—Chapter Eight—

Rethinking Our Human Guideposts (And Truth Itself)

"The aim of art, the aim of life, can only be to increase the sum of freedom and responsibility to be found in every man and in the world."

—Albert Camus

"[We need] new and more comprehensive theories, which without contradiction will take care ... of the diverse facts [within] our traditional incompatible doctrines."

—F.S.C Northrop

"I never give them hell. I just tell them the truth and they think it is hell."

—Harry Truman

The last of Cultural Maturity's defining themes is most specifically conceptual and most directly links those previous. Each chapter, in different ways, has touched on the question of what truth becomes when cultural guideposts and mythologized assumptions lose their historical potency. From its particular angle, each has provided a glimpse at how the future requires that we understand new truths—and more, that we rethink what we mean by truth. Here we turn to the issue of truth more specifically.

A person might rightly argue that truth is not the best term. Truth in the sense that is our interest has to do not just with what we think, but also what we do and how we relate—ultimately with who we are. There is also how truth beyond Cultural Maturity's threshold requires us to draw on more of ourselves, and more in general—how it is necessarily systemic and in a new, more complete sense.

Other words could replace truth. Better, perhaps, we might speak of what ultimately makes something matter, or what, in the end, for a particular endeavor best measures success. It is these things toward which our truths through history have served to direct us. Said most precisely, this chapter turns our attention to the kinds of information that at particular times and places provide us with the most useful and

accurate guidance. Most specifically, it turns to the kinds of information that will provide the most useful and accurate guidance for our time and for the decades (and centuries) ahead. Or we could put things more specifically in terms of Cultural Maturity's cognitive changes. Culturally nature truth is what truth becomes from the perspective of an Integrative Meta-Perspective.

We begin with a single, extended dialogue that confronts a particularly timely truth-related question: What makes information communication, and, even more, communication that matters?:

James (A television news producer): Earlier we talked about our diminishing confidence in leadership. I see a dramatic loss of such confidence in my profession—in the media. I think it is warranted. I'm interested in what we in the media must do if we are to regain public respect.

CJ: The word media makes a pretty broad brush. Does your concern reach equally across the board, or is it greatest with particular kinds of media?

James: I feel most concern with television, also movies ... and video games. Some less with radio and newspapers. The jury is still out with regard to the Internet.

CJ: You say diminishing trust is warranted. How is that?

James: What most people criticize gets at a lot of it—the endless sensationalizing, the gratuitous use of sexual and violent images, so often, and I think increasingly, a lack of values beyond turning a profit. That list makes a start.

The trouble is that such criticism, even when on target, tends not to be of much help. People choose to consume this stuff—and often for exactly the reasons they condemn. And while media professionals often nod in agreement at such criticism, knee-jerk programming is easy to produce and attracts advertisers.

When I get frustrated, I just end up media bashing—which is not of much help. I need more useful ways to think about all this.

CJ: Your question is hugely important. The media serve as our cultural nervous system. In times ahead, they will do so in evermore complex and impactful ways. If they don't serve us, we will be in significant trouble.

Addressing the media's future also provides good illustration of needed changes in how we make discernments more generally. Successful decision-making—including that which relates to the media—requires that we rethink the truths on which we base our choices.

If you don't mind, I'd like to engage your question on both of these levels.

James: Sure.

CJ: Pick one of your concerns—violence, sex, sensationalizing, a more general lack of values—and we will use it as a way in.

James: Let's take violence.

CJ: We need to start by better understanding why violence is a concern. We tend to assume it's because violence begets violence, but that is only part of it.

I'll share an experience from several years back that forced me to revisit the question. I'd gone to a movie I knew nothing about. I wanted a break from writing and the country town I was visiting had only one theater. I came out feeling more troubled about the human condition than I had in a long while. I could barely make out the movie's plot through the explosions, the car crashes, and the splattering blood. It was pretty clear that the story and the characters existed primarily as an excuse for the mayhem. We see this increasingly—and not just in movies, but also TV, and certainly with video games.

What disturbed me was not the violence per se, but the purpose it obviously served. I realized that the attraction of the violence in the movie didn't really have much to do with violence itself. Much more it had to do with artificial stimulation, the mini-injection of adrenaline that came with each shooting and explosion. Empty stimulation can be very attractive—especially when tied to provocative imagery. And

it becomes particularly attractive if we aren't doing that well at finding excitement and meaning in daily life.

At the least, violence used in this way exploits important human impulses. Our innate biological response to violent images tells us "be alert, stay tuned, this is important." When real danger exists, that is a very healthy response. But when it doesn't, or worse yet, when the images serve no purpose except to raise ratings or sell products, then the images themselves become a kind of violence.[1]

James: What you describe is increasing prevalent. Often it seems pretty much the norm.

CJ: I can imagine a person responding to my concern with "Hey, lighten up, this is just entertainment." But the use of media as artificial stimulation has implications even more dangerous and fundamental.

I'm drawn back an experiment often referred to in introductory psychology texts to illustrate the mechanisms of addiction. Wires are inserted into excitement centers in a rat's brain then attached to a depressable pedal in its cage. Eventually the rat steps on the pedal. Once he discovers the connection between pressing the pedal and the excitement it brings, he presses it with growing frequency. In time, the animal neglects other activities, even eating, and dies.

We could debate whether violent media content is formally addictive, but the parallels with addiction are hard to ignore. Addiction starts with a chemical or some other stimulus evoking a response—excitement, pleasure, whatever—that is meant to tell us that something needs attention or is good for us. What makes addictive substances addictive is that we get this excitement or pleasure without having to take the life risks or do the work these signals are meant to reward. When violence is used as artificial stimulation, this is exactly what we see.

This picture raises some scary questions about the future. Tomorrow's more interactive media technologies will have the potential to keep us better informed. But

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1 The gratuitous use of violent images exploits not just our "fight or flight" reaction, but also the compassion we naturally feel toward those in pain. Exploiting our natural responses to crisis can't help but numb us to feelings and make the world a more cynical place.

will also be able to generate greater and more highly targeted artificial stimulation—to function as increasingly powerful "designer drugs." That, combined with how today's crisis of purpose makes us ever more vulnerable to such exploitation, creates an exceedingly dangerous situation.[2]

Most people who reflect on the risks as well as the benefits of future invention tend focus on capacities most obviously cataclysmic in their potential effects, such as splitting the atom or genetic manipulation. Bur it may very well be that new information technologies, the inventions with the greatest potential to support positive change, present also the greatest ultimate danger to the human enterprise. Disconnect the feedback loops we rely on to know when something matters and we lose any ability to deal effectively with the future. Social evolution could essentially come to an end.[3]

James: How about other concerns I mentioned—such as gratuitous sex and sensationalism more generally? Is what we see related?

CJ: The situation is similar. Today's pervasiveness of erotic imagery in the media might reasonably lead to the conclusion that modern culture is obsessed with sex. More accurately, we are highly vulnerable to and obsessed with titillation—pseudo-sex—and, particularly, its use to sell products. We see sexualized imagery—often combined with images of violence—used increasingly for effects more akin to an artificial high than anything really erotic. And what we see with sensationalism more generally works in a parallel way. The emotional charge provided by soap opera, talk show, and "reality" TV melodrama has less to do with feelings than cheap,

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2 Much of our vulnerability to the attraction of such pseudo-excitement (and pseudo-meaning) is a product of our natures. But as much derives from today's crisis of purpose and hope.

3 We can think of vulnerability to artificial stimulation (along with the willingness to produce it is the name of signficance) as an ultimate Transitional Absurdity. Truth during Late-Axis culture was defined increasingly by the abstract "products" of creation—individuality, objective observation, and material acquisition—the stuff of structure and delineation. With Transition, truth becomes even more abstract—simply information. The less positive manifestation of this final abstractness is the ease with which we confuse artificial stimulation with significance. Add disconnection from bodily knowing and confusion readily translates to addiction.

consumable substitutes for feeling. In each case, what we see concerns empty stimulation more than communication.

James: I was going to defend my world of news as somehow different, but I guess it really is not. Certainly television news is not immune to those charges. "If it bleeds it leads" all too often rules. And there really isn't much difference between talk-show sensationalism and the road-kill journalism of a news camera poked into the face of a grieving parent.

CJ: Given the symbolic status the news media holds in the modern psyche,[4] what we see there is of even greater concern. Much more of news than we would like to admit is less about significance than about creating the appearance of significance when little if any is present.[5] This fact violates what is in essence a sacred trust.

James: Point taken. The news should be warning us of ways we can be exploited, not adding to the exploitation.

CJ: But let's shift our attention to solutions. Here is where we confront that need to rethink the truths we use. We can stick with the violence example. To take useful

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4 With the late twentieth century, television news became increasingly our "keeper of final truth"—like the church in the Middle Ages or science in the Age of Reason. Events became real only when we'd seen them on the evening news. As the Internet challenges this information monopoly, this function is becoming more decentralized. How much more responsibly ithis function will be held will depends on the broader changes this book is about.

5 Local television news is the worst offender. Once, in preparation for a speech at a media literacy conference, I taped a week of television news from each of Seattle's local commercial stations. Two-thirds of the content—setting aside sports and weather—was either the latest killings, rapes, and natural disasters, or tabloid sensationalism—O.J. Simpson, Tonya Harding, and the like. What most struck me was how little of what I witnessed was actually news—in the sense of anything new, anything that could add to what people know. We can predict pretty accurately how many robberies and rapes are likely to happen in a year. Parading the latest examples before us each evening (often from locales far distant) really isn't news—except in the unlikely chance that we know the people involved.

action with regards to media violence we first have to ask what needs to be different. The goal might seem self-evident: we need less of it. But if we make our referent, our measure, only the frequency of violent acts, we miss the point. We will fail at dealing with violence, and more important, with what ultimately makes violence a real concern in the first place.

James: The problem is not so much violent images as their exploitative use.

CJ: Exactly. Visual media's ability to depict violence with graphic inescapability represents one of its greatest strengths. Remember those pictures of tanks rolling through Tiananmen Square, or the photo of the young girl who had been hit by napalm running naked toward the camera during the Vietnam War. Such images mark some of modern media's greatest moments. We would pay a high price if we could succeed at eliminating violent imagery. The ability to depict violence, and sometimes with graphic immediacy, will be essential for the depth of informed decision-making culturally mature responsibility requires.

So just having fewer violent images by itself can't be the answer. We need a different measure if our response to the exploitative use of violent content is to serve us. We have to get more directly at whether violent imagery represents meaningful communication or a cheap substitute.

In the end, this is not just a different measure, it is a different kind of measure. We see the most obvious difference in how much harder it is to quantify. The number of violent images (or sexual images, or whatever) used in an hour is readily added up. But measuring the degree such images make us more or divert us from what matters—whether they fill us or rob from us—that is a trickier proposition. Indeed it is a whole different sort of proposition.

James: What you describe would seem to throw us back to square one. It becomes all in the eye of the beholder—a totally subjective call.

CJ: Not really. It certainly becomes a harder call. It requires us to discern more complexly and do so in ways that draw on more of ourselves. Better we observe,

simply, that it is a more systemic call. Thus we have to be humble to the complexity of the considerations required, and necessary limitations

But it is not beyond us. I've experimented with having people rate clips from TV news after introducing them to the dilemma we've discussed. I make sure they understand how the distinction we are talking about—news versus an artificial substitute—is different from just biased news versus unbiased news, or serious journalism as opposed to entertainment,[6] I've found much greater consistency in people's responses than we might expect, And the consistency improves markedly if I give people tools that can help them distinguish reactions that may have more to do with personality style differences or local tastes than significance. It is very possible to make useful policy decisions without our more familiar kind of quantitative measure.

James: I'd still like things to be clearer.

CJ: We have to rethink what we mean by clarity. We get nowhere by measuring variables that miss the point because they are more readily measured—a trap we all too often fall into. We have to do our best to measure what is really our concern—here whether information diminishes us or makes us more—even if we can't do so with our favorite kind of precision.[7] In the end, this provides answers that are more precise not less. Whatever, this will be the kind of call we will increasingly have to make.

James: I don't understand whether you advocate censorship of some kind or are just saying we should be more aware.

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6 This polarity, too, begins to break down in a culturally mature reality. "Serious" news is about that which is creatively significant. Such communication appropriately engages all of our cognitive complexity (serious and playful parts equally).

7 In a way, nothing is new. Whether information is truly information, something that "informs," has always been media's bottom line question—from the earliest cave drawings. The change is that today we must face such questions much more consciously and with a deeper understanding of the complexities involved.

CJ: Certainly we need to be more conscious in our choices. We will successfully address exploitative uses of the media only if we understand what is going on. The growing prevalence in our schools of classes on media literacy represents an important step in this direction.

With regard to policy, nothing is off the table. Most often people will vote on media policy with their feet—or with their ears and eyeballs. But I can certainly think of situations that would call for formal social limits—particularly with regard to children. America's first amendment guarantees freedom of speech. However, when speech becomes more a tool of addiction than communication the first amendment no longer applies. We have no problem arresting a drug dealer selling his wares at the corner of a schoolyard. The dangers here are much greater.

But censorship presents even more than the usual problems when needed measures become more systemic. Again, the measurement questions—just what do we censor? The good news is that Cultural Maturity's changes support the capacities required to make needed discernments—whether in a specific situation the task is formal limits or just getting better at saying no.

James: They somehow must.

CJ: I agree.

Truth

Today's new questions demand that we discern with greater nuance and precision. Doing so requires both more nuanced and precise truths and more sophisticated ways of thinking about truth.

The word truth can seem a bit spare—even off-putting. We tend to associate it either with rarefied philosophical conjecture or now-outmoded dogmatisms. Many contemporary thinkers carefully avoid the term.[8] But as should now be obvious, I take

8 Sometimes for valid reasons (wanting to avoid any confusion with past absolutes), other times for reasons that have more to do with keeping the demands new truth's present at bay.

an almost opposite tack. I see truth as very much our concern—if by this we mean the discernments on which we base our choices.

Big picture, Cultural Maturity asks a simple and ultimate question: What in the future must be our guide for making decisions—our north star? What becomes the "bio-feedback" (intellectual feedback, emotional feedback, spiritual feedback) we use to make our way. Better we might ask simply, What makes something true? The question applies both most generally and to all our very specific daily choices. Our success at leadership of every sort hinges on our ability to answer this question effectively.

