that all religions and philosophies aim toward the perfection of the human toward the divine.⁸⁰ He promulgated the idea of the *sensus communis*, the sense of the good within us all, translated simply as "heart."

Oetinger, in using an example parallel to Mencius's examples of the natural feelings of empathy, said, "Fathers are moved without proof to care for their children; love does not demonstrate, but often against reason rends the heart at the beloved's approach."⁸¹

This common sense, which is the proof in rhetoric, is the verdict of the Heavenly Mandate for the Chinese, and what is built through the great universal cultural project known as *bildung*, is our great democratic idea that together, through the great web of hearts united, we can find our way to fulfillment.

The common ring of what every heart shares is brought in full circle to the realization that not only do we all share a common heart, but that everything is held within the heart. As Oetinger went on to say, “The whole of life has its center in the heart, which by means of common sense grasps countless things all at the same time.”⁸²

Oetinger’s vision of synthesis, unity and harmony was one that was intrinsic to Chinese thought and its heart-centered approach.⁸³ However, it ran against the movement of analysis and separation that were the mode and ethos of the scientific method emerging at that time in Europe.

With the understanding of the circulation of the blood, discovered by William Harvey in 1628, the heart took another step toward losing its symbolic power. With the advent of science and technology our metaphors changed. The heart became literalized as the cardiac muscle. It was seen as a spring or pump.⁸⁴

Though we have come to a greater understanding of the material world, we have lost the heart, and so have lost what is central to who we are in the universe. The heart, once the noblest symbol of all that is best within us, was, by the 18th century, reduced to a cliché of romantic novels.⁸⁵

Through the world view of philosophers like Descartes and Kant, the elimination of the “middle” of the human being, which Plato called the *thymoides*,⁸⁶ and what Mencius called heart, left man without a central core of being out of which his ethical self

emerged. The dominance of intellect over heart eliminated the symbolic recognition of our possibility of unity which left us with meaninglessness.⁸⁷ What was lost was the Chinese concept of *jen* or the Greek notion of *arête*. This term allowed us to imagine profound being, a bearer of the highest values and their realization.⁸⁸

The torch of lament of the loss of heart that emerged from the dehumanization process of the advance of modernity was taken up by the romantics. The revered German author, Goethe, who lived from 1749-1832 foretold this longing for the heart in his most profound work, considered to be one of the peaks of western civilization,⁸⁹ *Faust*. The main character speaks, referring to the unity of reason and the heart:

“When in our narrow cell the lamp
Once more sends out its friendly beams,
It grows brighter, here within the breast,
Within the heart that knows itself.
Reason once more begins to speak
And Hope once more begins to bloom.
We long, now, for the waters of life,
Ah, for the wellspring of our lives!”⁹⁰

And,

“Who, far beyond things' mere appearance,
Strives only for their deepest essence.”⁹¹

The heart is now not only lost due to our existential condition, our archetypal patterns, and our personal historical conditionings, but is lost to us in the movement of history.

Despite the heroic efforts of these figures who criticized our lost-hearted world, today we live in a disenchanted world dominated by literalism, technology, and performance. In the social democracies, we have seen the last 30 years marked by a Hobbesian Social Darwinism, marking a precipitous decline for the avatars of heart. Co-

opted by the likes of the Hallmark Greeting Card Company, the image of the heart is ubiquitous, but we hardly notice it and its meaning has been denuded of depth and substance.

Nevertheless, seekers continue to intuit that something is missing, and continue to search. As the Romantic Movement attempted to be a corrective for a world dominated by logos, the battle continues today to rediscover an essential part of our existence. The contemporary work of religious philosopher Karen Armstrong, in her reverence for mystery, and participation in a devotion to the development of compassion, shows that the spirit of the heart lives today.

My young daughter, like every child who learns to draw and learns the symbol, is captivated by the image of the heart, because in her heart she senses what it means. For her, and every child like her, this work aims to bring us back to our great heritage, that is, it aims to find the lost heart.

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CHAPTER 7 THE MENCIAN HEART

Now that we have taken this historical survey of the heart, let us examine what the Confucians, and in particular, Mencius, believed the heart to mean.

As human thought had its greatest advance in the few hundred years following the 5th century BCE, this time, too, saw the revelation of the meaning of *hsin* in Chinese philosophy, most accurately translated as heart/mind. Previous to this time, including in the writings of Confucius himself, though the heart is named, its meanings were not explored in depth.¹

As our inspiring quote has it, “The principle of self-cultivation consists in nothing but trying to find the lost heart.” When Mencius writes about the heart, and tells us about a process of self-development based on a rediscovery of original nature, he is describing his own life process. As Mencius relates his experience of actualization in his discussion of heart, he serves as an inspiration for other questers in search of their own essential being. As we understand from our exploration of hermeneutics, the purpose of reading Mencius in depth is not some intellectual exercise of understanding, but a central method of self-cultivation. The goal of reading Mencius is not to understand the heart, but to find it. This heroic journey of self-realization which is made possible by traveling with Mencius into the symbol of the heart is what makes his writings on the subject so valuable.²

Essence, Entelechy, and Heart

In their search for the good of all, the Confucians looked for the 'single thread,' or universal law. They found these principles through an examination of nature as exemplified in agriculture.³ "The principle in the course and operation of nature . . . obeys only its immutable law . . ."⁴

Agriculture operates from the understanding that when we cultivate plants according to the laws of the processes of nature we can dramatically increase and control our yield. If our plant withers, it must mean we have not grasped nature's law. This ability to understand nature's secrets allows us to improve on nature, but it also poses a danger, because if our understanding is one-sided we can disturb nature's ecological balance. We can create a short-term gain and a long-term problem. For example, planting the same crop repeatedly could lead to soil depletion. The land would at first yield an abundant crop, but by attempting to exploit the land to give the greatest amount of that crop, the land would eventually yield nothing. When the land was sometimes allowed to remain fallow, it would produce an ongoing yield. This led to the discovery of the idea of crop rotation.⁵ The workings of nature are more subtle than simply increasing an immediate yield. We see how even today we continue to struggle with accomplishing sustainable fecundity.

Through a process of inference, the Confucians believed that in the same way that nature has hidden laws that can be discovered, humans, too, have these subtle, profound principles. This is human nature, which is embedded in nature as a whole. Through an observation of living things in nature, the Confucians recognized that each living thing grows and develops. It has an inherent pattern that exists originally in potential. When it

is optimally cultivated, it realizes this potential. This was the Chinese discovery of what Aristotle would call a *telos*, a purpose, or that to which a thing aims.

The Chinese view is that the principles of development and realization found through agriculture are a microcosm of universal patterns.⁶ If we can understand these universal principles, and live in harmony with them, then we, too, will grow maximally, and fulfill our potentials.

As the Confucians believed in the notion of the ‘unifying thread,’ they conceived that the universe, through the example of life, also must have its processes of growth and change. The universe must have its *telos*, purpose, or developmental realization. The modern Archeologist/theologian Teilhard de Chardin recognized this as well. He claimed that there were two basic movements in the universe. One is toward a loss of differentiation. Much of the universe is moving toward entropia, a breakdown of complex, systemic organization into ‘noise.’ Rather than the universe developing, this indicates that the universe is falling apart. However, a smaller, but far more important, segment of the universe continues to move toward greater differentiation and complexification. As this segment has complexified it has become alive and has increased in consciousness and freedom. It is this universal complexification axis that the Confucians intuited through coming to observe relationships and processes of growth and development. By observing this process, we can infer where the universe is heading. This motion is what the Chinese would call the Tao, or Way.⁷

This corresponds to Aristotle’s entelechy. Human nature is a process of becoming. That is, we all have the potential to continuously develop. Individually, this process leads toward each of us becoming an absolutely unique being. When we realize ourselves in

this way, we are living in harmony with our own nature, and so in harmony with universal nature. This is what nature ‘wants’ from us.

Our life is meant to be an expression or manifestation of what one essentially is, both in its universal aspect of a fulfillment of our human nature, and in its most individual, unique, and particular aspects. Both together make up our entelechy which is the purpose for which we exist, and are the realization of our inherent potentials that existed *ab origine*, nascently, in our beginning.

Observing the workings of nature, Mencius understood the Aristotelian cause of form. One cause of a thing’s individual existence is its organization. The greater the complexity of a thing, that is, the greater the harmony of its parts, the greater the thing’s health, capacity for development, and power. The laws of nature can be perceived in this growth through a harmony of parts, which is one way of defining a complex structure.

The workings of any vital living organism are a miracle of complexity and harmony. Within the organism disparate elements and systems operate cybernetically with homeostatic systems, which are those that maintain the balanced functioning of the system, and also morphogenetic systems, which are those that promote growth and development.

The optimal functioning of the organism is dependent on this harmonic cooperation of parts for the good of the greater whole. This harmony in complexity has given human beings enormous power: the ability to reach the moon, conquer disease, and produce “I Am the Walrus.”

If we conceive that we are each individual parts of a universal organism, then this would lead to the conclusion that our purpose is not only to have internal order within our

individual organismic selves, but that we find our fulfillment, or achieve our entelechy, by being a part in harmony with this universal whole. Finding this proper place in the cosmos is what is meant by living according to universal law. This is good both for the individual organism and the universal one. As sentient beings, by understanding natural law, we get to participate in the process of optimizing our alignment toward this law and so promote the natural movement of nature's development. Our job, then, is to comprehend the laws of nature and live according to these principles. In this way, we find individual fulfillment and the fulfillment of the greater universal organism.

That which is taken to its summit point of development, beginning with the simple and moving to the complex, leads to the ultimate realization. As Mencius said,

“Or consider the high mountains: they consist of nothing more than a multiplicity of single handfuls of stones. But when these are taken to their fullest extent of breadth or vastness, then trees and grasses grow upon them in untold profusion, all manner of birds and beasts dwell within them and hidden treasures emerge from their midst.”⁸

As every realm is ecologically intertwined, our inherent potentials are not only designed for the good and growth of the individual, but for culture, group, society, species, world, and universe. We are inextricably interwoven in a web of relationships and relatedness. These, too, make up organism, and system. These developmental and relational laws are the Heavenly Mandate.

That which we are meant to be, our purpose or telos, is one way of defining our essential nature. Mencius asserted that what makes a person's essence is that which makes them unique. He called this unique feature of humanity, that is, our entelechal purpose, the heart. For Mencius, the home of human nature within the individual is the heart.

We can know the Heavenly Mandate—universal nature—if we understand *human* nature. Therefore, the home of the Heavenly Mandate within the person is the heart. As such, Mencius's humanism is a transcendental one. As he said, "Following our inner knowledge, we shall know our heart, thereby know our nature, and thus come to know our heaven."⁹

If we find our hearts we can know these universal laws of nature, and by living in accord with them, we can achieve our life's purpose. Our task in life, the Confucians believed, is to find what they called the *Central Harmony*. When we make manifest the Heavenly Mandate by living according to the principles of nature, we achieve the Central Harmony. By finding our hearts and living according to the Tao we achieve the Central Harmony. The heart is the part of us that "possesses the nature to grow" toward the realization of our true humanity.¹⁰

This contribution of Mencius, of defining the heart as the place of our realization, is the core of the Chinese humanistic philosophy.¹¹ The source of fulfillment is within. Mencius tells us that a phenomenological process of self-exploration, a journey to this inner source, will lead us to rediscover the heart, and to be in harmony with essential human nature.

Furthermore, through coming to comprehend microcosmic and macrocosmic nature, this dynamic, inspiring symbol leads us to the ultimate realization of the self, humanity, and the universe in its totality.¹²

The Heart as the Exalted Nature of Humankind

“Every man has in him that which is exalted,”¹³ Mencius tells us, and that is the heart, the best within the person. The heart is a symbol of our greatest aspirations. As Tang Chun-I, (1880-1978) a contemporary interpreter of Mencius stated, this symbol of heart inspires us to reach “supreme humanity.”¹⁴ Mencius claims that the greatest human achievement is to be found in the realization of our moral nature. This moral nature has four essential aspects. The first is ‘*the heart of compassion*’. This is proved by our natural abhorrence of the suffering of others. Second is ‘*the heart of shame,*’ which is proved by our disgust at atrocity. ‘*The heart of courtesy and modesty*’ emerges from our reverence. Finally, the ‘*heart of right and wrong,*’ emerges from the heart being the sense organ of goodness.¹⁵ Each of these four aspects has its virtue, or optimal realization of its capacity, which we will now describe.

The cultivation of the heart of compassion leads to the realization of benevolence or *jen*. This notion of *jen* represents the achievement of our ultimate humanness, or being humane.

The cultivation of the heart of shame, leads to rightness or dutifulness known in Chinese as *yi*. Our healthy shame leads us to take the right action even when no one is looking.

The heart of courtesy and modesty, when cultivated leads us to have the virtue of decorum or *li*. This means following the right form of behavior and an observance of rites.¹⁶

Finally, the heart of right and wrong leads to wisdom or *chih*.¹⁷

Though Confucius concerned himself deeply with what was called, *li*, or external, ritualized form, the intrinsic experience was what was essential for aligning with the ethical value. He tells us that symbolic actions without embodied emotional qualities are meaningless. In this sense, for the outside to have meaning, it had to derive from the inward, the heart. Confucius said, “In the ceremonies of mourning, it is better that there be deep sorrow than a minute attention to observances.”¹⁸ Authentic feeling is our goal, not fulfilling some outer ritual.

