

The Emerging Noetic Revolution

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For no light matter is at stake. The question concerns the very way that human life is to be lived.

—Plato (*The Republic, Book I*)

On the cusp of the 3rd century CE two great scholar-masters—Nagarjuna in the East and Plotinus in the West—began the noetic nondual knowledge revolution for our species that is just now emerging as the Noetic Revolution of the 21st century. (Nondual is subject/object unity, *advaya*/not two; nondual wisdom is noetic/*noēsis* knowledge with no *essential* subject-object, matter-spirit separation). As the developmental dialectic of our species' emotional, spiritual and ethical evolution proceeds, and the ontological estrangement of the present Modern/Postmodern worldview of Scientific Materialism recedes, this incipient global noetic reformation in religion, science and culture has gently reintroduced to humankind an interior, integral and transpersonal knowledge paradigm, discoverable through the contemplative injunctions of the esoteric and nondual knowledge paths of our primordial Great Wisdom Tradition (Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Christianity, Judaism, Islam). All this toward discovering the meaning of our lives. What is the meaning of life in the constant presence of our death? How can we be happy? What shall we do with this precious life we've been given. Such ultimate questions must be asked, and answered by each one of us.

Our Wisdom Tradition teaches of the profound dialectic of the Two Fundamental Truths—our two ways of being here—social interobjective and cultural intersubjective Relative Truth (*samvriti satya*) of arising finite conventional spacetime reality, and perfectly subjective Ultimate Truth (*paramartha satya*), the infinite nondual ultimate reality that transcends, yet embraces objective reality, and in which it arises and appears. Yes, we live in two worlds at once!

I shall argue herein that the rigorous cognitive coupling of our objective understanding with the deep subjective realization of this momentous principle of the indivisible unity and dimensional interdependence of these two seemingly incommensurable paradigms—the conceptual Two Truths that are the transconceptual one truth—is the inherent treasure of mind, our heart's desire, and both origin and aim of all our seeking. A robust, integral noetic science of matter, mind and spirit must utilize this phenomenological “doublet” of both third person, exterior, quantitative objective (Science) and first person interior, qualitative subjective (Spirit/value) methodologies if it is to guide our conscious evolution—individually and thereby collectively—through the ascending life stages of human psychospiritual development toward an end point that is nothing less than our individual and collective liberation/enlightenment—ultimate “Happiness Itself.”

These primordial wisdom teachings have, at last, been introduced into Western contemplative science, cognitive science, neuroscience, consciousness studies and philosophy of mind to help resolve the “Problem of Consciousness,” the “hard problem” of the “explanatory gap” between the data of exterior objective physical brain states (second and third

person data) and the arising of private interior subjective awareness states (introspective first person reports) that include contemplative spiritual experience. This explanatory gap is the dualism between knowing subject and its apparently separate object, between mind and matter. How does mere matter produce Mozart, or Einstein, or buddha mind? Do objective physical and neurobiological brain processes *cause* subjective mental/spiritual awareness states? If so, how? This conundrum is fundamental to understanding the perennial “mind-body problem.” What is the actual relationship of our physical body to our mind? Of matter to spirit? Of Science to esoteric Spirituality? Of science to exoteric religion? Are these two paradigms—these two ways of being here—as utterly incommensurable as they seem? Is the gap unbridgeable?

Consciousness (first person reports) “supervenes” or depends upon brain processes, but how? The scientific paradigm reduces the primordial emptiness sourceground of the spirituality paradigm to form—mere material/physical matter. Yet the “irreducibility of consciousness” precludes a naïve reduction of consciousness or its ultimate base to purely physical brain states or epiphenomena of such states. First person introspective reports of subjective experience, including spiritual experience, cannot be methodologically eliminated, or reduced to third person objective data or phenomena. To do so precludes or at least ignores the very possibility of subjective direct first person conscious experience at all. Consciousness then, is necessarily first personal subjective, beyond the realm of third person observation statements. So how do we objectify it? We don’t. Merely third person materialist/functionalist scientific and philosophical approaches cannot account for our subjective experience. Consciousness gets left outside. Thus the urgent need of an integral noetic “Science of Consciousness”—the long ignored exploration of the interior life of the mind.

With what shall we fill this paradigmatic explanatory gap between our outer objective and inner subjective experience? Objective matter? Subjective spirit? Causal neurochemical correlates? We shall see that this explanatory gap that is the paradox of mind is bridged by the full *Bodhi* of *samadhi/moksha* that is our great wisdom tradition’s psychospiritual liberation/enlightenment. If we surrender our deep cultural background attachment to the concept that consciousness is either physical/material matter (Scientific Materialism) or mental/mind (Subjective Idealism) and consider the possibility of a vast interdependent primordial matrix sourceground that embraces both, then where is the “explanatory gap”? How do we do this? With the spirituality paradigm’s contemplative practice that uncloaks the “primordial presence” of this all-embracing consciousness base. Moreover, we shall see that the conscious formulation of this adventitious “hard problem of consciousness” necessarily requires the very consciousness that is in question. Perhaps then, there is no actual problem of consciousness at all. We shall explore this ostensibly “hard problem” in order to further the dialogue and *rapprochement* of these two hitherto incommensurable paradigms that are Science and Spirituality.

This emerging “new science of consciousness” with its noetic meditative/contemplative studies unifies and includes both Western neuroscience and Eastern contemplative science (*adhyatmavidya*), and is an urgent juncture in the perennial Problem of Knowledge. Such an incipient unified science of consciousness is a precursor to a truly integral noetic science of matter, mind, and spirit, and an augury to any fruitful, provident integration of the two

paradigms toward a higher, subtler, post-materialist and post-metaphysical unifying synthesis that furthers human happiness and well-being. Jon Kabat-Zinn's Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), MB cognitive therapy, and Richard Davidson's functional MRI research in neuroplasticity at the University of Wisconsin with H.H. The Dalai Lama's advanced meditators are cases in point. As this new noetic Science of Consciousness deepens we shall see contemplative studies extend its reach into the social sciences, medicine, the humanities and education.