We usefully talk about how Cultural Maturity changes truth in two steps. The fist step reflects on changes in where we go to find truth. Depending on who we are and where are thinking takes us, our particular conclusions may vary. But three now familiar requirements apply if the answers we arrive at are to contribute in a culturally mature way.

First we must step back and take new, more conscious responsibility for the truths we use, personally and collectively. Second, as past truths become less reliable—both because we increasingly see through them and because we need more than the shorthands they've provided—we need to get at what makes something true more directly (what I've spoken of as truths new "crux" task). Third, we need to think in ways that are more nuanced and detailed, that better get at all that is involved and how pieces fit together (truth's new "multiplicity" task.)

James' look at violence in the media involved each of these changes in where we go to find truth. We see the first in the importance of questioning traditional media thinking about violence and its significance; the second in the need to get at more basic levels of the violence question, address not just violent acts, but their relationship to what makes information communication (and, ultimately, communication that matters); and the third in the requirement that we think more complexly, take more information into account and more of ourselves into account. Each chapter's introductory dialogues have similarly implied each of these changes. Whatever our concern—war and peace, morality, government, community, health care, religion, the lives of our children—we confront the importance of reexamining

familiar truths, grasping what more generally underlies truth, and thinking about truth in new, more nuanced and multi-faceted ways.

Integrative Meta-Perspective produces each of these basic new truth-related results. It requires a new, more complete ability to stand back. It invites us to better grasp the whole of what ever we wish to consider—the box along with the crayons. And it helps us better appreciate the full detail and complexity of whatever it is we consider—the full diversity of pertinent hues.

Again, beyond these requirements, the particulars of what we come to believe can vary dramatically. Indeed we develop new respect for just how dramatically different our conclusions can be. But if our conversations are to support culturally mature outcomes, where we start must share these basic characteristics.

Change at the Level of Truth Itself

The second step is in fact directly implied by each of these three changes, but is more obviously provocative and requires some deeper reflection for its implications to make full sense. Cultural Maturity's changes not only affect where we go to find truth and the specific truths we might chose, they alter our most basic notions about what makes something true.

This is a radical conclusion, but we've seen it affirmed in different ways with each chapter, and it follows directly from where this book's reflections have takes us. What we assume to be true always has as much to do with how we think as what we think. We've seen how the mechanisms of understanding are changing. Integrative Meta-Perspective alters not just where we look to find truth, but truth itself. James needed "not just a different measure, but a different sort of measure."

We got our fist inkling of changes at the level of truth itself with the observation that the relationship between ourselves and our cultural contexts has been not just parental, but mythologized. The problem with familiar truths is not just that they have been tied to specific cultures and thus inadequate for a global context, but that they have involved protective distortions. The "absoluteness" of familiar truths derives as much from the kind of truths they represent as the fact that we believe in them. Protective distortion doesn't by itself prove the necessity of different ways of

thinking about truth. It may be that we simply need to be a bit braver in how we look at things. But other changes implied in this picture make it inescapable.

Previous reflections have touched on a series of such changes—or, more accurately, alternative ways of looking at what is new. We started with how needed new truths "bridge" familiar conceptual polarities. The limitations polar thinking presents are most clear where polar aspects are projected—as with our past need to think of social groups in the language of "us" verus "them." But truths of times past, even with the best of thinking, have juxtaposed separate-worlds realities—objective and subjective, mind and body, masculine and feminine, humankind and nature, matter an energy, and so on. We can effectively make sense of truth as conceived at different cultural times and places by identifying the specific polar relationships that underlie past assumptions. Truth's up to the tasks before us must be whole=ball-of-wax truths, truths able to address systems as wholes.

Another way we've come at what is new in today's new truth turns to what in us it takes to make sense of it. We can reduce Enlightenment truth to the conclusions of rational discourse (or if we expand slightly how we think about truth, the objective clarity of rationality juxtaposed with the more subjective world of esthetic. emotional, and spiritual sensibilities). We've seen how culturally mature truth requires more of us, that we bring to beat the whole of ourselves as cognitive systems. It requires that we apply all the diverse ways we make sense of things and do so in newly conscious and integrated ways. Enlightenment objectivity is simply not sufficiently objective, if by objective we mean being complete in our considerations. It elevates one kind of cognitive capacity and sets it in opposition to the rest. In its way, it remains mythologized and polar. Culturally mature conclusions require understanding of a more complete sort.

We've also come at the truth question in terms of what makes us who we are, the kind of system we represent. At least we are alive. The gears-and-pulleys reality of classical science restricts us to a machine world, and the all-is-one, static (perceived as timeless) assumptions of spiritual discourse in the end get us no closer to the needed dynamism. Somehow our truths must reflect the fact that we are alive, and ultimately more, the particular kind of life we are by virtue of being conscious and human. We've seen how our Dilemma of Differentiation highlights this critical

necessity. Usual ways of talking about either difference or connectedness not only can't help us, they throw us immediately into conceptual traps.

Integrative Meta-Perspective similarly provides a response to each of these requirements. It gives us the ability not just to better recognize projection and mythologizing, but also to get our arms around the larger picture that polar juxtapositions in times past have protected us from seeing. It offers that we might both step back from our richly multiple ways of knowing—rationality included—and apply them in new, more complete and integrated ways. And it makes it possible that we might more consciously embody the whole of our "living" complexity. Needed new truths—both their possibility and what they look like—reflect a new step not just in what we understand to be correct, but also in the functioning of our cognitive mechanisms.

We can again, too, draw on our development metaphor for support. We find both steps in truth's new picture reflected in more limited ways in the developmental tasks of maturity in our individual lifes. All stages in life have their specific truths, and not just handed down parental truths, but truths determined by the needs of each life stage. (Will Durant observed, "Each age, like every individual, has its own characteristic intoxication.") During life's first half, truth—if not its particulars, it underlying principles—evolves in characteristic ways. We've see how related protective mechanisms to what we have recognized in the story of cultural come into play.

During life's second half, we become more able to step back. In doing so take a deeper kind of responsibility in the truths we use. We, also, become more able both to entertain the multifaceted complexity that makes us who we are and to tease apart its contributing aspects. We may not consciously recognize how this alters truth itself, but in a more limited sense than we see with Cultural Maturity it quite specifically does. Durant went on to note, "If play is the effervescence of childhood, and love the wine of youth, the solace of age is understanding."[9] At least we come a bit more able to recognize truth's defining question—what, ultimately, makes life significant—and

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9 Our analysis must separate the "solace of age" into the specific understandings of young adulthood and the more mature, contextual understandings of life's second half.

to answer some better for ourselves, both big-picture, and in terms of all that goes into creating significance.

We've seen how we witness a related progression—and a related more encompassing and complete perspective—with the mature stages of any formative process. Truth's new picture becomes an expression of our conscious, tool-making natures—and specifically, what happens when we are able to effectively step back from it.

Where it All Takes Us

Just where to Cultural Maturity's new truths take take us? Once we venture a couple steps into culturally mature territory, just what do we find?

Integrative Meta-Perspective—and in particular, the ingredients we newly engage in realizing its more encompassing vantage—suggests answers. I've spoken of three ingredients, each directly related to these truth-related requirements.: the re-owning of projection, a more conscious appreciation of our multiple intelligences, and the fresh acknowledgment of past ordering realities that comes with Reengagement.

As I emphasized in the last chapter, we've not really been dealing three discrete ingredients, but rather three different ways of looking at things that each provide useful information. We can put our "Were does it takes us?" question in a different way by asking what our pieces together describe. A couple ways of framing the answer are now familiar.

One answer: Integrative Meta-Perspective gives us systemic truth—though systemic specifically in our second sense. That way of thinking about what is different in truths new picture has served us well.

Another answer: We can also think of where an Integrative Meta-Perspective takes us in terms of formative process, in terms of consciously engaging the mechanisms that produce the tool-making, meaning-making capacities that make us who we are. Creative Systems Theory proposes that this conclusion in another way describes the same thing. Truth viewed from an Integrative Meta-Perspective becomes creative truth—though, again, not in some sense that sides with art as

opposed to science, or things of the imagination any more than to the concrete tasks of daily life. It is simply truth that reflects our audaciously generative natures.

I've brought these two more theoretical answers together with our box-of-crayons metaphor. Integrative Meta-Perspective is about more consciously engaging our all-the-crayons-in-the-box completeness. The whole of this book can be thought of as an attempt to make sense of the more mature, systemic, creative kind of understanding that results.

With each of Cultural Maturity's defining themes we've seen changes that follow directly from how cultural maturity's threshold alters experience—and truth itself. Integrative Meta-Perspective's workings help clarify why each of our themes might be something we see. They also help make sense of why each theme requires that we rethink what we might assume it implies. Each requires that we understand its piece of the truth in more mature, systemic, and creative ways.

Integrative Meta-Perspective gives uncertainty a newly integral role in how truth works. It challenges arm's length objectivity and bridges deterministic assumptions at every turn. The rethinking of uncertainty this requires deepens our appreciation for order.

Cultural Maturity's new conceptual vantage makes us newly responsible for the truths we choose. More than this, by making how we think inseparable from what we think, it makes us newly responsible in the fabric of truth itself.

Stepping back, and now just from who we know truth, but from how truth evolves, helps us appreciate the essential role of temporal context, how what is true at one time may not be at another. It also invites us to understand change not just as a force that affects truth, but an inherent characteristic of truth.

This stepping back similarly alerts us to the importance of more deeply taking into account here-and-now systemic context. Doing so, again does more than just alert us to multiple pieces. It alters how we understand fundamentally. It makes inescapable the all-the-crayons-in-the-box, "apples and oranges" nature of mature truth.

Integrative Meta-Perspective also makes limits inescapable. It more encompassing vantage makes obvious that limits are essential to life. It also reveals fundamental limits to any kind of last-word truth. Claims of exalted status by any one

part of systemic complexity don't long survive its scrutiny. The topic of limits points toward a necessarily more full, robust, and courageous kind of truth.

With regard to Reengagement and truth, our new conceptual orientation makes it newly possible for Reengagement to happen—we no longer need to fear falling back into the safety of past more "reliable" truths. It also helps us grasp how fresh access to sensibilities better known in times past is important—how none of these other observations about where truth's new picture takes us make much sense without it. Reengagement is essential to truth's new dynamism and completeness.

Another more general way I've spoken of where Culturally Maturity truth takes us draws on the apparent paradox that its conclusions are at once more sophisticated and simpler—in the end more "ordinary." While James' inquiry into the implications of media violence produced more complex perspective, he got there by confronting the most basic of media questions, what makes information communication. That mature truth can seem simple comes from that greater completeness possible from an Integrative Meta-Perspective. And that it can seem ordinary follows from how a more integrative picture gives us truth spared of idealization and thus truth at least a step closer to "just what is." We can turn to Harry Truman's famous utternace, "I never give them hell. I just tell them the truth and they think it is hell." Integrative Meta-Perspective confronts us with truth that is necessarily a bit hellish. We are able grasp truth's simplicity and ordinariness because we have sacrificed our now-limiting dreams of what in times past we might have preferred it to be.[10]

Applying Culturally Mature Truth

Later in the chapter, we will look more specifically at applying culturally mature truth. We will look at some hands-on approaches for doing so. We will summarize some of what we've learned about how a creative frame can be used to

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10 We could say culturally mature truth returns us to Keats's encompassing dictum that "truth is beauty and beauty truth"—though here beauty derives a more encompassing definition than more romantic parts of us might prefer.

make detailed systemic distinctions. And we will use the Creative Function to map the history of truth—at least truth of a more philosophical sort.

But we can also make some useful, more general application-related observations. One important kind of observation concerns how an Integrative Meta-Perspective alters our relationship to the more left-hand and more right-hand aspects of truth. We will draw extensively on these conclusions when applying culturally mature perspective in various cultural domains in Chapter Ten.

Culturally mature perspective alters truths that would traditionally be expressed in more left-hand or more right-hand terms in slightly different ways. But each hand of truth is equally—and just as fundamentally—challenged. At the same time, each gets filled out in ways that make its implications ultimately even more provocative (though it may take us some time for us to appreciate the benefits along with what it takes away).

For concerns we've tended to describe in left-hand terms—such as spirituality, love, art, or community—Cultural Maturity's new conceptual vantage requires at the least that we be more conscious. This in itself is no small thing. It is often exactly the fact that these things have not been conscious (the stuff of mystery) that has most characterized them. And the task ultimately is not just to be more conscious, but to be much more discerning, even more rational. We've seen how Cultural Maturity requires of love, community, and spirituality not just greater responsibility but a willingness to think in quite detailed ways about how they work (how they contribute to truth/fulfillment) and how they work differently at different times and places. Cultural Maturity argues that without such more systemic perspective they will stop working.

With concerns we've tended to describe in right-hand terms—such as progress, economics, science, or government—the need to be more conscious is less obviously a threat. But an Integrative Meta-Perspective reveals the challenge to be just as direct and inescapable. At the least, each concern loses some of the influence and perceived objectivity once conferred by "hard truth" status. The application of multiple intelligences stretches things further. It requires that truth in all these spheres be conceived more systemically, and systemically in that new, more dynamic and complete, all-the-crayons-in-the-box sense.

In exchange for what is lost, each creative hand discovers truth that comes a bit closer to what our times require. We better grasp how our various spheres of understanding and activity come together. An Integrative Meta-Perspective helps us appreciate the all-the-crayons-in-the-box nature not just how we think, but of the larger realities that together we create.

Some other general applications mentioned earlier are worth noting because they are direct products of how an Integrative Meta-Perspective alters truth itself. One it how an Integrative Meta-Perspective also helps us identify traps in our thinking. It remains true that some observations are simply wrong. But conclusions that have been right in their particular ways, can today become wrong because they stop short of the kind of truth we need. At least they may no longer be timely. A deeper look may reveal that they confuse one part of complexity with the more complete kind of truth the future requires. We need culturally mature truths to make the needed critical gifts and curses discernments.

We've also seen how the way Cultural Maturity's change alter truth itself provides surprising bonuses. Most notable is how an Integrative Meta-Perspective makes is possible to address many eternally baffling questions—such as the apparent conflict between determinism and free will, the nature of the "self," and how we might usefully think about the relationship between spiritual reflections and more material concerns. As surprising as the fact that we find answers is just why we do. We discover that such questions were never really mysterious. They simply require mature systemic perspective to make real sense.

Is an Integrative Meta-Perspective, then, about finally seeing the "the whole truth"? The result is necessarily more humble. Such truth is about grasping a bit more directly and completely what it is possible for we humans to know. What we can say with confidence is that it provides a picture of who we are that better prepares us to address the questions we now face.