In the same way, the virtue, the integral quality of the person, is what is of significance, not some external marker like station, wealth, or success. “The Master said, ‘High station filled without indulgent generosity; ceremonies performed without reverence . . . wherewith should I contemplate such ways?’”¹⁹

For each of these virtues to be authentic, they must emerge, as Augustine also asserted, from the heart. To simply follow the form of *jen*, *yi*, *li* or *chih* without a natural motivation for doing so is merely to have the conduct, not the virtue. Authentically embodying these virtues means that we are in harmony with the principles of nature. When we live by the dictates and form, rather than the intrinsic principle, this inevitably leads to inner and outer conflict.²⁰

This place of morality where the universal law meets human law is the heart. The internal is manifested externally. “When one has something within, it necessarily shows itself without.”²¹

Realizing these moral virtues is dependent on their cultivation, which Mencius describes as the act of searching for the heart.²³ The fact of our falling short of this ideal does not mean that these capacities are destroyed or that they are not natural.²⁴

Cultivation only means finding what is already within us. Mencius focused on our own efforts as the path to finding or retaining the heart. To find the heart means accessing the right way to live according to universal principle and human nature, as exemplified by an ideal inspired by a timeless, ancient form. This defined the moral. By developing the good, we find the heart. The way to find the heart was to seek it. As Confucius put it, “Is benevolence really far away? No sooner do I desire it than it is here.”²⁶

Rather than creating something, the ideal moral development was seen by Mencius as retaining what is already present in all of us. Keeping the original heart is a defining characteristic of the Confucian ideal of the profound person. Mencius says, “A gentleman differs from other men in that he retains his heart.”²⁷

Mencius asserts that the natural realization of heart is *yi*, or, rightness. By fully developing what is within us, we become capable of knowing and acting in accordance with the good.

The Heart of Compassion and Goodness

The heart, as Mencius defines it, is the sense organ that knows the good just as the tongue knows the delicious and the eye the beautiful. The good is beautiful to the heart.

As he stated,

“ . . . all palates have the same preference in taste; all ears in sound; all eyes in beauty. Should hearts prove to be an exception by possessing nothing in common? What is it, then, that is common to all hearts? Reason and rightness. The sage is simply the man first to discover this common element in the heart. Thus reason and rightness please my heart in the same way as meat pleases my palate.”²⁸

What Mencius means is that the heart ‘knows’ what is reasonable and right, the way the eye ‘knows’ what is beautiful. When we embody, or live out, what is reasonable

and right, the heart is pleased. When this inherent sense is optimally cultivated through devoted practice to doing what is right, this leads to the optimal moral development, which means becoming a Sage.²⁹

Mencius, in using the symbol of the heart, was not speaking literally of the muscle in our chest. In contemporary understanding we would probably locate our ‘taste for goodness’ in the right orbital pre-frontal cortex and limbic structures of the brain.³⁰ The point that Mencius was making with this metaphor was to assert that a sensitivity to, and knowledge of, goodness, rightness, and reason is an intrinsic, fundamental human capacity. Recent research is catching up with this 2300 year-old philosophy which is indicating that even new-born infants have a proto-typical sense of rightness and morality.³¹

For Mencius, the heart is the seat of compassion and empathy, which he believed were universal to all people and proved their core goodness. Empathy is the capacity to feel what others feel. This ability for empathy leads to compassion. This is captured in Mencius’s statement, “No man is devoid of a heart sensitive to the suffering of others,”³² which he states leads to a feeling of “unbearability.” He uses as proof the argument that any sentient human would feel compassion if they saw that a child was about to fall into a well. This feeling would occur spontaneously, and not for any extrinsic purpose.³³

This natural reaction to the suffering of others is Mencius' primary proof of the inherent goodness of people. He suggests that this natural attribute is the most important aspect of humanness, and is what needs to be cultivated in order for one to achieve jen, or to be truly humane.³⁴

A significant story of the heart from the Mencian text is his tale of the king who could not allow an ox to die because of the unbearable feeling brought on by seeing the fear and suffering of the animal. This capacity for compassion, even for a dumb beast, is the essence and realization of heart, the measure of the profound man.³⁷

In perhaps the first recorded example of empathic attunement, a central skill of the effective psychotherapist where one individual deeply enters the felt experience of another, Mencius grasps and reflects the king's experience in such a way as to bring awareness to him when he had none. Mencius conveyed his understanding of the king's motivation in saving the ox by saying, "The heart behind your action is enough to make you a true king."³⁹

Astounded at Mencius's insight, the king first quotes The Odes, one of the earliest sources of eternal Chinese wisdom that are often referred to by the Confucian philosophers, in the same way that the Greeks quoted Homer. They are a primary source of the Confucian exegesis. This quote is a wonderful inspiration for the therapeutic process.

"The Odes say,
The heart is someone else's,
but it is I who have surmised it."⁴⁰

The king went on to say to Mencius, "This describes you perfectly. For though the deed was mine, when I looked into myself I failed to understand my own heart. You described it for me and your words struck a chord in me."⁴¹

Mencius tells us that as our compassion is developed through cultivation, we have that inherent potential in the first place. If such compassion was purely being added to us from the outside, we would simply never grasp the concept. Mencius claims that

goodness is not learned but rather unearthed. When moral behavior is imposed from the outside, it has no strength. Instead, goodness emerges from something natural within, which is the only true source of power. This inner place of empathy, compassion, and goodness is the heart.

Since our empathy and compassion are essential, we do not have to rely on external authority for guidance of our behavior. All morality extends from the heart's ability to feel what others feel, and the greater we extend our emotional relatedness toward compassion, Mencius believed, the more we have found our heart.

In one of Mencius's most compelling arguments for human intrinsic goodness as the heart, he uses the rhetorical warrant of analogy. Mencius states that,

“Can what is in man be completely lacking in moral inclinations? A man's letting go of his true heart is like the case of the trees and the axes when the trees are lopped day after day. Is it any wonder that they are no longer fine? Others seeing his resemblance to an animal, will be led to think that he had never had any native endowment. . . . But can that be what a man is genuinely like? Hence, given the right nourishment there is nothing that will not grow, while deprived of it there is nothing that will not wither away.”⁴²

Here Mencius connects the heart, goodness, and our entelechy. As the home of the potential for goodness that is developed through cultivation, the heart is both the means and the realization of our entelechy. Like the tree, if we receive the proper cultivation, we will become that which we are meant to be, which Mencius calls finding the heart. To the contrary, just as the mountain will not thrive if it is not properly treated, destructive aggression – toward others or the self -- or any other kind of dysfunctionality, is not the expression of one's essential nature, but rather the results of poor cultivation.

Central to the Confucian philosophy is the concept of *shu*. This is the Confucian construction of the golden rule. His version states, do not do unto others as you would

not have them do unto you. This is the idea of reciprocity. The Chinese character for shu is of a heart and “alike.” This further validates that we all share a common essence, and we call this essence heart.⁴³ Shu, in this sense, means empathy and compassion, or the ability to enter the emotional world of the other and to act in sympathy with this felt experience. The golden rule is based on the extraordinary leap that we can feel as others do. As such, we can use our own feelings as a guide to relationship with others. In this sense the Confucian test in looking for the ethical answer is to “find it in yourself.”⁴⁴ The place we find this moral direction is within the heart.

The chief virtue of the Confucians, which emerges from our capacity for compassion, is benevolence. Benevolence means that we act with the good of others foremost in our hearts. When we have a cultivated heart and are connected to our essential goodness, we embody this virtue. To have found the heart means that we treat not only others, but also ourselves, with benevolence.

The Heart and Ch’i

The next quality that is central to the Mencian conception of heart is *ch’i*. Ch’i is the prime energy of the universe. This can be correlated to “the sacred fire” of the *Upanishads*. The Indians, too, located this energetic source in the heart.

“I know . . . that sacred fire which leads to heaven. Listen. That fire which is the means of attaining the infinite worlds, and is also their foundation, is hidden in the sacred place of the heart.”⁴⁹

Buddhists located their equivalent, *prana*, a concept they borrowed from the Sanskrit, in the heart, and also saw the unity of heart, energy, and the cosmic reality.⁵⁰

Ch'i has also been named *tejas*, *mana*, or by Jung, *libido*.⁵¹ It is found in Norse mythology as the mead from the world tree of *Ygdrasil*.⁵²

The Chinese posited two kinds of ch'i, the gross and the subtle. The body was the home of the grosser ch'i and the heart was the home of the subtle ch'i. To cultivate the heart means to cultivate our subtle ch'i. This not only impacts our moral health, but also our physical well being.⁵³ Mencius unified his concepts in a moral vision, where right living, as determined by heart, resulted in maximum ch'i. Health, wellbeing, and courage are related to living in harmony with the dictates of heart, which emerges from its connection to universal nature.⁵⁴

Mencius believed that this general energetic principle of the universe is something that “runs through” humans. When we achieve an optimal alignment with the Heavenly Mandate, we have the greatest access to this primal energy of the universe. We then possess what Mencius called *flood-like ch'i*, which is the ultimate energetic capacity.

Mencius himself admitted that explaining flood-like ch'i is difficult. A disciple asked, “May I ask what this flood-like ch'i is?” And he replied,

“It is difficult to explain. This is a ch'i which is, in the highest degree vast and unyielding. Nourish it with integrity and place no obstacle in its path and it will fill the space between Heaven and Earth. It is a ch'i which unites rightness and the Way. Deprive it of these and it will starve. It is born of accumulated rightness and cannot be appropriated by anyone through a sporadic show of rightness. Whenever one acts in a way that falls below the standard set in one's heart, it will starve.”⁵⁵

This means that our energy, mood, and motivation are dependent on our integrity, of acting from our highest moral understanding, which is in our hearts. This places us in alignment with universal forces, which gives us courage. Depression and failure can be likened to a lack of moral attunement. This does not only mean not doing the right thing

toward others, but also toward the self. The condition of shame, or treating ourselves from self-hatred instead of self-love, will lead to a diminishment of ch'i.

Through the manifestation of flood-like ch'i we develop the virtue of imperturbability. This means being true to oneself even without external validation.⁵⁶ As Mencius stated it, "Only a gentleman can have a constant heart in spite of a lack of constant means of support."⁵⁷

When we have imperturbability, our motivation for action must be on rightness, and not dependent on outcome. We saw a recent example of this in the health care debate of 2010 in the United States government. In his speech of March 20, 2010 to the House of Representatives, President Barack Obama quoted President Abraham Lincoln saying, "I am not bound to win, but I'm bound to be true. I'm not bound to succeed, but I'm bound to live up to what light I have."⁵⁸ Both Presidents used this argument to rally courage within his minions to do the right thing, even though there might be personal consequences. In Obama's case, it was an attempt to overcome the fear that politicians would be punished at the polls for voting for health care reform. Thousands of years ago, Mencius expressed the same sentiment. As Mencius put it, "Of course I cannot be certain of victory. All I can do is to be without fear."⁵⁹

This corresponds to Paul Tillich's definition of courage. He, too, saw the union of ch'i and this virtue. To quote, "courage . . . must . . . be understood as the expression of the perfect vitality."⁶⁰

Tillich called this particular courage to live according to our hearts, or essential nature, the *courage to be*. He also saw the interpenetration of our actions with our quality.

To cultivate ch'i, we must act with courage and to act with courage we must cultivate ch'i. It is this vitality which gives us the courage to be.⁶¹

We find this same correspondence between energetic spirit, courage, and heart in the word courage itself, which is derived from the French word, *coeur*, or heart.⁶²

Tillich states that to the extent we have this courage we are agentic, which means we have the freedom to act from intention. This is his definition of flood-like ch'i, or optimal vitality.⁶³ This capacity for free choice and self-directed action is also definitive of heart, as it defines the human. As such, only humans are capable of this maximal energetic manifestation, which brings us into closer alignment with universal nature.

Not only do we have the capacity to choose, or direct our actions, but we direct them toward that which we experience as meaningful. This meaning is what we experience to be the beautiful, the true, and the good. Our moral, dialectic, and symbolic capacities, which exemplify the heart, direct us toward that which we find meaningful in these ways. This Tillich defines as intentionality. When we follow the "taste of the heart" for the beautiful, good, and true, we are purely intentional.⁶⁴ This courage, or imperturbability, corresponds to Plato's notion of *thymos*, or the spirited, courageous aspect of our being. Plato's *thymos* corresponds to the Mencian heart. It is the central aspect that lies between thought and sensation, reason and desire. As the heart is drawn to rightness, the *thymos* is the part of the soul that aims toward the noble.⁶⁵

The heart, in its function of vessel for our energetic being and the source of our courage, is also the home of our striving toward the noble. This is reflective of our promethean capacity to imagine an ideal. This faculty feels and knows justice in the core

of our being, longs for the good, and wants to be our realized best. To aspire toward this ideal requires courage.

Our noble aim is to aspire to realize our virtues, to be that which we are meant to be, or to manifest our entelechy. Courage, from this perspective, is to be what we authentically are.⁶⁶ As Tillich put it, “. . . in the act of courage the most essential part of our being prevails against the less essential. It is the beauty and goodness of courage that the good and the beautiful are actualized in it.”⁶⁷ This corresponds to the notion of *fortitudo*, one of the Roman philosopher Cicero’s (106 B.C.E. – 43 B.C.E.) four cardinal virtues, which is the strength of the heart to be what it essentially is.⁶⁸

Spinoza stated that to act in accordance with our true nature is the definition of the realization of our virtue. The extent of our virtue, he says, is the limit to which we strive to live from the heart.⁶⁹

Nietzsche also links imperturbability with heart.

“He hath heart who knoweth fear but vanquisheth it; who seeth the abyss, but with pride. He who seeth the abyss but with eagle's eyes, - he who with eagle's talons graspeth the abyss: he hath courage.”⁷⁰

When, in the face of all the dangers of existence, we have Mencian imperturbability, or Tillichian courage, we embody ourselves as we truly are. As Theodore Roosevelt said, (To find the lost heart means) it is not enough to be thoughtful or even popular; it requires becoming what he called the man "in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and soot and blood," who fights with the certainty that, even if he fails, "his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat."⁷¹

But courage does not necessarily mean physical risk or battle. For Confucius, courage is living from the heart, which is equivalent to manifesting *jen*, or being humane, which is difficult. “The superior man thinks of virtue; the small man thinks of comfort.”⁷²

To inhabit the heart, to be our true selves, poses risks. We may be hurt, rejected, or ignored. For some of the most enlightened, from Socrates, to Jesus, to Martin Luther King, living from the truth put their very lives in peril. When we inhabit the heart, or are our true selves, we may also be at risk of our very lives. The courage of the heart means acting from our authentic center in the face of death.⁷³ However, the danger of not living from our truth is far worse. The heart will vitiate if we act against our own intrinsic sense of the right out of fear of consequence.⁷⁴

Socrates, a contemporary of Confucius, manifested this philosopher’s courage. He was able to do so because he believed that what was essential about him, what Mencius would call the heart, was not endangered by death. He believed this original self was transtemporal. Therefore, he was able to face his own execution with imperturbability.⁷⁵

Socrates, in this sense, is a yantric symbolic model for contemplation. He is an exemplar of how to be. In this, he is a brother of Confucius. They shared other qualities, as well. These words about Confucius could have also well been written about his Greek counterpart: “There were four things from which the Master was entirely free. He had no foregone conclusions, no arbitrary predeterminations, no obstinacy, and no egoism.”⁷⁶

This is a great description of core psychological health.

