

1 Creating the World

Our shared realities are not all objective, nor predetermined, nor ruled by scientific or mathematical laws. Neither are they all arbitrary, indetermined or a function of pure chance and accident. Yet accidents happen and chance plays a role in the unfolding of every human life. And human beings remain caught in the webs of their own self-making and in the painful, absurd, and sometimes amusing creations of their imaginings. The mind is inseparable from its contemplative, intellectual actions, and therefore, in concert with others or sometimes in isolation, the world comes into being with all the contours and signs that we have learned from childhood, education, and experience. And yet, in our own time, it is a fragile and contradictory world populated with innumerable other beings, entities, and species—both real and imaginary. Contradiction frames our thinking, irreconcilability terminates our relationships and rapid transformation blurs our vision. How is it that such a situation exists? How is it that we are so ill-prepared for greater transformations coming? How is it that whole worlds collapse and so few take notice of the consequence?

These questions can only have many answers. There is no summary of the present that can do it justice and no cogent synthesis that equals the complex turmoil of its many parts. So, I will start with some simple observations and show how they can be made into an authentic center. However, to accomplish this we must be prepared to dismantle our perceptions and attitudes and

to redirect our will to alternative ends—creative, enduring and memorable ends—that are themselves only steps in further transformation and becoming. A primary image of this process of becoming is that of a spiral moving inward toward increasing depth and individuation while simultaneously using the power of its inwardness to expand outwardly, encompassing evermore reality and alternative possibilities. This double motion of inward and outward exploration can be summarized as awakening and creation, as an integrated self-knowledge and as a knowledge of others, as twin movements of the soul in its journey toward greater wisdom and social realization—a double-edged sword requiring discrimination and mutual care and honesty.

To begin, it is necessary to first consider those attitudes popularized in twentieth century, western mentality that may hinder us in our journey of exploration. Let us start by setting aside, as much as possible, the “empirical bias” that would bind us irrevocably to prove, in a positivist manner, the validity of our individual and shared perceptions. The methodology of this work is reflexive and comparative in viewing a multitude of visionary worlds as all diversely relevant and meaningful to their respective communities in their construction of a world. The “objectivist” platform, the bias that assumes that what is valid or real must be empirically obvious is itself a constructed and relative truth. The fallacy of this perspective lies in the denial of the personal and the visionary as viable sources of personal and communal development and spiritual transformation. There is no guarantee that an empirical methodology will result in a meaningful worldview; it may only reinforce an existing paradigm or pattern of thinking which lacks authentic personalization and may in fact reinforce a tendency toward detached and alienated observation. As a visionary world, rational empiricism is bound by its own externalizing tendencies and often fails to grasp the import of the subjective experience by which meaning and value are attributed to the worlds we inhabit.

Thus, in this work I can offer only the proofs of personal experience, thoughtful reflection and the fruits of long-term interactive dialogues with others. What can be picked up, examined and agreed upon through direct observation is not my immediate concern. Further, my evidence does not depend on consensus for its validity, nor mass agreement for its importance. Though there are

many, many things upon which the reader and I might agree and many hopes and dreams we might share, these can only be validated in the experiences of authentic living. I have lived a rich and varied life, one that is real, vital, alive and the impressions and impact of these experiences have had a profound influence on my thinking and believing. What is written here is based on authentic perception and encounter but it is also fallible, idiosyncratic, and only a point of reference among many voices speaking. The validity is in the living, in the quality of life, and not in the rationality of the proof, nor in the empirical immediacy of the evident or obvious.

Another prejudice that lies in the way of mutual understanding is a widespread denial and even fear of subjectivity. This is not a book of rationally derived and deterministic ideas, nor is it rooted in externalized evidence. It is based on dreams, visions, mystical encounters, and a great deal of thought, study, and personal exploration. Behind it lie the ruins of numerous worlds and before it rises the possibility of numerous others. Surrounding it in the present are expanding horizons of alternative realities; some so expansive that they would absorb every created world, and some so small as to be barely recognizable, and yet within each a spark of value and truth. And woven through all—falsehoods, partial-truths, limitations, and uncertainties. I see no truth so great that its subjective reality applies to all beings in all times forever, without circumstances to give it form and struggles to mutate its intention. Yet every life contains the potential for something unique, something that was lived, felt, and suffered however briefly.

