

Chapter One



Reason Wears a Wizard's Cap

The eye by which I see God is the same as the eye by which God sees me.
My eye and God's eye are one and the same.

(Meister Eckhart)

A fool sees not the same tree that a wise man sees.

(William Blake)

We commence our endeavor of examining the faculties of knowing and perception by making an initial reference to the unique phenomenon of the modern mentality: its instinctive reliance on human reason to negotiate its way through the mystery that lies at the heart of human existence. Underlying the entire scientific premise is this presumption that human reason is somehow guaranteed access to the profound truths of the universe on its own terms. Needless to say, this assertion begs the question: are we as modern¹ individuals supposed to settle for a secular—as opposed to a sacred—science that has no credible answer to the perennial mysteries that surround us? Are we to accept without question the aura of truth and finality that colors the speculative pronouncements of modern science concerning the true nature of ultimate reality?

Is there, indeed, no decisive Truth that transcends all human speculation, a truth that could overwhelm us with its veracity and its certitude? Is it not possible that at the heart of the universal mysteries we seek to comprehend there lies a seed waiting to evolve into a paradigm of knowledge whose manifestation and growth will resolve the perennial questions with a certainty that continues to elude the findings of modern science, even though science's empirical system of belief and secular philosophy now

1. This term will be clarified further on in the chapter; for now it will suffice to understand the term modern as referring to those who have come this far and have profited from the knowledge and experience of generations since time immemorial and who are now on the verge of a new, dynamic future of unknown proportion.

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play such a vital role in shaping the attitude and ambiance of the human condition?

We live in the divided house of the modern mind which extols a reductionist approach to the understanding of the body, mind, and heart, rather than the unified vision of the One Reality which brings these modes of being together in a sacred interaction of holy faith and human reason. With the rise of modern science, faith's luster has gradually lost its sheen and reason has come to be understood as the only true standard through which the basis of all knowledge could be established. Through the light of reason, the 20th century mentality finally gained complete access to all knowledge based on the model of inquiry and experimentation of the natural sciences. Having passed through the cold logic of human reasoning, knowledge is now to be considered factual, deductive and empirical, based on the universal laws of mathematics and the physical presence of matter, whose self-evident objectivity cannot be denied.

Throughout the modern era, in spite of the efforts of contemporary scientists to satisfy the fundamental mysteries that haunt the human psyche, the pursuit of scientific knowledge has left modern humanity feeling edgy and put upon. We no longer question what we know and helplessly accept the expert notions of the scientific community.² We assume the validity of what we know and want possibly to know more, but without asking the vital question: How do we know what we know? The fault lies undoubtedly in the question. We no longer question what we know. Indeed the certainty of our assumptions leaves no room to alter or compromise our assertions about the true nature of the reality. What remains of the cosmic mystery merely awaits our scrutiny and resolution.

Faith and reason need not be the mortal enemies of the self, however, creating a psychic fault line through the inner landscape of our cognitive world. Instead they could be understood as complements with the power to reunite body with soul, reason with intellect, matter with spirit in order to bridge the great rift that separates the sacred and profane worlds. Faith's intuitive light understands

2. A case in point, for example, is the theory of evolution. Try telling the average person, much less a scientist, that evolution is still an unproved theory and you'll be taken for a madman, if not a fool. It is as if to suggest that a possible chink exists in the armor of this sacrosanct belief would bring their world (view) crashing down around them.

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everything within nature and humanity to be a transcendent symbol of a higher reality that casts rays of the sacred across every aspect of our earthly life. Human reason need not be the cold, autonomous standard of mind that we make it out to be, replacing the intellect as the sovereign instrument of visionary knowledge and insight. After all, what actually prevents reason from being a door of perception that leads us out of ourselves and makes everything appear as it truly is—a symbolic image of the infinite and the eternal—except perhaps reason itself?

Within the interior of the human world we find distinctive characteristics that distinguish humans as unique among all living things. These features include higher order faculties such as discursive reasoning, visionary intelligence, a broad range of emotions, moral sensibility, and an intuitive sense of the sacred and the otherworldly. Although in some cases appearances might indicate otherwise,³ we are so far removed from the cognitive levels of the animal kingdom that we simply cannot account for ourselves on the basis of purely natural processes within the existing laws of nature. On both rational and symbolic levels, human reason and the natural order itself actually call out and yearn for the spirit of a transcendent intelligence that we feel within our very bones and that we witness in the complexity and design of the universe from the double helix of DNA to the magisterial procession of the galaxies. Both human reason and its natural complement, intelligence, find their venue for self-directed mental activity within the borderland of the spirit which constitutes a kind of sacred precinct of our inner being that relies on the higher faculties that actually have no dependence on the externalized physical world.



We shall make repeated reference to the term *modern* and its derivations throughout the course of this book; it would therefore be wise to give an account of its meaning at the outset so as to avoid any unnecessary confusion of terms. By the word *modern* we do not wish to suggest a reference to a specific temporality as such, to

3. A certain similarity between the simian and human worlds and the nearly identical chromosomal count between chimps and man certainly qualify as analogous possibilities.

highlight the new, for example, as opposed to the old; nor do we mean a condition of knowing about things that were not known in earlier times and whose mystique therefore takes on the flavor of a development to which earlier generations merely gave crude expression. Architecture and technology, for example, are now perceived to be a reflection of modern culture versus the archaic or old-fashioned structures of former times and the temperaments that built them.

The word *modern* in the context of this work relies on the qualifying terms scientific, secular, and rational to substantiate its meaning and highlight its particular focus. The term *modern* and its counterpart *modernity* have evolved over time into a meaning that fully summarizes the ambiance and point of view of the rational, secular and scientific spirit of inquiry that colors and shapes the very mentality of the age in which we live. When we refer to modern humanity, the modern mentality, and modern science throughout this work, we mean none other than the rational, secular, scientific and increasingly scientific⁴ outlook that prevails worldwide and that characterizes the prevailing worldview of the modern era.