The means of becoming the courageous person is to make our self right. This means to live in harmony with the Heavenly Mandate, or to live in absolute integrity with our essential nature, the heart. Courage, then, is the mark of the virtuous person.

“Sze-ma Niu asked about the superior man. The Master said, ‘The superior man has neither anxiety nor fear.’
 ‘Being without anxiety or fear!’ said Miu;—does this constitute what we call the superior man?’
 The Master said, ‘When internal examination discovers nothing wrong, what is there to fear?’”⁷⁷

And, “The Master said, ‘The wise are free from perplexities; the virtuous from anxiety; and the bold from fear.’”⁷⁸

For Mencius, when we are in possession of *flood-like ch’i*, and we face the risks of living according to the inner light of the heart, we remain imperturbable; no danger sways us from bravely being what it is that we are uniquely meant to be.

Mencius was a model for this cultivation of imperturbability. He said, “My heart has not been stirred since the age of 40.”⁷⁹ This means that, though it took him decades of self-cultivation to accomplish, he did reach a point where he had the fortitude to remain true to himself in the face of any danger or risk.

The heart, then, when found, is agentic and autonomous. When we embody the heart our actions emerge from the core of our being and are not determined by external considerations or conditionings.⁸⁰

The Heart and the Tao

In the Mencian conception, heart, the Heavenly Mandate, and flood-like *ch’i* are combined with the Tao, or the Way. The method of living in alignment with the Heavenly Mandate is called the Tao, or Way. To quote from *On the Practice of the Mean*, one of the four canonized books of Chinese wisdom, “by ‘the ‘Way’ we mean that path which is in conformance with the intrinsic nature of man and things.”⁸¹ One accomplishes an alignment with the Heavenly Mandate by living according to the moral

dictates of the heart. The moral life, living in accordance with natural principles, which is the Way, cultivates flood-like ch'i.⁸² As a result of living according to the Tao, we become the profound person; we achieve *jen*, or authentic humanity.⁸³

In the Mencian conception, it is in the natural order of the universe to have manifested a compassionate heart in humankind. Humankind is also given the faculty of cultivating ourselves. What this means is that we can advance our own evolution. We can participate in the perfecting of our own nature. We are given the capacity for goodness through our inherent compassion, and it is our task to develop this capacity optimally. Advancing our personal development is doing our part in the advance of universal development. If we extrapolate from this given, then the universal purpose, telos, or entelechy is understood as love, where love is defined as the ultimate realization of our capacity for compassion and harmonic relationship. If this is the case, then cultivating the compassionate heart is fulfilling the mandate of heaven and is what it means to live according to the Tao. As the furthest extension of universal development, humankind finds its optimal harmony with the purpose of the universe when we self-cultivate toward the realization of heart, which is love.⁸⁴

In the Mencian view, we find the heart through living according to the Tao. The Tao is the heart in time. The heart is the Tao in us. The heart is the faculty that can comprehend and practice living according to the Way.

To the extent that we devote ourselves to living according to universal principle, to that extent inner conflict ends, and what we *should* do finds harmony with what we *want* to do. As Mencius put it,

“A gentleman steeps himself in the Way because he wishes to find it in himself. When he finds it in himself, he will be at ease in it; when he is at ease in it, he

can draw deeply upon it; when he can draw deeply upon it, he finds its source wherever he turns. That is why a gentleman wishes to find the Way in himself.”⁸⁵

Finding the way within the self furthers the Confucian idea that to develop morally is not to learn moral rules, but to cultivate our hearts, so we know right from wrong within. In this way we do not obediently follow some rule imposed from without, but intrinsically do the right thing in any circumstance, as the circumstance dictates.⁸⁶

The full realization of our potentials is to know our nature. To know our nature is to know the universal principle. The process of development of these potentials, self-cultivation, is accomplished by living according to the Tao. The Tao is the reflection, in human process, of universal principle. When we manifest the potential of the universe, we are at one with the energy of the universe.

For the Confucians, we get “close enough” to the Tao by having optimal relationships in each domain of being. We cultivate these relationships by practicing the virtues, and we do this by accessing the heart.

The Confucian conception of the personal heart and its interconnection to all other hearts, the heart of the universe, and the transcendent spiritual heart, is best explicated in the monumental work, *The Highest Order of Cultivation*. Here is my interpretation of the core of this text.

- Only once one has an embodied experience of the interconnectedness of all, can one integrate all aspects of the psyche, leading to integration and wholeness; where the parts of the self exist in cooperative relation.

- Only when we are whole can the potentials of the heart be realized. Only when we are whole can we realize our potentials for perceiving, thinking, feeling, imagining, acting, and connecting.
- Only when we have realized our potentials do we manifest virtuous moral being. Only when we have manifested virtuous moral centeredness can we put our relationships right, having harmonious relationships, meeting the needs of our partners and growing optimally.
- Only when we can put our relationships right can we have happy, good children and flourishing families.
- Only when we have balanced families can society be at peace and harmony.
- Only when society is in order are we living according to the Heavenly Mandate, or the laws of the universe.
- By cultivating ourselves, we fulfill the purpose of the universe.⁸⁸

Endnotes

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- ⁶⁰. Tillich, 79.
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- ⁷¹. Sean Wilentz, *Newsweek*, October 27, 2008, 41.
- ⁷². Yutang, 168.
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- ⁷⁴. Lau, xv.
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- ⁷⁶. Yutang, 217.
- ⁷⁷. Ibid., 252.
- ⁷⁸. Ibid. xxviii, 225.
- ⁷⁹. Lau, 31.
- ⁸⁰. Huang, 118.
- ⁸¹. Plaks, 25
- ⁸². Lau, xxv.
- ⁸³. Huang, 119.
- ⁸⁴. Lau, xxvi.
- ⁸⁵. Ibid., 90.
- ⁸⁶. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 317. In discussing Aristotle's ethic, the author says, "The difference between the craftsman's task and the moral one is that. . ."What is right. . .cannot be fully determined independently of the situation that requires a right action

from me, whereas the eidos of what a craftsman wants to make is fully determined by the use for which it is intended."

⁸⁸. Plaks, 5.

CHAPTER 8 THE HEART OF THE HEART

As stated previously, in Augustine's model, the hermeneutic process that leads to the full realization of the individual happens in three stages. The first stage is the discovery of the yantric symbolic text. The Mencian text that inspires this work, which is about the heart, of the heart, and from the heart, touched my heart. It resonated with my heart, spoke to it, and evoked something in it. That point of resonance, where the ancient symbolic utterance met my heart, is where the essential, the universal, is found.

The second phase of Augustine's hermeneutics is to unearth what the great explorers have discovered about the numinous symbol before us. That has been what has been accomplished in this work to this point.

The third phase is to experience and make manifest the very thing the Mencian text proposes. This means going on an inward journey to discover what this symbol of the heart means for, and to, me, to bring this up and out, and to articulate it. It is to come to know my heart by journeying to find it, and bringing back the boon of my discovery to share with humankind.

Thus the question becomes, what is the heart to me?

To enter my own heart and bring up the words that I find there leads me to a deep feeling of humility. If the heart is a metaphor for that within us which is of infinite depth and extension, for that within us which includes all space, time, history and beyond, for the great realm of all that we can never know, then how dare I jump across the threshold

of certainty into paradox and the end of awareness, into that endless vastness of inner space, into the murky blue that we find when we dive downward, or that velvet black at the center of the sky when we peer into the night heavens? How dare I commune with the ancients, the wise, the enlightened, and the inscrutable? How dare I leap into history so vast and incomprehensible? How do I create this work standing in the center of the monumental edifice, the great library of human expression? How do I offer my little findings when we can never know even the tiniest part of what has been said, thought, felt, or comprehended?

Smaller than a grain of rice, larger than the biggest star, all in all, nothing in all, all in nothing that which is neither something nor nothing but is both, how do I answer, *what is the heart?* And yet the great human adventure of finding the heart is to do what cannot be done. Our job in the universe, above all others, is to offer our heart. Here is my heart on the heart.

The Heart as Essence

The heart is a symbol of our essential nature.¹ Our essence is known through our telos, that which we are meant to be. The potentials of the heart are for optimal thinking, feeling, imagining, acting, and connecting. The heart is the place of the realization of these potentials. It is the home of wisdom, passion, genius, strength, and love.

The Heart as the Archetype of Archetype

The symbol of the heart is archetypal. It emerges from the remotest past. It is something that is representative of the psyches of people in every culture across the span

of time. It can be found in our greatest works of wisdom. It lives in the present moment, permeating our world both in its hidden presence, and its felt absence. It extends into the future as a goal, an inevitable outcome, and a promise that longs to be fulfilled.

Such is the potency, meaning, and universality, of the symbol, image, and metaphor of the heart.

The Heart as a Symbol of Being

As Tillich proclaimed, “. . . every assertion about being-itself is either metaphorical or symbolic.”² The heart is an ontological symbol, a symbol of being.

That which cannot be apprehended directly is projected into the symbol. As such, we apprehend the nature of being reflectively through the symbol of the heart. As we gaze into the mirror of the symbol, through the medium of our projection, we peer into an infinite pool of non-ending depth and see ourselves in the symbol of the heart.

Yantric symbols, as Jung tells us, hold opposites in a way that discursive symbols cannot. The heart, as such a symbol, has inexhaustible meanings. As it is a symbol of the inexhaustible, infinite depth of meaning, it is a symbol of symbolization. As Goethe put it, “(it is) properly symbolic . . . (an) eminent example which stands in a characteristic multiplicity, as representative of many others, and embraces a certain totality. . .”³

Therefore, this exploration of the meaning of the symbol of the heart is not to reduce it to a singular thing, but to explore its endless ramifications, contradictions, paradoxes, and possibilities. The heart doesn't symbolize everything, but it is a symbol of *everything in its human and cosmic essence*. The heart of a thing is its transcendent, loveable essence.

The capacity for being, for self-affirmation, as Paul Tillich would call it, is a defining characteristic of heart, and is the microcosmic manifestation of a universal drive toward an identity with existence. The universe says through our hearts, “I am! I am that I am!”⁴

The Heart as Center

The historical visions from all over the world unify around the notion that the heart is a representation of the Center.

The heart was chosen as the apt metaphor to what is central to the person because of its central location in the body. It was clear that the person could not live without the heart and the heart was connected to the rest of the body. To most of the ancients the brain, which we now identify with as the central part of the body, appeared peripheral, inconsequential. The Egyptians believed the brain was simply the creator of snot.⁵ In our culture where we overvalue thinking, this may very well be a more apt description of much of our thoughts.

We moderns “hear” thoughts in our head, and so locate ourselves there, but to the ancients the sound of a voice was seen as illusory; what approached the profound reality was the silence that they experienced as surrounding the heart, or “in” one’s essence. In the Indian wisdom that derives from the Upanishads, this is referred to as *guha*, the cave of the heart, a place of total isolation from the world. Through contemplative forms of meditation, they found the “incomparable treasure of spiritual wisdom, the knowing of which comprehends all things. . .”⁶ in this central aspect of being. To enter the silence brings us closer to eternity than to listen to the mindless mind chatter that fills the space

between our ears.⁷ To quote the *Upanishads*: “When the wise rests his mind in contemplation on our God beyond time, who invisibly dwells in the mystery of things and in the heart of man, then he rises above pleasures and sorrow.”⁸

The only way to find our center is by entering the silence of the heart. The mind with its noise and sound obscures the final truth of the universe which is silent. The silent music of the heart, the place we go when we meditate, is the pathway to ultimate truth.⁹ The veiled face of truth is not seen unless the seeker enters in a “certain secret and hidden silence wherein there is no knowledge or concept . . .”¹⁰

Why have people been so concerned with the central? To understand what is central, that is, essential, allows us to understand the whole. To know the heart is to comprehend not only ourselves, but the totality of things.¹¹

Our concern with the central stems from our intuition that we are beings of depth. We know that there are surface manifestations that hide this essence, what something is. We use metaphors in describing the nature of our true selves as behind or under: we say, there is a motivation behind that act, or, underneath, he really felt great sadness, etc. When we talk about parts of the self that are behind, down, under, inside, or above it suggests an ultimate, final, last, deepest, highest, inmost place within. As we explained previously, this is the way dialectical thinking works. If we see ourselves as beings with an inside, we infer that we are beings with depth. If we conceive of depth, we can conceive of a deepest place. If we say something like, “though I acted on the outside like it wasn’t, in my heart I knew it was true,” this suggests not only that we have an inside, but there is a deepest part of ourselves that we assume to be the true and real. This we call the heart. As the Latin word tells us, the heart is our core.

As a metaphor, the heart is aspirational. The image of the heart points to that which will bring us to the end of interpretation, the final meaning. It is The Truth that we can imagine and move towards but always eludes our ultimate grasp.

The symbol of the center implies a circular structure of the self. As Jung showed, circular images show up in endless cultures as symbols of the Self, where Self is the archetype of wholeness and realization that transcends the limited egoic self.¹² As Gadamer states, “The circle . . . is fundamental to all understanding.”¹³ In descriptions of the heart itself having a heart, and the vision of the heart having depth and an “inmostness,” the heart takes on a spherical description.