So I seek to share what is valuable, useful and worthy of remembering, not in a personal or autobiographical sense, but in a synthesis of ideas and a sustained narrative meant to identify the processes of visionary transformation. We can always discard or give up what is inadequate through the mutating processes of our communal or personal exploration and growth. But what we retain is that part of who we are or who we might become as a viable center of authentic life. What we reject are the blind alleys and dead ends that are part of every search for real existence. There is blindness in both what we accept or reject—so let the reader consider where their own limits lie rather than simply evaluate the limits of others. Seeking honesty and having a direct voice, rather than an unrealistic perfection, is a truer means for personal trans-

formation than merely professing abstract spiritual ideals. What is written here springs from the immediacy of an existential search for the roots of spiritual transformation based on all the limitations we each face within ourselves in making sense of our shared and self-constructed worlds.

This is also not a book about corporate existence, social adaptation or experimental therapies. It rejects the theory that culture is the product of purely human imagination and that art is compensation. It espouses no particular psychological school and does not support social, political, or behavioral determinism. In fact, I find modern social theories woefully inadequate in describing human existence and remarkably limited in attempting to grasp the incorporeal, visionary, and transpersonal. Therefore, a central premise of this work is the importance of the mental, psychic, and sacred contents of direct human experience, garnered through a wide spectrum of visionary horizons as they relate to a meaningful existence imbued with spiritual joy and harmony. Such harmony is the essential inheritance of all human being seeking to grow beyond limitation, doubts and denials. Here you will find an open acceptance of the spirit, the soul, life after death, out of body experience, prophecy, healing, incorporeal beings, mythic realms, gods and goddesses, the powers of darkness, and all forms of visionary description as intrinsic to the human effort to understand what it means to create and realize a world. These shared collective visions, these mystical and metaphysical dimensions, all contribute to the unfolding of our potential and the realization of our possibility. But from what do they spring and how do they relate to our own self-becoming? This is my most fundamental concern.

Myths of Beginning

There is no beginning. As much as human beings would like to find or establish some determinate beginning, some absolute point of reference, no such point can be established. How many myths there are about the beginning! Yet, not every people have such myths—for many the beginning has been a slow dawning of personal or social awakening, a memorable point in time passed down through

the generations as intimately and directly connected to the life of a specific people. These beginnings are more dramatically existential than cosmological. The Jews remember coming out of Egypt, not the creation of the world. Christians remember the crucifixion and resurrection, not the beginning of time. Muslims remember the battle of Badr and the return to Mecca by Muhammad, not the moment when Allah said "Be!" and it was.

In classical Hinduism, time is regarded as cyclical and, like many other traditions, offers a multitude of creations—one from the meditative power of intense *tapas* or the spiritual "heat" of the Supreme Meditator.¹ In the ancient Upanishads, the highest Atman (Self) realizing a deep and abiding Aloneness, divides into a male in sexual pursuit of a female counterpart, changing from one species after another through all forms of created beings, thus creating through the sacred power of sexual relations a diverse world of multiple beings.² Later Puranic narratives invoke Lord Vishnu as one who churned the primordial sea of milk, creating like butter, all forms of life; or the dance of Lord Shiva who created through the power of ecstasy. *Kalpa* after *kalpa*, periodic cycles of time unfold but human beings, constrained by ignorance, die and are reborn again and again as the Wheel of Rebirth turns unceasingly, binding all beings in patterns of static existence, differentiated only by social class and function, by innate desire and incomplete dreams—but for those few who escape the misery of the Wheel and become one with the undifferentiated mystery of the divine *Sat-Cit-Ananda* (Being, Consciousness, Bliss).

In ancient Egypt, a seat of western civilization, the priestly traditions offer alternate visions of the beginning: out of Nun, according to the priests of ancient 'Iwnw or Heliopolis, Atum arose by his own power, ejaculated and through further generation, produced the council of the gods; Ptah, according to the priests of Memphis, gave birth to thought-in-the-heart and through commanding speech, life burst forth; from the egg of the primordial mound, according to the priests of Hermopolis, life was born in the form of the sungod, Ra.³ These interrelated descriptions of the beginning from the ancient Black Land, are only the barest testimony of a complex symbolism of belief and practice that surpasses all interpretive efforts, no matter how brilliant or insightful.

Among indigenous peoples, every group has its stories, tales

and narratives of origin; frequently many and often contradictory. These sacred traditions are cherished and enacted in an oral context of passionate belief and ritual sincerity. Many of these origin narratives tell of sacred animals, often primordial ancestors, who are the source of creation and the ordering of the world in all its natural structures, through images of birth, destruction, and renewal. Prehistoric origins also tell of the archaic power of the feminine and the prevalence of the bird, snake, and bull as primordial sources and symbols of wisdom, strength, and creation.⁴ In such visions, both males and females play central creative roles for the transformation of others, as priestesses and guardians of an archaic, secret wisdom.