The modern mentality, and the modern worldview that is the product of that mentality, for all its sheer innovativeness, its technical brilliance, its formidable modes of intelligence and perception, its practical applications, and its sophisticated assertions of a credible worldview, has backed itself into a corner in which there is not much room to maneuver and from which there is little hope of escape. It could be symbolically represented as the closed system of the mind's "I" that bases its first principles on purely hypothetical conjecture and speculative theory on the one hand, and a series of categorical denials on the other; rather than the open door of the mind's "eye" that bases its intuition and resulting faith on the principle of a first cause and a final end as

4. "There is a sharp yet oft-overlooked distinction between scientific knowledge and scientific belief. And the difference is simple: authentic knowledge of a scientific kind refers necessarily to things that are observable in some specified sense, and affirms a verifiable truth; scientific belief, on the other hand, is distinguished precisely by the absence of these positivistic attributes. Thus, no matter what may be its 'scientific status,' the latter refers to entities that are not in truth observable, and affirms something that is in fact unverifiable" (Wolfgang Smith, *Cosmos & Transcendence* [Peru, Ill: Sherwood Sugden & Company, 1984], p. 9).

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the ultimate Source of the universe and its principal defining quality.

Modern science strives to reduce the whole of the qualitative richness of the universe to a purely quantitative mathematical formula. As such, it boldly casts aside the so-called vertical perspective portrayed within the great spiritual traditions, which perceive an inner dimension to every external form, an enduring spirit behind the temporality of matter, and an abiding truth with the power to synthesize every physical fact into a union of meaning and purpose. In so doing, modern science effectively closes the open door to the Infinite and denies humanity any possibility of fulfilling its true vocation on earth as a physical form animated by the breath and spirit of God, a thinking and conscious being created by God and cast into a physical and human form.

In spite of the aura of objectivity, certainty, and invincibility set forth by the contemporary scientific establishment, the modern scientific endeavor and the high priests of science who religiously uphold its doctrines, have a lot to account for.⁵ The modern scientific outlook and its approach to the pursuit of knowledge initially entertains theories and suppositions that must ultimately be supported by a body of empirical evidence that is believed to lend an aura of objectivity and a quality of the absolute to its procession of speculative thinking. Although this approach may pose as an intriguing and legitimate endeavor, it still begs the question: What substantiates the truth of a fully reasoned but unproved hypothesis, and what objectifies the reality of the physicality of a transient and temporal matter, that they have the power to substantiate and objectify the true nature of ultimate reality?

Moreover, the modern scientific approach to the pursuit of knowledge harbors a misguided and questionable faith in the absolute veracity of its first principles, namely its unchallenged assumption that the laws of mathematics provide the categorical

5. Ironically, scientists often resort to religious terminology to clarify their points, making reference for example to the “canonical definition of objective scientific knowledge” and the “grail of objective truth.” The Harvard professor and biologist E. O. Wilson goes well beyond the decorum of professional neutrality when, with reference to the objective truth of modern science, he writes, “. . . Ignorance-based metaphysics will back away step by step, like a vampire before the lifted cross” (*Consilience* [New York: Vintage, 1999], p. 68).

imperative of the human mind in the formation of all scientific theory. Perhaps they do and perhaps they do not. Who or what has the right to decide whether the laws of mathematics should determine what is real and what is unreal in the natural and supernatural order? Is the knowledge entertained by the faculty of reason the result of its function within a purely human and rational order, or from a supra-individual and metaphysical order? The same question keeps recurring in many different guises: What will provide the ultimate criterion for a knowledge that will be not only scientific but also universal, an objective knowledge that will transcend the limitations of the natural world and the human condition? The quest for a unified theory of knowledge is what everyone wants to know and it drives many of the leading proponents of modern science to the far ends of the earth to uncover.

Finally, the modern scientific outlook continues to remain uncomfortable with the prototype image it has created. It steadfastly maintains an attitude of awkward ambivalence toward the full capabilities of the human persona in terms of the intelligence, the range and extent of human reasoning, and human consciousness as an afterthought of a mindless evolutionary process that traces its line of origin back to some form of animal ancestry. The still mysterious and incredible theory of evolution, when applied to the development of the cognitive, discerning, and reflective mind, only heightens the mystery surrounding the origin of human vs. animal intelligence, the higher faculties and fields of perception, and the meaning and import of our true humanity. In other words, the modern frame of reference and the scientific worldview we now live in do not admit of the borderland of the spirit of which we write. The modern mentality does not fully appreciate the richness and fullness of the human faculties of intelligence, the reasoning powers of the mind, higher consciousness, the fields of perception, spiritual imagination, sacred emotions and ultimately the meaning of the soul in the same way that these higher faculties were understood during more traditional times, namely as basically human properties capable of transcendence: human by virtue of the human condition and transcendent by virtue of the human image as a reflection of a divine Principle.

Modern science and the predominant worldview that provides the framework for its findings is mind and matter bound. It is fix-

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ated on the ability of reason to work its way through any dilemma and the need for empirical evidence to quantify and fully objectify its theories. Moreover, the modern mentality permits itself the luxury of a dream in which the faculty of reason is somehow transcendent, that is to say, a faculty that has the power to surpass itself beyond its natural capabilities *by its own means*; a faculty that in pursuit of its self-ordained inquiry into the true nature of reality will ultimately unearth sufficient evidence to substantiate the miracle of existence *on its own*.

The modern-day reliance on the determining powers of human beings and the absolute trust in the ability of human reason to lead us into the future of ourselves, on our own and without the aid of Heaven, tends to dominate the first tier of our inner world with its superficial line of reasoning and its closed system of thought. The mind, with its intricate thought processes, moves from the phenomenal world of the senses to the inner world of thought and abstraction and back out again into the world of created forms with an assurance that is frankly astounding and that belies the truly mysterious nature of our inner world. The question, however, lingers at the edge of consciousness: What lies beyond the first tier of the mind?