If we see the self as a sphere, then the heart is the central, infinite point at the center of the center, unmeasurable, unreachable, only imagined and impossible to imagine, the heart of the heart, the essence of who we are, the Self of the self. Yet as we established, this central point is everywhere. Every place that we are is the center of the universe. This paradox is like the universe itself as we understand it -- the universe expands infinitely from any point at which we find ourselves -- the center exists wherever one is.

This idea of the heart as a divine infinite center in a transcendent spherical structure was a sentiment expressed by such varied visionaries as the pre-Socratic 5th century BCE Greek philosopher Empedocles who believed that the heart was the center of consciousness¹⁴ and said, “The nature of god is a circle of which the center is everywhere and the circumference is nowhere.”¹⁵ The German theologian, philosopher and mystic Meister Eckhart (1260-1328), also stated that the divine resided in the heart of every individual¹⁶ and used the exact same words as Empedocles to describe the divine as

circular.¹⁷ This precise same image was used by St. Augustine, the French Enlightenment author and philosopher, Voltaire (1694- 1778) the Indian yogi and guru, Paramahansa Yogananda (1893-1952),¹⁸ the theosopher H.P. Blavatsky, (1831- 1891) and the French mathematician and philosopher Blaise Pascal (1623 -1662) who said “Nature is an infinite sphere of which the center is everywhere and the circumference nowhere.”¹⁹ In particular we find the work of the Christian mystic, Nicholas of Cusa who said that the “whole of theology is said to be circular.”²⁰ And, “. . . those who considered the most actual existence of God affirmed that He is an infinite sphere . . .”²¹ Cusa reveals that the Infinite Essence, Aristotle’s *metrum et mensura*, or measure of all things, or simple being, is an infinite sphere where the center, circumference and diameter, length, width, and depth are one. The infinite center is both middle and is everywhere.²²

This notion exemplifies a yantric symbol. It cannot be understood by the rational mind. It is ineffable, which we come to know through Cusa’s concept of divine ignorance. By contemplating what cannot be grasped by the discursive we approach a comprehension of the trans-rational. This resembles the purpose of the Zen koan, apparently nonsensical statements that break through the limitations of thinking to a higher order of meaning.²³

There is one view that archetypal metaphors for the human emerge from the conditions of the time.²⁴ The symbol of the heart may have emerged from a misunderstanding of the body, where we did not comprehend the function of the brain and nervous system. From this view, the notion of essence itself has been brought into question. As technologies have advanced we have represented ourselves in new ways. As I have described, from the ancient Chinese perspective, we have defined ourselves

agriculturally, as that which needs to be cultivated. In Medieval Europe we have seen ourselves as books that need to be recorded and read. In the Industrial Era we have seen ourselves as mechanical machines. In the age of computers we have defined ourselves as information processing devices.

Perhaps this turns the truth on its head. Another view would be that our technological advances emerge from a deepening understanding of the ways of the universe reflected in the human system. The symbol, in this sense, would drive the advance in technology, which comes closer and closer to capturing and expressing the essential. The insights brought about by agriculture taught us something true about the universe and the human. The book was one form of giving expression and form to the human.

However, each symbol has its limits. The limit of the book is its linearity. The World Wide Web is a more advanced expression of the organizing principle of the universe as it exists in the microcosm of the person. Approaching a physical manifestation of the mystic insight, there is no single central point, but every point is the center. Every individual, representing one of an endless set of points, is a center in an infinite web of connections that form a collective pattern of consciousness. Each heart is a nodal point in a network that makes up, and is a reflection of, a supra-heart. In this sense, the web is a manifested embodiment of the Buddhist metaphor, *Indra's Net*, the infinite web of connected jewels where each jewel reflects the whole.

As we see the self as a discrete point of heart-consciousness, we can also see it, as Chardin describes, as a singular point in an endless web of conscious hearts that are part of one eternal, infinite cosmic mind/heart, which he called the *noosphere*, of which we

are as yet unaware. In a world of infinite points all of which are centers, and a world of infinite meanings, all of which are the truth, the heart is a symbol of that center and the truth.

Whereas a book is a line, the machine is without depth and meaning, and the computer is a cybernetic system, the web is returning us to the notion of the infinite center in an infinite web of centers, and therefore, the symbol of heart.

The Heart is Hidden and Found

Though the heart is that within the self that is eternal and immutable, it is also that which is hidden and asks to be found. This hiddenness of the heart shows up in innumerable symbolic forms. As Frazer reveals in his classic book, *The Golden Bough*, stories of a hidden heart are “widely diffused all over the world.” The Norse story of *The Giant Who Had No Heart in his Body* is perhaps the best-known example.²⁵ In this story, the giant says,

“Far, far away in a lake lies an island; on that island stands a church; in that church is a well; in that well swims a duck; in that duck there is an egg, and in that egg there lies my heart.”

These endless symbolic tales reveal that an understanding of a heart so hidden as to be lost has been intuited throughout human conscious history. This means that humanity has known that the grounded core of essential being, or aspects of it -- that which embodies human life in its potential and manifestation -- the human entelechy, is somehow, psychologically, energetically, and behaviorally refused, hidden, not made manifest. As I will prove in a later volume, the intent of the self in the hiding of that which is essential is to protect it.

The “hiddenness” of the heart is also representative of that which cannot be apprehended through discursive rational thinking. The purpose of a devotional relationship to archetypal symbolization is to reveal what is held in what one of the earliest Italian humanists, Petrarch (1304-1374) called the *Secretum*, our secret place.²⁶ In Petrarch’s book of that name, he struggles with the question that is central to this study: *why do people appear to bring about their own unhappiness?* To find the answer, he travels within and participates in a deep process of self-examination. The secrets of the self are to be found within the heart.²⁷

That which is held in the symbol is hidden, in part, because its totality can never be fully known. Such is the nature of the Tao, the Way of universal being. In the *Chung Yung* it is written,

“ . . . When the man of noble character discourses on the vastness of the Way, nothing in the world is able to contain its full scope; and when he discourses on its most minute aspects, then nothing in the world can penetrate to its subtlest meaning.”²⁸

Since we can't understand the Tao with our intellect, because the intellect cannot hold opposites, or ineffables, “(we) need to use our heart and spirit to feel and experience its essence, to know what it is.”²⁹ It is with the heart that we come to know the hidden secrets of the universe.

The three stages of the Augustinian hermeneutic of discovery, exegesis, and expression can be correlated to the psychotherapeutic processes of phenomenological discovery through introspection, interpretation, and dialogue. The discovered text that becomes the source of knowledge, wisdom, and insight is to be found in the hidden heart. The exegetical process of interpretation that the therapist provides is to put that personal revelation into the context of what is known and understood about the human psyche and

experience. The dialogue that occurs between therapist and client is the expressive manifestation of what is found within. It is an experiencing of the heart that leads to its self-revelation. In this sense, the psychotherapeutic process can be understood as a process of bringing the heart out of hiding.

It is through this phenomenological personal hermeneutic that the heart is revealed to ourselves and to others. What emerges is something about myself that I “did not previously know.” This, which I did not know about myself, must have existed somewhere, but was hidden.

That which is also hidden in the symbol of the heart is our own personal narrative, or personal mythology. This is made up in part of our reconstructed memories. Experiences are *recorded*. Where the etymology of “cor” is heart, this literally means they are inscribed in the heart. When we say we know something by heart, we remember it perfectly. That which we do not remember is hidden. In remembering, we find the lost heart. Therapy also includes working with memory and personal narrative. One definition of successful therapy is the ability to reconstruct personal narrative in a more adaptive, differentiated way that frees our capacity for growth. What is hidden when the heart is lost is a broader, more expansive, narrative of the self.

The Heart is a Symbol of Interiority

We are a mystery. One of our purposes is to follow the dictum of the Delphic Oracle, to know ourselves. In order to do this it is said that we need to plumb our own depths in order to explore, discover, and reveal what is hidden in our own mysterious nature and being. But where does this mysterious nature and being reside? Where is our

“depths?” This is a paradoxical question that can only be answered symbolically. The image that speaks to this mystery is the heart.

There is an unshared interiority, a private self, a self that is hidden even from ourselves that we know from its emergence. Finding this interiority means “dwelling in the depths of one’s being in the mystery of the Divine Presence as the spark that gives us awareness, our consciousness that we are.”³⁰ Where is this something that cannot be located, because it is immaterial, be found? The heart.

We can read the neural networks of the brain, we can understand the adaptive function of affiliation, but we still cannot locate love, desire, imagination, passion, courage, strength, or confidence. We know they exist, but where are they? If we say that we do not “have” these things, we want them. This suggests that we believe they exist somewhere, and we want to find them. But where are they? Buddhists would say the self does not exist, because these are unresolvable paradoxes. Idealists would say that only the immaterial exists because it is the only “stuff” that doesn't change. Only our ideas are true. Aristotle would say that the form of body results in soul, which is the place he puts such inner qualities. But if I discover something about myself of which I had previously been unaware, where was it before I came to know it?

We know that immaterial substance is not actually located anywhere, and it is strange to hear of someone locating our essence in a part of the body, but the paradoxical mystery of interiority, that I can “hear” my thoughts, but you can't, suggests that this immateriality has location.

The boundary of emotion is less rigidly defined than our thought world. We cannot read another’s mind but we can feel a close approximation of what others feel. In

fact, when the heart is operating properly, or when we have our heart, that is exactly what we are capable of doing. We can empathically enter another's emotional experiencing. Something “inside” of you can harmonically resonate with something “inside” of me. I call this *syntony*. Syntony is a term in physics that means to vibrate at the same wavelength. It is derived from a Greek word, *syntonos*, which means to be in harmony. To feel empathy requires “getting” someone, to, as the hippies in the 1960’s would say, to be on their “wavelength.”

The heart is a symbol of this interiority. This notion of an interior self is itself a paradoxical notion. We only exist in relation, there is only the in-between, the space between subjective and objective, which is the place of experience, yet we think of ourselves inwardly, as an interiorized structure.

The heart is a place we search for and find, and this place is interior. As Campbell tells us,

“The journey of the quester is one into his own heart. It is this trip within, to the source, we must go within to find the energy we need to accomplish our goals. (The goal is to) . . . conduct the questing wanderer into the sanctum sanctorum of his own heart.”³¹

The Heart is the Home of the Prelanguaged

If there are aspects of the self that we discover through a process of introspection, where were the hidden meanings before they became known? Jung and the archetypal psychologists would say they are in the unconscious. But we need to remember that such a concept is not a place, it is a symbol. It is a reified metaphor. The meanings must be somewhere, because they don't come out of nowhere. Do they exist if they are not

known? Once discovered, the felt sense is that they were always there ready to be plucked. This corresponds to the Platonic concept of anamnesis, the notion that all knowledge is recovered, not discovered. We are not aware of dimensions of the heart because they have not yet been discursively represented. They have not been symbolized. They have not been languaged. Instead of using the reified metaphor of the unconscious to describe the phenomenon of the unknown, we can substitute a process concept and say instead, prelanguaged. If we do not do the work of languaging our inward experience, it remains lost to us. This is another way of understanding the lost heart. As Mencius said, people search for their chicks and dogs, but they do not search within for the lost, hidden meanings of the self, that reveal the heart.

Where does this knowledge of the self and cosmos live before it becomes languaged? A far more evocative symbol than the unconscious, I imagine that it lives in the lost heart.

The Heart is That Which is Recovered

One way of interpreting Mencius's statement of finding the lost heart is as a return to a pre-conditioned state, which the Zen Buddhists call "Beginner's Mind."³² This, we now understand, is impossible, because we cannot remove a person from the environment, and that which has, and does, influence him. In fact to speak of a person's historical conditioning as the cause of the distancing from our essence is to not go far enough. We are from the instant of our birth interwoven with our environment and "it" is part of what "I" am. We are in the act of birth separated from the All, and this is the existential root of our estrangement from essence and our conditioned existence. To be

born into a body is to live a conditioned existence. Nevertheless, we can posit a pre-conditioned state, or perhaps we should say a-conditioned. The heart represents what we would be if we were able to get beyond conditioning. This is what we “have” originally, we “lose” it through our conditioning, and we aim to “find” it through self-cultivation. It is both realized and recovered. As T.S. Eliot said, we return to where we began and know the place for the first time.³³

The achievement of spiritual fullness rests in our recovery of the knowledge of the heart, the *Gnosis Kardia*, which demands the full embrace of what is real and the overcoming of ignorance, stereotypes, prejudices, and preconceptions which are the signs of having a lost heart and mark our undifferentiated and undelineated symbolic constructions which emerge from our conditionings.

Not only is loss and recovery intrinsic to our conception of personal heart, but we see that this process is necessary culturally as well. The narrow-mindedness, fear, and self-destructiveness that are all too prevalent in our time tells us that, just like Mencius in his time, we live in a lost-hearted culture. We need to return to a heart-centered culture redefined. In this humanized world, the overcoming of conditionings and the discovery and cultivation of essence would be given primacy over our consuming culture which conditions us to have a distorted, shame-based, view of ourselves.

The Heart is a Symbol of the Non-Material Existent

The metaphor of the heart is a way of holding together the paradox of material and non-material. The Heart is the non-material location. It is a metaphorical “space” of the self behind or under our conditionings. We have to use a metaphor like heart to

describe subjectivity because we cannot comprehend a paradox like non-material substance, or location. Though it cannot exist, it does. We can only grasp this symbolically. With its recognition, the symbol becomes a fact, in that it is observable and exists. The symbol materializes the immaterial and makes it empirical. Corporeal, also comes from heart -- heart is where the material and immaterial meet.

The brain is an appropriate metaphor for the empirical and material. It is, after all the place that processes the information we receive from the five senses. The heart, on the other hand represents all that cannot be seen. We have become frightened of emptiness, but the Buddhists cultivated a relationship to this, which they considered the only truth. The heart was the means through which we could enter and know this place. The *Heart Sutra*, one of the central collections of aphorisms meant to be used for yantric hermeneutics in *Mahayana Buddhism*, is particularly important because of its teaching about emptiness.³⁴

The Heart Symbolizes Our Faculty to Enter into Meaning in Depth

There is that which is hidden in the universe. We apprehend surface manifestations, and only with a penetrating exploration in depth do the secrets of nature reveal themselves. There is that which is hidden in the human heart. It is only with an exploration in depth that we can come to know the secrets of the human heart.