Alternatively, modern science also has its creation mythology, a visionary hypothesis about the origins of all life. In this contracting-expanding universe, the magnitude of all cosmic matter is drawn into one great mass of collapsing entropic stellar plasma which, in its critical moment of extreme intensity and heat, much like the ancient song of creation in the Rig Veda, gives birth to all galaxies, stars, worlds, and beings. Physicists become utterly preoccupied, like ancient priests, trying to determine the exact moment, the milli-milli-milli second within which this mythic creation occurred. Like the priests of Hermopolis finding the time when Ra ascended from the primordial mound, they calculate, debate, and recalculate the precise moment of creation. And like every priest, they too believe in the unquestionable reality of their visions. These visions track the life and death of stars, the formation of planets, the protozoic sea in which protein molecules combine to form that first living spark, animate matter! World within world, vision within vision, they too pursue their believable beginning and trace it through the rise of evolutionary forms until it culminates in humanity, the highest of all world-dwelling species. Thus scientific mythos, these stories of beginnings, like religious mythos, seems always to serve their own creators, to justify a way of life, to give a rationale for acting and behaving in life as it is conceived and as it must be and will become.

Yet, observing from an individual center, there is no real, observable beginning but the one we choose to believe in; and none of these beginnings are fully adequate. For Buddhism, questions of origin were called "poison arrow" questions: a royal prince was shot

with an arrow. If the victim were to ask, to insist frantically, before removing this arrow, the answer to the questions—From where has this arrow come? Who made it? What poison did they use?—he would die before the answers could be attained. Therefore we must learn to ask questions that will heal our illnesses, in the immediate present, and learn how to get the poison out of our systems! In such a time of crisis, a philosophy of origins has little to offer, for it is the living consequence and the immediate processes that matter. In ancient China, little concern was directed toward questions of origin. Life was the way it was, the principles of nature operated to sustain and promote those who could penetrate the mystery of their interactions. Nu Gua, the female creatress, created men from yellow earth but tired and dragged a rope through mud thereby distinguishing between the superior and inferior types of men. In Daoism, the principles of Heaven and Earth, born of the Dao, work together to give birth to the myriad creatures, but only the wise know how to discover their worthiness and adapt to the revolutions of Heaven and Earth.⁵

There is no one beginning but a multitude of beginnings, each superseding the other, overlapping, interpenetrating, giving rise to argument, conflict, war, death, sorrow, and suffering. Learning to open the mind, to establish patterns for creative interaction, and determining social relations in a climate of passionate belief is well-known to human beings. But often, this process of belief becomes a closing of the mind that fails to see beyond the passionate contents of convention and acquired mental habits. Every beginning justifies its creators, tries to prove the validity of their way of life, tries to find criteria for why that lifeway is correct, necessary, supreme. This is why I say there is no necessary beginning. There is only the processes of the present, the transforming potential that causes us to grasp at form, absorbing what we can retain or believe, then, in understanding, to release the forms because of their insufficiencies, gaps, and obvious biases. Can there be a beginning without prejudice? Our views, so relative to our experience and our limited grasp of the whole make this unlikely and extremely difficult. What people ever envisioned itself as not selected by the gods or powers of nature, or by their own intellectual or social power, to be that which in fact they are—the supreme propagators of their own wisdom? There is no single beginning, only a multitude of ori-

gins, all of which contribute to our mutual understanding of what it means to be human, and therefore, finite and fallible.

It might be argued that the mythology of science is an attempt to supersede every previous myth of origins and to give us the "truth." But this is exactly the claim of every religious revelation! Christianity superseded Judaism on the very claim of a new understanding, based in faith not reason, and taught its vision as truly superior to all previous truths, all paganism and idolatry. Today, scientists often regard any kind of religion as "superstition," a kind of modern paganism that refuses to recognize the superiority of scientific claims, methods, and evidence. And those who study and teach religion often reduce its depths and complexities to a historical, social-psychological or textual phenomenon, denying its implicit mythical or mystical character as irrelevant to competent understanding. And doesn't each have its own "metaphysics"?