Developing "Crux" and "Multiplicity" Tools

Once we accepted the new responsibility for the truths we use that comes with culturally mature perspective and the fact that new truths will be different in

fundamental ways, truth's task reduces to developing practically useful "crux" and "multiplicity" tools. Chapter Three introduced these two most basic sorts of truth and how each takes on a wholly new meaning once past Cultural Maturity's threshold. We benefit from some quick review and also from some important further filling out now possible with ideas from more recent chapters. These can be tricky notions, and solid understanding is essential if we are to develop effective "crux" and "multiplicity" tools and not have our conclusions lead us astray.

We best do this more complete look in the same two-step manner we approached truth's changes more generally. We want to solidify our appreciation of why culturally mature truth requires a more conscious and direct relationship to "crux" and "multiplicity" distinctions. We also want to look more deeply at how an Integrative Meta-Perspective fundamentally alters what "crux" and "multiplicity" refer to—how this more conscious and direct relationship necessarily involves change at the level of truth itself.

As far as truth's "crux" aspect, better understanding what ultimately makes something true—or, at least, how we know when something is true—becomes essential once past Cultural Maturity's threshold. Partly this follows from the loss of our past parental relationship with culture. Without familiar guideposts defining the bottom line for our choices, must learn to confront what matters bare-boned, stripped of its cultural trappings. But the explanation is ultimately deeper. Such more bare-boned truth is necessary to how understanding works in Cultural Maturity's more systemically complex world. An Integrative Meta-Perspective both demands and makes possible a more direct relationship with truth's underpinnings.

Truths "crux" aspect confronts us with that critical Question of Referent. To address the implications of media violence, James needed to get beyond assumptions about particular acts and think more directly in terms of what mattered—in this case, information and communication (how the former becomes the latter). In a culturally mature world, the pertinent Questions of Reference is where we must start whatever our concern—personal, relational, organizational, cultural. To make good individual choices I must first ask what uniquely matters to me—beyond not just personal parental expectations, but past "parental" expectations of culture. I like how Mary Oliver posed the most big-picture aspect of this personal Question of Referent—"Tell

me what you want to do with your one wild and precious life." Whole-Person relationship similarly requires leaving behind role expectations and directly addressing the degree relationship makes life more, whether and just how "one plus one equals more than two."

The observation extends to the most encompassing of concerns. In a related way, successful relations between nations requires that we replace ideology and projection with more direct and systemic measures of benefit. Progress, if it is to be really that, must start with a more essential and integrative definition of what it means to progress. The concept of Cultural Maturity represents an answer to today's most overarching Question of Referent.

Questions that have a moral dimension help make clear this importance of measuring significance more directly. As cultural handholds become less reliable we have to get at what, in any particular situation, makes an act moral. In the end, we have to get at what makes anything moral. We may not have good verbal answers—rational discourse alone can't fully capture it—but as we refine our culturally mature sensibilities we get increasing facile at grasping (conceptually teasing apart, sensing and feeling, creating useful images—no one intelligence alone can do it) when an act is "life giving." (Or at least we get facile at making good guesses—uncertainty is a necessary ingredient in our determinations).

Ultimately a related imperative applies to human concerns of every sort. In a systemic reality, all questions become moral questions. It used to be that we could think of certain aspects of life, because their measures were "objective"—science or business for example—as "value free." Systemic perspective teaches us that any part in a systemic whole, because it affects the whole and carries certain biases in that whole, is value-laden.

Rethinking the future of any specific cultural domain necessarily starts with such "crux" questioning. Effectively addressing the future of government requires not just attention to governmental structure, but also to the more basic question of governance and it purpose. To rethink education, we must examine what education ultimately exists to accomplish. To usefully think about what may lie ahead for science or religion, we need to better understand scientific and religious ways of

knowing, both their characteristics and how they serve us. It has not been possible to step back in quite this way before. It now becomes essential.

With truth's new "multiplicity" task we turn from what most basically makes truth true to questions of difference and contingency. While on one hand James' question of what he needed to measure became suddenly more basic and straightforward, in another it required much greater sensitivity to personal, cultural, and technical contingencies. We can again understand what we encounter either in terms of what a surrendering of past absolutes makes necessary or what an Integrative Meta-Perspective makes newly possible. We addressed both aspects of "multiplicity's" new challenge in the chapters on change and complexity.

A central purpose of cultural guideposts, and the polarizing of truth, has been to reduce complexity. Cultural absolutes have provided one-size-fits-all answers for many-sided questions (or at least dramatically reduce the number of needed sides). Today we need to bring a much keener eye to questions of difference and context. This conclusion applies equally to temporal and here-and-now contextual variables. The needed new capacity for nuance and dynamic distinction follows directly from cultural maturity's cognitive changes. An Integrative Meta-Perspective is specifically about appreciating the intricacies—both temporal and spatial—of an all-the-crayons-in-the-box world.

As important as appreciating the need to more consciously and directly address "crux" and "multiplicity" variables is that way an Integrative Meta-Perspective changes what "crux" and "multiplicity" mean. Once we step over Cultural Maturity's threshold, each kind of truth not only gives us different answers, it becomes a fundamentally different sort of truth. Understanding how this is so is essential to any sophistication of culturally mature conception and to avoiding conceptual traps.

I've made "crux" and "multiplicity" terminology purposefully casual so that what these notions demand does not produce undue confusion. But fully grasping what these core tasks of truth imply in a culturally mature context requires a leap. When first introducing this leap, I observed that it could initially seem subtle or even a bit non-sensical. With the book's additional reflections, these changes should now be more understandable. We need to replace old measures with more specifically

systemic, Integrative Referents. The same shift applies both to “crux” and “multiplicity” concepts.

Historical perspective helps with the needed teasing apart. We can think of each of these primary tasks of truth as having a historical antecedent and a qualitatively new version particular to the tasks of the future (just as we observed each of our seven themes to have an old definitions and new one necessary for our time). In both cases, the second definition follows directly from an Integrative Meta-Perspective.

Looking back with regard to "crux"-type discernments we recognize a grand lineage of philosophical, poetic, and religious ideas of truth's "essence," of some essential "core" of truth. Integrative Referents are fundamentally different. What makes such referents work is how they embrace complexity in its entirety, how they don't leave anything out. That includes things we’ve identified with truth’s essences; but that is not all it includes. Truth's first task is about grasping experience as a fully inclusive encompassing gestalt. Integrative Referents bridge polarities at every level.

With regard to "multiplicity"-type discernments, we see—marking just as grand a lineage—all manner of categories, collections, lists, and taxonomies. The Dilemma of Differentiation highlights what is new, and necessarily so. For such discernments to work in a culturally mature reality, they must somehow respect and reflect that we are alive, and more, alive as conscious beings. Culturally mature “multiplicity” concepts are similarly bridging notions. As such they succeed at this essential task.

The language of systems helps clarify what is different. Culturally mature “crux” discernments addresses systemic wholes—of our second, all-the-crayons-in-the-box sort. They are not about abstracted essences. They require that we be attentive to everything involved. They are about taking our best shot at articulating what we get when we succeed at doing so.[11]

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11 Note that the Dilemma of Differentiation in the end applies to "crux" distinctions as absolutely as "multiplicity" concerns. Measuring the well-being of a connect-the-dots system and that of a system that requires more mature perspective is not at all the same. We can reduce the health of an engine to that of its parts and their interactions. The health of a family is not just a more complex equation; it requires that the bottom line for our measures be something less readily quantified.

Culturally mature “multiplicity” discernments address systemic parts. But the word part within systems of our second sort no longer refers to separately analyzable parts—or categories thereof. Parts become systemically interrelated and in the particular sense needed to support life. Connect-the-dots images remind us that very often there are a lot of parts to consider (and that we can pay a high price when we leave part out). Systems of our second sort add that because we are living/conscious beings we can't stop with the sort of parts that organize into lists and boxes.[12] "Parts" within our second sort of systemic perspective become systemically juxtaposed organizing principles, patterns of "living" relationship.

The picture fills out with the addition of a creative frame. Here we add a couple of awarenesses. The first pertains to how historically we've thought of these two kinds of discernment. We return to that notion that creative polarities have "left" and "right" creative hands. Traditionally, we've associated our first kind of discernment with more left-hand truths. We've thought of the more archetypally feminine—with its emphasis on oneness and connectedness (spirit, nature, the romantic, and the receptive)—as having to do with essences. Conversely, we've associated our second kind of discernment with more right-hand truths. We've linked the more archetypally masculine—with its emphasis on distinction (analysis, materiality, competition, and the worldly)—with the world of the manifest and the multiple. Which hand got the last word has depended on whose hands we were looking at. For an idealist like Plato, left-hand sensibilities ultimately ruled (the "ideas" generate truth). If you were more an empiricist like Locke or Hume, preeminence went the other way (with the left hand essentially eclipsed at materialism's far extreme).

The second awareness pertains to the historical relationship between these two kinds of discernment. In the past they've occupied separate worlds. Whether you saw causality primarily in left-hand terms or right-hand terms (or were, like Descartes

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Measuring family income, children's grades, or even how well people get along may provide useful information. But in the end, what we want to know is more generic and fundamental, the degree existence in that family is ultimately "life giving."

12 Or even “strange attractors” and the like that we kind with chaotic systems (systems of our “half-way” sort).

more explicitly a dualist) the basic two-world, essence/structure picture held. In contrast, Culturally mature truths of both the "crux" and "multiplicity" sort are specifically bridging notions. "Right-hand" truth and "left-hand" truth become part of a larger picture at every level. It is this "procreative" completeness that brings each kind of distinction "to life." The diagram below makes this creatively integrative relationship of "essences" and "manifest forms" more explicit:

13 14

Dualistic Truth Truth as creative "crux" Truth as creative "multiplicity"

Creative Truth's Dual Integrative Task

Truth's "crux" stops being some timeless essence to become a statement about the full nature of whatever we wish to consider. It asks what the whole of any particular dynamic complexity—the softest parts along with the hardest—is in the end about. It stops being a fulcrum around which the world of forms turns and becomes instead a circle drawn around multiplicity's apples-and-oranges, all-the-crayons-in-the-box generative dynamism.

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13 Which way the two headed arrow goes depends on whether the person's belief system tends toward the idealist, romantic, transcendental, or humanist on one hand (the arrows then go left to right) or more empiricist, positivist, or materialist on the other (the arrows, if considered, would go right to left).

14 Here I've used the Creative Function to represent differentiation. But any image that represents the al-the-crayons-in-the-box nature of "living" distinction would do.

In a parallel but opposite way, Cultural Maturity gives multiplicity a more explicitly integrative definition. Mature perspective not only gives left-hand and right-hand parts equal billing, it requires a more "two-handed" understanding of what it means to make a distinction. Our focus remains difference, but underlying connections are never far from our minds. In a culturally mature world, unity informs distinction just as fully as distinction informs a fuller grasp of the whole of things. Any "living" understanding of multiplicity is at once a statement about linkages and connections—and ultimately about meaning. It is about how meaning "patterns"—in time and in space.

Our developmental analogy brings such conceptual and philosophical talk a bit more down to earth. The defining changes of personal maturity affirm both the dual task and its fundamentally new nature. On the "crux" side of things, truth through life's second half takes on a new directness. We could say truth takes on a new simplicity. But this is more than the simplicity of essences (though left-hand truths do take a new prominence). Rather it is the simplicity of our hard won complexities (with all their more left-hand and more right-hand ingredients) becoming second nature (with wisdom, in the best creative sense).

With regard to multiplicity, truth through life's second half becomes increasingly nuanced in a way that is at once more personal and more inseparable from things larger than ourselves. Mid-life's newfound perspective helps us better recognize that truth indeed has its very different seasons. It also brings new appreciation for our often-contradictory here-and-how multiplicities. And it makes increasingly clear how every choice is tied ultimately to purpose. We could say we better acknowledge and understand our complexity, but this is a complexity born as much from how life's intricacies connect as how they are different. It is the complexity of life as something alive, and that of the unique life we have become through the courage we have brought to it.

I ended Chapter Three's introductory look at "crux" and "multiplicity" distinctions with a perhaps surprising conclusion. I observed that understood systemically, whether we describe something as a "crux" distinction or a "multiplicity" distinction may have less to do with what ultimately is true than with

the kinds of questions we ask and where we are looking. I promised, then, to return for a closer look.

Fortunately, as it messes with usual thinking even more than these more basic "crux" and "multiplicity" observations, this recognition not so critical to getting on with our project. When it comes to practical application, it doesn't add very much to what is already clear. In any particular context, "crux" is "crux" and "multiplicity" is "multiplicity." But some readers may have guessed this conclusion—if not specifically, at least in feeling that something important was missing. And the observation comes directly into play if we move back and forth between systemic scales and is certainly pertinent to this chapter's more abstract truth reflections.

Systemic language helps clarify. We've seen how we can usefully replace the word "crux" with the phrase "systemic whole" and the word "multiplicity" with the phrase "systemic part." Because human systems imbed one within the other—an individual within a family or an organization, an organizations or domain within culture as a whole, any system is at once a whole and a part—to use our box-of-crayons imagery, a whole box and a crayon within other boxes. "Crux" discernments measure the significance of a whole box. But set in a larger context that box might be appropriately thought of as a crayon (or perhaps, better, a red box or a blue box or a yellow box). Education's contemporary Question of Referent by itself is a Whole-System concern. But set in the context of culture as a system, it, measures what is newly true for a particular systemic part. The same true if our concern is economics, health care, or religion. Each as a sphere describes a whole box. But, at once, each represents a crayon within culture as a systemic whole.

"Crux" and "multiplicity" discernments in the old sense represented polar opposite categories.[15] Culturally mature "Crux" and "multiplicity" discernments are not so wholly distinct—or at least they are not distinct in the same sense.

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[15] At least in modern times. With early stage in culture, they weren't separate in the same absolute sense we find with Cartesian dualism. But as we will see, this represents a wholly different sort of connectedness. Certainly it was less conscious. But it also has totally different creative implications.

That “Crux” and “multiplicity” distinctions address different concerns is just as important to recognize in a culturally mature reality. Indeed, given that we need to bring greater awareness to our discernments, differences arguably become more important. But seen from an Integrative Meta-Perspective, what makes “crux” and “multiplicity” discernments different comes to have more to do with the scale at which we are looking and the kinds of questions we wish to answer than truth itself.