As the heart represents our faculty that both manifests and comprehends symbols, the part of us that understands beyond the categories of language and logic, that which is hidden in human depths is apprehended by the heart. As we represent ourselves to ourselves through the use of symbols, it is through a participation in the life of symbols

that we come to develop the self. Thus the heart is that within us that is able to find itself. Such is the nature of the process of self-cultivation.

The heart symbolizes the human faculty that enters into meaning in depth. The heart is that in us which goes inward and down, that can explore our unknown depths, and bring what is found up to the surface. The heart makes it possible for us to plumb the depths of ourselves to find the endlessly hidden meanings there, which illuminate ourselves and the universe.

The heart represents the organ of introspection. It is the inner eye that looks down and in. It is that which can peer into the infinite within, and is the infinite within. The heart is that in us that listens and looks and finds that which is in us but has been forgotten, that which is out of our reach, that which has yet to be thought, or put into words, or known. The heart is what knows that which cannot be seen or empirically proven. To be able to articulate what is known but has not been put into words is to find the lost heart.

Phenomenological introspection is the process of reading the self in depth, of performing hermeneutics on ourselves, of looking into the depths of our own heart. This hermeneutic approach of the heart is the pathway to true wisdom. Through this method we approach ourselves as an open vessel, as a point of entry. It is a way into the endlessly expanding depths of truth. The heart is both means, in terms of being the faculty of self-reflection, and what is found, in terms of the home of our authentic being.

The symbol is an experience of infinite depth. The heart apprehends infinite depth. When we develop this heart-faculty, we are freed from our perceptual limitedness. Our symbols become infinitely enriched. We approach the pure meaning embedded in all

perception. The universe becomes enchanted. We recognize that all manifestation is a symbol of love, beauty, truth, goodness, oneness, All. When we can see ourselves, not on the surface, but in our infinite depth, we see ourselves in our deepest meaning. We see *ourselves*, in our hearts, as love, beauty, truth, goodness, the oneness, and the All.

The Heart is Our Place of Knowing the Good

The heart evaluates either proposed or completed action by comparing it to an original source. This relates to the Mencian concept that the heart is the perceptive organ that has a taste for goodness. The heart, when it is optimally realized, tells us if what is proposed is in concord, harmony, in accord, with itself. It is the source within oneself of knowing, where we can determine if we are in harmonic convergence with universal principle.

The heart develops and realizes its own potential to the extent that it is a transparent receiver. Its function is to be in con-cord (heart harmony) with the universal truth.

The heart is like a tuning fork, when the right note is hit it vibrates. If we can sense the vibrations of the heart we know if we are living in resonance with the truth. If we come across an articulated truth, and it resonates with the heart, it expands what the heart knows. The heart is both our source of wisdom and our internal guidance system toward the good and the true. Socrates, in his “Apology,” described what this is like. He said that he had a *daimonion*, or something divine that warned him when he was about to do something that was not in alignment with the good and true.³⁵ Socrates is instructed in the “Symposium” by the priestess Diotima that this *daemon* is an intermediary between

heaven and earth, bringing the earthly to the divine realms and the transcendent to mortals. She said, “He is the mediator who spans the chasm between them.”³⁶

The Heart is the Place that Understands Music

For Confucius, music was one of two means for cultivating the heart. Music, like the heart, does not speak in words. It speaks in emotions, but more than that; it speaks in the beauty of forms that cannot be seen or held in the hands. Out of these patterns which symbolize pattern itself, we are moved to resonate with, and understand, aspects of the human and universal experience that can be conveyed in no other way. There is an understanding with music that is purely of the heart, of which thought has no part. How can you scientifically explain music? It is as absurd as smelling colors. As Louis Armstrong said when asked what jazz is, “If you've gotta ask, you'll never know.” The part of us that knows what music is, is the heart.

The Heart is the Place of Conviction

When we say that we put all of our heart into something it means that the heart is our place of conviction. When we have a total participation through putting all of ourselves into a thing, it means that we identify ourselves with what we are doing. The thing we have taken on becomes part of an expanded notion of who we are. It means that we have entered the activity with full passionate commitment. It is this passionate involvement that is the expression of the heart, the manifestation of flood-like ch'i, and the embodiment of human achievement.

The Heart is Our Place of Transformation

The heart, being the place of conviction and experience, is the place where true change occurs. We can know that something is the right thing to do, but this does not mean we do it. Like with Augustine, a change of heart leads to an absolute transformation, a recentering of personality. In order to actualize one's ideal being we need to go beyond the comprehension of the mind. We change when the heart comprehends, or when we can allow ourselves to be ruled by the heart.

The Heart is the Place of Experience

Though the heart is a symbol of one's interiority, it is also that which transcends identification. Since the heart is a representation of that which is of the nature and substance of the ultimate realities it represents that part of us that we share with all humanity. In fact it is a symbol of that which we share with all of nature, and that which transcends observable nature. And so, though it is a symbol of that which gives us individuality, our "I," it is also that which connects us to all others, and, as such, is a symbol of the connective space, the in-between.

This in-between, the space between self and environment, is where experience occurs. Experience is the place where thought, feeling, perception, interaction, imagination, memory, and sensation interact. The metaphorical heart is the "organ" of experiencing. The heart is a representation of the experiencing center.

The part of us that can focus on our experiencing is symbolized by the heart. When we can penetrate through layers of stimuli to our deepest experience, we can determine the heart of the matter, or the essence of that which we are aware of in this

moment. Our experiencing is not simply reducible to an accumulation of distortions based on historical conditionings. Certainly, to understand these distortions is one way of clearing the window of perception. But there is something that goes beyond this awareness of the “dirt on our window.” Great mystics have all worked to open the “doors of perception,” as poet William Blake (1757 – 1827) put it. To quote, “If the doors of perception were cleansed everything would appear to man as it is, infinite. For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro’ a narrow chink in his cavern.”³⁷ Rather, the image of the heart inspires us to imagine an experiencing that is vital, free, and spontaneous, which the inventor of Gestalt therapy, Fritz Perls, would call aliveness itself.³⁸

The Heart is the Place of Relationship

If the heart is the organ of experiencing, it is also the place of relationship, the part of us that is intersubjective. This means the heart is the part of us that experiences the experiencing of another. The heart is the part of us, as Mencius stated, that is empathic. This is the ability, which can be cultivated, to imagine into someone else’s experience. It is the ability to make “sense” of another's world, so that they become comprehensible to us and we can know their essence. With our hearts, we can enter the heart of another.

The heart is the seat of sympathetic responsiveness. When you are living from the heart, you are living in connection. When we have found the heart, we perceive from the source of our compassion. Through a recognition of otherness we have authentic relatedness. This is the heart resonance I call *syntony*. When we live out of the empathic mirror we are living from the heart.

Self-cultivation leads to a rising to the universal. This is a movement toward connection through the paradox of recognizing the complete otherness of others, and finding a total heart sympathy with them. The ability to truly meet another in their insurmountable difference is the function of the heart. This bridges our estrangement. This authentic connection to the other is a symbolic enactment of reuniting with that from which we have been separated, the great All. This is the purpose and end point of self-cultivation, or the process of finding the heart.

This process of entering the heart of another, or authentic intimacy, is one of the dimensions of cultivating the heart through yantric hermeneutics. Here the text is another person. The faculty that we possess for meeting, for an exploration in depth of the obscure symbolic acts of others, and the understanding that emerges in relationship to them, is held in the symbol of the heart. That is what the symbolizing heart does. When we fully bring ourselves to this process in our intimate relationships, we continuously grow our conception of the other and we develop ourselves. We expand in love and becoming.

The process of finding the heart not only involves bringing our experiencing into our own awareness, but to give words to what we find within and have them heard and resonated with by another. Comprehension, revealing what is hidden, can involve voicing words. For these words to have maximal meaning they need to be received and mirrored. We come to know our own hearts in the mirror of another's eyes. Our heart is not only the empathic mirror for another, but our heart needs syntony, the resonating with another mirroring heart, for it to be found. We find the heart in an empathic mirror.

The Heart as Alpha and Omega

The heart is not only a symbol of basis, essence, beginning, core, and center, but it is also a symbol of manifestation and full realization. As it is said in the *Odes*, the earliest source of Chinese wisdom that was used as yantric symbolic material by the Confucians,

“The hawk in the sky soars up to meet the very heavens;
The fish in the sea dart down into the unfathomed depths.”³⁹

We have said that the heart is an unfindable central point in an infinite sphere. We have also said that the heart reflects a depth process. The self is to be found through phenomenological experiencing and languaging the previously unknown. Now we are adding that there is also the metaphor of aboveness to the heart. This describes an evolution of spirit that leads to reuniting with the All. The heart then, becomes a representation of the channel, the transmitter for what is above, which is our highest spiritual achievement. As the prayer, *om mani padme hum* expresses it, our task is to allow the infinite love of the universe to express itself through our hearts. To express means to make manifest, to make known, or to represent. So here there is a movement out of heart into manifestation. There is a movement from the infinite source of love, through the heart, and then a movement out from the heart into expression, or manifestation. The heart is what enables us to make manifest the love that is the universe. In so doing, we become an expression of the divine within us.

What this means is that we travel down into ourselves, we aim to find our essence through a heart-process of symbolic encounter, in order to reach the highest end, to make real the great All, which, paradoxically, we find in the heart.

The Heart is a Symbol of the Ideal

The heart is a symbol of the unlocatable location of the ideal. It is a symbolic way of describing the home of the natural ability to imagine our way into the ultimate. The search for the lost heart is the recognition of the distance between who we are and what we can imagine being. The search for the lost heart is the search for our imaginative capacity which allows us to imagine an ideal.

The heart is a representation of the ideal self. It is an image of ideal compassion, love, authenticity, wisdom, courage, fearlessness, energy, imagination, clarity of perception, passion, and moral understanding. As it is put in us to be able to imagine a better self or world, this must be a reflection of our intrinsic being. This is the original nature of the heart.

The heart is the place where we are this ideal in potential. The heart represents our capacity for endless energy, and the ability to manifest goodness. One of the achievements of having found the heart is developing our capacity to live from our highest selves against our natural and conditioned fears. This sense of knowing the good, and having the energy to live toward the good in the face of danger and difficulty, is something that emerges not simply from thinking, feeling, will, or relating, but from the highest development of all of these functions. When we have developed these faculties to their utmost, then we have the wisdom, passion, strength, and love to act in accordance with the good irrespective of circumstance and obstacle. Then we are living according to the laws of nature, the laws of our own nature.

As the heart includes this capacity for imagining ultimates, it also represents the faculty that provides us with a sense of where the universe is heading. As such, the heart

is also the symbol of the human telos of taking an active, intentional, conscious role in the movement toward this ultimate universal realization.

Confucius said that when the light of truth shines through something it fills the universe for all times. In this sense, when we manifest our best selves, beginning with the image of the ideal, we are realizing the universe.

This heart theory is unitive. The totality of our potentials is what is held in the symbol of the heart. The central harmony is achieved when all the aspects of the self operate in harmony and to their utmost fruition.

Within the imagining of the heart is the transcendence of duality. The heart, as our synthetic, wholistic, symbolic faculty, brings together what the episodic, procedural, analytical, discursive function of our brain has taken apart.

The function that allows us to integrate the disparate, and sometimes conflicting, aspects of our nature we call the heart. This not only brings us inner harmony, but also brings us into harmonious relationship with the world around us. When we are connected to our hearts, our needs and desires are in accord with what is best for us and for the cosmos as a whole.

Through this unification and harmonization, the heart is the place where we become one with the great All. The heart, which is the vehicle toward the infinite oneness, has within it, at its most central point this oneness, where when we reach it we become one with the oneness.

The Heart as Wholeness

Symbolically, the heart is our faculty for perceiving wholistically. The heart perceives the sequence as well as the moment. The heart sees the right behavior in a context of relationships. The heart sees an action in context and as a part of all space. The heart sees ecologically. As the Confucians put it, to realize our heart is to “maximize the range of comprehension (which lies) in an encompassing awareness of the interconnectedness of all things.”⁴⁰

To see the principle or law in its broadest, ecological sense requires a depth of perception that is the capacity symbolized by the heart.

The critical intellect separates, analyzes, atomizes, deconstructs. The heart represents our attribute that synthesizes, sees the unity, finds the common sense, unifies and penetrates appearances to essentials. It speaks to the human dimension that is wholistic, ecological, dialogical, and relationship centered.

Through the process of science we come to know the specific with the use of our intellect by removing a thing from its context. The process of the scientific experiment which aims to isolate causes by eliminating variables depends on removing relationship, wholeness, or web-ness. The heart, on the other hand, represents the dimension of our being that uses all of ourselves, and all that we are connected to, to apprehend truths of humanity and cosmos.

As heart is concerned with harmony it is concerned with relationship. When we can, through the heart, enter the relatedness of all things, by loosening the illusory bonds of separateness, we find our original nature, the heart. We begin believing that the universe is a part of us, and we evolve to understand that we are one with the universe.

The Heart Beyond Recipe

Using the vehicle of the symbol of the heart as our pathway to the good has a resonance with the philosophy of Aristotle, who believed that morality was a process of decision making. To be moral was to do the right thing in a particular situation.⁴¹ Even if there is a perfect good that can be known, it is to be found in the process of “perfect deliberation with oneself or *eubolia*” and not knowledge of foreordained answers.⁴² The answer is not in knowing the right thing to do, but it is a way of being, it is a way of coming to know the right thing to do. In this same way, the answer to finding the heart, to living from the heart, to realizing one’s true nature, does not emerge from following a recipe. It comes from participating in the creative process of cooking for a lifetime. As Karen Armstrong tells us, this is an “apprehension that we (build) up over time, repetitively and incrementally. We (have) to cast ourselves in this cast of mind again and again.”⁴³ It comes from a cultivated relationship with the self. As Gadamer put it, “For moral knowledge contains a kind of experience in itself, and in fact we shall see that this is perhaps the fundamental form of experience, compared with which all other experience represents an alienation, not to say a denaturing.”⁴⁴

The Heart is Where Self-Love and Love of Others are Unified

We live from the heart and realize the universal entelechy through harmonious relationships. This systemic, wholistic view, which in and of itself is definitive of the heart, operates on all levels of being. To live from the heart means to have harmony within the self, harmony in our closest relationships, social harmony, political harmony and universal harmony.

