

## ***Religion and Self-Acceptance.* John F. Haught. New York: Paulist Press, 1976.**

### **Preface**

Intention = an *introductory* essay in the *philosophy of religion*.

The purpose of philosophy is *self-appropriation*.

### **Introduction**

Common Methodologies:

1. *Genetic* approach = location of chronological or psychological point of departure. But no matter how substantial their insights, this is not the whole story of so complex a phenomenon.
2. *Phenomenological* approach = brackets questions of psychic and cultural motives and concerns itself with unfolding the structure of religious consciousness without regard to questions of value or validity. But one cannot suspend critical questions indefinitely without doing violence to the inborn dynamics of the human mind.

“... a *post-phenomenological reflection* on man’s attestation to the sacred.”

Asking how religious affirmations relate to the basic human *desire to know*.

Unless religion is rooted in the desire to know, the *validity of its formal testimony* to the sacred comes under challenge.

“The philosophy of religion must take as its point of departure already existing pre-theoretical religious acts and language.”

Self-appropriation is the integrating principle in both epistemological and psychological questions about religious life, language, and belief.

### **Chapter ONE: Identifying the Desire to Know**

Three questions:

1. What do they mean? (meaning/congruity)
2. What good are they? (value)
3. Are they ‘realistic’ or true? (truth)

The question of *congruity*: ‘Do religious stories seem to consolidate elements of my experience into a coherent totality? Or do they seem foreign, remote, meaningless?’

The question of *value*: ‘Does the religious narrative correspond to what I consider worthwhile or conform to my sense of what is good?’

The question of *validity*: ‘Are there reasonable grounds to the claims of a religious community or are these claims sheer mystifications?’

My association with a religious community involves a being grasped by the power of symbolic and narrative utterance at a level that stirs to life long before I ask questions of validity in a deliberate way; but if I am true to my basic desire to know I must ask whether such religious claims are reducible to desires, feelings, and moral commitments or whether these claims have a content that transcends their aesthetic or moral appeal.

### The priority of the validation question:

"The explicit, reflective inquiry as to whether there is formal truth in religious statements usually occurs only after one has passed sentient and value judgments on them. But unless the language of religion can satisfy my craving for the real, for being, it is doubtful whether it can more than momentarily appeal to my aesthetic tastes and moral concerns."

Though chronologically the validity question may be last, systematically it is first.

"Unless religious visions satisfy the need to know in addition to other needs, they cannot fully appeal to those who are seeking to be reasonable and not just secure in their lives."

"Once the truth of a religious vision is made questionable, then its fittingness and value must also be questioned."

### The Roots of Method:

"The three questions we have already ushered forth spring spontaneously and inescapably from a method that is latent and invariant in the human mind itself."

"An appreciative understanding of one's cognitional acts and the dynamic drive underlying these can provide each individual with a standpoint from which he may enter into the veritable swamp of cultural, intellectual and religious alternatives without fear of being engulfed by relativism or crippled by the obsession with certitude."

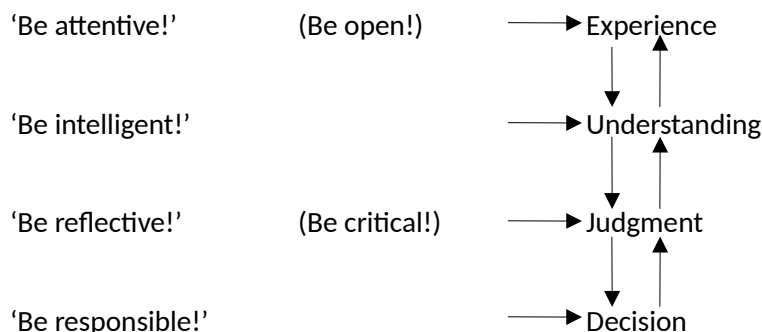
### Method and Cognitional Self-Awareness:

Method = a set of directives guiding a process toward a result.

Sequential pattern of one's spontaneous thinking:

1. *Experience*: perceptive and open to *data*.
2. *Understanding*: struggle for *insight*.
3. *Judgment*: *reflective grasp* of the fulfillment of those conditions necessary for the act of assent or negation.
4. *Decision*: Act that mediates between human knowing and human doing.

### Imperatives Rooted in Cognitional Structure:



The intention of these *transcendental imperatives* is always to *open consciousness up* to newer and richer experience, to *enlarge* our world and to *expand* our possibilities for action.