Epistemologically, scientists posit a foundation to all knowledge through an unassailable belief in rational deduction and empirical reason based in observable evidence—granting a metaphysical, ontological character to both "energy" and "matter" as well as to "observed facts." Reason guided by intuition is the highest power, technology its greatest manifestation. But what is the metaphysics of the hydrogen bomb? That energy, manipulated successfully by immoral human beings, can destroy an entire world for the sheer purpose of maintaining a political ideology? Is such an ideology sacred and are its instruments the creations of gods who give and take away life? And how is it that this human life principle itself arose—only through accident, contingency, and coincidence? This is a statement of artificial facts, entirely unproven, another mythos of creation, another visionary world.

But we are still groping for beginnings of some sort, some means by which we can establish a sense of identity and perhaps, purpose or motive. There is, after all, the birth of the individual. However, this takes place in the context of a family, with ancestors, perhaps highly revered ancestors. Many traditions of beginning place divine ancestors at the origins of history and social identity granting them a high status that supports the claims of the family. The identity of the individual has a context of descent, inherited skills, ability, social rank, obligations, property, wealth, education, and emotional and mental health. All these act to shape the indi-

vidual far beyond the context of their physical birth; we are born into the midst of a process of complex events, beliefs, and often contradictory influences—parents, family and elders being the early dominant authorities. In many ways birth is more of a beginning for the parents than for the child. Life is dramatically changed, new responsibilities emerge and relationships go through dramatic adjustments, sometimes successfully, sometimes not. By the time the child becomes consciously aware of the significance of his or her birth, of the multitudinous influences that birth represents, he or she is no longer a child! So birth cannot be taken as a beginning.

Perhaps we can find a beginning in national or ethnic identity. Yet, the nation-state is not a reliable source for establishing a trustworthy sense of beginning. In the last century alone, how many states have crumbled, revolutions occurred while social transformations sweep away the very foundations of political organization and bureaucracy is crushed under its own weight! Ethnic identity, like family identity, is tied to the restraints of birth, color, gender, and other social, physical bias. Minority identity is charged with all the inherent limitations imposed by dominant majorities, all the backbreaking prejudices of an uncaring, unseeing, often wealthy elite. But majority identity is no better because even there it is difficult to maintain the fictions of historical origins. Majorities have their own biased mythologies that justify dominance and oppression in the name of self-serving values while members act to enhance and reinforce their own prestige. Manifest destiny underlies majority rule—such as the suppression and destruction of indigenous peoples throughout the world, their enslavement—because those in power rarely renounce the benefits of their position even knowing they were unjustly founded. In fact, the powerful have their own mythology of dominance: that the strong rule over the weak, that only the fittest survive, that might is right and competition a law of nature and that power is commodity capable of being transferred to worthy heirs.

There is no beginning, yet each of us can choose a beginning and therefore anything might be a beginning. Everyone has those moments that they can identify when something happened, something manifested itself and life changed, some crisis or death or confrontation awakened new attitudes and resolve. This is the per-

sonal beginning. Yet even this is a relative, changeable kind of understanding. What, at the beginning, seemed incredibly important, significant, and valuable turns out to be banal, unfulfilling, and not at all creative while something seen only in retrospect, perhaps many years later, turns out to be a decisive moment in personal history and development. So while there is rarely a decisive moment in time that can be identified as such, either collectively or individually, there are moments of significance in which a life may reconfigure and reconstitute itself, thereby opening the individual to new horizons of experience and understanding. In some of these moments, which may impact a lifetime, all beginnings can be released and liberated from their social and historical matrix and seen afresh within the context of an illumination that gathers them together and evaluates the whole with spontaneous ease and joy. Such a recognition is the beginning of true knowledge and opens the individual to horizons that have no beginning, no origins, only a fulfilling presence of wonder in the unexplored processes of becoming.

All these narratives of beginning reflect some need that drives human beings to justify their present conditions, to explain how it is that things are as they are. Revered ancestors and cosmic acts of creation by mysterious powers, all point to the single concern that human beings share: the need to organize their world and to give it continuity over time, a sense of purpose or direction. Meaningfulness becomes assimilated through shared patterns of behavior and interaction heightened by experience reaffirms or conditionally alters collective ideas about the nature of our becoming. And in a religious world of spiritual experiences, the narrative takes on the contours and forms of a divinely inspired communication. In this sense, beginnings are not simply imagined, but affirmed over time by similar and related experiences which are equally foundational. Yoga as a means of spiritual enlightenment is affirmed over and over by generations of practitioners who aspire to the goal of enlightenment or liberation. Shamanistic techniques given by foundational powers, truly heal the sick, protect the individual from injury and allow lost individuals to be found. A Christian revival reveals the activity of the spirit and leads to new styles of life and commitment. And each of these have a context and stories which explain how such powers came to be accessible, or how such realization could be achieved.