In this sense, to *be* absolutely, to live from our essence or to be true to ourselves, we need to do what is best for others and the whole. Jen, which defines our ideal realization, means to be most giving to others. We are most fulfilled when we are most loving. In this sense, there is unity in the heart between self-love and love of others. Aristotle makes the same point in his *Nicomachean Ethics*.⁴⁵ This view is confirmed by other thinkers as varied as Spinoza and Erich Fromm.⁴⁶ The act of loving is self-loving as it represents the essential expression of self, the manifestation of heart. This is one of the central unifying visions of all of the great spiritual traditions of humankind.

The Heart is the Place of Devotion

Self-cultivation is not so dependent on the what, but on the how; anything approached with devotion will lead to the cultivation of the heart.

We know and we forget, we know and we can't articulate, we forget and we remember. That is why we must live in devotion, a constant returning to the source.

It is the devotion, not the method, which leads to the 'finding' of the heart, because devotion is the authentic condition of the heart.

The Heart as Anthropocosmos

The human heart is a microcosmic representation of the cosmic heart, the symbolic center of the All. The center is the place of greatest organization. As we move from the periphery, that is, chaos, toward the center, we approach that which is most representative of the sacred, that is, the ultimate order.

During archaic times, it was believed that all creation, including the creation of humankind, began at a cosmic central point. In every place where people lived a center was identified as the location of this sacred reality and the source of all creative manifestation. These symbolic centers could be cities, temples, or castles, which themselves were symbols of “the Cosmic Mountain, the World Tree or the central Pillar which sustains the planes of the Cosmos.”⁴⁷

Joseph Campbell describes this point as the “world navel.” It is through this central point that the inexhaustible energies of the universe are made manifest.⁴⁸

We find this symbolic central location as cosmic source throughout myth and even in fairy tale to contemporary times. For example, in *The Wizard of Oz*, the sought-after place which holds our source of passion, wisdom, and courage is the Emerald City which is found in the center of the country.

The heart symbol can be likened to a world tree within the self, the focal point for the channeling of this energy which has been called libido, prana, or ch'i. The symbol of the heart is a symbol of this cosmic center as it exists within the human body. In this sense, this vision of the heart is *anthropocosmic*.⁴⁹

In early cosmologies the universe has also been represented spherically, for example, as an egg.⁵⁰ The universe as sphere is also, as we have shown, a common mystic vision. The heart as a central point within an infinite sphere means that a cosmic model is found within the person, and the whole nature of the universe is what is represented by the heart. This central location, which is the point of origin for the universe and is its essentiality, exists within the person in layers of infinite depth. The cosmos is within the person; within the person it is within the heart; within the heart there

is the central most point of the heart where the ultimate reality is found.⁵¹ We, as human beings, are carriers and transmitters of the divine energy. The seat of this transcendent source is the heart.⁵²

The symbol of the heart is like a *mandala* in the body; an object of contemplation that represents “the cosmic centre.”⁵³ In this sense, the heart is well-suited as a primary Yantric symbol, a core object for phenomenological-hermeneutic exploration, to use as a vehicle for the discovery, realization, and embodiment of one’s essence.

The center that is the heart is an image of a wholistic process, of apprehending the whole of the person, when such a thing is discursively impossible. It is not only the essence of the person, but it is them in their wholeness, which can never be apprehended because we describe and discover ourselves in time. One thing after another is felt, revealed, understood, forgotten, lost, recovered. The sphere that is the heart represents the simultaneity of that which we experience sequentially.

This circular unfolding is also symbolically rendered in wisdom texts and mythic tales from around the world in the form of a “cosmogonic cycle.” This is represented in the hero’s tale. This story is the story of finding the lost heart. As Joseph Campbell put it,

“ . . . the perilous journey was a labor not of attainment but of reattainment, not discovery but rediscovery. The godly powers sought and dangerously won are revealed to have been within the heart of the hero all the time. From this point of view the hero is symbolical of that divine creative and redemptive image which is hidden within us all, only waiting to be known and rendered into life.”⁵⁴

Campbell relates a myth of the Yakuts of Siberia. This is a tale of a return to the place of birth from the land of exile, which is a return to the “mid-point or navel of the world.” This is the place where the hero of the tale, the “. . . White Youth, came to consciousness.”⁵⁵

The Heart as Hierophany

As much as the heart represents the whole as process in time, the heart as cosmic center is a symbol of eternity. This is so because the movements of time are seen as something rotating around such a heart, or center. For Aristotle this center of the time-wheel was called the “unmoved mover,”⁵⁶ and is also known as the Immovable Spot of the Buddha legend.⁵⁷

The human heart is an earthly human representation of that which existed originally before time and space. It is the human embodiment of the patterns of the transcendent, ideal, original realm. In this sense the heart is a *hierophany*. It is a symbol of the real, of that which transcends temporality and profane existence, and is sacredness itself.

In the metaphor of the “book” that was commonly applied to the heart in the Middle Ages, we find the notion of the *exemplar*. This was the original and divine version of the text that was then copied both for practical and spiritual purposes. When we live in harmony with nature, we are in *concordance* (heart resonance) with a divine exemplar. This bears a resemblance to Plato’s archetypal realm, the place of Form that underlies manifestation and is the fundamental reality. To extend this metaphor, through our heart we are a living embodiment of a divine model.⁵⁸

The heart, as the anthropocosmic manifestation of the center within us, represents our approach to that which is divine within us. To have our heart is to be in harmony with the cosmos through moral being which brings us toward the divine. This bears a relationship to Jung’s vision of an “*imago dei*” which is both the inner image of the divine stamped within us and any outer manifestation of that image.⁵⁹ Such is the essence

of the view of Mencius,⁶⁰ and such was the accomplishment of *his* exemplar, the Profound King of the Chou.

The heart is the place where heaven and earth meet. The world tree, from legends as diverse as Norse and Chinese, is where the realms of heaven, earth and hell met.⁶¹ So, again we see the heart as the human equivalent of the center of the world where human nature and cosmic nature harmonize. What this means is that immanent within the heart is the capacity to know the principles of nature -- nature's laws -- and that these laws have the possibility of being lived out and brought into manifestation when we are connected to our hearts. The heart represents that place where human nature and universal law find their point of meeting.

As a symbol of the sacred, ineffable reality of the universe, the heart is a symbol of the infinite depth of nature and the source from which nature springs. It is a symbol of that within us which connects us to that in the cosmos which is of infinite depth, and it is a symbol of the end of that infiniteness, presupposing a central point, a final meaning, which is the ultimate nature of the cosmos. The heart is where the ultimate and the infinite meet. It is the place of infinite possibility through which we move toward perfection.

In the *Central Harmony*, the Confucian writer tells us that truth is the realization of the heart.

“This absolute truth is indestructible. Being indestructible, it is eternal. Being eternal, it is self-existent. Being self-existent, it is infinite. Being infinite, it is vast and deep. Being vast and deep, it is transcendental and intelligent. It is because it is vast and deep that it contains all existence. It is because it is transcendental and intelligent that it embraces all existence. It is because it is infinite and eternal that it fulfills or perfects all existence.”⁶²

The realization of the heart, the home of the essential, original self, brings us into contact with the All and perfects it. The universe, Teilhard de Chardin would put it, is in a process of self-evolution towards an Omega point of pure love.⁶³

As the Confucians would put it,

“In this light, the Way of Heaven and Earth can be completely subsumed within a single expression, defining the cosmological relation between them - in their capacity as material entities – as a seamless state of non-dualism whereby all existing things are generated with unfathomable fecundity.”⁶⁴

The Heart is a Symbol of Life

Though the heart is a symbol of unitive consciousness,⁶⁵ these visions of the heart are not anti-rational. The heart is not just the seat of emotion or intuition. The Chinese word for heart, *Hsin*, includes feeling *and* thinking. For the Chinese there are no dualities of feeling, thinking, intuiting, mind, body. These are all aspects of a unified field. All of our potentials reside in the heart: thinking and judging as well as intuiting and feeling. Humanists from the Confucians to Shaftesbury agree that the central harmony is achieved when all of these aspects of the self are optimally realized. Wisdom emerges when our capacities for thought and feeling are most developed. We are called to develop these two aspects of the heart because they represent the “two eternal passions of the self, the desire of love and the desire of knowledge: severally representing the hunger of heart and intellect for ultimate truth.”⁶⁶ It is in the vision of the heart that the mythos and logos are united.

In that which is of infinite depth, the truth is emergent. The heart is a symbol of the point of origin and the place to which we all return. It represents the center, the essence, the singular point, the beginning, the end, the path, and the process.

The heart, as a symbol of being, points to who we are, what we were, who we can become, who we are becoming.

As Hermes was the god who was the messenger between the gods and humans, he bears an important relationship to the notion of heart. Through the hermeneutic processes of introspection, a deep reading of wisdom texts, an immersion in nature, contemplation of the ineffable and authentic relating to others, we come to an understanding of cosmic principle. We unearth the secrets of nature through our exploration and discovery of the unthought known. We do this through a process of *maieutics*, through the Socratic process of giving birth to thoughts that exist that we don't know we have.⁶⁷

Through the faculty represented by the heart we can discover the energetic source of all. Irrespective of the extent to which we remain unaware of this possibility of connection, it exists for us waiting for our discovery. So it is in and through the heart, as a symbol of the center, as the place where heaven and earth meet, as the place where communication between the realms becomes possible, that we can access on this earthly plane the cosmic principles that are the source of ch'i, energy, power, and manifestation.

The heart is a symbol of life, life itself and all that is beyond the known in living. As Evelyn Underhill put it in the classic, *Mysticism*,

“By the word heart, of course we here mean not merely “the seat of the affections,” “the organ of tender emotion,” and the like: but rather the inmost sanctuary of personal being, the deep root of its love and will, the very source of its energy and life.”⁶⁸

The Heart and Existential Limits

The quest for our hearts is never ending. Like the symbol of the heart itself, human nature is of infinite depth and can never be fully known. The ethical project of a

quest for an ideal is one that is never fully accomplished. To reach the end is not our aim. It is engaging in the process that is the Way. The answer is available to all who search but the final answer is ultimately unknowable. From the great work, *The Central Harmony*,

“The moral law is to be found everywhere, and yet it is a secret. Great as the Universe is, man is yet not always satisfied with it. For there is nothing so great but the mind of the moral man can conceive of something still greater which nothing in the world can hold. There is nothing so small but the mind of the moral man can conceive of something still smaller which nothing in the world can split.”⁶⁹

The metaphor of finding the lost heart resonates with us because we all feel the noble and tragic longing to rise up from conditioned and historical being to fulfill our inherent magnificence.

When a person has a so-called disability -- whether it is physical, psychological, conditioned, or cognitive -- and rises up against limitation, either internally or externally imposed, it speaks to something in all of us, because we are all, in a sense, disabled. We are all wounded, conditioned, and therefore distanced, from our essential selves. We are all limited in our power to be. We are all contingent and part of a finite world, while possessing an aspirational imagination. We are all limited in the capacity to realize that which we can dream of. We are all, by the nature of existence, the nature of the limitations of our upbringing, and the conditions of our culture and society, estranged, separated, less than *jen*, the ultimate quality of the heart. We are all limited in that which connects us ultimately to ourselves and to others. We are all limited in the realization of our capacity to give and receive love. We find that we can never express ourselves the way we want. We all are distant from the heart of genius: the feeling, longing, loving, passionately committed creative beings that we know -- if we could only reach it -- that we are. We are all limited in our capacity to become one with the infinite.

When any one of us strikes out from behind their oppression or disability, fights and struggles against the limits put up against us by an incomprehensible world, and claims the right to be, we cheer them on, knowing that they act to be with courage for all of us.

We cheer this struggle despite the knowledge that we will never, in our limited lifetimes, wholly realize and embody our essence, our hearts. It is in our essential nature to struggle with faith in the face of certain defeat. We see this when The Old Man in *The Old Man and the Sea* is asked why he fights the fish he knows he will lose, and says, “It is what a man must do.” We see it in what was said about Confucius: “He is the man who knows a thing cannot be done and does it anyway.” As Tillich says in *The Courage to Be*, courage is self-affirmation “in spite of.”⁷⁰

When Helen Keller, blind and deaf, touches the water, and begins to connect, and speak, and she comes out of her enraged silence, it speaks to all of us, because with our lost hearts we struggle to do the same. All of us, who are blind and deaf and enraged at our isolation, but choose to exit our self-protection from the injustices of a lost-hearted world, who choose to reach out anyway and speak and connect in the face of certain failure, have found our lost hearts.

We act in the face of certain defeat, because we recognize that what the heart represents is that we are infinitely significant microcosmic representations of the universe. We manifest the universal energy through devotion. We find the inner knowledge, imagine our way toward a goal, and transmute these energies into action. We direct the course of our own life. In doing what is true to the heart, in the face of our ultimate failure, out of our love for the all, we become heroes. We become sages. We find

our way out of the isolation of individuality by finding, through living the heart, that the universe lives within us. As Reinhold Niebuhr said,

“Nothing that is worth doing can be achieved in our lifetime; therefore we must be saved by hope. Nothing which is true or beautiful or good makes complete sense in any immediate context of history; therefore we must be saved by faith. Nothing we do, however virtuous, can be accomplished alone; therefore we are saved by love. No virtuous act is quite as virtuous from the standpoint of our friend or foe as it is from our standpoint. Therefore we must be saved by the final form of love which is forgiveness.”⁷¹

We may never reach the ultimate goal of fully having and knowing the heart, which means having complete access to our intrinsic goodness, a maximal free flow of our energy, or ch'i, of being benevolent, empathetic, and courageous, of living in harmony with the laws of the universe and of realizing our virtues of wisdom, passion, strength, creativity and love. But the process of searching is the life of the heart. It is the purpose that Prometheus made us for: to aim for the heavens.⁷² To find the lost heart means not only the acceptance of the unknowable, but to embrace the beauty of the impossible.