“When the philosopher approaches the data of religious life his most direct concern is *how religion relates to the world-enlargement toward which the imperatives of his mind instinctively moves*. Does religious life promote or frustrate the goals of these innate and irremovable precepts?”

The objection to any philosophical approach to religion on the grounds that religion can only be criticized from within a milieu generated by faith and not by reflection is premised on the assumption that philosophical interests cannot coincide with religious ones.

“When the philosopher asks whether being religious is being reasonable, this is a legitimate question provided that its meaning is as follows: ‘Is being religious consistent with being open, insightful, critical and responsible?’ In those cases where it is not, religious man needs the iconoclasm of the philosopher.”

#### Identifying the Desire to Know:

“Wonder” = dynamic, restless, irrepressible basic drive.

“Many philosophers and also some theologians would instinctively shy away from any enterprise that even hints at a positive relationship between religion and rational desire. Unless there is an *intimacy between religion and the desire to know*, however, there is no conceivable way in which religious persons and communities can escape the charge of wishful thinking, of flight from reality.”

### **Chapter TWO: Religion and the Elements of Consciousness**

The most characteristic aspect of the desire to know is its *intention of the real*.

Desire to know: pure / detached / disinterested

The desire to know is *detached* from those impulses that urge us to take refuge in bias and illusion; but every person has to struggle to disentangle the innate leanings of this desire from more primitive orientations.

It is *unrestricted* in its objective.

*Religion*: there are three general classes of attempts to understand the fundamental element in religious awareness:

1. Religious *belief* = the act of affirmation of a transcendent, personal God (as in Judaism and Christianity).
2. Religion = act or attitude of constituting the *sacred* as a realm distinct but not separate from the profane.
3. Religion = the state of *being ultimately concerned*.

The concern of this work is the biblical affirmation of God as (a) *Creator* and (b) *Redeemer* which invite the responses of (a) a grateful appreciation of the sense of *creatureliness* and (b) acceptance of ‘*redemption*’ from some *threat*, usually involving the sense of guilt.

It is important that these reflections be kept anchored firmly to the *particularity* of religious response (but the conclusions drawn may be applicable *mutatis mutandis* to other forms of religious symbolism than those of biblical religion).

## Human Desires:

Distinguishable but interpenetrating *human desires*:

1. The desire to know.
2. The desire for meaning.
3. The desire for pleasure.
4. The will to power.
5. Other psychic and social desires.

Obviously there is an *underlying unity* in any person's strivings, but there is also the *possibility of disharmony and disproportion*.

The ineradicable disproportion between rational desire and the drive for pleasure is not itself 'evil,' but is a condition that makes the positing of evil a possibility.

A philosophy of religion is committed to asking whether religion makes for happiness as the state promised by fidelity to the imperatives of the mind.

"Our inquiry into the genuineness of religious life must come back again and again to the question of its role in motivating the condition of self-acceptance necessary for a full liberation of the desire to know."

## Intentional Fields:

*Intentional fields* are ways of reaching out for and allowing the world to come into consciousness in ways corresponding to its and the subjects depth and richness.

Our cognition of the world is not confined to the narrow perspective of theory, but rather expands also along a spectrum of interrelated pretheoretical fields of meaning.

### The *Sentient* Field:

The world laid open to us by our feelings and moods.

Feelings are vehicles of the desire to know.

"Through the sympathy of feeling, the world becomes OUR reality."

### The *Interpersonal* Field:

Living-with-others is an inherent aspect of our own self-understanding.

The world opened up or intended by interpersonal consciousness is a world of moral concerns.

### The *Narrative* Field:

Human consciousness seems to have something like a narrative a priori that compels us communally to experience events, places, and persons in the context of some story or other.

So central are stories to human existence that without them life is experienced as empty and meaningless.

The story, with its attendant ritual, is the most typical form of religious expression because it is through the narrative mode that men have always communicated and exchanged what is of utmost significance and concern to themselves.

The *Aesthetic* Pattern:

The work of art appeals to a distinct mode of consciousness whose prime interest is a balance, proportion, harmony of light or sound, color, etc.

Appearance.

Aesthetic symbols imply no distinction between form and content; what they express is fully contained in the expression itself.

The construe a 'virtual' universe.