No one doubts that the faculty of reason plays a vital role in the inner discourse of the mind; but the reality of our inner life—at both conscious and unconscious levels—goes far beyond what the faculty of reason can account for. There is something happening within the human mind that leads us far beyond the literal and logical proceedings of our rational mind. Like “the wind that bloweth where it listeth” (John 3:8), our minds move in uncertain and unpredictable ways. Our imagination portrays possibilities that lead us beyond the apparent self; our understanding arises from a dimension for which we cannot fully account. Ultimately, we arrive at thoughts, ideas, and resolutions that have their own mysterious origin and that offer no explanation beyond their ability to enlighten the mind, raise our consciousness, and offer the certainty for which the human heart yearns.

What, then, are we as modern individuals to make of the faculty of human reason? What should it accomplish for modern humanity, and how and why? Does it establish the *raison d'être* of the human being? Does it define human meaning according to the proclama-

tions of the scientific paradigm of knowledge? Does it actually permit human beings to maneuver through the corridors of the mind in a way that allows them to transcend the limitations of a matter-based mind? If so, what is the ultimate source of such explanatory power and such potential illumination? Does today's faculty of reason observe, witness, and exercise awareness in the same way that the intellect and higher consciousness of the people living in an earlier, more traditional culture functioned, drawing as they did on the source material of revelation and the capacity of the higher faculties to recognize and appreciate the direct knowledge of God? Is the modern concept of reason actually the mind's "I," the psychologized ego of the 21st century personality that serves as a pale reflection of the mind's "eye" of the religions, the "eye of certainty" referred to in the Quranic revelation, the third eye that reflects a higher dimension, or the eye of Shiva that is symbolic of the gift of spiritual vision?

According to the prevailing scientific worldview, the only possible answer must be a resounding no, for nothing and no one today wants to play the shadow figure and be the dark afterthought to an illuminated faculty or first principle. The realm of the shadowland must traditionally be considered the domain of unreality and illusion, where a pale horse and rider pose as the real thing, when in truth they are merely phantom shadows representing the unrealities they truly are. To rely on reason alone as the mechanism to process human thoughts in a manner that reflects the whole person is to live in the shadowlands of the lower self and to rely on a faculty of mind that was originally intended—but no longer serves—as a bridge to the higher faculties and modes of perception.

In other words, human reason was not intended to be a one-horse rider serving the impressions of the human senses and directing them through the filter of the human ego, for this in fact only represents the first tier of humanity's inner world. According to the traditional Islamic perspective, human reason (*al-aql*) serves as a bridge between the lower world of the mind-body relationship and the higher world of the intellect-spirit relationship; it thus takes an active part in the borderland of the spirit as a human faculty illuminated by the superior realms of the intellect and not the shadow self that it has become in today's rational and scientific environment.

Perhaps we need to understand the traditional concept of the

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faculty of reason from a different angle of approach. According to traditional philosophy, we live within the rhythms of the earth and enjoy an easy familiarity with the harmony those rhythms convey. The enduring cycles of nature are reflected in the changing seasons in the life of humans. The waxing of spring becomes the waning of winter, just as the expansion of childhood and youth matures into middle age and maturity, only to diminish again in old age and finally senescence. The seasons and cycles of nature and earthly life seem to interact in ways that suggest a broad complementarity of purpose and design between the rhythms of human beings and nature.

So much for appearances; and yet the truth of the cosmos would be impossible to conjure if it were not more than what it appears to be. Within the harmony of the natural cosmic order lies a dark and sobering symbolic message. Everyone is familiar with the two faces of the earth. The sun casts down its light to give us the face of day, while the rotation of the earth turns us away from the sun to give us the face of night. The mystery of day and night is unceremoniously resolved in the relative fixity of the sun and the rhythmic fluidity of our planet Earth as it floats on its orbit. The message is self-evident to the casual observer, or do appearances again mislead? Is there contained within the darkness of night a lingering secret that refuses to shed its moon glow of light?

In fact, the cosmic Eye has a different perspective than the human one. The sun casts down its light upon the earth in the form of an ever-expanding ray, while the earth sends forth its night back out into the cosmos in an ever-receding shadow coming to a point at the wall of infinity. The earth's day wears its pale luminescence like a mantle of blue, while the earth's night wears its conical shadow like a wizard's cap.⁶

In this way, we arrive at a conception of reason that transcends the narrow and limited framework of the scientific perspective, which invests much of its identity in the ability of matter to objectify reality. The immense intelligence displayed in nature and the timeless rhythms of the natural order are reflected as similar properties within the human mind, most notably in the instrument of human

6. The image of the wizard's cap is drawn from Chet Raymo's *The Soul of the Night: An Astronomical Pilgrimage* (Saint Paul, Minnesota: Hungry Mind Press, 1992).

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reason whose cognitive rationalism can react with interest to the intuitive insights and natural rhythms of a higher order. If we are not careful in the way we express our modernity, we may end up wearing the wizard's cap, sending shadows in every direction when we should be reflecting the influences of a supra-rational luminescence.

Every object in the vicinity of an illuminating sun carries with it a cone of night whose shadow-draped stylus casts its signature into the surrounding void. Why should human nature be any different, if not the very antithesis of natural law? Human beings and their higher faculties of mind are no exception; they are the example *prima facie* of the universal norm, whether they walk across the earth in search of livelihood and fulfillment or traverse the borderlands of some inner universe. They can always count on the light of intelligent intuition to shine across the surface of their being, just as a person's physical form always casts a shadow.