Thus myths of beginning provide continuity and give orientation for the actual practice of a way of life, often justifying or explaining social events and customs. And behind the plurality of these origins lies a whole range of encounters and transformations wrought by various powers and beings attributed to those origins. This process of reaffirmation has been frequently articulated as part of a cyclical and seasonal round that orders the way in which those powers are brought to consciousness, usually for the benefit of affirming their reality and for the communication of gifts and abilities which may be "poured out" on the believers. Shamanistic initiations, prophetic visions, mystical dreams, speaking in tongues, healing the sick, or walking on fire, all express intensively the broad range of human possibility in the realms of alternative perception and actions. But cyclical patterns of ritual or initiation cannot be said to be strictly identical, or an eternal repetition of an origin. It is a spiral that contains both insufficiency and possibility, malleable over time to increasing transformation and change. The cycle expands and contracts in relationship to its fulfilling values; should those be questioned or contradicted through experience, the cycles will change, modify, and meaning and emphasis will shift. Does a Catholic Mass mean today what it meant 100 years ago, 1,000 years ago? Is it possible to recreate any human experience in exact detail with the exact meaning when performed by other actors?

The reality which imbues this process with fullness, beauty, and power is often exclusively identified with its traditional manifestations. This is a great misfortune when it gives rise to war, competition, and persecution. It is then that the "mythic quality" of beliefs and origins stand out so clearly, revealing the insufficiency of their contents and the narrowness of their ideals or promises. Every origin contains a limit, just as every manifestation is necessarily a contraction or abandonment of alternate visionary potentials. Contractions that lead to birth are good, but also need to be followed by release and relaxation, a letting go and healing. If not, continual contraction stops the process of birth and death or strangulation may quickly follow. In the contracted state, many beginnings have been used to oppress others, or used as a means to evaluate the validity of another's counter claim, to disabuse them of potency or significance. Manifestations of power are not beginnings, they are continuations of the eons-long process of manifesta-

tion that has no beginning. To open to the vastness of the present, its diversity and maximization we need to let go of our hold on beginnings and realize that every beginning has an end and that in the fullness of time, no beginning is adequate or even necessary.

History, then Civilization

If we cannot identify our primal, mythic origins, those most mysterious moments when we first became more self-aware as a distinctive species, differentiated from other life forms, can we not then identify our historical beginnings? However, this too is problematic. History has no "objective" beginning other than the demarcations that we arbitrarily assign to scattered and disparate remains. The human historical record goes back as far as the earliest piece of bone, stone, or flint to which we attribute human craftsmanship. The fact that classifications present the past in aesthetically and intellectually satisfying patterns only reflects the values that the classifiers hold—their aesthetic and intellectual concerns, their methods and procedures—all express their relative worldviews. Archaeologists have a certain vision of the past, a vivid visionary notion, static, moving, or fragmentary, of the peoples they study. Paleontologists envision the face of the skull they hold or the posture and movement of the creature they have discovered, moving over radically changed and altered environments barely recoverable. The demarcation between animal and human depends on prevailing concepts of what is human and/or what is animal. The idea that humans are descended from mammalians is really a limited conception of what it means to be human, an idea supported by the analytic organization of historically, archaeologically, or biologically related materials.

The spiritual basis of our collective identity, its mythic and componential nature, should not be reduced to a particular tree of rationally conceived relations. Consciousness need not be reduced to a unique manifestation only human, only ours. All living beings have the sensitivity for response and reaction, all forms—animal, vegetative, and mineral—may possess manifestations of interactive awareness barely recognizable to us in our present limited states of human development. The denial of such awareness is a

limiting bias, a certain fixity of thought attributing to humanity a special place and centrality in existence that accepts no equals, no peers other than its own species which, in paradigm after paradigm, is ranked and delineated. And this bias is rooted in an old myth of origins, that humanity shall rule over the animals and plant worlds, and all the produce of the earth shall be ours to inherit and control. Yet, our descent and development is from the entirety of all species, it reaches back to the primordial oceans before any species could be identified, back into the primal matter of creation, back into the unidentifiable fullness of spirit and becoming. This fullness is the potential awareness, the unexamined horizons of every living being differentiated according to the qualitative structures of its incarnate life. These qualitative manifestations seek to touch the heart of every self-aware being, however unconscious it may be, however full of denial.