Endnotes

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 - ⁵. “Heart,” *Egyptian Myths*, <http://www.egyptianmyths.net/heart.htm> (accessed May 18, 2010).
 - ⁶. “Upanishadic Mysticism and Meister Eckhart Some Parallels” from *Monastic Interreligious Dialogue* <http://www.monasticdialog.com/a.php?id=490> (accessed March 12, 2010).
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 - ⁹. Huang, 123-125.
 - ¹⁰. Nicholas of Cusa, *De Visione Dei*, 689.
 - ¹¹. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 291.
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 - ¹⁴. “Empedocles of Acragas,” *Newsfinder*, http://www.newsfinder.org/site/more/empeocles_of_acragas/ (accessed May 18, 2010).
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 - ²². Ibid, 38
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 - ²⁸. Plaks, 30.

²⁹. Liang, 80.

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³¹. Campbell, *Hero*, 44.

³². Shunryu Suzuki, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*. (Oxford Oxfordshire: Oxford University Press), 1980.

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<http://www.tristan.icom43.net/quartets/gidding.html> (accessed January 26, 2010).

We shall not cease from exploration
 And the end of all our exploring
 Will be to arrive where we started
 And know the place for the first time.
 Through the unknown, unremembered gate
 When the last of earth left to discover
 Is that which was the beginning;
 At the source of the longest river
 The voice of the hidden waterfall
 And the children in the apple-tree
 Not known, because not looked for
 But heard, half-heard, in the stillness
 Between two waves of the sea.
 Quick now, here, now, always—
 A condition of complete simplicity
 (Costing not less than everything)
 And all shall be well and
 All manner of thing shall be well
 When the tongues of flame are in-folded
 Into the crowned knot of fire
 And the fire and the rose are one.

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- ⁵⁷. Campbell, *Hero*, 41
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- ⁶¹. Eliade, *Eternal Return*, 14.
- ⁶². Yutang, 125
- ⁶³. Chardin, *The Future of Man*, 122
- ⁶⁴. Plaks, 46.
- ⁶⁵. Stromer, Personal communication, March 7, 2010.
- ⁶⁶. Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism* (New York: Image Books, 1990), 72; Yutang, 286.
- ⁶⁷. Eliade, *Images and Symbols*, 35-37.
- ⁶⁸. Underhill, 72.
- ⁶⁹. Yutang, 108-109.
- ⁷⁰. Tillich, 15, 17, 27.
- ⁷¹. Niebuhr, 63.
- ⁷². Bulfinch, 15-20.

CONCLUSION

The guiding premise of this work has been that the heart is a symbol of our essential nature. Our essential nature is intrinsically connected to our entelechy, the realization of our developmental potentials. The fundamental human potentials include thinking, feeling, imagining, acting, and connecting. The realization of these potentials results in the virtues of wisdom, passion, genius, strength and love.

Mencius tells us that we have pain and problems because we have lost touch with our heart, the most precious gift given to us by a bountiful and generous universe. Having a lost heart means we have become estranged from our essential nature.¹ If our essential nature is the heart, and to be estranged from something is the same as having lost it, then to be estranged from our essential nature is the same as having a lost heart. To have a lost heart means we are not developing our capacities to their utmost. To have a lost heart means that we are not realizing our human nature. We are not that which we are meant to be. The universe has a pattern, a movement, a direction, and an end. As we are made of the cosmic universal dust, we are a part of this directed movement. The question for us is what part do we play in this pattern? When we are not in harmony with this Way, we have a lost heart, and we suffer. This suffering serves as a signal that we are out of alignment with a trans-personal purpose, which is, that through the manifestation of our potentials, we fulfill our function as part of the realization of the universe.

The symptoms of having a lost heart include distorted thinking, emotional disturbance, imaginative impoverishment, enervation, shame, inner disharmony, a lack of courage, and a limited capacity for empathy, compassion, and love. This results in the multifarious problems of living, including, among others, destructiveness of self and others, compulsive behaviors, impulsivity, relationship problems, work problems, depressions and anxieties. To have a lost heart means that we live far below our potential.

We come to lose the heart existentially, archetypally, and personally. We are estranged from our essential nature existentially through being thrown into manifested being by being born into a finite body with a limited capacity for self-realization. We are estranged archetypally through inherited relational patterns between parent and child and individual and world. We are estranged personally through the wounds we suffer in our most important relationships, especially our earliest relationships with our caregivers, but also through all of our interactions on every level of culture and society.

The heart is the home of our best potentials, that which we are meant to be. We all have everything we need within us to have all we desire. Like the acorn is meant to be the mighty oak, we are meant to be happy and fulfilled. We are not bad, primitive, helpless, or broken. Our source of goodness is within us – it is simply out of reach. To get all we want in life and to heal the world, we need to find our hearts.

Foolishness, fear, and unhappiness are not our fate, but rather, the result of having lost touch with our heart, our innate capacities for good. If we can reconnect with our source and free our natural abilities for growth, we will become what the universe intends us to be.

This answer, which is as old as human thought, is now being validated by cutting-edge scientific research. What we are learning is that we are all genetically endowed to make good decisions based on reason and feeling, to act on those decisions, and to do what is best for ourselves and others. Evolutionary psychologists are now asserting that our prime evolutionary purpose on this planet is to love.

The Path of Devotion

What do we need to do to find the lost heart? The great truths of humanity have always been communicated through our great cultural heritage of wisdom, story, and art. These sources all contain a similar hidden message. When we listen with our hearts, we find that there is one story behind all stories. What this story tells us is that in order to find our hearts we must each *live our own tale of search and discovery*. We each need to travel down the yellow brick road, slay the dragons, find the Golden Fleece. In order to create a life of true fulfillment, authentic intimacy, and deep spirituality, we must devote ourselves to finding our hearts. We do this by living a life of self-cultivation.

By showing us that the answer comes from *living a story* or *following a way*, we learn that the solution won't come from a quick fix, three easy steps, or a weekend workshop. We must participate in a process of *becoming*. This is a project of a lifetime.

Whether the process is being described in the biblical story of the Jews wandering in the desert for forty years in their search for the Promised Land or Odysseus's ten-year return to his home in Ithaca, this journey of the heart, the search for our center, is long and difficult. As Mircea Eliade, the Romanian philosopher and religious scholar put it:

The road is arduous, fraught with perils, because it is, in fact, a rite of the passage from the profane to the sacred. Yesterday's profane

and illusory experience gives place to a new life that is real, enduring and effective.²

No singular method will solve our problems and bring us what we want in life. Instead, we must learn a new attitude of heart and approach to living.

In order for us to realize our hearts and become what we are meant to be requires the development of a new kind of spirituality. We need what in Sanskrit is called a *Bhakti Marga*, a path of devotion.³ This is not a devotion to some supernatural being, but rather, to those things that are close at hand. We devote ourselves, first and foremost, to the rediscovery of our own hearts. It is only when we put this at the center of our lives that we have the possibility of truly flourishing. This devotion, this commitment to working on, discovering, and realizing our heart over a lifetime, is what Mencius meant by self-cultivation.

This notion heralds back to the wisdom of Shankara, an 8th-century Indian philosopher who deeply influenced the development of Hinduism. In his masterwork, “The Crest Jewel of Wisdom,” he said:

Chief among the causes of Freedom is devotion, the intentness of the soul on its own nature. Or devotion may be called intentness on the reality of the Self.⁴

In the Parsifal legend, the young hero finally brings the king to health and the kingdom back to life simply by asking the right question about the Holy Grail.⁵ All we have to do to bring ourselves back to health is to ceaselessly ask the question, “Where is the heart?”

In order to realize our destinies we need to align ourselves with the Heavenly Mandate. When we are in harmony with these laws we are happy and fulfilled, our relationships and families are harmonious, and our society is peaceful and prosperous.

Devoting ourselves to a lifetime of searching for the heart is the way to learn about this natural, universal law, because the heart is where these laws reside within us. This devotional act brings us closer to the essence of the cosmos.

The goal is not some end point, or even some final success. The goal is an immersion in the process itself. The finding is in the seeking. It is this devotion which leads to the finding of the heart, because devotion is the authentic condition of the heart, where devotion means an ultimate commitment of love.

This striving for the core within us that lives in harmony with the universe, is what nourishes our Ch'i, the lived embodiment of universal energy. It is what gives us strength, courage, and self-confidence.

Just as in the Grimm's fairy tale, "Lily and The Lion," where Lily had to search the world over to find the lost and enchanted prince, to find the lost heart we need to say, "As far as the wind blows, and so long as the cock crows, I will journey on, till I find it once again."⁶

Don't Pull the Seedlings

Healing does not come from the 45 minutes of sitting in a room with a psychotherapist, but from the ongoing process of self-discovery that we learn in those sessions. This process that we can learn in therapy is something that, for it to work, should become part of our life on an ongoing basis.

Though we long for the magic prescriptive, for conversion without effort, we should be suspicious of instant cures. We need to follow the guidance of the ancient masters who instruct us that things done quickly only bring small advantages. Haste

prevents us from doing things thoroughly and achieving great ends. How can we rush becoming a *person*?

Rather, we need to see that accomplishment comes from evolving through a slow, ongoing process.

Our longing for the quick and simple solution, for the magic pill, is indicative of the problem itself. As part of a lost-hearted culture, used to instant results, we lack sensitivity and awareness. We have become inured to subtleties. We do not know when or if we are in alignment with the Heavenly Mandate. We do not recognize the truth when it is in front of us. We wander, suffering, lost to ourselves, because we have lost the ability to enter experience in depth. Addicted to what is shallow, we end up empty.

We must respect the organic process of growth which operates at its own rate. Mencius said that though we must never let the work out of our mind, we must not, as he put it, “pull the seedlings.”⁷

We see in this planting metaphor the source of our understanding of the Heavenly Mandate.

By repeating an act it takes on symbolic value. When the farmer plants, the fisherman goes out to sea, or the weaver sits at the loom, this activity becomes a meditation. It comes to represent the human condition and the self, and metaphors emerge, revealing essential aspects of truth. This is what the sages referred to as the place “where heaven and earth meet,” where earth symbolizes our daily work and heaven represents the clear light of universal truth.⁸

When we try to make the process go faster than is natural, we ruin the new shoots as well. Through the law of analogy, these observations of the farmer led to inferences

about human nature. We are all-too-often impatient with our rate of growth and end up not getting anywhere. Those who try to take a short-cut through life never reach their destination.

With our focused attention we cultivate the emergence of higher aspects of being. We do not do the changing, but rather, we liberate our inherent capacities for transformation. This is what it means to not pull the seedlings.

Accessing our source requires loving attention. This giving to our self is a sacred task. As Simone Weil, the 20th-century French philosopher and Christian mystic, said, “Absolutely unmixed attention is prayer.”⁹

Realization comes from immersion. With a process in depth, the more we look, the more beautiful the object of our contemplation becomes. The deeper we dig, the richer the gold that is mined. If we allow ourselves to be fascinated, the heart’s sublime qualities are revealed. Through our involvement in this project, we uncover the heart’s essence and core.

In the story of Psyche and Eros, Psyche must go to the underworld to fetch some of the beauty of the queen of the underworld. If she can return this to the goddess of love, she will be reunited with her lover, Eros.¹⁰ When we take the dangerous journey and plumb our own depths, we find treasure, and this is what connects us to the energetic source of the universe.

The search for our essential truth is vital because it is what brings about the liberation of the human spirit. It is what leads to self-fulfillment. The truth will set you free. This immersion is the solution itself, because in this slowing down, what we gain is

not information that instructs us in a technique—which is what we get from the quick, surface experience—nor knowledge for its own sake, but wisdom in how to live our lives.

This slow process of self-discovery and becoming is known as the *Tao*, or the Way. The 16th-century Chinese sage Wang Yang-Ming, who was the greatest of the Neo-Confucian philosophers, said that the way does not exist in space or form. The only way to discover it is to go through a journey within ourselves.¹¹

When we travel this long, hard road we become imbued with a beauty that can come no other way. This beauty that emerges through an initiatory process can be likened to the Japanese aesthetic ideal of *wabi-sabi*. *Wabi* means simplicity and imperfection and *Sabi* is the quality that comes with age. It is the richness of patina, of a stone building one thousand years old, of the sound of an instrument whose wood has vibrated for hundreds of years, of ancient words that speak across the eons directly to our center.¹² It is something that cannot be bought, only earned.

The recovery of our hearts must come from within. No method can bring us there. The process is one that goes on forever. Through the daily work of self-cultivation, with effort, overcoming every obstacle is possible. We end the estrangement from ourselves. We return to what we were always meant to be.

Morality: Cultivating the Taste for Goodness

When we penetrate anything with depth, we participate with that thing; we enter into an experience with the object of our devotion. In so doing, we cultivate and develop discrimination, taste. If our object of contemplation is wine, we develop a great sensitivity to the tastes, aromas, textures, and qualities of wine. The heart, Mencius would

say, is the organ that has a taste for goodness. If what we contemplate is our hearts, we gain a refined sense of goodness. Our moral taste is developed. We have the native talent for moral alignment, but this needs to be turned into a subtle skill, which comes through immersion in the problem over protracted periods of time.

The journey of finding the heart is a moral approach. It involves developing our virtues through continuous self-reflection. It is a commitment to realizing the full measure of our love. It involves devoting ourselves to the activities of our day-to-day lives—to our partners, children, work, chores, play, and health.

This concept of self-formation, of cultivating our human essence, is the ideal to which we aspire. Self-cultivation means that through the absolute investment of our thought, emotion, will, imagination, acts, and love, we form our own character. We have within us, in our hearts, the image of the ultimate, and we approximate that ideal through our devotion.