Almost (But Not Quite)

Conceptual movements of the last century help put truth’s new picture in a social context. They also further clarify distinctions. Our “first step” look at truth’s new picture described three new requirements. Three influential philosophical contributions give one of these truth-related most basic requirements particular emphasis. I've made glancing reference throughout these pages to post-modern perspective, the contribution that relates most directly to the need for greater conscious responsibility in the truths we use, The second, pragmatism, helps with filling out what understandings “getting a truth more directly,” “crux” aspect asks of us. The third, social relativism, is particularly pertinent to truth’s more “getting at all that is involved,” "multiplicity" aspect.

We have to be a bit wary when drawing on the philosophical. Certainly it is as vulnerable to absurdity as thought of any other sort. Cicero once observed, "There is nothing so ridiculous that some philosopher hasn't said it." Later we will look at how the rational bias of philosophical thought limits where it can take us. But such limits noted, there is also an important new sense, as these reflections on truth suggest, in which we are all, just a bit, need to be philosophers.

At least in its common application, each of these philosophical threads also leaves us short of fully mature understanding for more particular reasons. Indeed each barely get us up to maturity’s threshold. But for our task that need not be a problem—indeed it provides important insight. We can learn as much or more from what each formulation may lack as how it contributes. Shortcomings and

contributions help equally with clarifying truth's deeper changes and what they ask of us.

Later we will critique post-modern perspective as a lens for interpreting the future. Here our interest lies more specfically with post-modern thought's claims regarding truth. Post-modern is an imprecise term—not just with regard to its definition but also with regard to what and who we should include in its purview. For some the term refers most simply to a time (roughly the last half of the twentieth century), for others to a broad social and esthetic movement (I've made reference to post-modernism in architecture), and for others to particular schools of philosophy. Indeed there is debate about what time we are talking about. In philosophy, social constructivism is unquestionably post-modern. But existentialism, with its roots a hundred years previous, is often given similar status.

However we resolve the inclusion debate, those two threads—existentialism and social constructivism—provide good reference for comparison with Cultural Maturity's perspective on truth. I've proposed that the post-modern argument's (considerable) contribution to the conversation about truth lies with how clearly it articulates our times' loss of guideposts. I've also argued that its great weakness lies with how little it gives us to replace such loss. (Indeed little of what we have examined in truth's new picture makes real sense from the assumptions of post-modern belief—and not just the specifics, just the need for such examination.) Existentialism and social constructivism help fill out this dual picture from slightly different angles.

Existentialism, most influential in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century (in Europe, and in the middle of the twentieth century in the United States[16]) questioned the existence of objective truth of all kinds—philosophical, religious, social, and scientific.[17] Its thinkers proposed that meaning is to be found not in the discovery of answers, but in the courageous engagement of a world without

16 It really didn't register in the United States until after World War II.

17 Existentialist ideas were foreshadowed in the thinking of Frederick Nietzsche and Søren Kierkegaard and made explicit in the writings of Jean-Paul Sartre, Martin Heidegger, Karl Jaspers, Albert Camus, and others.

guidelines. I think of John Paul Sartre's famous assertion that "Man is condemned to be free."

I've implied a relationship between Cultural Maturity and existentialism with the concept of the Existential Abyss. I locate existentialist thought right at the threshold of the new maturity—a location that explains both the richness of its contributions and its limitations. Existentialist thinkers describe with particular eloquence the psychological precipice we stand at with the loss of familiar absolutes. The shortcomings of existentialist thought derive from its inability to help us in more than the most limited way with making sense of what may lie beyond it.[18] Given their time in history, existentialists have been predictably better at critique than illumination, better at articulating what no longer is adequate than what may lie ahead.

Social constructivism, a loose body of work that gained prominence in the 1970's and 80's,[19] emphasizes the dependency of beliefs on cultural context. A constructivist perspective replaces the idea that truth is an objective "out there," something to be discovered, with the idea that we, as individuals and together as social beings, "construct" truth. Depending on the absoluteness of the view, truth can mean primarily personal belief and social convention or can refer to everything—including the chair on which you sit. Constructivist thinkers emphasize the existence of multiple worldviews, talk about there being not one truth but many.

Social constructivists tend to be immediately skeptical toward anything that might look like overarching conception (even though one might argue that theirs is such), a characteristic Jean-Francois Lyotard described as an "incredulity toward metanarratives."[20] From a constructivist perspective, there are no universal theories, only local theories, truths specific to particular times and places.

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18 This explains the common popular view of Existentialists as a rather dour and depressive lot (however accurate this conclusion). A world without familiar handholds and anything obvious to replace them appropriately seems, in anticipation, not a particularly cheery place.

19 With the ideas of Michel Foucault, Jürgen Habermas, Jacques Derrida, Richard Rorty, Jean-Francois Lyotard, and others.

20 Richard Rorty proposes, "There is no big picture."

This fundamental skepticism is the source of social constructivism's great strengths as well as its often major blindnesses. Constructivists eloquently articulate how we map makers are never wholly separable from our maps. Their ideas also shed important light on the value to be gained from appreciating the contrasting perceptual and conceptual realities embedded in differences such as gender, age, and cultural background.

But the claim that truth is constructed often comes dangerously close to an assertion that truth is arbitrary. People's beliefs become inventions born from little more than whims of power or shifting tastes. The best of constructivist thinkers do not suppose that one reality is as good as another and are careful to point this out. But Cultural Maturity sees social constructivism, as deeply limited by that "incredulity toward metanarratives." Social constructivism's suspiciousness toward big-picture ideas has admirable roots—getting beyond cultural absolutes is no easy task. But its knee-jerk dismissing of such ideas easily discards the baby with the bathwater, rejects the guidance that overarching perspective can offer exactly when it is needed most.[21]

The relationship between post-modern thought and the tasks of Cultural Maturity is important, but only goes so far. The post-modern contribution takes us just up to maturity's threshold—and, at its best, in the argument for finding meaning in a world without obvious meaning and an eclecticism of esthetic, a small step beyond it, but by itself, it can only be a beginning. Yes truth is “constructed.” But beyond this recognition we need to better understand why we have constructed it in the particular ways we have. Most important, we need to understand how to construct truth’s sufficient to the tasks now before us, to appreciate, as here, both the criteria such truths must meet and some of the ways meeting them can be achieved.

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21 The Creative Function helps us understand how this would be predicted. The loss of traditional beliefs explains only part of it. In addition, Transition's absence of a creative lower pole (any connection with the ground of being) makes it difficult to understand multiplicity as anything more than randomly scattered parts. Absent the sensitivity to interconnectedness provided by the creative lower pole's more unitary esthetic, we tend either to dismiss questions of pattern or entertain pattern of only the most trivial sort.

In reflecting on the contributions and limits of post-modern perspective, I am reminded of a concert I attended some forty years ago. It showcased the music of John Cage. Cage's compositions eloquently expressed post-modern esthetics.

In one well-known piece, each musician in the orchestra is given a single sheet of music on which is written a sequence of musical measures. Everyone starts at the beginning, but how many times each musician plays each measure is open to his or her whims on that particular evening.

The piece's presentation lasted about forty-five minutes. I suppose it could have lasted many hours if the musicians had been more perversely inclined. As an esthetic experience, the piece was meager at best, but philosophically and psychologically, at that time, it struck me deeply. It confronted numerous quandaries that had become newly provocative: What is the relationship between order and randomness? How do we as individuals and social beings derive meaning out of our experience? What makes something beautiful?

But after I had spent a half hour immersed in reflection in such questions, my mind began to wander. I found myself wanting Cage to get on with it. Music needs be more than just philosophy and psychology. And I wanted him to do more than just offer up questions, to commit himself to something, to at least take a shot at creating truth or beauty, whatever those words might mean to him.

In an important sense he was doing just that. The artist's ultimate task is to somehow give voice to just-emerging cultural sensibilities.[22] By that definition Cage's composition was valid and important art. It very much pushed at the creative edges of cultural understanding and experience.

Still, no one got up to dance.[23] And, today, its creative timeliness now decades in the past, it would be unlikely to generate much of a response at all. In a similar

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22 See "The Arts" in Chapter Ten.

23 The profundity/absurdity gets worse (or better). The *Funny Times* reports that "After the British musical group The Planets introduced a 60-second piece of complete silence on its latest album, representatives of the estate of John Cage, who once wrote 4-33 (273 seconds of silence), threatened to sue the group for ripping Cage off (but failed, saying the group neglected to specify which 60 seconds of the 273 seconds it thought had been pilfered). Said Mike Batt of the Planets: 'Mine is a much better silent piece. I am able to say in one minute what took Cage four minutes and 33 seconds.'"

way, post-modern social theory has been timely and provocative. But, it too has tended to remain disembodied. It does not inspire us to dance.[24] And the creative edge of culture's challenge has moved sufficiently beyond it that its significance is largely historical.

Pragmatism provides a good comparative reference for bare-boned, “crux” distinctions, its concern what truth looks like stripped of ideology. Pragmatism has formal philosophical roots,[25] but its basic meaning has become part of common usage. Pragmatism argues that we retain particular beliefs less because they are true in some stand-alone sense than because they get us where we need to go. We recognize again both important links with culturally mature truth and also fundamental points of departure.

We see how Pragmatism at its best intersects with Culturally Maturity's formulations with what I’ve described as mature truth's "ordinariness." Mythologized truth is dramatic—romantic, heroic, claiming of the absolute. Truth from the perspective of Cultural Maturity is "just what works"—this in a culturally mature reality. Our beliefs may help us find what works. And we craft new beliefs in response to what works. But beliefs are in the end tools, ways of thinking and acting that if used well move us toward what matters.

The often controversial and always influential legal philosophy of Oliver Wendell Holmes had its foundation in pragmatism. Holmes asserted that "the life of the law has not been logic, it has been experience." Such was not to side with feelings as opposed to facts. Rather it was to propose that, often as not, judges make decisions first and come up with the legal rationale later, and more, that this is exactly as it

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24 There are exceptions. We sometimes see new contributions framed in post-modern language that capture some of the deeper vitality the future will require. At first, post-modern architecture tended only replaced the glass and stainless steel sterility of the height of modernism with a hodgepodge of esthetics. Today we often see post-modernism esthetic translated into a richly inspiring and organic vision. I think of Jørn Utzon's Sidney Opera House and Frank Gehry's masterwork Guggenheim Museum at Bilbao. We've also see increasingly mature constructivist thinking in education (ideas that put primary emphasis on supporting the student's process of inquiry).

25 Uniquely American roots—in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century ideas of Charles Pierce, William James, Oliver Wendell Holmes, and John Dewey.

should be. While necessarily imprecise, anything else makes justice unacceptably vulnerable to narrow interpretations and legal dogmatisms.

When teaching, Holmes would often start by asking students to cite a legal quandary and propose the most pertinent legal principle. Holmes would then proceed to use that principle to argue both sides of the case. Holmes' point was not that legal argument was capricious—he valued legal argument immensely—but that it was only part of the way good judges made decisions. In the end, judges decide on the basis of their best sense of what is just—within the constraints of the law—given all the complexity of apples and oranges factors that may be involved. They derive help from legal principles, most often more than one. And they certainly use the decisions they reach to refine their use of legal principles. But the best of judges don't confuse legal principle with truth. Holmes contended that legal truth's bottom line should be, and in fact with law at its best always had been, what has the greatest potential to work—for the individuals directly involved and for society as a whole.

Cultural Maturity affirms in a similar way that effective future decision-making must be based on practicality rather than ideology. Practicality and ideology do not wholly contradict. Given that ideology in its time has worked as truth and how conflicting ideologies have served to creatively drive truth, we can think of it as a time-specific shorthand language for practicality.[26] But over-simplified beliefs and clashing ideologies tend increasingly to leave us immobilized and ever-more distanced from workable truth.

At the same time, culturally mature perspective emphasizes that pragmatism, if simplistically interpreted, has a gaping flaw. That flaw highlights both particular traps and key conceptual demands. Too often pragmatism begs that critical Question of Referent. It is a solid step forward to say that truth is "what works." But we have gained little—indeed made ourselves open to harmful consequences—if we've left unanswered "works toward what end?"

This flaw is no small matter. Fail to address it and pragmatism can be used to support most any conclusion. Make our referent undiluted power, and pragmatism becomes justification for a narrowly Machiavellian ethos. Make it wealth alone and

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26 Placed in historical context, ideology becomes practical in a particularly sophisticated way. It points toward what might work while protecting us from more reality than we are ready to handle.

both generosity and truthfulness become threats to success. Make it a calm cool rationalism and we easily leave out major pieces of what we need to consider. Make it adherence to some particular notion of spiritual rightness and we risk a dangerously narrow understanding of what makes something right. In each case, we are left vulnerable to driving off in unhelpful directions.

More formal explications of pragmatism often avoid this trap with regard to daily decision-making, but they tend not to find a way past it with regard to truth more broadly. Richard Rorty put it this way in *The Consequences of Pragmatism*: "[Pragmatists] see certain acts as good ones to perform under the circumstances, but doubt that there is anything general and useful to say about what makes them all good."

A culturally mature pragmatism requires us to examine the feedback we use to determine if something does in fact work—and ultimately at both of these levels. It is right that we should strive to succeed and to avoid failure. Culturally mature pragmatism simply adds, "but what is success, and what does it mean to fail?" Most important for the challenges of today, it must effectively address just what success and failure mean in a culturally mature reality. Only truths that in the end support culturally mature possibilities remain pragmatic.

The third contribution from contemporary thought shifts our attention from "crux" to "multiplicity" concerns. Another way to talk about what defines today's new truth is to describe it as relativistic.. Relativism comes at questions of truth from the perspective of context and complexity. Its interest lies with how truth differs depending on when and where we find it. Such relativity is an important theme in most all the modern humanities and social sciences—not just philosophy, but also literature, psychology, anthropology, sociology, linguistics. The term also finds usage in casual discourse.

Relativism observes that experience is always contextual. Even at the level of our biological natures our sense of the world is much less unbiased than we might assume. Perception is very selective and very species specific. We evolve not to see, hear, and taste what is true in some absolute sense, but to perceive in the specific ways that will most support our unique approach to survival. The perceptual world of a dog, a bee, a bear, or an ameba is much different from our own. And while we

reflexively assume our reality is most sophisticated, if I were lost in the woods with only the scent of my previous steps to guide me home, the perceptual reality of the dog or the bear would offer much more sensitive and useful truth.