In the next chapter, we will write more extensively about the luminosity of the human intellect as a direct reflection of the Supreme Intellect, by virtue of whose reflection we as human beings are able to transcend the limitations of the earthly realm and reunite once again with the presence of a Supreme Being. Perhaps it is no small miracle then that as rational beings, we have the use of the faculty of reason with which to traverse the inner landscape of thought and reflection in a logical and ordered manner. Like the conical darkness of the night that leaves its mark on the universal void, the stylus of our inner being can engrave its signature and leave its mark on the mystery of the individual self. Whether we use our faculty of reason as an instrument of light or darkness remains a decision that is ours alone to make, a decision that will determine the true nature of our unfolding destiny.



Two predominant trends exist within contemporary thinking concerning the true nature of human intelligence. Firstly, we need to reckon with the uncompromising dogma of reductionism, the methodology of choice among the scientific community in search of a unified knowledge that can explain virtually everything. Secondly, and by way of complement, we need to come to terms with the progressive research into identifying the neural activity of the brain as the

sole source of intelligent mind and human consciousness. Reductionism tries to comprehend one level of scientific phenomena in terms of concepts and processes that occur at a lower and more fundamental level of existence. In chemistry, for example, large-scale reactions are accounted for by examining the behavior of molecules. Physiologists study the activity of living cells in terms of processes carried out by organelles and other sub-cellular entities. The predilection of modern scientists to approach the understanding of the phenomenal world in purely reductionist terms attempts to limit the intelligence to the strictly human frame of reference, namely brain matter, human reasoning, and the insights of the physical senses.

Francis Crick and Philip Anderson are two scientists who represent the bookends of the broad spectrum of the reductionist argument. Francis Crick, a noted physicist and biochemist who collaborated with James D. Watson in the discovery of the molecular structure of DNA, has expressed in no unspoken terms the ultimate reductionist statement in the very first sentence of his book *The Astonishing Hypothesis*: “You, your joys and your sorrows, your memories and your ambitions, your sense of personal identity and free will, are in fact no more than the behavior of a vast assembly of nerve cells and their associated molecules. As Lewis Carroll’s Alice might have phrased it, ‘You’re nothing but a pack of neurons.’”⁷ Philip Anderson, on the other hand, who won the Nobel Prize in 1977, has echoed the traditional spirit, which contends that there are hierarchical levels of reality in some sense independent of, rather than dependent on, each other. “At each stage, entirely new laws, concepts, and generalizations are necessary, requiring inspiration and creativity to just as great a degree as in the previous one. Psychology

7. Francis Crick, *The Astonishing Hypothesis* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), p. 3. This is an astonishing contention that actually constitutes the astonishing hypothesis of Crick’s title.

8. John Horgan, *The Undiscovered Mind: How the Human Brain Defies Replication, Medication, and Explanation* (New York, Simon & Schuster, 1999), pp. 258-259. Evolutionists do not refer to the hierarchical order of nature. According to Seyyed Hossein Nasr: “They reduced mind to the result of evolutionary development—that is, purely material processes—that moved toward every greater organization, resulting finally in human life and consciousness. The reductionism of modern science thereby took a giant step by reducing the other half of Cartesian dualism to matter and ending with a monistic materialism that characterizes so much of modern biology. . . .” (*Religion and the Order of Nature* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996], pp. 145-146).

is not applied biology, nor is biology applied chemistry.”⁸

Reason is the cognitive faculty considered by the scientific establishment to be decisive in establishing the criteria that leads to the formulation of scientific knowledge. It can be summarized as humanity’s capacity to reason its way through the labyrinth of scientific knowledge. Scientists hope to arrive at an understanding of the true nature of reality through the human ability to objectify existence within the physical and natural order through the objectifying power of the physical senses and the explanatory power in the reasoning of the human mind. Thinkers who would attribute to the mind nothing more than an epiphenomenal capacity suggest that this thinking process, far from echoing higher, supra-rational modes of awareness, is based on the belief that what we come to know is the input and the product of our physical senses and is ultimately attributed to cellular activity and genetic inheritance. In some kind of exclusive manner, our ideas must be applicable to the phenomenal world that is disclosed to us through the physical evidence and quantified with exactitude to the *n*th degree through the laws of mathematics.

Our sense experience constitutes more valuable evidence in support of the hypotheses of modern science than the other modes of conscious experience available to us, such as the intuitions and insights of the imagination and the higher emotions. Of course, everyone knows that the senses cannot be fully trusted⁹ and that it is therefore not so much the senses themselves but the laws and principles of mathematics inherent in what the senses can measure that really count and that form the final criteria of objectivity. Only what can be expressed in mathematical terms can ultimately be identified as a reality within nature. Anything that cannot be explained in physical terms through empirical evidence and framed within the context of a mathematical law is summarily reduced to the domain of the subjective. No other comment could be more pejorative and suspect in today’s climate of opinion than that something is only a psychologi-

9. Look at what the eye perceives with regard to the activity of the sun, moon and stars; indeed look at what the human eye does with the quantum world that it cannot even perceive on its own.

10. Perhaps it is further symptomatic of today’s intellectual climate of opinion that much of the traditional terminology has become “inverted.” Thus, the word “myth,” which was originally intended to suggest or recall a “reality,” now connotes an “untruth,” whereas the traditional science of man’s inner psychology was at one time very much “real” insofar as it dealt with and reflected a “science” of the human soul.

cal,¹⁰ and therefore subjective, mode of manifestation.

Secondly, the modern individual, by following in the footsteps of the leading world scientists, fervently maintains a predisposition—perhaps one should call it by its rightful name of prejudice—to conceive of intelligence as nothing more than the intelligent reflection of organized matter based on the neural activity of the brain, although why such a conception should be appealing to the human mind is anyone's guess.¹¹ The well-known writer and astronomer, the late Carl Sagan, wrote in his book *Dragons of Eden*: “My fundamental premise about the brain is that its workings—what we sometimes call ‘mind’—are a consequence of its anatomy and physiology and nothing more.”¹² This is a fairly definitive statement on a subject highly qualified by the suspect nature of its pure speculation. Once again, we quote Francis Crick, the biologist who has gone where no one else has gone before. Writing in his book *Of Molecules and Men* on the subject of whether biology needs to be explained in terms of life forces lying outside the domain of physics, he asserts: “The ultimate aim of the modern movement in biology is in fact to explain *all biology* in terms of physics and chemistry.”¹³ Perhaps we need not look for a more characteristic example of the reductionist spirit than in the radical “*all biology*” of this statement (*italics mine*).