The evolutionary history of humanity is a fictive creation, the imaginative workings of human intelligence seeking to interpret the fragments and shards of past forms of becoming. As a fictive creation, it is enshrined in the broader context of a social-scientific revolution which seeks to interpret history in a broad, expansive sense as a dependably accurate representation of actual processes of species evolution. This reconstruction of the past proceeds according to methods which rely on rationalized interpretation, on the appropriate arrangements of material datum. But evolutionary history is also a visionary reality. It is a way of constructing, deconstructing or reconstructing the world, of making sense of a limited set of datum which are arranged and rearranged according to the beliefs and attitudes, the current theories of the interpreters. It would be extremely naive to imagine that evolutionary history is not full of remarkable errors, that it will not be written and rewritten and perhaps radically revised or even abandoned in the generations to come. What about the internal or psychic parameters of history and evolution, the inner power of consciousness seeking to unfold its potential and power? No evolutionary history can capture the inner reality of outward change based only on physical or biological evidence. There must be an awakening to the psychic and spiritual dimensions which also motivate outward change and developments and which, for the sensitive and aware, are primary sources of motivation and conception.

Evolutionary history is also mythic. But it is a myth that in many ways lacks sophistication; it begins in random chance and proceeds through vaguely articulated transformations to eventually differentiate into the multitude of beings and living forms that constitute the global life of planet earth. We may ask about the question of purposeful intent, of some inner sense of direction and unfolding, about the origins of self-conscious awareness, in vain. We hear that life proceeds in fits and starts, by chance, randomly, without any inner coherency other than the external forms of its adaptation. While expansion, progression, equilibrium and extinction may characterize theories of the evolution of species, what characterizes the inner motive power of such transformation? The narrated myth among competing theories is to identify the objective material causes and to overcome the "transcendent fallacy" that attributes causality to unknown or unseen powers. This exclusive denial of the immeasurable and the unobservable is an intrinsic feature of the mythic pictures of much twentieth-century biological and empirical science. The equally hypothetical "violent universe" is nothing other than a metaphor for a particular vision of the world, one stripped of its inner coherency and postulated in accordance with limited observable processes whose sheer energy is intrinsically threatening (according to this picture) to human becoming.

Our emotional and spiritual history is not unconnected to our material history and the intoxicating perspectives of scientific explanation frequently do not admit the validity of the spiritual point of view. Religious scholars compound the problem by either ignoring scientific development and theory or, even worse, by trying to artificially construct a scientific analysis of religious development. The so-called "western science of religion" has turned its attention to the outward structures of social and religious history and has adopted any number of social-scientific theories to explain the nature of religious behavior and belief. Ironically, it also ignores the work being done in parapsychology and considers it in no way germane to its primary interests—the objective study of religious phenomena. This externalized view of religion also denies the validity of the spiritual realities underlying religious experience and personal encounters. Neither the mythic structures of scientific belief nor the mythic structures of religious tradition can be taken as

fully adequate explanations of the inner potentials of genuine spiritual maturity. It is not the objectivity of the world we are seeking, but a meaningful place within which to construct a satisfying and spiritually valid home—this requires different narratives, less objective and more attuned to our evolving potential and deeper emotional and psychic needs.

The material and biological history of human becoming is not inseparable from our racial, cultural, and spiritual histories. A deep schism has in fact developed between these mutual aspects of human existence. Denial and ignorance are common among adherents of the various schools of thought, a denial of the reality of the others' visionary world, ignorance of the history and development of the others' interpretation. Where the mythic worlds of these interpretations do not interpenetrate or overlap, there is an unwillingness to accept the possibilities implicit in the visionary worlds of others or to close or cross the gap between them. Subsequently these worlds frequently collide and much harm and injury is done. Material realities and spiritual realities need to be brought into harmony with one another, not one subjugated to the other. The collective history of visionary interpretation interpenetrates our shared worlds, every envisioning throws new possibilities on to what constitutes the real. And every vision becomes mythic in contents as it attempts to summarize, integrate and synthesize the expanding diversity of its primary conceptions. The task at hand is to arrive at a realization of our spiritual potential without denying the manifold complexity of alternative possibilities.

The history of our physical evolution merges at some arbitrary point into identifiable cultural histories as the "rise" of civilization. The histories of civilization are also mythic. In the rise and fall of empires and cities, in the conquest and domination of one people by another, in the institutions of kingship and political intrigue, the history of violence and appropriation are characteristic of our attempts to achieve some temporal picture of past eras, or to justify rapacious attack and seizure. The typical "history" of human life has inevitably focused on the cultures of the elite and ruling classes. There has been an undeniable fascination for the study of war and violence as characteristic of the successful exercise of power. Historical interpretations present protest and rebellion as significant only in the modern era, but overshadowed by the rise of

nationalism and the corporate state. The history of civilization is also the history of social inequality, patterns of dominance, the brutalization of both women and children, and the establishment of rigid hierarchies of social control. Urban civilization seems to hold a particularly expressive fascination for this type of authoritarianism; kings are glorified and ages are romanticized without a clear conscience of the life of the ordinary person. Human beings are mesmerized by the drama and excesses of an age, by the extremes of power or wealth without attending to the poverty and suffering of the struggling populace.