The *Theoretic* Field:

Emerges in the awareness of a *distinction between subject and object*.

Beyond descriptive to explanatory knowledge of the world.

Getting into a position to know the real as it is in itself, apart from any subjective moods, feelings or aesthetic bias, etc.

It is from within the primal (pretheoretic) fields of meaning that a sense of the sacred first took hold of religious man's consciousness.

And though there is much dominance given to theoretical thinking in contemporary Western culture, the intentionality of most of our conscious life is still primal.

From within the world intended by the primal fields there is no question of the reality of the sacred.

It is questionable whether theoretic subject/object detachment is always capable of putting us in touch with all aspects of the real that the desire to know intends.

Our criterion of truth must always be fidelity to the desire to know, not to theoretic detachment.

I.e., no one pattern of consciousness is normative for the unfolding of the desire to know.

Exclusive preference for one pattern of consciousness may be the result of capitulation to some other urge than the desire to know.

The problem of the validity of belief statements revolves to a great extent around the issue of the primacy and hierarchy within the fields of meaning.

Theory-influenced minds cannot help but ask about the value, congruity, and especially the validity of the language articulating belief in the reality of a personal, trans-empirical, loving God involved in human history.

It is rash to ignore these question, but equally rash to hold that answers to them await a purely theoretic response.

The arbitrary suppression by theoretical consciousness of the cognitional capacity of the primal patterns is a major contemporary difficulty.

Yet until the primal patterns are *reinstated by theory itself* as having legitimate cognitive status any reference to the sacred will appear gratuitous to many of our contemporaries.

If we relate religion to the desire to know we may find that no one pattern of consciousness opened up by this desire suffices on its own to contain the phenomena of religious life. All the patterns of consciousness and all the desires we can identify in ourselves have some relation to religious consciousness.

The most fundamental question for any philosophy of religion is that of the relationship of religion or belief to the desire to know which moves through all fields of intentionality.

#### Summary and Conclusion:

1. Religion must somehow relate positively to the pure desire to know.
2. My desire to know comes into contact with the real world not only theoretically but also through self-involving primal patterns of experience.
3. Because of its intimate initial association with the primal modes of intentionality, religion and its language are inevitably self-involving and apparently undetached; because detachment is so highly prized by theory as essential for arriving at knowledge of the 'real' world, modes of knowledge that do not share this ideal detachment are often considered unreliable because subject to bias.
4. Each of our desires is capable of energizing the patterns of intentionality in a unique way, either shaping the world according to arbitrary preference or allowing it to emerge in the various fields in accordance with the desire to know.
5. We must distinguish between knowledge of the world from *within* a particular field, and the motivation-desire governing the *choice* of a particular field or group of fields of meaning for relating oneself to the world.
6. Two types of self-involving knowledge can be distinguished:
  - a. In which the desire to know adjoins itself to the primal patterns as well as the theoretic one – *realistic involvement*.
  - b. In which other desires take over the fields of meaning so as to impose preferences upon the 'world' inconsistent with being open, intelligent, critical, and responsible: *illusory involvement*.
7. Two types of detachment can be differentiated:
  - a. In which the knower disengages his desire to know from other desires so as to allow it to reach its objective unimpeded: *realistic detachment*.
  - b. Detachment of subject from object undertaken in order that the subject might master the object out of some other impulse than the urge to know: *unrealistic detachment*.

#### **Chapter THREE: Religion and Psychic Striving**

Deep within each person there is an ineradicable '*I want.*'

Two main points to be made:

1. Religion responds to some desire or desires.
2. Unless the longings to which religion responds include the pure desire to know, religious claims cannot be defended against the charge that they may be projected fulfillment of infantile wishes.

The question is whether religion is an illusion or a product of the desire to know.

Reality = the *objective of the pure desire to know*.

Illusion = the fantasized product of any human wishing or desiring exclusive of the pure desire to know.

#### The Desire to Know as a *Psychic Drive*:

Privileged position is given here to the desire to know.

It must not be placed in opposition to other drives; but given the recurrent condition of psychic conflict in the lives of all of us it assumed the central function of harmonizing and integrating our other desires.

“The closer this ‘I want’ associates itself with the pure desire to know, the more do our desires approximate harmonious coexistence.”

### Facing Reality:

The cognitive act most representative of religious awareness in *imagining*.