In another corner of the scientific universe, neuroscientists have been trying to close the gap between the brain and the mind. Many neuroscientists now believe that all aspects of the mind, including its most puzzling attribute—human consciousness and its implicit self-awareness—are likely to be explainable in a more materialistic way as the behavior of large sets of interacting neurons. Some even believe that consciousness arises from quantum-physical processes taking place in microtubules, which are protein structures inside neurons. They are busy attempting to show that consciousness is simply “an emergent property” (whatever that means) arising from brain cells, whose behavior can be explained with the actions of

11. Things like intelligence, intellectual intuition, and the higher emotions—indeed the very higher faculties of the mind—need to be reduced to a matter-based, provable, and thus objective, doctrine according to the party line of the scientific establishment. Anything that undermines that doctrine undermines the very foundation upon which the establishment is built.

12. Carl Sagan, *The Dragons of Eden* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1977), p. 7.

13. Francis Crick, *Of Molecules and Men* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1966), p. 10.

chemistry, the organization of molecules, and the behavior of atoms. The powers of the mind in this instance arise (or emerge) from the physical laws affecting brain matter.¹⁴ According to this ultra-reductionist view of the mind, the brain is everything while the mind is actually a linguistic formality that serves a useful purpose by allowing communication through a medium that is actually only the nominal sum of its parts and has no reality of its own. Psychic and spiritual life, not to mention the vagaries of human emotion, are understood to be epiphenomena of brain functions and nothing more.

Not all scientists hold this view and the debate will undoubtedly continue for quite some time. An increasing number of brain experts have come to believe that the purely materialist position is unrealistic and that the phenomena of perception can only be explained through an equally real—and vital—second element, namely mind. “Because it seems to be certain that it will always be quite impossible to explain the mind on the basis of neuronal action within the brain, and because it seems to me that the mind develops and matures independently throughout an individual’s life as though it were a continuing element, and because a computer (which the brain is) must be operated by an agency capable of independent understanding, I am forced to choose the proposition that our being is to be explained on the basis of two fundamental elements.”¹⁵ This statement seems as honest as it is brave, considering the rigid opposition to any hint of activity independent of the physical world that may impinge upon the foundations of the scientific worldview.

Scientists hope that this reductionist hypothesis of the mind will lead to an explanation of how the brain makes decisions or even how it proves mathematical theorems. Even if it gets that far, however, the theory is still silent about how these processes give rise to

14. Antonio R. Damasio, in a special Winter Issue 1998 of *Time*, has added an intriguing afterthought to the argument in his article “A Clear Consciousness”: “And yet something else may be needed—not some divine spark or soul, but some as yet unknown aspect of brain activity.” Indeed, something “unknown” must be at work, yet why should it necessarily be an aspect of “brain activity” and not merely a mystery suggesting another dimension of reality altogether?

15. Wilder Penfield, *The Mystery of the Mind* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), quoted by E. F. Schumacher in his *A Guide for the Perplexed* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), p. 76.

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conscious experience. Indeed the same problem arises with any theory of consciousness based on purely physical processing alone. This must lead us to the observation that if the human mind were merely the reflection of organized matter, and although this may be the contemporary idea of intelligence, it is certainly not the kind of intelligence envisioned by the traditional sages who believed human intelligence to participate in a transcendent principle reflected within the human being as an individualized beacon of light drawn from an otherworldly, supra-individual source.

For now, modern science endorses the idea that humanity has the power to fully rationalize the thinking process, while the concept of humanism, which is the logical by-product of the rational mind, reduces everything to the merely human. To that end, the faculty of reason¹⁶ has assumed the mantle of the highest human function, which, together with the observation of the senses, has led to the birth of the scientific methodology and the philosophy of contemporary rationalism. Rationalism elevates human reason to the level of principal faculty within the human being; reason processes incoming knowledge and serves as the final criterion for judging the objectivity and truth of anything and everything. The faculties of imagination, emotion, sentiment, the cognitive abilities, and especially the sphere of the senses, are all under the influence and control of the faculty of reason to provide the framework and balance for the workings of the mind, whose ultimate purpose is to discover a unified theory of knowledge that will identify the true nature of the cosmic reality, in keeping with the parameters established by none other than human reason.

Instead of human reason being a practical instrument that is complementary to an authentic human intelligence as the religious traditions suggest, modern science portrays this noble faculty as the objective pole of a qualifying reality and the very axis of human intelligence. It thereby provides the ground in which the modern psychological conceptions of human identity can take root and shape the scientific framework that constitutes the human reality. In the process, however, modern scientists have created an arbitrarily closed system that speculates upon the mysteries of mind, the

16. The Muslim mystic Rumi ironically observed the contrary idea: "It is reason which has destroyed the reputation of the Intellect" (quoted in Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Sufi Essays* [Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1991], p. 55).

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origins of human consciousness, and the true nature of universal reality with all the naiveté and temerity of a child who is fully ensconced in the veracity of its own world without realizing the extent of the vast cosmos beyond the limited horizon of its mind.

The faculty of reason navigates its way through the investigation and discovery of the laws of nature; it sifts the sands of its inquiry, makes assumptions that advance its thinking, speculates upon the heart of the matter in question, quantifies its premises into mathematical formulations, generalizes its findings concerning the laws of nature into universal patterns, and ultimately articulates into a contemporary worldview the knowledge of higher principles scientists claim to have uncovered.