In every case, history is a construction and synthesizes a visionary account of previous periods and places. The envisioning of the past, how it was or how it operated, or might be, accords with the imaginative tendencies of the historian and the fragmentary contents of the historical record. Historians swear to the accuracy or "objectivity" of their representative creations and to the validity of their evidence—but they are constructed portraits that often miss the inner life of the actors and give only limited, externalized pictures. Every historical interpretation is relative and in some sense arbitrary; it reflects the mind of the interpreter and their own preoccupations and manipulation of historical datum. This is an inescapable condition in the interpretation of all "other" worlds, past and present—the author must bear the weight of his or her perspectives and beliefs, take full responsibility for having a "view" and recognize the subjective quality of their work, regardless of how objective they may believe their handling of historical evidence. Consensus in this matter is no help in relieving the burdens of responsibility that fall on each of us to make sense of our human situation. Tremendous error and inadequacy have characterized whole ages and peoples, the consensus to dominate through either law or opinion is expressive of the tendency to find relief from personal thought and reflection by simply adopting the expediency of mass opinions. The myths of history are constructed out of such opinions.

This is not to say the study of history is not important; it is in fact essential and primary in helping us to grasp our collective past. But the tendency to recreate this past needs a motive that illuminates the present if we wish to truly be the inheritors and to learn from our own ancestral experiences. History has no begin-

ning. It extends into the indefinite, dissolving mists of long-ago eras and moves forward through an all-too-unconscious present into poorly formulated future perspectives that will profoundly affect the generations to come. The "march of civilization," the "progress of science," the "improvement of human life" are all mythic constructions embedded into historical frameworks. In fact, social and scientific historians of the twentieth century might be characterized as obsessed with historical interpretation. Never has so much been available for study, never has the implications of historical experience made such an overwhelming impact on the life of every human being as in the present century. Only in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has the mythology, religion, philosophy, and ideology of the past become so accessible to the ordinary person. But to what end? It is a complexity, a vastness, of disjointed records and artifacts that exceeds the capability of any individual to fully grasp or understand.

Subsequently, partial mythologies arise with regard to our mutual or individual interests. The glory of Spain—its architecture, music, art, and civilization—is juxtaposed to the cruel exploitation and destruction of the Meso-American Indian peoples and the obsessive persecution of heretics and unbelievers during the Inquisitions. The courageous American pioneer family and the inventive, industrious, youthful expansion of the western frontier is contrasted to the complete subjugation and destruction of Native Americans and the oppressive and brutal destruction of African populations to serve the economic ambitions of innumerable profit-making societies. Ancient cultures, deeply entrenched in traditional ways of life incorporated slavery, child and wife abuse, and the exploitation of the poor as the intrinsic rights of the ruling class. Patriarchal domination overshadows the entire history of all civilizations and the abuse of women is a constant theme in all its many bizarre and aberrant forms: foot-binding, clitodectomy, enforced abortion, abandonment, and innumerable other practices. Torture, cruelty, murder, and massive and extensive warfare expedite the desires of individual rulers both on a national and local level. The unending persecution of minorities, either racial or religious, characterizes the "civilization" of every era.

How are we to construct the past unless we grasp fully the terror and abuse that lies buried in it? War is not glory, but insan-

ity and madness. Kings do not rule by divine right but by accidents of birth, through treachery, oppression, and the subversion of the rights of the individual. Democracy is not the highest expression of government and capitalism is not the product of enlightened self-interest. These visions of reality are all products of historical experience that has been framed to suit the beliefs and collective myths of the participants. They are partial, fragmentary, and incomplete. The interpretation of history is really in its infancy; it has hardly begun to attain a mature view of its subject matter because human beings have hardly begun to attain the appropriate degree of self-knowledge necessary for deep interpretations of such complex datum. The problem of civilization is that we do not yet recognize what true civilization might be or become; how it might recognize the rights and needs of every individual in a context of social communalism enhanced by shared responsibility, more profound horizons of transpersonal awareness and an end of all excessive wealth and sanctioned patterns of dominance. But that too is a mythic vision.