In any case, the philosopher's "hard problem of consciousness" outpictures everyone's prior, *really* hard mind-body problem, namely that separative dualism that is the primordial split between the perennial "Two Truths" that are being and non-being, form and emptiness, the objective finite existence of our bodymind, and our ultimately subjective infinite sourceground in which, or in whom everything arises. We shall see that it is this primary, separative dualism, this *anamnesis* or forgetting, this ignoring or ignorance (*avidya*) of our actual, ultimate "supreme source," Consciousness Being Itself—by whatever name—that is the root cause of human evil: the egocentric, then ethnocentric and gendercentric ignorance that is the adventitious negative emotions of fear, anger and aggression—and their horrible result—despotism, war, genocide and despair. And it is the recognition (*vidya*) then realization (*bodhi*) of the inherent prior unity of this ostensible primeval separation of matter and spirit that is our individual and collective liberation, and our relative flourishing and then ultimate happiness (*paramananda/bodhi*). So it is told in the continuity of nondual wisdom traditions that is the primordial Great Wisdom Tradition of our kind.

This emerging epistemic and ontic Noetic Revolution in religion, science and culture is nothing less than a global consciousness shift toward the light. We shall see that this unfolding developmental or evolutionary phase transition of the enfolded basal Primordial Awareness Wisdom (*gnosis, jnana, yeshe, epinoia*) is the direct result of the decision, during the past century by recent and living masters of the primary Eastern wisdom traditions—Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism, Sufism—to transmit their hitherto secret esoteric and nondual view and profound contemplative yogic technologies (first person plus third person data) to prepared teachers and students in the West.

The resulting view and robust, holistic, yet pluralistic methodology of this nascent Noetic Revolution now again begins the integration of the paradigmatic "Two Truths"—relative/finite form, and ultimate/infinite emptiness—that arise historically through our traditions as the mythic Premodern, the objective Modern, and the subjective Postmodern wisdom of our Great Wisdom Tradition. The long term task is to continue the dialectic of idealistic absolutist Modernity with the skeptical nihilistic Postmodern response, and discover the subtler, noetic unifying synthesis inherent therein.

According to the masters and *mahasiddhas* of our Great Wisdom Tradition, recognition, then realization of the perfectly subjective ultimate nature of reality—the very Nature of Mind (*cittata*)—abides in our *relationship* to the infinite, that essential *ontological interdependence* of our painful finite existence, and this, our always present, aware numinous matrix of all form and formless being. This realization is being the emptiness/openness of Tao, "The Bright" *Kham Brahm* of the Hindu tradition, *Christos/logos*, the indwelling presence of our Christ nature, and Buddhist primordial wisdom presence (*vidya/rigpa*) that knows our supreme sourceground

(*cittadhātu*).

As this, our Great Wisdom Tradition arose in the Axial Age (800 to 200 BCE) the great axial sages—Buddha, Lao Tzu, Pythagoras, Plato—told that it is this infinite primordial *Kosmic* womb, utterly ineffable to conceptual mind, but not to contemplative mind, that is nondual Spirit that is interdependent ultimate Reality Itself that embraces, enfolds and in which or in whom arises all unfolding finite appearing spacetime reality, including we beings who experience and try to understand it. And wonder of wonders, That (*Tat/Sat*) is who we actually are—our supreme identity—undreamt of in the thoughtful slumber of human reason and belief. Yes, this is the “extremely hidden” yet “always already” present and awake nondual primordial wisdom—by whatever name—that pervades the “innermost secret” highest or subtlest teaching of the primary traditions that comprise our nondual Primordial Wisdom Tradition.

We shall see that the urgent immediate task of our inchoate Noetic Revolution is the integration of the subjective nondual wisdom and compassion of this perennial tradition with the objective and pragmatic knowledge of the physical, biological and cognitive sciences. This requires an individual and collective cognitive shift from ego/ethnocentric to world/theocentric *poesis* and *praxis*. Astonishingly, this profound epistemic/ontic synthesis is, in the subtlest nondual view, spontaneously, “already accomplished,” deep within us, at the spiritual Heart (*hridayam*) of each human being. All of the primary wisdom traditions teach this at the subtlest levels of view and practice. It is primordially present from the very beginning. It is who we actually are. Yet, from the exoteric relative view we must do something; we must respond. We must recognize, practice, realize, then perfect it through altruistic compassionate wisdom activity in our everyday lifeworld conduct. Why? For the benefit and ultimate happiness of all beings, everywhere. The result for the committed practitioner, according to our Great Tradition, is not only relative happiness and flourishing, but “Happiness Itself” (*paramananda, mahasuka, eudaemonia, beatitudo*). This is the ultimate happiness that cannot be lost. Indeed, a most amazing paradox for conceptual mind.

What then, is the contribution of relativistic Quantum Field Theory and Quantum Cosmology, and the nondual Buddhist view of *Dzogchen*, the Great Perfection to the resolution of this, the fruitful ambiguity that is the ultimate “hard problem” of knowledge and happiness for our species as we participate together in this emerging contemplative and integral Noetic Project—this “enterprise of great pitch and moment”—that is nothing less than a new 21st century Noetic Revolution?

East is East, and West is West. May the wisdom of the East, and the wisdom of the West be unified through this auspicious coming to meet, for the relative, then ultimate happiness of all beings, without a single exception.