Yet, an alarming paradox strikes at the heart of the perception of what human powers of reason can accomplish: is human reason and thus a discerning intelligence something fundamental or is it subject to the contingency of evolution? Does it have the power to establish universal laws and principles and, if so, what standard does it abide by? Can it identify the truth and objectify reality? Do the laws that scientists uncover resonate throughout the universe and within time as being truly universal? Is there a standard inherent in human reason that has the right to qualify the parameters of a worldview such as the one set forth by modern science?

Needless to say, the modern-day conception of the nature and purpose of the faculty of reason has nothing to do with the phenomenon of the borderland of which we write. The modern conception of human reason sets boundaries that cannot be crossed, while the borderland of the spirit is a frontier wilderness in which the faculties of knowing and the fields of perception make the experience of the Ultimate Reality possible within the human frame of reference because it is a truth that exists to be experienced and “humanity as such” has the capacity to do so by virtue of these higher faculties. The modern concept of reason deals with the phenomenal and sensible world and attempts to process what those worlds deliver to its field of perception. As the mind’s principal functional faculty, reason acts freely and autonomously within a closed system as if it had inherited certain inalienable rights, although the original source of that inheritance remains anyone’s best guess. Not the least of these self-proclaimed rights is its professed ability to set the parameters of what we choose to believe and categorically deny as well as cast aside any-

thing that does not fit that view.

In the modern era, reason has become the human faculty that is the final arbiter of the truth. As such, it is decisive in the formulation of all scientific knowledge. It serves as the criterion for what is true and what is false, for what is knowledge and what is ignorance, for what is intelligent and what is unintelligent. As the final arbiter of truth, the modern scientific worldview relies primarily on the faculty of reason in order to arrive at a true conception of the nature of things as they are in their true reality and not as they appear to be on the surface. This has led modern scientists down an unexpected pathway—to the very heart of the atomic elements which according to the new theories of quantum physics give way to a less than decisive theory of indeterminacy, whose very failure of predication is not the stuff of objectivity for which the scientific elite are looking in their verification of the universal principles of science.

Upon closer scrutiny, these claims to objectivity through the senses, to universality through the mind, and to the articulation of a “near absolute”¹⁷ formulation through mathematics and natural law as the foundation to a relative world, produce a shallow echo of certitude that is “full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.” Moreover, a paradoxical failure of logic emerges in which the mind itself not only attempts to place limits on the mind, but also then insists on such limits as the basis and the best of its logic.

In truth, there is an overwhelmingly subjective, contingent, and relative flavor to all that human reason proclaims and consequently to much of the worldview that modern science sets forth as a fully comprehensive system of knowledge and as a framework for action. It is true that reason pursues a line of logic, exhibits a profound capacity for mathematical formulation, and offers an exacting and progressive vision of the future with cutting-edge technology as the measure of its success. In addition, reason could be understood to have a subjective rather than an objective quality validating its findings, particularly the reason of modern times, without the irradiating factor bestowed upon the traditional concept of reason through the intellect and the intelligence. This is partly because everything the rational mind generates emerges from the contingent knowl-

17. Some scientists actually express a fear of arriving at an “unassailable definition of objective truth” because it “smells of absolutism” (E. O. Wilson, *Consilience*, p. 70)

edge of this world alone, and partly because as an inflexible and closed system working on its own, the rational mind functions within a climate that refuses to acknowledge a supra-rational source for all the principles—whether they be scientific, mathematical or otherwise—found within the natural order.

In order for a river to flow, it must have an origin and source. In order for the faculty of reason to function and exhibit some kind of meaningful directionality, it must also have a starting-point and primary source of knowledge that it can draw upon for its inspiration and light. Contrary to public expectation, however, the faculty of reason in its modern conception has no well-defined starting point and no credible source of knowledge other than the premises and propositions placed upon the *tabula rasa* of its field of vision by modern-day rationalism. Unlike the intuitive knowledge of the human intellect, which according to the various traditions represents a direct and immediate descent from above, discursive knowledge is basically synonymous with indirect and mediate knowledge, which is the mainstay of human reason, a knowledge that is gained by participation in the cognitive process alone. It cannot find within itself the guarantee of its own truth, but instead must receive this guarantee from principles that surpass it. Otherwise, it is merely the individual mind attempting to define supra-individual realities on its own together with a faculty of reason that wears a wizard's cap.

What is the first premise that generates the cognitive process? What underlies its preliminary theories and suppositions with a foundation of certitude? From where does it derive its authority, much less its certitude? What is the source of its knowledge, what Plato called the *arche anypothetos*,¹⁸ his first principle or the Absolute? Is the question of the criterion of objective truth merely a physical problem amounting to an empirical question that can be answered by probing the physical basis of the thought process itself? Or is it a philosophical problem whose answer lies within the higher faculty of intellect to be able to recognize and respond to the original source and final word for what is objective, true, and absolute?

The modern-day faculty of reason, and the encompassing envi-

18. Plato, *Republic* 510B-511B.

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ronment of rationality it inspires, cannot constitute the criterion of a truth or a falsehood because there is nothing intrinsic to any aspect of reason that could qualify it for such a role. Where can the guarantor of truth and the witness of its veracity be found? Who is the true observer within us who can rightfully assert that this is true and this is false, this is real and this is illusory. There must be within the mind a capacity of detached observer that has the power to transcend the individual order and the possibility of an impartial witness that can provide the objectivity of first principles and serve as the prefiguration for all certitude.