The task at hand is to familiarize ourselves with all the wealth of history, both organic and cultural, in an attempt to penetrate the significance of its variety as well as its successes and shortcomings. But we must not be taken in by the interpretive dogmatism of either the content or a particular reconstruction. The pluralities of history are too deep and too rich to be easily or even adequately schematized. Every history represents an alternative reality, every civilization contains world-envisioning processes and events that are marginalized and rarely understood by even its most self-aware participants. How much more difficult for those who only look on from the fragmentary perspectives of documents and artifacts! Yet each of us constructs numerous pictures of the world, perhaps shadowy and barely visible or sharply etched in imagination, but never quite the same worlds, and often ones grossly distorted and inaccurate. Can we say we understand our present cultural situation? How penetrating a glance can we cast on our present history, how illuminating is the light of mind that contemplates the mysteries of the present, to say nothing of the past? The inward turning of the spiral always comes back to the inward depths of the observers, to the fullness of true personal awareness, to concern, compassion and hope before we can encompass more, absorb more of the vast complexity of all lives together.

Our collective spiritual histories are even more challenging because they do not depend strictly on outward impressions of being and becoming but on the inward unfolding of potential in the context of primal religious experiences. Yet they are inseparable from their histories, both in their poverty and riches, they depend on a certain inseparable immersion in a historically irretrievable condition—one that has no beginning, no identifiable moment that represents an absolute certainty. Our shared present is a present that is imbued with numerable mythical contents, be they social, religious, artistic or scientific, and human life cannot be separated from its rootedness, its incarnation in this multiplicity of mythical histories and civilizations of many sorts. We conceive and give birth to innumerable varieties of interpretation—we reject, synthesize, outgrow, and search again for meaning and reality. This is the visionary process: to create the world in relation to the arising of what life might be or become. Life without vision is sterile. It is a conformity to consensual opinion and the blurred visions of the often unreflective collective, lacking in identity other than what it most often shares unthinkingly. To grow we must create. Therefore we must seek to be free to create and must first discover the circumstances that allow for creation. This is both an individual and a social task and its inspiration has multiple spiritual origins that far exceed the limited historical record.

Patterns of Truth

What about traditional religions? Is this not an aspect of human experience which has been dedicated to the uncovering of the inner reality? To these questions we may answer both yes and no. In creating the world, religions have played a crucial and dominant role. Generation after generation has been raised on the communal structures of shared beliefs. And these beliefs have originated in or have been attributed to other visionary realities that are conceived as necessary sources for personal survival and transformation. For thousands of years religious traditions have attempted to envision the world in their own images—in the image of the founder, the charismatic leader, the teaching of the elders, the revered ancestors, the gods, goddesses and all forms of power and sacred pres-

ence. Every religion, however great or small, has perpetuated a vision of the world as the core images around which human life revolves. The "yes" of our answer to the inner life is that every tradition has formulized a method and philosophy which allows for an inner development in relationship to what it holds as most sacred. This is good but relative and not complete or final. The "no" of our answer must be that every tradition has in some way barred its practitioners from the exploration of alternative worlds—if not in the realms of religion, then in opposition to what it terms irreligious, secular, or worldly.

Every religion presents us with a pattern of truth. A particular way of conceiving both the structures of human existence and the cosmological counterpart to those structures. And in every case, these patterns are the work of many generations, seeking to understand the inner nature of that pattern or externally concerned with adaptation to the processes of evolving historical circumstances. While a single individual may act as a catalyst for sudden and dramatic change or confrontation, it is the generations that follow that formulate communal experiences into some form of consistent and yet variable belief and practice, who give it visible form and ritual elaborations. Buddhism, founded by Siddartha Gautama in sixth century B.C.E., has a long and noble history. It branches out into innumerable schools and lineages forging both historical and mythical links to the founder. But the knowledge of the Buddha was based on a thorough study of all the teachings of his day, intensive yoga and meditation disciplines, and many other ascetic practices, all of which have their own long and complex history of development, a history that pre-dates the rise of Buddhism and disappears into a misty and irretrievable past. The enlightenment of the Buddha, the unique religious experience, is a core around which many types of meditational practice have developed, each oriented to confirming a Buddhist vision of reality in terms of similar religious experiences. Yet in going to Tibet, China and Japan (as well as America), these traditions evolved, changed, and adapted to new cultural environments where new emphasis and techniques were adopted. The Buddhist pattern of truth is not static or timeless, it is highly syncretic, adaptive and historical—this is one of its great strengths.

Of even greater historical depth and complexity are the multi-