As the great Chinese sages instructed, the way to find the good is to consistently seek out what is best in our nature and work daily to live it out.¹³

There is no one right method for seeking, and the receiving does not depend on luck. We all have the same innate potentials, and the most ordinary of us can be a sage. What is required is the work to make the best of ourselves. If we desire to find our essential selves, we will be “drawn to superior virtue.”¹⁴ Our differences are not in our nature, but in the constant training of our hearts.

The Six Listenings

One of the *Four Books*, the canonical works of Chinese wisdom, was called the

Chung-Yung, which can be translated as *On the Practice of the Mean*. This work tells us that to self-cultivate, we must understand and realize “integral wholeness.” In order to do this we must,

Study it extensively,
question its meaning precisely,
ponder it with full vigilance,
scrutinize its distinctions with clarity of vision,
practice it in all earnestness.
If there should remain that which has not been studied, or that has been
studied but has not yet led to full mastery, do not desist!¹⁵

We are not to be held back by failure, or self-perceived limitation. No matter what we have suffered in our lives to this point or what others may have gotten with ease which we cannot seem to achieve, we can succeed. All that is required is the absolute commitment to learn continuously, and apply the lessons in how we live our lives in every moment.

“What other men may master in a single try, you yourself must strive to attain with efforts increased a hundredfold;
and what others may master in ten tries, you must strive to attain a thousand times over.
For, one whose efforts reach fruition in the mastery of this path,
be he of limited intellectual capacity, he will gain clear understanding;
and be he of weak disposition, he will enjoy great strength.”¹⁶

Finding the heart through a process of self-cultivation means that we can engage in a process of overcoming our estrangement ourselves. The way to understand the human, and therefore ourselves, is through the human. We represent human truth through the formation of symbols. It is through a devoted immersion and participation in symbolic life that we discover what it means to be human, and this is also the means by which we become most fully human. We do this through a process of phenomenological-hermeneutics. Phenomenology is a process of understanding through self-

exploration. Hermeneutics is an interpretation of texts in whatever form. Yantras are complex symbols that are utilized for the realization of our greatest potentials. A process of phenomenological yantric-hermeneutics is one where we use the study and contemplation of complex symbols to go within ourselves and manifest our own yantric symbols.

The way to find the heart is to immerse ourselves in the six listenings. This method of self-cultivation suggests that transformation includes the processes of psychotherapy but requires much beyond it. *The first listening is learning how to introspect.* This means to go within oneself and discover the symbolic products that we spontaneously produce and reflecting on what is discovered there. This is an essential skill we can learn in therapy. *The second listening is a process of studying the utterances of the wise.* The wise are those who have most profoundly gone within themselves and have brought out and articulated their symbolic discoveries for others to contemplate. *The third listening is participating in bildung, or an immersion in a world of symbolic cultural products.* The great artistic products are such because they capture in the most vivid form our symbolic essence and universal truth. *The fourth listening is an immersion in nature, both directly and through science, to understand and comprehend universal law as it is symbolically manifested in these realms.* *The fifth listening is a spiritual listening, or a contemplation of symbols of the ineffable and transcendent.* *The sixth listening is practicing authentic communication with others.* Through intimate relationship, which involves both providing and receiving deep mirroring, we come to expand ourselves. Completing the circle, the skill of listening to others is also one that can be learned in therapy.

Study, in and of itself, is central to the answer. We come to penetrating insight into the subtle and profound meaning of the ancient teachings, the works of culture, nature, and the world of spirit by using the perceptive faculty of the heart. It is the part of us that “dives like the fish to the unfathomable depths and soars like the eagle to the heights of the sky.” This means that with the heart we can plumb to the depths of our own nature and come to know ourselves in the center of our being, and we can know our highest purpose and nature as it is found in the fabric of the universe. Through penetrating contemplation we come to know the meaning in our hearts, which leads to a lived embodiment of the words.

By meditating on these wisdom texts of old, the great works of art, and the profound secrets of nature, we maximize the likelihood of discovering ourselves. The further we go, the greater we will perceive infinite detail and the more we will find. We discover the essential workings of the universe hidden in these sources. The truth will emerge, shining vividly, lucidly. Connections will become apparent everywhere. Through great effort, when we truly comprehend the intrinsic order of our natures, knowing what to do becomes simple, and doing it becomes easy. We honor our hearts when we follow this path of deep inquiry.

Polishing Jade

The ancient Chinese saw the process of cultivation like the cutting and polishing of jade.¹⁷ To be carved and ground like jade refers to the perfection of our individual selves. Each one of us—our essential nature, our entelechy, that which we are meant to be—is a thing of art, beauty, and great value. In order to realize our intrinsic beauty, we

need to be cut and polished. We need to be *annealed*, that is, forged and tempered over a great length of time. This is the cultivation that leads to the restoration of the lost heart, a return to one's unfolding process of becoming. That is human nature.

The jade becomes beautiful all at once and the job is finished, but to achieve true humanity or *jen*, to find the lost heart, to reveal our beauty, we need continuous cultivation.

In order to succeed in finding the heart we must endure the long road filled with trials. To change in a way that goes to the core of our being, we need to do daily work over a lifetime. This is the path of the heart that leads us to find meaning and purpose. What our great cultural heritage reveals is that the road is difficult and long, but if we follow it we are sure to win the treasure.

Devoting ourselves to a lifetime of self-cultivation gives us the tools for acting authentically. It develops our ability to guide and direct our lives in accordance with our moral knowing. It provides us with the power to become an effective and helpful citizen in the world. When we fully embrace this way of living, we have the means for achieving all of our goals and finding true fulfillment.

When we free our natural capacities for growth, the self emerges throughout life. The transformations that occur along the way are like a flower, where after the petals unfold, the full bloom and center are revealed. It is like a caterpillar emerging from its chrysalis, wholly transformed into a butterfly. The heart is already there; it just needs to be revealed.

Through the process of the six listenings, we not only come to understand ourselves and what it means to be human but we cultivate ourselves. That is, we free our

capacity for continuous development toward the realization of our entelechal potentials. The cumulative realization of those potentials is refined empathy, compassion, and love. When we have realized these potentials we are harmonious within and we have harmonious relationships. We realize our intrinsic moral being. We realize the Central Harmony by following the Heavenly Mandate by living according to the Tao. We do what is best for the self and the world, known from our source, the heart. Realizing our individual potentials is the basis for individual fulfillment and world harmony.

The essence of exploring the world of symbols is not about what the symbol is, but rather what the symbol *does*. Through the devotional self-cultivation of an immersion in a symbolic process, we not only actualize our purpose, but we make manifest the telos of the universe, which is to grow toward an all-encompassing love.

A lifetime devotion to working on ourselves, self-discovery, ceaseless study, and ongoing practice, moves us ever closer to wisdom, emotional maturity, self-confidence, courage, creative expression, and the full-flowering of our love. By humbly traveling the long, hard road, guided by the sure hand of all those who have gone before us, we will come to the place in our lives where the heart, so long searched for, is finally found, now not as the basis of our being, but as its realization.

As we find our hearts, we liberate the human spirit. Not only will this path bring us personal fulfillment, but by living a life of self-cultivation, we turn the cycle of lost-heartedness around. We will no longer proliferate our wounds; instead, healing will be passed down through the generations. A natural spiritual development occurs when we find our hearts. We become passionate about, and find purpose in, nurturing ever-

widening webs of relationships, from loved ones and family members to humanity and the planet as a whole.

This personal realization serves the highest purpose of living out our function in the great cosmic organism. As Mencius tells us, when we find our hearts, we heal the world.

By embarking on the great journey of finding the lost heart, we join the noble human adventure of aspiring to fulfill our destiny: to be our authentic selves, to create a life of personal happiness and loving relationships, and a world returned to its place of harmony. The ancient Egyptians agreed with this view. As it was said in the writings of Ptahhotep, the wise vizier who counseled the Pharaoh 4,000 years ago: “Life, prosperity and health are a man’s heart.”¹⁸

At the culmination of the Grimm Brothers’ fairy-tale *The Water of Life*:

“ . . . the merry bells rung,
And all the good people they danced and they sung,
And feasted and frolick’d I can’t tell how long.”¹⁹

The journey of finding the lost heart, irrespective of circumstance or outcome, is our act of having the heart and as such, it is the source of our fulfillment and joy. It is the courageous act of saying yes to our own true being. It is, as the Upanishads says, the “bliss experienced in the space within the heart.”²⁰ As the stories tell us over and over again, through searching, we find the lost heart, and we live happily ever after.

Endnote

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 - ⁶. “Lily and the Lion,” <http://www.authorama.com/grimms-fairy-tales-46.html> (Accessed May 17, 2010).
 - ⁷. Lau, 33.
 - ⁸. Yutang, 221.
 - ⁹. “Simone Weil, *Beliefnet*, <http://www.beliefnet.com/Quotes/Holistic-Living/S/Simone-Weil/Absolutely-Unmixed-Attention-Is-Prayer.aspx> (accessed May 18, 2010).
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 - ¹¹. Huang, 189.
 - ¹². “What is Wabi-Sabi?” <http://nobleharbor.com/tea/chado/WhatIsWabi-Sabi.htm>, (accessed May 18, 2010).
 - ¹³. Lau, xxiv.
 - ¹⁴. *Ibid.*, 126.
 - ¹⁵. Plaks, 43.
 - ¹⁶. *Ibid.*, 43.
 - ¹⁷. Yutang, 241.
 - ¹⁸. “The Maxims of Good Discourse or the Wisdom of Ptahhotep.” <http://www.maat.sofiatopia.org/ptahhotep.htm>, (accessed May 18, 2010).
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GLOSSARY

anamnesis. A Greek concept from Plato. The view that all learning is a process of “remembering” that which we already “know,” but forgot in the act of birth.

anthropocosmic. The human being as a representation of the universal.

aporia. An apparently unsolvable dilemma.

archetype. A concept named by Carl Jung and developed by his followers. Universal attributes of the psyche that are complex agglomerations of motivations, beliefs, emotional tendencies, patterns of growth and development, forces, energies, thoughts, imaginings, actions, and relational dynamics which operated largely out of the awareness of the individual. These common human patterns had their origin in the collective history of humankind. They represented a kind of evolutionary inheritance which has developed over the course of countless generations. They are known through their symbolic manifestations, most clearly in myths and fairy tales.

bildung. The German word for the process of self-cultivation and human development through a participation in culture that leads to a realization of ultimate character.

Central Harmony. One of the four canonical books of Chinese philosophy. The central harmony is achieved when an individual’s heart and acts are in alignment with universal law.

chih. A Chinese character that means the wisdom associated with knowing right from wrong.

complexification. A concept developed by Teilhard de Chardin. In his view, the universe is developing along an axis of increasingly complex forms that lead to consciousness and is moving toward an endpoint of pure love.

dialectics. The natural attribute of mind to imagine beyond evidence by creating ultimates and opposites from the known. A process of advancing toward knowledge through the resolution of contrasting views.

Sacred Ignorance. A revelation that the essential nature of the cosmos is ineffable and unknowable. It is a knowing that transcends knowing. Nicholas of Cusa called “sacred ignorance,” the realization that “the more he knows he is unknowing, the more learned he will be.”

entelechy. A developing entity’s realized form.

entropia. A neologism that describes the syndrome of having a lost heart.

essence. In Aristotle’s definition, *to ti esti*, which means ‘the what it is.’ That which makes an entity what it is and no other. In this sense, it is definitional.

exegesis. The critical examination and interpretation of texts, especially religious texts.

heart. A symbol of the human essence.

Heavenly Mandate. The ancient Chinese concept of universal law.

hermeneutics. The discipline concerned with the art of understanding and interpreting texts.

hierophany. The manifestation of the sacred in the profane plane.

intersubjective. Robert Stolorow, one of the progenitors of the theory, asserts, intersubjectivity is, “. . . a field theory or systems theory in that it seeks to comprehend psychological phenomena not as products of isolated intrapsychic mechanisms but as forming at the interface of reciprocally interacting worlds of experience.”

jen. An ancient Chinese concept with multiple meanings. It has been translated in English as benevolence, human-heartedness, goodness, love, altruism, and humanity. It represents the ultimate realization of the human. In this sense, perhaps the best translation is humane.

li. A Chinese concept used extensively by Confucius. The principle of mutual respect and courtesy applied to all aspects of life. Moral discipline. Form.

nominalistic. The view that only the particulars exist, and there is no essence that transcends the concrete.

noosphere. A concept invented by Teilhard de Chardin representing a universal, collective consciousness of which we are unaware.

normative. How things should or ought to be. Relating to an ideal and a standard. In this it combines an idealism with a pragmatism.

numinous. An object or event suffused with a spiritual quality that has an uncanny, transformative, impact.

paroksa. A Sanskrit word meaning the realm of subtle matter beyond duality.

performativity. J.L. Lyotard's concept of value determined by economic efficiency.

phenomenology. A process of finding truth through an examination of one's own consciousness.

sankofa. An *Akan* word used by the people of Ghana to mean going back to the past to take what can be helpful in creating the future. The symbol for this is called *Asante Adrinka*, and is represented as a heart.

symbol. The product of the human faculty of representing ideas.

syntony. A neologism that means harmonic, sympathetic resonance between people.

Tao or Way. A profound Chinese concept the definition of which is impossible to fully represent. One meaning is the lifetime path of aiming to align with universal principle.

telos. In Aristotle's definition, a thing's final end, aim, or intrinsic purpose.

thymos. In Plato's definition, the spirited, courageous aspect of being.

tikkun olam. The kabalistic notion of healing the broken world.

wabi-sabi. The name for the beauty that emerges from the simple, imperfect and that which has aged.

yantra. Symbols that have the purpose of functioning as revelatory conduits of cosmic truths. They are used for the purpose of helping humans self-cultivate, or realize their entelechy.

yi. A Chinese concept often translated as righteousness. However, yi can also refer to right action, to the person who does the right thing, and to the thing that a person ought to do.