Beyond the question of an arbitrary reductionism that searches through the remotest elements of the natural order in an effort to comprehend the totality of the cosmic reality; beyond the questions raised by quantum mechanics concerning the true nature of physical matter; and beyond the problem of a reality based solely on the concept of matter to the exclusion of all else, lies the meaning and significance of the human faculty of reason within this speculative context. When we say that humans themselves have become the criterion of reality, we refer of course to the faculty of reason within the mind, which provides the operative framework and rational basis for establishing this objective reality. From the traditional point of view, this assumption is considered a highly questionable point of departure, suggesting that there is no higher faculty within humanity other than the faculty of reason. The modern scientific worldview makes matters worse by suggesting that reason is both *tabula rasa* and *end station* of the mind, the rarefied arena for the prefiguration of all knowledge and the final transfiguration of the mind into the witness and harbinger of truth.

As a kind of *tabula rasa* of the mind, reason is portrayed as a neutral faculty that has its own integrity but that does not suffer the intrinsic emotion, confusion, uncertainty, and doubt that are the inevitable characteristics of the human condition. As the operative receptacle of all thoughts and impressions, reason is understood to be free of the all too familiar condition of inner turmoil that is embodied in the human ego and summarized in the conflicting emotions of our daily lives. As such, we imagine in our fantasy that

the faculty of reason is unencumbered by any outside influence and unobstructed by the psychological knots or complexes that may confront the emotional and psychic systems of the mind. This, of course, must be the very stuff of a modern-day mythology. As *end station* of the mind, it sweeps away any challenge to its authority by proclaiming that there is nothing real in an objective world other than what the human reason itself can establish and process through the senses. Needless to say, what distinguishes the two philosophies of the secular and traditional worlds is the distinction that exists between reason and the capacity of the intellect to enlighten the rational mind with the first principles that form the basis of all thought.

From the point of view of traditional wisdom, reason possesses only a dialectical and not an illuminative function; it is therefore not capable of grasping that which lies beyond the world of forms. The fault lies not with its traditional ability but with its modern-day interpretation and application. The modern scientific worldview claims that reason can deal with the origin and source of our existence and our fundamental reality without opening itself to the higher levels of perception made available by the direct intuitions of the human intellect. The intellect has traditionally been understood to be the faculty through which humanity apprehends and experiences the metaphysical and eternal realities. However, modern science is not interested in these metaphysical and eternal realities. With no use for these astounding truths, the scientific establishment simply pretends, indeed insists, that they do not exist. Scientists adhere to the party line that their discipline is a rational one, just as their form of knowing resides within the physical rather than the metaphysical plane.

However, the denial of the existence of the intellect leads to a conceptual chasm between the seen and unseen realities, and this is nearly impossible to bridge in the modern world:

The external world of matter and the internal world of mind, if you will, have then seemingly lost their connection; and this means, of course, that the universe, and our position therein, have become *de facto* unintelligible. It is the nature of reason to analyze,

19. Wolfgang Smith, *The Quantum Enigma* (Peru, Ill.: Sherwood Sugden & Company, 1995), p. 16.

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to cut asunder even, it would seem, what God Himself has joined; no wonder, then, that a *Weltanschauung* based upon reason alone should turn out to be fractured beyond repair.¹⁹

It is as if the power of observation, the cognitive abilities of the mind, and the immediacy of sensory experience have constructed a kind of "wall of prejudicial truth" that arbitrarily excludes the faculty of the intellect with its concomitant perceptions of the higher realities. From the point of view of modern science, beyond this wall of truth nothing exists; indeed, nothing is considered real unless it is measurable and can be expressed via mathematical formulation. Observational experiments can be conducted and believed in without the alleged deceptions and vague promises of a blind religious faith.

Once again, more questions emerge that need addressing by the scientific community. Was modern science then born as a form of worship of our purely sensorial experience? What precisely does modern science ask of us? Does it ask us to believe in a homogeneity of knowledge that results in the certain reduction of the qualitative aspects of nature to quantitative modalities? If so, then modern science asks us to sacrifice a good part of what is, according to the various traditions, the reality of the universe. In compensation, it offers us a mathematical schema whose major advantage is to help us manipulate matter on the plane of quantity, without however taking into account or realizing the qualitative consequences that have had such disastrous results for humanity in the modern world.

Why does modern science ask so little of its devotees? Indeed, one could rightfully ask: why does it ask so much if it proposes to narrow the scope of a universal knowledge to the ability of reason to determine what is a valid experience through the human senses? Doesn't this attitude effectively eliminate all of the qualitative and spiritual richness of the universe, as well as the world of the spirit within us? Is the human being all mind and matter, dependent on the chemical fusions of the brain and the implicit intelligence of cellular DNA, leaving humans bereft of the benediction of the higher planes of spiritual intelligence, intuition, soul, and spirit?

After a careful study of the contemporary research concerning the nature of the mind and the implicit consciousness that makes us what we are, a person cannot help but come away with a feeling of profound ambivalence concerning the modern conception of humanity because this ambivalence lies at the heart of the modern worldview and is reflected within the social norms and ethical

behavior of modern society. What people today seem to want is a rational and empirical explanation that can define what a human being is and to what purpose the species of *Homo sapiens* is supposed to function. Yet, for all of its advanced powers of observation, its incredible single-mindedness of approach, its miraculous discoveries, its technical powers, and its broad diversity of expression, modern science still has no clear idea about the true nature of humanity. What escapes its scrutiny are the very things that define a human being's identity, that characterize his individual human nature, and that ultimately qualify his unique humanity.

The overwhelming question in neurobiology today is the relation between the mind and the brain. Most neuroscientists now believe that all aspects of mind, including its most puzzling attribute—consciousness, and its complement awareness—are likely to be explainable in a more materialistic way as the behavior of large sets of interacting neurons. Still, it is precisely because there are mysterious aspects to the nature of the human mind, to consciousness, and to the presence of an awareness that seems to elude all physical description, that people living in today's world still remain basically unsatisfied with the scientific explanation of the mind and of human consciousness as purely a manifestation of the chemical activity of the physical brain. The irony lies in the fact that in its single-minded attempt to reduce all the miraculous interaction of the body, mind, and heart to the machinations of chemicals and neurons, science has inadvertently revealed a deeper world of mystery that is not yet ready to give up its secrets. The deeper our scientific understanding becomes of the inner world of the mind, the more profound the mystery that is revealed.