Beyond the wholly biological, we find aspects of perceptual relativity that are products of learning. The beliefs we grow up with in our families color our perceptions. And cultural traditions and mores prescribe, or at least suggest, answers to truth's quandaries—from the everyday to the transcendent. Indeed, every moment of experience makes my life different from yours—and the more various our experiences the greater those differences will be. Our immense capacities to adapt, learn, and grow mean that, to a degree not present with other creatures, what I see and what you see may not be the same.

There are also levels of truth's relativity specific to being human. Some have particular pertinence to the tasks of culturally mature understanding. I've described how the ways we perceive and conceive are products not just of biology and learning, but also of the very different ways, at different times and places, we may live in our human natures. We've looked at how variations in the sensibilities we bring to experience—for example, by virtue of cultural stage or personality style—fundamentally alter what we see.[27] With this added aspect of contextual relativity, the phrase "where you are coming from" takes on a newly concrete and consequential meaning.

As with the language of pragmatism, we need to be careful with using relativism as comparison. If what we mean is the anything goes, different-strokes-for-different folks worldview we find popularly associated with the term, we have gained little. Indeed we easily perpetrate harm. To claim that one opinion is as valid as the next is to abdicate moral conviction at just the time when moral conviction is most

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27 CST gets specific. We've seen how the ways we conceive of ourselves and everything about us is relative within each developmental process of which we are a part—our lifetimes certainly, but also the evolution of key personal relationships or important life projects, and of greatest importance here, the story of culture. We've seen also how truth becomes just as relative in the more "spatial" diversity of personality styles, organizational roles, and domains of cultural understanding.

critically needed. Culturally mature relativism calls for greater discernment, not less.[28]

But a deep appreciation for context, for how what is true in one situation may not be in another (how different things become pragmatic at particular times and places) is pivotal to mature thought. Cultural Maturity makes truth's relativities newly tolerable and understandable (even fascinating). Again, in the end, nothing is new. Truth has always been contextual. But our ability to recognize just how far such relativity extends is new, and could not be more significant.

Each of these philosophical vantages, when appropriately reframed, captures an important piece of mature systemic understanding. Culturally mature truth becomes a courageously delineated post-modernism. It is about surrendering absolutes—and at once about seeking to understand truth more fundamentally. We could also think of it as a meaning-centered pragmatism. It is about getting at "what works"—while never losing sight of that question, "works toward what end?" And just as much, it is an aware and differentiated relativism. It is about discerning the endless intricacies and contextualities of experience and bringing deep integrity and a keen eye to how we choose between options.

"Hands-On" Approaches

The fact that mature truth requires more of our cognitive complexity suggests that experiential methods might prove especially helpful. I often use "hands-on" approaches in my work both with individuals and with larger systems. Applied well, they can get at culturally mature truth with a directness difficult to achieve with words alone (either with words used abstractly, or as we just have, to make comparison).

Hands-on approaches able to help us with the tasks of Cultural Maturity must be specifically structured with culturally mature perspective in mind. They must

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28 We can just as readily fall off the other side of the conceptual roadway. If our relativities become only new taxonomies, further categories of the old mechanistic sort, at the least we've failed to address the Dilemma of Differentiation. We may also, if we are not careful, end up just replacing one set of biases and bigotries with another.

specifically evoke and support an Integrative Meta-Perspective, engage experience from an all-the-crayons-in-the-box systemic vantage.

Just including non-rational sensibilities give us nothing new. For example, good education commonly makes use of poetic references that tap feelings, the imagination, and the intelligence of the body to make learning more fun (the non-rational serving as decoration for rational intelligence's conclusions). And experiential approaches can lead as readily to conceptual traps as mature truth. We commonly find psychological approaches that help people "get in touch with their feelings" accompanied by belief systems that make feelings the "real" truth. In each case, not only do our methods not generate culturally mature perspective, they can lead us to mistakenly conclude our thinking is sufficient.

No method can take a person into culturally mature territory unless that person is close already (culturally mature perspective is Capacitance-dependent). But certain "hands-on" methods can, if led skillfully, almost demand that experience's larger complexity be engaged. Let's take a few moments with a couple of them that I regularly make use of.

I've briefly introduced the method I call "parts work" and used it to illustrate some of the implications of all-the-crayons-in-the-box perspective. It is a simple and sophisticated hands-on approach that I often use in work with individuals. I've described how "parts work" is based on the recognition that we can think of the various aspects of our psyches—our inner multiplicity—like characters in a play. The method starts with a person identifying "characters" that play roles in his or her life.[29] The person is then guided in engaging the aspects identified in ways that specifically support an Integrative Meta-Perspective. Leadership always resides in the Whole-Person Chair. But parts, like our now familiar crayons, each contribute to the larger systemic picture.[30]

Most often the initial focus of such work is a specific issue. But such work always, at once, supports more general culturally mature capacities. For this chapter's task, "parts work" offers an additional reward: We will see how it provides a

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29 We see common patterns in the characters people discover, but no two people are the same and the simple identification of parts is always itself enlightening.

30 Appendix I in *Necessary Wisdom* presents instructions for this method.

"definition" for culturally mature truth better than simple words or diagrams can achieve.

The description that follows is excerpted from work with a man employed by an environmental advocacy group who came to me for therapy. The work addresses an issue that has direct cultural as well as personal implications. But how the method is structured would support culturally mature perspective even if the question at hand were only personal. For the sake of brevity, the description involves interaction with only a couple parts:

> Bill's father had died. The immediate reason Bill had come to me was the depression the loss had evoked. But with time, along with addressing grief, he recognized a further concern—what he described as a war within himself.
>
> His father had left him a beautiful piece of land that had been in the family for generations. He loved the place and planned to construct a cabin and move there when he retired. But new zoning regulations had made the land unbuildable. Suddenly, his plans were on hold. He felt deeply sad—and angry. He also found himself torn from the comfortable moorings of a once-unquestioned set of beliefs. He was known for banging heads with property rights proponents and more often than not emerging victorious. Now disparate internal voices were advocating not just different social policies, but two very different—and contradictory—views of the world.
>
> He found distress and confusion in this conflict and asked if we could somehow explore it. I agreed. But I recognized that such work would present some difficulties. Bill was an exceptionally intelligent man with well-thought-out, not easily questioned beliefs. We would have to do more than just talk if I was to be of help.
>
> I began by having Bill imagine that the warring parts were like two characters on a stage. I asked him to describe everything he could about each character—what it wore, its age, the expression on its face. Then I had him invite them into the room. The environmentalist sat stage left, sensitive features, longish hair. The property rights advocate stood more distant, stage right, stockier in build, baseball cap tucked between his crossed arms. After a bit, he too sat down.
>
> I instructed Bill to turn to the two figures and describe the issue he wanted to address. After a bit of initial self-consciousness, Bill proceeded to talk with them about the land, the new regulations, the deep conflict he felt. Then I suggested that he go over to each chair and respond as that character—become it and give voice to what it felt about the

questions at hand. I had him return to his own chair when each character had said his peace and from there to respond and to follow up with any further questions he might have. I instructed him to let himself be surprised by what each character might say.

This back and forth went through several iterations, first Bill speaking, then in turn, each of the parts. The character in the left chair spoke of the importance of protecting the environment in its natural state. The character on the right argued that government had no right to dictate what a person did with private property. Both expressed a longing to live in such a beautiful place. As the dialogue progressed, Bill's relationships with each of them deepened. He became increasingly able to find a place in himself where he could both respect what each character had to say and see limits to its helpfulness..

After some time, Bill again turned to me. He said he felt a bit disoriented, but that the conversation had helped. It hadn't given him final answers for how to approach the property issue. But it had given him a solider place to stand for making decisions. He commented that much of what the two characters said had indeed surprised him—and moved him. He found it particularly enlightening that each character seemed essentially well-intentioned. Before he had framed the environmental/property rights conflict as a battle between good and ignorance (if not worse). The work showed him that it was more accurately a battle between competing goods. It had been hard for him not to identify with the environmentalist, but he recognized that in fact each figure had useful things to say and also blindnesses. He had begun to see a more full and creative picture.

Later I asked Bill what implications the exercise might have for his professional work. We decided to continue with the hands-on approach. I tossed him particularly thorny questions that pitted environmental and property rights concerns. His task was to use his two inner "consultants" to help him determine the most effective and fair approach. The result in each case was a deeper understanding of the dilemmas involved and, in several instances, novel solutions.

This example is highly simplified. Such work most often involves more parts than just two,[31] and it may take several months of work before a person can sit solidly in the

[31] Work that extends over time most always involves more aspects—three to five is most common. Sometimes more parts are appropriate simply because the questions at hand involves more than two aspects. But people with different personality styles tend to work best with different degrees of differentiation. Some temperaments work best with just a couple of characters in the room, others with as many as seven, eight or more.

Whole-Person—we could say Integrative Meta-Perspective—chair. But the example illustrates a general type of approach that is both straightforward and highly effective.

As a therapist, I draw frequently on this kind of approach. I don't know of other techniques that apply the full complexity of intelligence so simply and unobtrusively. I also don't know of other ways of working that so directly support mature perspective and do so not just through what is said, but through every aspect of the interaction (and even the layout of the room). Mature perspective and responsibility becomes directly—physically—acted out and embodied. The technique makes a wonderful starting point for other types of intervention.

More important than the answers this type of approach can provide is the way it supports the ongoing development of culturally mature capacities. Bill's specific conclusions were ultimately less significant than his growing ability to hold the more systemic reality that Whole-Person chair represented.[32] Ongoing work with this kind of approach alters not just how a person approaches specific issues, but how they engage reality more generally. It becomes like lifting weights to build the "muscles" of culturally mature capacity. Bill's new comfort with the Whole Person chair provided an anchor for his choices, helped him be confident that even if appropriate action was not fully clear, he was asking good questions—or, at the least, asking them from the right place. It gave him a reliable point of reference for an exploratory relationship to truth and a point of reference that could grew in substance with each new question he used it to engage.

For our task, this approach provides not just methodology, but a powerful "definition' for culturally mature truth. Culturally mature truth is what we get when we sit solidly in that Whole-Person, Integrative Meta-Perspective chair. Given the Dilemma of Representation, such definition represents a highly significant contribution.

Definition of this sort might at first seem less precise than what we are used to. But ultimately the opposite is true. The Whole-Person chair as "definition" is concrete and complete in a way that more customary articulation alone cannot achieve. Right off we see essential differences between truth perceived from where

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[32] One of the litmus tests for success with this kind of approach is the appearance of culturally mature shifts with regard to questions that have not been directly discussed.

this method takes us and truths of more familiar sorts. The Whole-Person chair is about more than just being objective—watching the play from some elevated balcony. It is much more involved—stretched, impassioned, challenging—than this. The Integrative Meta-Perspective it represents is not just about awareness, but a particular set of internal relationships. We see also how mature truth is more than some middle ground, some place of compromise. Compromise can reduce tension, but it gets us no closer to culturally mature perspective.

How parts work gets us to culturally mature truth adds important detail to what mature perspective involves. We can think of Integrative Meta-Perspective as a kind of "rewiring." In getting started, we commonly find parts "talking" to other parts and our interactions with the world often happen through parts (with projection and mythologizing the result). Two cardinal rules that are key to the new "wiring" arrangement direct the process in parts work. First, only the Whole-Person chair gets to interact with the world. Parts don't engage the world directly—and this includes the therapist. (The old wiring is what gave us projection and mythologizing.) And second, parts don't talk to other parts, only to the Whole-Person Chair. (Parts talking with part produces truth defined in the language of polarity.)

The Whole-Person chair holds the Integrative Meta-Perspective. That means taking final responsibility. It also means that is where interaction with each of the others chairs takes place. The person "triages" the contributions of each chair, making use of what is helpful discarding what is not. Ideology—one chair/crayon taking over and assuming the status of last-word truth—is replaced by the more pragmatic and contextual truths of mature systemic perspective. The full richness our all-the-crayons-in-the-box understanding along with the new possibilities it makes possible is the result.[33]

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33 Related "parts work" methods are used within several schools of psychology. But this CST-based approach is unique in the uncompromising emphasis it gives to the Whole-Person chair and through this to the needed Integrative Meta-Perspective.

Consistent with how directly "parts work" supports culturally mature leadership in the client, it also alters the role of the therapist. This is often not immediately celebrated. It necessitates a certain "dis-illusionment." I no longer get to be the expert in the same sense—the great analyzer of dreams, the venerated interpreter of complex psychodynamics. I still do a bit of these things. But I have to accept that what happens is generally "smarter" than I am. This approach takes a lot of skill (and a deep

We can also apply hands-on techniques when working with groups. We see a variety of approaches today that engage groups in ways designed to support collaborative inquiry. Often the result is nothing new, just a replacing of traditional right-hand methods with more left-hand, process-loving techniques. But we also find new and effective collaborative approaches applicable to education, psychology, and leadership more generally.

I often use a methods similar to parts work in group setting. Work I once did with a religious organization torn by the question of abortion illustrates one such approach. The technique is most effective when at least a few people in the group are already capable of venturing a ways into culturally mature territory, but with skilled leadership/facilitation, it can be used in a variety of settings:

> Abortion had become not just a contentious issue for the group, but a potentially divisive one. The group included about an equal number of people who identified themselves as pro-choice and as pro-life. People feared the issue could fracture their long-cherished bonds. Not long after getting started, interaction became stuck in the usual tired ways.
>
> The group agreed to engage together in an exercise. I picked three people from each camp and had them sit in the center of the room. The rest of us sat in a circle around them. I invited the six people within the circle to one by one express their views, doing so in as specific and personal a way as possible. (To stir things up a bit, I instructed one of each group of three to advocate for a position opposite to that which they actually held.) The task of people in the outer circle was to try to hold that larger picture, to step beyond the knee-jerk polarization. I asked them to listen, to note the truths and the possible partialities in what each person said—to engage the question just as subtly and complexly as they could. After the six active participants had completed their statements,

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capacity for mature perspective in oneself), but the most important "pearls" most often don't come from me.

Note that while I am not in charge in the old sense, what I describe is fundamentally different from the "non-directive" posture taken with more feelings-oriented approaches. "Parts work" is highly structured and pushes toward a particular kind of outcome. But the content that results is specifically "emergent"—a function of the unique person and the process, not something I produce (or, in the end, capable of predicting—a meta-determinacy that provides some of the work's richest rewards).

the people in the outer circle worked together to try to frame and address the question more systemically.