Before closing this chapter, it is worth noting in passing that physicists, who are perhaps most familiar with the mysterious ways in which matter actually behaves, tend to take a less mechanistic view of the world than do biologists and are actually taking the lead in articulating a new scientific paradigm that can lead the way beyond the old thinking of the classical and mechanical scientific worldview into a new age science that is less dogmatic and more attuned to the realities of nature it sets out to describe. Biologists have been steadily moving toward a hard-core kind of materialism as a result of the reductionist approach that attempts to reduce the human mind and spirit to a series of atoms and molecules. They

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have invested so much in the theory of evolution that for them to abandon it now would be perceived by the life science people as a form of intellectual suicide. The insistence on the spontaneous and indeed miraculous emergence of the life force within inanimate nature against all statistical probability and the discontinuous transmigration of species from a single-celled organism to sophisticated humans attests to the fact that modern scientists will go to any lengths to maintain the basis of their assumptions.

Physicists, on the other hand, have come to realize through their relentless analysis of the fundamental building blocks of matter that we do not even know anymore where a particle ends and where a wave begins, a phenomenon that lies at the heart of the quantum mystery. The true nature of matter has become indeterminate in such a way that the true nature of the mystery has finally been revealed. Some scientists are increasingly preparing themselves for the eventuality that our scientific criteria and methods of observation may have to undergo some subtle but important shift and begin to take account of certain clues that may present themselves in unexpected ways in areas of understanding that may initially seem to be beyond the scope of science *per se*.

Roger Penrose, a well-known British mathematician who has written extensively on the mystery of the mind,²⁰ falls back from embracing a new scientific paradigm of knowledge and relies on the following comment which really summarizes the heightened feeling of ambivalence that lies at the heart of this difficult issue. He writes:

It may well be that in order to accommodate the mystery of mind, we shall need a broadening of what we presently mean by science, but I see no reason to make any clean break with those methods that have served us so extraordinarily well.²¹

Scientists may be reluctant to realize that a paradigm shift may happen not so much as an accommodation to the mystery of the mind as an accommodation to the mystery of the scientific attitude that

20. *The Emperor's New Clothes* (1989) and *Shadows of the Mind: A Search for the Missing Science of Consciousness* (1994) are among his most respected works on the subject.

21. Roger Penrose, *Shadows of the Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 50.

all truth must be reduced to a rational and empirical standard of thought in order to adjure its validity.

Perhaps the shift in perception will find its sufficient cause in the realization that what we know to be true by virtue of an inner experience cannot be described in the words of a determined rationalist by a top-down set of algorithmic rules and principles. Curiously enough, much of what we know and act upon is the result of what we call common sense, an inner knowledge amounting to a wisdom that is based partially on sound experience and partially on an accepted and universal perception of things which is the collective pursuit of the ages. The main failure of artificial intelligence to date has been in the common sense activities that the humblest of us indulge in every day of our lives. No computer-controlled robot can yet begin to compete with a young child in performing some of the simplest of everyday activities such as recognizing that a colored crayon is needed to complete a particular drawing. Even an ant could far surpass today's computer controlled systems in performing its daily activities. The mind, the will, and the self-awareness that we take for granted are perennial mysteries that cannot be accounted for by modern science. Common sense tells us that they exist, serve a useful purpose, and ultimately determine and define who we are in ways we may never fully understand.

If we could perceive and experience our lives with the unimpeded clarity of our higher or spiritual consciousness, we would be able to see and understand that no visible thing—indeed nothing belonging to the world of natural phenomena—possesses existence or being in its own right. We would see and understand that, apart from its inner dimension and its spiritual identity, matter on its own possesses no reality whatsoever, whether physical, material, or substantial. That the purely physical reality could come into being and exist on its own is a strictly modern conception that is the product of the ego-consciousness of this era and is the defining characteristic of our time.

The manner in which the faculty of reason is exercised during modern times is merely a reflection of the shadow self and not a reflection of the higher intellect that can perceive the truth directly. What, then, can lead human beings beyond the horizon of the individual self? For an answer, we must turn now to the inner world of higher intelligence in our search for a faculty with the power to

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transcend the limitations of the human mind. The faculty of reason, with the aid of an intelligence that finds its luminous source in the Supreme Intelligence, and with the aid of an intellect that enjoys direct access to the knowledge of God, can fulfill its role as bridge between worlds within the borderland of the spirit, dealing with the contingencies of this world and with the illumination of the world of the spirit. It can serve as one faculty among a number of other faculties that make the totality of the human experience possible in the first place.

If we take this modern-day reliance on reason back down into the well of our being in order to reach its source, we may be startled by what we discover. If there is a mystery at the center of our being, then we must use all the means at our disposal, including our mind, our intelligence, our reason, our heart, our imagination, our emotions and not least the sacred sentiments in order to come to terms with that mystery. The mystery that lies deep within the well of the human being is the mystery of existence itself, whose resolution can only be found in the experience of being oneself within the totality of one's true nature and being.

Ultimately, the spiritual traditions may have the final answer to the dilemma of reason as an instrument of enlightenment. They envision the faculty of reason as a two-sided face, one side illuminated by the rays of the intellect and the product of its divine reflection, the other side a dark hinterground of logic and causality whose self-reflection produces shadows that run the risk of actually creating an eclipse of the intellect rather than reflecting its light. In the traditional context, the faculty of reason serves as the bridge between the two worlds of logic and transcendence, giving rise to a conviction, like a lamp beckoning in the darkness of some vast prairie, that there is a knowledge whose certitude cannot be denied, whose source lies far beyond the horizon of the human mind, and whose realization within the human heart is destined to become the final emotion and the most enduring one.

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