Our probings stretched those on each side of the issue. The pro-choice advocates had to admit that while abortion may or may not be murder, it is certainly ends a potential life. The pro-life proponents were pushed to acknowledge the dangers that making abortion illegal presents and the validity of the distinction between life and viable life, however one interprets the implications of that distinction.[34] The conversation was not easy. Significant tension often filled the room. But by the end, most present had glimpsed possibilities that they had not seen before. [35]

This group technique can be extended to address more than one polarity. Integrative change of any complexity most always involves multiple generative linkages with each ultimately essential to the other's success. When working with groups wanting to address the future of their particular domain, I often have people start by making a list of their realm's defining polarities. We then address several hands-on as in the abortion example. Later we assemble the various bridging conclusions into a coherent change strategy.[36]

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34 The abortion debate returns us to Cultural Maturity's requirement that we come to terms with life's ultimate limit. Each side in its own ways denies death. The pro-life side avoids recognizing that sometimes death can be the best way to support life. And the pro-choice side keeps at arm's length that abortion is about death—that it is in fact a kind of killing. As long as the face of death is not consciously confronted—from both sides—the two extremes in the abortion debate will sit at opposite ends of an unbridgeable divide.

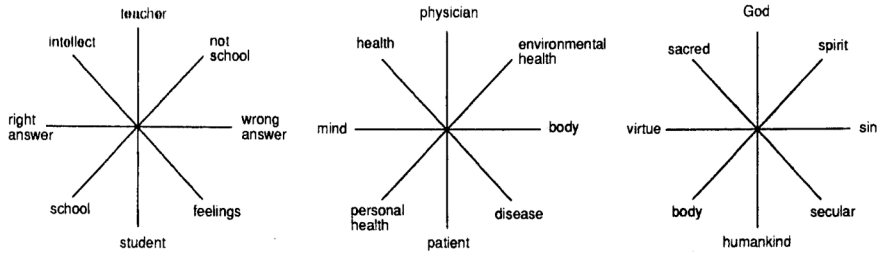
35 The pro-choice and pro-life groups only made a first step into culturally mature territory. If they had progressed further we might have seen not just mutual respect, but a commitment to finding ways to bring together their seemingly irreconcilable viewpoints.

36 Picturing the various needed bridgings like a wagon wheel clarifies the more encompassing challenge and helps counter the common tendency to take one needed change (even if maturely integrative) and make it "the" solution.

Again we can think of this approach not just as methodology, but also as a way of "defining" culturally mature truth. The outer circle represents the needed Integrative Meta-Perspective—the box for our box of crayons. Again, this is definition of a different sort than we are used to, but it is definition of a particularly direct and practical sort. Mature truth lies in finding the solidity and sense of rightness knowable only at the circumference's at once most demanding and most creative inclusiveness.

Sitting in the Whole-Person chair with "parts work" and getting one's arms around an issue's Whole-System circumference are in the end just different ways of describing the same result. Each reflects Integrative Meta-Perspective. Each leaves behind creatively partial vantages and makes visible—and in important ways obvious—a more deep systemic picture. In the end, Cultural Maturity is nothing more than the ability to recognize, inhabit, and act from such systemic completeness.

Each defintion brings limits to representation—and articulation—into high relief. Nothing could be more concrete than sitting in that Whole-Person, Integrative Meta-Perspective chair or taking part in that outer circle. But talking about the experience of either before doing the exercise is extremely difficult. Even afterwards, articulating conclusions derived from the greater perspective either exercise provides can prove frustrating. Again, this apparent elusiveness is not a product of mature systemic truth being esoteric or ephemeral. It is an expression of how fully such truth encompasses complexity, a product of its completeness.[37]



Education Medicine Religion

37 The religion dialogue with Jonathon in the last chapter illustrates a group hands-on approach that shifts attention from here-and-now complexities to how particular truths have evolved through time. I described using improvisational theater techniques to help bring alive the realities of different cultural stages. This is a sophisticated approach and requires a group whose members are of uniformly

Truth and Creative Systems

We've seen how Creative Systems Theory provides a comprehensive "pattern language" for addressing truth in culturally mature terms. As important as its specific conclusions for our project is how it serves as an example of successful comprehensive culturally mature conception.

Previous reflections help clarify what such detailed conception must accomplish. We can think of four criteria: It must help us step back from and take responsibility in the truths we use. It must effectively address "crux"-truth questions. It must similarly provide a means for making nuanced "multiplicity" discernments. And to succeed with any of these tasks, it must provide an overarching approach to understanding that reframes truth itself. Its ideas must effectively address that Dilemma of Differentiation, reflect our "living"—read maturely systemic—natures, and not just by applying some add-on notion, but at the level of basic assumption.

We can use these four criteria to summarize what we've seen of Creative Systems Theory's approach to this point and to elaborate just a bit in anticipation of the Appendix's more detailed treatment. We might think of the last criteria as the first being that each of the others depends on it. We've seen how Creative Systems theory achieves the necessary overarching reformulation by applying a creative frame.

We've pulled evidence for this notion of a creative frame from multiple sources. I've observed how the fact that we think in polar terms in the first place is most certainly an expression of truth's link with formative process. I've also described how we can think of intelligence as being specifically structured to support the human capacity to innovate. We've glimpsed how our beliefs, and even our institutions and inventions, appear to exhibit an underlying creative order. We've also seen how an Integrative Meta-Perspective can be thought of as providing a specifically creative vantage. Creative Systems Theory put is all more simply in proposing that truth—at least as we can know it—is predictably tied to our creative, "tool-making" natures.

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pretty high Capacitance. But it can be very powerful for pushing deeply into integrative territory and bringing detail to culturally mature perspective.

The idea that truth is somehow creative is not original to CST. We hear such language, for example, in the idealist formulations of Plato, classical Eastern philosophy (in particular Chinese Taoism), Hegel's dialectics, the vitalism of Henri Bergson, and the process philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead. But what CST does with the notion is original. In fact, the word creative takes on a fundamentally different meaning. Previous notions all reflect an idealist, romantic, or spiritual claim for left-hand causality.[38] The word creative as applied in Creative Systems Theory is systemic in the needed, specifically integrative sense.

As far as the first criteria, helping us step back and take new responsibility in the truth we use, we've seen how this result follows directly from awareness's new function in an Integrative Meta-Perspective. While Integrative Meta-Perspective supports thinking in creative terms, it vantage also follows directly from a creative frame—we've seen how we find related changes at some scale at the mid-point of any human formative process. An Integrative Meta-Perspective addresses our first criteria by providing the overarching view needed to take full responsibility in the truths we apply and also by offering the more systemic, all-the-crayons-in-the box kind of understanding such specifically creative responsibility requires.

A creative frame also offers that we might directly address the second of our criteria—that conception effectively address the "crux" aspect of truth (and do so in maturely systemic terms). In Creative System Theory, Whole-System Patterning Concepts address "crux" concerns. Whole-System Patterning Concepts engage systems as wholes. Their interest lies with the degree an act or idea is "life-giving"—in the language of formative process, the degree it supports and enhances our creative growth and wellbeing. We've seen how a creative frame makes "crux" a specifically bridging notion. It takes us past the reduction of "crux" to some spiritual essence and offers that we might address "crux" concerns in systemic, whole-ball-of-wax terms. Whole-System Patterning Concepts use a creative frame to delineate a purpose-centered pragmatism—to delineate what truth at its most basic becomes when a system's full living complexity is taken into account.

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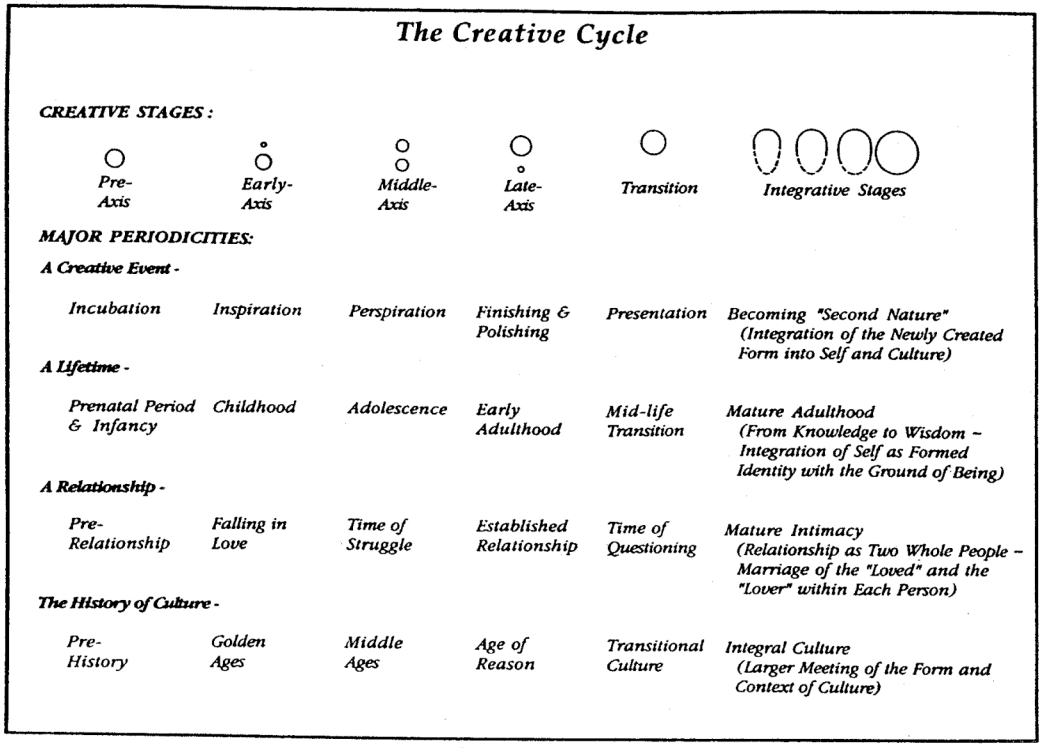
38 The one "sometimes" exception in this list is the thinking Alfred North Whitehead. Sometimes his conclusions seems to reduce to classical idealism, but as often they reach for a more full and integrative picture.

We've taken a first-glance at a two Creative Systems Whole-System Patterning notions. First is that notion of Integrative Referents. Creative Systems Theory often uses the simpler term Aliveness. Aliveness refers to the degree our choices are life (conscious life)-giving. It also provides reflects what is ultimately a creatively-framed definition. Choices tend to be most alive when they manifest at a system's growing (or at least maintaining) creative edge. The courage (and humility to limits) required to make such choice is not a solution in the sense of providing surety and the resolution of all dissonance. But it does offer that a system might be the most vital that is possible (given its temporal and spatial contexts).

The concept of Capacitance is also a Whole-Systems Patterning concept. Capacitance measures the amount of creation/life a system can handle before being overwhelmed. Remember that balloon that pops if stretched too far. With any moment of choice, we want to know not just where the most creative options lay, but also whether we are up to what they might ask.

We've also seen how creative frame directly addresses our third criteria—helping us address culturally mature truth's complementary "multiplicity" task. In Creative Systems Theory, what the theory calls Concepts of Creative Differentiation make the needed, all-the-crayons-in-the-box, "multiplicity" distinctions. Concepts of Creative Differentiation use a creative frame to get beyond the historical relegation of detail and difference to the world of mechanical parts. They describe how the underlying architecture of formative process manifests not just in how we think, but in what we think—and more, in how we create the worlds we live in. The result is a highly detailed, yet also dynamically "living," relativism.

We've looked briefly at each of Creative Systems Theory's two kinds of "multiplicity" notions and each is developed in detail in the Appendix. Patterning in Time describes how human systems of all sorts—personal to planetary—grow and change in creatively predictable ways. In Chapter Four we took a quick look at Patterning in Time distinctions through the lens of our multiple intelligences. The chart below outlines how the Creative Function relates to formative processes of different scales (to different "creative periodicities" to use Creative Systems terminology).



Patterning in Time[39]

A full Patterning in Time analysis addresses change at each systemic layer pertinent to the question we wish to confront. For example, to address the sort of organizational leadership needed to succeed with a specific project, we might be interested in how far the project has already progressed, the ages of those involved, the maturational stages of the project team and the organization as a whole, and the project's relationship to broader cultural change processes.

Our second basic Creative Differentiation notion—Patterning in Space—describes how parts in human systems at particular times, in a similar way, relate—and organize—creatively. Patterning in Space notions can be applied to intrapsychic dynamics, personality style relationships, the underlying function of academic disciplines and cultural domains, and interactions at a global scale. The Creative Systems Personality Typology is an example of a Patterning in Space application.

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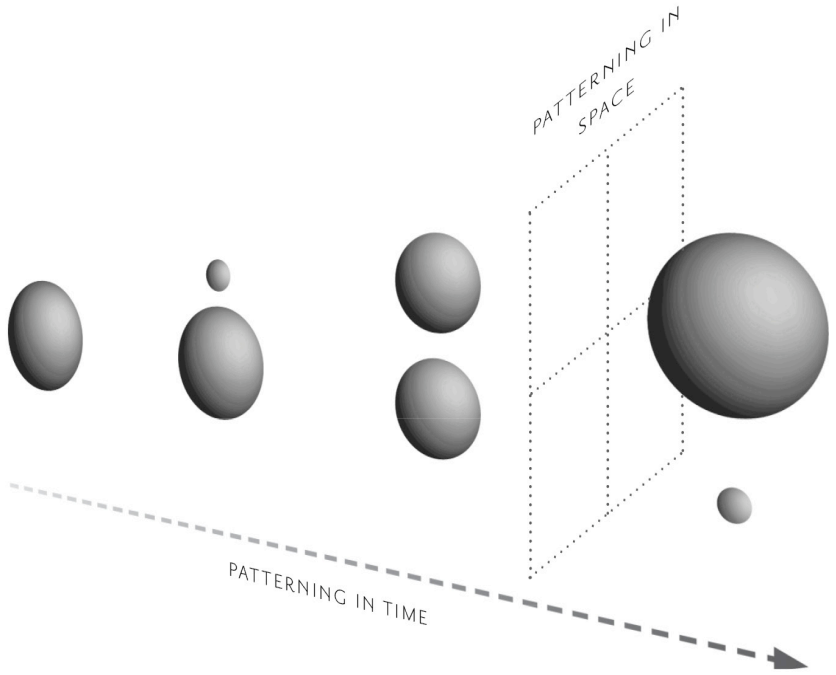
39 From *The Creative Imperative*.

A full Patterning in Space analysis overlays each of the systems pertinent to the question one wants to examine. Thus that person wanting to address how best to proceed with a specific project might want also to look at the temperaments of key people involved, the kind of project (is it more R&D, administrative, marketing?) and the sphere of culture in which the project would have its primary effect (how one appropriately approaches a project in the military, in a church, on Wall Street, or in an art studio may be very different).

We've seen how Creative Systems Theory is unique in how it applies similar language to Patterning in Time and Patterning in Space discernments. We've also seen how that fact that it does is not some arbitrary selection of terminology. When we frame systems creatively, change and here-and-now complexity become inextricably related.

Creative Systems Theory also includes patterning concepts that combine "crux" and "multiplicity" observations. The notion of Creative Fallacies is an example. So is an additional notion implied in our earlier discussion of Capacitance and developed in the Appendix. The concept of Creative Symptoms describes the characteristic ways systems with different Patterning in Time and Patterning in Spaces dynamics respond when pushed beyond available Capacitance.

The Creative Function in limited ways represents each of these patterning notions. Whole System Patterning Concepts are reflected in the image as a whole (the idea that truth is creative is a Whole-Systems notion), in the size of the circles (their volume describes Capacitance), and where the system most resides in the image (a systems greatest Aliveness lies at its "creative edge"). The developmental sequence describes Patterning in Time. And the vertical polarities mark Patterning in Space. (A more complete Patterning in Space picture would take a cross section through the progression—revealing the whole of here-and-now complexity as it exists in that moment).



TRUTH AND THE CREATIVE FUNCTION

It is important to distinguish where Creative Systems Theory is useful from where it is not. It is not good for everything. Its contribution lies with concerns of underlying pattern and with questions that relate to how, big picture, we organize experience.

Much in the particulars we observe has wholly different origins. For example, personality style differences explain only part of why a person may act the way he or she does. As important are personal idiosyncrasies and life events that have nothing to do with temperament—or anything else a creative perspective has much to say about. And while aspects of what we see in a culture's artistic forms, religious beliefs, and

governmental structures reflect cultural stage, as much may be a result of essentially arbitrary historical events and, again, numerous effects for which creative mechanisms at any level play little if any significant role.[40]

An observation made briefly earlier is important to reemphasize in bringing these further introductory reflections with regard to Creative Systems Theory to a close. Creative Systems Patterning distinctions are simpler and more readily made than might at all seem the case on first blush. Understanding why this is so important to taking on the task of learning how to make them. It also helps further with making sense of what ultimately they describe.

Creative Systems Theory's multi-layered approach to teasing apart human experience might seem on initial encounter frighteningly complicated. We are saved from total bewilderment by two essential facts. First, each of these discriminations reflect a single fundamental patterning dynamic—that of formative (creative) process. Learning how to make one type of discernment takes us a long way toward understanding how to make them all. Second, if Creative Systems Theory is right, that single fundamental patterning mechanism organizes how we think. While any part of us is quickly overwhelmed by such multi-layered detail, the whole of ourselves can learn to hold it quite comfortably. Indeed, at some level we've been making this sort of discrimination since our species' beginnings. Such determinations, made less consciously, had been central to how we have chosen of friends and mates, defined our beliefs, and created the great art and the great institutions by which we

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40 This chapter's reflections on truth raise the philosophical question of whether CST's conclusions are best thought of as epistemological or ontological—as observations about how we understand truth or about truth itself. With regard to physical and biological systems, CST's most obvious contribution is epistemological. It describes how it is we perceive our inanimate and animate worlds in the different ways we do (and how what we have seen is creatively predicted). With regard to ourselves, CST is again primarily epistemological, but the sense in which what we create reflects how we understand is equally important to its argument. CST observes that how we create our social (relational and institutional) and structural (artistic, architectural, and technological) worlds mirrors these creatively ordered changes in how we conceive and perceive. A person could argue for a certain, more functional, ontological contribution. (At the end of the chapter, we will have some fun with the notion that maybe its all creative—which would make a creative frame more ultimately ontological.)

recognize civilization. Creative Systems Theory proposes that such formative patterning is what, in the end, makes us who we are.[41]

A Creative History of Truth

One of Creative Systems Theory's particularly useful truth-related contributions is how it help us put specific truths in historical perspective. We can apply the Creative Function to help delineate how our various kinds of truth—scientific truth, religious truth, artistic truth, the evolution of our ideas about government, education, or the human body—have evolved through time. The way it provides a big picture vantage for thinking about philosophical truth makes a particularly apt example for this examination of truth more generally,

Right off, Creative Systems Theory alerts us to inherent limits. Philosophy, even when interpreted very broadly, as here, means ideas that can be verbally articulated and put in some rational form (even if their focus is the non-rational[42]). Thus while philosophy claims to be about truth itself, the perspective from which it views truth often limits what it is capable of seeing. John Keats voiced the limitation as a rhetorical question, "Do not all charms fly at the mere touch of cold philosophy?"[43]

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41 CST proposes not just that such patterning could not be more familiar (at least unconsciously), but that it is inevitable. Patterning in Time and Patterning in Space distinctions follow directly from the "tool-making" function of conscious awareness and intelligence. They are not some invention of conscious awareness, a handy choreography designed for that task. Rather they reflect how creation in human systems necessarily works. Any formative process must start with nothing (or more accurately a context); new form emerges, at first fragile, later more solid; and with time that form becomes part of "just how things are" (and the context for a next round of creation). The mechanism doesn't need design. There really aren't other ways to go about it. Be tool-makers and this is pretty much how it has to work.

42 Often the rational, then, also has a more direct influence. We commonly see great lengthy treatises on the limits of rationality. The length and the fact that we would refer to them as treatises belie their author's ultimate allegiance.

43 Because rationality represents the most creatively manifest of intelligences, we might be drawn to conclude that philosophy is a solely right-hand activity. But our picture needs to be more nuanced. CST affirms that philosophy is largely an upper-pole activity (in the Creative Function and in

But with that recognized, philosophical truth provides a valuable window. It is at least representative of broader understanding. And because it tends toward verbal descriptions and logical analysis it is more amenable to brief synopsis (ignoring for the moment that philosophers are rarely brief) than say the historical "beliefs" of art, government, or religion.

The Creative Function provides a crude but provocative way to "map" the history of philosophy. Such mapping is based on the notion that we can think of philosophical tradition as having left and right hands (or a least traditions that lean variously to the right or left). Philosophy refers to these two fundamental currents in different ways—the transcendental as opposed to the empirical, that of the idealist and that of the materialist. Each at times flows into the other, but the simplification supports understanding. Jean Gebser described the situation this way: "Idealists and materialists are like two children on a seesaw who have been teetering back and forth for two thousand years."

The first current includes thinkers such as Plato and philosophers of more religious bent who believe that what we can ultimately most rely on is inner experience, whether mental or spiritual. The second includes thinkers who in one way or another believe we rely ultimately (or at least most usefully) on our senses, such as the early natural philosophers, Aristotle, and most of modern science. Creative Systems Theory expands on this recognition by using its notion that polarities organize creatively. The history of ideas becomes a chronicling of the diverse ways this two-handed interplay has been perceived through time, and from different perspectives at any particular point in time.

If nothing else, this observation offers the possibility of synopsis and an antidote to that common lack of brevity in philosophical writings. Two basic changes shape this philosophical trek through time—both now familiar. The first is that gradual shift from left-hand to right-hand emphasis over the course of creative differentiation. Left-handed cosmologies predominate in earliest cultural periods

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ourselves, an activity of the head more than the body or emotions). But it also delineates how each pole has more reflective (inner) and expressive (outer) aspects. Philosophy most draws on the iner aspect of upper-pole sensibilities. This additional recognition is essential for appreciating what philosophy observes in general, and in particular, to what happens to philosophy at Transition's threshold.

while more right-handed worldviews come to the fore as we move toward the present. The second is the role of cultural stages. Incubation, inspiration, perspiration, and polishing tasks give each hand identifiable characteristics depending on which hand predominates. These creative tasks translate into the animistic thought of tribal times, the more magical thought of the earlier civilizations, the morally-focused philosophies of the Middle Ages, and the opposed material and romantic perspectives of the Modern Age.

The descriptions that follow are highly (even absurdly) abridged. But given our project in these pages, more detailed analysis is best left for other writings. In deference to space, I will mention thinkers without great elaboration. Some familiarity with Western philosophy's people and traditions is helpful, but the most important recognitions concern the suggested underlying patterns.

Many people would consider where we must start not really philosophy. Tribal (Pre-Axis) times precede written language. But the animistic assumptions of Pre-Axial realities produce a consistent conceptual world. We see a reality in which left-hand sensibilities strongly predominate. It is not that right hand elements are denied, rather, simply, that they are not yet strongly present. All is seen as connected—tribe, nature, spirit, time—and these connections define truth. People assume more right-hand and left-hand roles. A tribal chief's duties are more "secular" than those of a shaman. But differences manifest within an almost entirely unitary holding of experience.

The cosmologies of civilization's early rise (Early-Axis) more overtly acknowledge both hands of truth, but the left hand retains dominance. The magical and mythic beliefs of ancient Egypt, the Incas and Aztecs, classical India,[44] or Olympian Greece, each, to varying degrees, gave final word to the archetypally feminine. Plato's philosophy belongs in this left-hand tradition, though he conceived of truth's left hand more in terms of mind than spirit. In Plato's cave, external reality is a play of shadows cast by internal essences—the "forms" or "ideas." Aristotle, along with the earlier Greek natural philosophers, focused more outwardly, on phenomena that could be understood with the senses: the natural world, speech, behavior. Their thinking laid the foundation for modern scientific thought. But even

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44 CST views classical Eastern philosophy as emanating from this stage.

Aristotle's ideas made but a start to the right. Aristotle saw divine action as what began it all—the "unmoved mover"—and invisible causal forces behind motion of every sort.

With culture's perspiration stage (Middle-Axis) the strength of truth's two hands became more balanced. Because philosophy tends to take expression from the more reflective side of our rationality (in contrast to politics or economics), medieval philosophical writings tend still to lean toward the archetypally feminine. This continued left-handed emphasis is particularly evident in expressly theistic formulations such as the fourth century ideas of St. Augustine of Hippo or those of medieval mystics such as Meister Eckhard or Hildegard of Bingen. But the Middle Ages saw also a manifesting of expressly secular philosophy. While St. Thomas Aquinas's ideas were deeply grounded in religious principle, they followed on and extended the tradition of Aristotle. William of Ockham went even further in pressing against the constraints of orthodox religious cosmology.

With the Modern Age (Late- Axis), archetypally masculine philosophical sensibilities moved forefront. In the empiricism of Bacon, Locke, and Hume, right-hand esthetics were assumed to shape the left. Positivist formulations, such those of Saint-Simon and Comte relied almost exclusively on truth's right hand as did the more extreme of materialist and early scientific views (Hobbes and Laplace).[45] Dualism became explicit in the seventeenth-century thinking of Rene' Descartes[46] (and in a less absolutely cleaved form in the ideas of Leibnitz). We see the greatest right hand preeminence in current times with the claims of extreme behaviorism and scientism that material explanation is all we need.

Modern Age left-hand cosmologies arose either as a counterbalance to, or reaction against, this new right-hand supremacy. The most important include modern forms of idealism (Berkeley, Kant, Hegel) along with eighteenth- and nineteenth-

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45 I say extreme because most early scientists, and most we associate with the birth of the Scientific Age, were religious people.

46 We might assume dualism to give equal weight to each hand. However, which hand ultimately predominates is a function of dualism's larger context. The separate worlds ideas of Descartes, while expressly affirming of religion's place, represents an important victory for distinction over connectedness.

century romanticism (Rousseau, Schelling, Goethe). Idealist cosmologies acknowledge the validity of both of truth's hands and assume that they interact—but, in the end, truth's left hand defines the right. Spinoza's equating of God with nature set the stage for romanticism's polar response to the growing dominance of right-hand sensibilities.

Note that this progression brings us eventually to the impasse we encountered in the last chapter. As left-hand sensibilities surrender their dominance to right-hand beliefs, eventually we confront that Dilemma of Trajectory. Thought's history describes a step-by-step replacing of mysticism by "hard truth." Modern thought represents a final victory for the objective (and assumes that future thought will simply reap the rewards of that victory).

We are left with the question of whether there is anywhere left to go. At the least, we are left with whether philosophy has anywhere left to go. If extreme advocates of right-hand truth are correct and right-hand truth is all there ever really was (the left-hand was just a pleasant illusion) then in effect we've arrived. Philosophy has appropriately reached the end of its usefulness—now an historical artifact (its functions now replaced by economics, science, and technology).

Certainly philosophy confronts difficulties. At Cultural Maturity's threshold, the empirical and the transcendental threads each reflect their respective Transitional Absurdities. An extreme objectivity that leaves out half of the data can hardly be considered objective. And an extreme subjectivity that leaves out the subject—at least in any embodied sense—is ultimately empty. (It is understandable that we might find so few job openings for philosophers.) And as we've seen, Transition's picture has more than just philosophical problems. A world defined only by right-hand values is likely not consistent with survival.

Cultural Stage[47]	*Left-hand preeminence*	*Right-hand preeminence*

47 For some purposes, particularly when the more "horizontal," left-hand versus right hand aspect of polarity is most pertinent, it is most useful to turn the Creative Function on its side. (Creative organization has related vertical and horizontal dynamics.) Philosophy, because of its conscious rational formulation, is uniformly an upper pole activity. Philosophical differences reflect more inner versus outer dynamics.

Pre-Axis	[ ]	animism———————————
Early-Axis	[ ]	Plato, the more spiritual——————Aristotle, Democritus, classical Eastern philosophies Confucius [The more secular of Eastern philosophies, Taoism for example, can be thought of as dualistic]
Middle- Axis	[ ]	St. Augustine, Meister——————William of Ockham, Eckhard, Hildegard of Bingen Thomas Aquinas [or dualism]
Late-Axis	[ ]	Kant, Schelling, Rousseau—--Descartes [or dualism] Hegel, Bergson Newton, Bacon, Locke Teilhard de Chardin Hume, Compte, Marx, and the modern analytic philosophers.
Transition	[ ]	The more extreme———The more ————scientism,[48] of new age and extreme of extreme behaviorism, environmental of post-modern the technological beliefs beliefs gospel
Early Integration (See Chapter Ten)	[ ]	The more mature————The more----------The best of science. of religious, Trans- mature of and the more mature formational/New Post-Modern of Post-Industrial/ Paradigm, and perspectives Information Age environmental perspectives perspectives

Philosophy as Patterning in Time

The way Cultural Maturity resolves Transition's predicament is now familiar. An Integrative Meta-Perspective does three things with regard to philosophy's right- and left-hand traditions. First, it challenges claims from either side to the last word. Second, it asserts that we must find ways to draw a circle around polar extremes. (It

48 While scientism is not limited to transitional times, it gains wider acceptance with transitional dynamics (the archetypally feminine pole so diminished as to exert little influence).

proposes that even just making right- and left-hand truths separate but equal—as with Cartesian dualism—is not enough.) And finally, it proposes that such a circle must embrace not just here and now difference, but differences through time (that task of Reengagement—necessary if bridging is to make any real sense given the Dilemma of Trajectory).

Cultural Maturity proposes not just that these changes provide a way to go on, they open the door to greater sophistication of understanding all the way around. Neither hand gets away unscathed and neither does truth as a whole. (The mythic gatekeeper steps aside to reveal neither the right hand's hoped for pot of gold nor the left hand's hoped for flash of final enlightenment.) But the truths of both hands become each more overt in their significance, more robust, more multi-hued in conception, and more extensive in their appropriate concerns. And our conscious recognition of truth as a whole becomes a more vital expression of the full magnitude of human experience. In some small way, we see this with any bridging. And it is just as true for truth's most encompassing of systemic relationships.

Reflecting on this big-picture interpretation and how it helps us, a person might appropriately ask whether culturally mature perspective is accurately itself thought of as philosophy. The post-modern argument for the end of philosophy—at least as a pursuit of final abstracted truths—is legitimate. And culturally mature truth is never just philosophical. It is always as much about politics, science, sociology, religion, or art. But with regard to questions of what makes truths true, its concerns certainly parallel those of philosophical inquiry.

Wherever we end up with our answer, culturally mature perspective does provide fresh life for the philosophical enterprise. Similar to what we saw for the study of history, integrative perspective offers that philosophical inquiry might be newly vital and substantive. At the least, Cultural Maturity makes the "big picture" newly relevant, indeed, essential. What culturally mature truth gives us is necessarily more humble than the ultimate answers to which classical philosophy aspired. But it succeeds in providing new appreciation for the wonders (along with the wondrous absurdities) of being human. And it offers a kind of practical applicability that philosophy has rarely been able to produce. Perhaps a time will come when parents

no longer cringe—appropriately—when they hear their child has chosen philosophy as a college major.

More Fun with Grand Overarching Conception

Some even more ultimate ponderings bring these truth reflections to a close. While Creative Systems Theory's specific concern is human systems, we appropriately ask whether a creative frame might apply in some more general way to existence as a whole, also to biological and physical systems.

By itself, the question represents blue-sky conjecture more than anything of much practical use. But it does have one kind of practically that should not be dismissed. We've looked at how we can use a creative frame to integrate spiritual and material aspects of understanding into a single narrative. Given the importance of guiding narrative, the question of whether we an articulate an even more encompassing "creation story" at least warrants curiosity.

A slightly more particular "theory of everything" question asks, How do the various "layers" of existence—the physical, the biological, and the humanity's realm of more conscious functioning—relate one the other. To talk in terms of layers in this way might seem simplistic. But it tends to be how we think and question of how these different realms relate has produced some of the most charged of philosophical/religious/ scientific debate.

We get a hint that culturally mature perspective might be needed to resolve the quandary with the recognition that each layer at it most fundamental presents a similar, now familiar conceptual elusiveness. I've spoken of how the "what is life" question escapes conventional thought. The ultimate nature of inanimate existence and the quandary presented by how human consciousness might be different from simple creatuly sentience have, in related ways, tried the best of minds.

Later I will suggest that we might best think of them like the layers in Neapolitan ice cream. But we are getting a bit ahead of ourselves. Without some preparation we will at least miss why this conclusion matters. Before we go there, we need to take a moment with a question that more specifically concerns the human

dimension: Why through history we have seen each layer in the particular ways that we have? Without good answers, our past time-specific assumptions are going to get in our way.

Creative Systems Theory describes how the different ways we have thought of nature through history have been creatively predictable. But for these reflections, we don't need that level of detail. It is enough, at least to get started, to note that belief in times past has always involved polar projection. Is the creature world a "peaceable kingdom" (and thus to be emulated) or "red in tooth and claw" (something to fear and, if possible, tamed)? Obviously, neither alone. And such projection is not just something of our distant past. Is it not curious that with the Age of Industry we might have come to see nature as a machine (one half of the objective/ subjective polarity), a conclusion that would have been inconceivable—even ludicrous—during any other cultural period?

We need, also, a further more basic recognition: As part of this polarizing mechanism, we've tended to collapse systemic layers one into the other. Each kind of collapsing alerts us to a particular kind of polar fallacy. Mechanistic interpretations of science may reduce it all to the physical—to atoms and their interactions. (Physical reductionism reflects a Late-Axis Separation Fallacy). Or, collapsing life and conscious life, science may treat conscious systems as little more than biological variants. Monotheistic religion frequently does something opposite. Common interpretations regards conscious life as divinely distinct and collapse the rest of creation into an (often denigrated) opposite to it. (A Middle-Axis Unity Fallacy.)[49] Contemporary humanistic views and the more simplistically conceived of "new

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49 There is also a less obvious collapsing in traditional religious views. It has to do with how we conceive of God. Much in the ideas we have carried about divinity and creation seem best interpreted as products of collapsing existence as a whole into cultural-stage-specific assumptions about our own conscious creative mechanisms. Take the common "argument by design," the idea that we can conclude God exists and created the universe for the same reason that if we find a watch in the forest we know by its complexity that it must have had a creator. The argument makes sense only with this collapsing of systemic levels. In fact, self-organizing processes can produce complexity well beyond what we can consciously create. (A person could counter that God's creative powers are infinite—which may be true, but that is a claim by faith, not by argument.)

paradigm" interpretations often collapse both human and physical processes into "organic" metaphors—with a naive holism the common result. (With humanism, a Late/Lower/Inner Unity fallacy; with “new paradigm” ideas more often a Unity Fallacy of Early-Axis origins).[50] However we do it, collapsing systemic layers leads to predictable, and predictably unhelpful, conclusions. Staying alert to such collapsing presents an important way to spot conceptual traps.

With these observations as background, we can now more safely take on our “theory of everything” question—though its answer will not come as readily as we might hope. The relationship between layers presents a most intriguing quandary. Viewing layers as wholly distinct begs the question of relationship and leaves us severed from larger existence. Collapsing layers one into the other leads us to conceptual traps. At an additional important level of detail we confront the Dilemma of Differentiation. We also in another way confront the question of story—ultimate, big-picture story.

A creative frame provides a simple way of thinking that at least avoids the worst of traps—enter our Neapolitan ice-cream model of existence. Each of the layers are in end the same (all ice cream—all creative), and at once specifically different.

Creative imagery has most obvious pertinence to the generative beginnings of physical, biological, and conscious existence. But we also appropriately think of each systemic layer as creative in an ongoing sense. Of particular pertinence to the task of differentiation, we can also usefully think of each layer as a different order of creation. Existence's levels are distinguished by innovations that have served as "creative multipliers," catalysts to new magnitudes of creative possibility.

What started it all is certainly creative—the ultimate "something from nothing." This is so whether we conceive our beginnings in terms of biblical creation, the Big Bang, or ancient creation myths. And today we are seeing many more on-going ways that physical processes can be self-organizing (we could say creative).

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50 We hear a relatively benign manifestation of this last form of collapsing in the common reference to the earth as a "living" system. More accurately the earth is a dynamic system (in the broadest sense a creative system) that contains life. To say it is alive is poetic, but a very different sort of statement. A look beneath the surface commonly reveals views that walk dangerously close to fallacies of a left-hand sort (if they don't outright succumb to them).

The leap that gave us organic existence made possible the creative rearrangement of fundamental formative information with each lifetime (and, in some cases, with even greater frequency, as with bacterial exchange of genetic material). It also gave us simple learning. More generally, it provided a level of excitatory capacity not witnessed in simple physical systems. Systems theorist Gregory Bateson was fond of pointing out that kicking a rock and kicking a dog produce quite difference outcomes. The difference lies in the predictability of the results, the "creative" options.

The advent of conscious awareness gave us a further creative multiplier. Awareness (combined with the newly complex cognitive capacities of which it is the most visible manifestation) made possible the generation of novelty at a rate limited only by our capacity for new insight. (And often we don't need insight. Much of creativity and learning happens unconsciously.) While all of truth is experimental, not just human, we choose our experiments—or at least fancy ourselves to—and as toolmakers engage experimentation as a particularly all-consuming enterprise. The complexity of response options available to simple organisms multiplies many times over in conscious systems. And with culturally mature conscious systems, it multiplies further, as the past safety of mythologized belief give way to more possibility filled perspective.

The fact that we don't know at all fully how creation at any of these levels works, makes this progression at most an invitation to ponder. It does address important philosophical concerns. It lets us transcend dualism and really do it—not sneakily cut off one of Descarte's legs in the name of non-duality. (It takes us beyond both mechanical interpretation—even its indeterminate forms—and the teleological belief) And it provides a third option beyond the dismissing of relationship that comes with regarding layers as simply different and the common collapsing of systemic layers one into the other.

Our Neapolitan ice cream creative interpretation invites an ultimate Question of Referent. We appropriately ponder our long-term significance in this creative picture. This sort of question commonly implies direction and intent. But I mean it in quite another way.

I will sometimes ask people what they imagine we humans might be doing five thousand years from now, a very short time in evolutionary terms. It is interesting how frequently people's first response is a frown. It is hard for many people to imagine that in that amount of time we will not have totally screwed things up. The long-term fate of conscious awareness as a creative multiplier—however worthy, even profound, its appearance might be—is not at all clear.

We can put this ultimate Question of Referent question in the form of a thought experiment. Imagine that calamity is not the ultimate outcome. We continue to survive and even thrive, and benefit existence more generally in the process (pretty much a prerequisite for survival). Leaving behind both idealized notions of who we are and images of magical intervention, just what would be required for such a more positive picture? The way conscious awareness works means that the answer is much more one of choice, much more one of branching creative possibilities than would otherwise be the case. We can think of our response not just as an answer to humanity's ultimate Question of Referent but an ultimate definition for culturally mature truth.

Truth and Hope

George Orwell proposed that "In a time of universal deceit, telling the truth becomes a revolutionary act." Ours is not such a time (beware the dangers of cynicism). But it is the case that truth presents very real conundrums—old truths are not working, needed new truths can be difficult to grasp, much is indeed absurd, and truth today is necessarily of a new sort. What we see makes truth telling today perhaps even more revolutionary.

The main way these reflections about truth contribute to hope is shared with each previous theme—they support that new ways of thinking able to guide us in the tasks ahead are at least possible. New truths themselves also contribute to hope. We've seen how Cultural Maturity invites us to think with a new complexity and completeness. Again, this does not mean seeing with some ultimate clarity. One of the things that greater complexity and completeness most alerts us to the impossibility of such clarity (and the dangers of assuming it exists—and particularly that we might

have it). But it represents the kind of truth the future calls for. It provides the dynamism and comprehensiveness of thought critical questions in times ahead will increasingly require.

There is also an aspect of such truth that has particular pertinence to the question of hope. Culturally mature perspective makes truth more explicitly about purpose. With today's crisis of purpose and hope, not just cultural mature truth's conclusions, but simply its orientation, derives great significance. In an odd sense, this is a radical shift.[51] Human truth has always been about what gives actions meaning. But making this overt is new. Mature truth is never just about the facts, but also about understanding what makes certain thoughts and choices matter.

A creative frame lets us be more specific with regard to purpose in today's world. It proposes that we experience hope and purpose when we engage the tasks that are most timely in a creative sense (whether we are successful in that engagement or not). I've argued here that such timeliness today translates into the tasks of Cultural Maturity. Cultural Maturity becomes an answer not just to the question of hope, but also to the question of what it means today to live purposefully—individually and collectively.

If nothing else, culturally mature truth presents important reward in the human endeavor. Robert Louis Stevenson described personal maturity with these words: "To love playthings well as a child, to live an adventurous and honorable youth, and to settle down into when the time arrives into a green smiling age, is to be a good artist in life and deserve well of yourself and your neighbor." Cultural Maturity's expanded truths are similarly about such growing up. And ultimately, too, they about deserving well of ourselves, personally and as a species.

The Price and the Prize

The price culturally mature truth extracts is now familiar. It takes away simple answers of every sort. It requires us to surrender culturally-specific guideposts, and

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51 People often assume that the most difficult topics to talk about are sex, money and politics. In fact, the most threatening questions—and those most taboo in both personal and social discourse—have to do with what matters.

challenges any belief that gives one part of understanding a monopoly on truth (one half of any polarity, one aspect of intelligence, one academic discipline, or the perspective of any one cultural domain—government, education, science, religion.). What culturally mature truth requires is not easy. It demands that we find the fortitude to confront experience more head-on, to grasp the substance of what matters in any situation more directly, and to open our eyes to the endless and often elusive multiplicities and contingencies that real-life truth involves.

But the price we will pay for culturally mature truth's absence is greater—and of a qualitative sort, not just that of a slightly lesser grade on life's test. In the end, we will be left unable to address, or even adequately frame, any of the most critical social and cultural dilemmas of our time. We will be thrust increasingly into a reality defined on one hand by ever-more dogmatic and fragmented belief, and on the other by an empty relativism in which one answer is as good as another. (Often it will be a thoroughly crazy world in which both are true at once.) We will experience the challenges presented by Whole-Person/Whole Systems relationships—at every scale—threatening and disorienting. We will find ourselves without the conceptual or emotional tools we need to deal with the challenges our increasingly change-permeated and complex world presents.

The prize for realizing mature truth is commensurately great. Setting aside parental protections and polarized assumptions allows us to engage truth with a directness and immediacy not before ours to entertain. For the practical tasks of decision-making, the realization of culturally mature truth means once again having guideposts—not final answers, but at least pointers for the directions we need to go (a kind of guidepost that in a culturally mature world is more powerful than final answers). More emotionally and existentially, culturally mature truth provides a newly powerful and purpose-filled picture of our human natures—and, in the process, a life-affirming response to today's crisis of purpose and hope.

Weaving Threads

The short version:

Today's new questions demand that we confront truth with a directness and sophistication not before needed or possible.

They also require more vital, rich, nuanced, and complete ways of thinking about truth.

The good news is that Cultural Maturity should make such more subtle understandings of truth more available and increasingly compelling.

With the book's last section we turn more specifically to the task of application.