This led Freud to argue that religion is a flight from reality in that it is a fantasy in service of the pleasure principle which allows one to overlook the harsh realities of life and to construct worlds for oneself in which obstacles to happiness are imaginatively dissolved.

Freud’s bias for the theoretical field, however, seems to flow not from within that theoretical field but rather from the will to power.

Behind such theory fixation there lies a refusal to accept the basic openness to one’s desire to know.

Fidelity to the pure desire to know, facing reality, may demand on the part of the theoretician a new look at the possible role imagination may play in opening the world to the reality principle.

“Full surrender to the instinctive predilections of the desire to know involves entrusting it also to those primal patterns in which feeling, imagination, and their sedimentation in symbols and stories are essential cognitive elements.”

The basic question is whether images and stories of God can be so understood as to motivate one to accept the native openness of his basic eros, to augment its relentless passion for the real and its abhorrence of wishful thinking.

### Epistemological and Psychological Self-Acceptance:

The degree of deference to the imperatives of the mind is the measure of *epistemological* integrity; but the degree of appropriation of these same imperatives is also one of the ways of determining one’s status from a *psychological* point of view.

Religious imagination advances the innate openness of the desire to know in those instances where it (1) reconciles us to our *finitude*, and (2) awakens us to our *possibilities for being*.

#### 1. The Sense of Creatureliness:

Whatever enlivens awareness of the unrestricted scope of our desire to know is in service of that desire.

By means of two defense mechanisms persons often recoil from the gap between our pure desire to know and actual cognitional achievement:

- a) To become desensitized to the unrestrictedness of my desire.
- b) To overemphasize the extent of my actual knowledge.

The more I accept my condition as incapable of omniscience, the less will I be pathologically anxious about the inexhaustible extent of my desire.

“Religious images are in service of the desire to know whenever they suffuse our consciousness so as to lead us to a sense of awesome gratitude in the face of the immeasurable depth exposed by our unrestricted desire. Religious images function in resonance with the desire to know whenever they motivate us to accept our native openness to being with courage and thankfulness. The self-acceptance that they thus engender serves the quest for both truth and health.”

What makes an interpretation of *contingency* distinctly and normatively *religious* is the element of *gratefulness* (contra nausea, resentment, indifference, or bitterness).

For of all the possible attitudes we may assume with respect to our contingency, only gratitude appears to be capable of allowing us to accept and sustain the openness of our basic drive.

Through its symbols and stories religion has always had the potential for stirring man to acceptance of himself as a creature gratefully aware of his infinite capacity of knowledge and being, but humbly aware also of his inability to terminate his striving for more.”

## 2. Religious Stories and *Human Possibility*:

The role of religious imagination in opening up a world of creative possibilities lies in its refusal to allow the repression of the primal modes of intentionality.

The neurotic condition results from an inability or refusal to allow consciousness to unfold in the narrative mode required for apprehension of meaning.

Stories of God provide the context in which one can continually and critically retell his individual story without feeling that he is forsaking his past or moving into a voidful future.

### Conclusion:

Images of God as creative and redemptive are capable of conjuring up feelings of gratitude and the courage of self-acceptance that cannot be acquired from within the theoretic field of meaning alone. These can only be given to consciousness through a symbolic and narrative grasp of the world as a coherent, intelligible totality.

## **Chapter FOUR: Religion and the Desire for Meaning**

The will to meaning is the drive *to place one's existence within an ordered totality*.

One's life is meaningful if, and only if, it is *part of a story*.

Religious story-telling originates in the will to meaning; the question is whether such story-telling can also be a vehicle of the need to know.

Feelings of emptiness and loss of perspective accompany the iconoclastic process in which one prefers to follow his theoretically detached desire to know instead of an apparently uncritical will to meaning and the stories through which it is given form.

*Can we still tell stories while being fully intelligent?*



### Religion and Alienation:

Many maintain that the religious expression of the desire for meaning *estranges* one from the deeper urge to know reality apart from wishful thinking, that unrestricted release of the passion for meaning is capable of alienating oneself from his inborn need to be attentive, intelligent, critical and aware of one's creative responsibility.

Yet it seems impossible to live indefinitely without a participatory connection to some story.

For example, many critics of religion are devotees of the 'rationalistic story' that links theoretically detached individuals to the psychologically essential primal patterns of world-involvement.

### The Desire to Know in Narrative Consciousness:

In addition to the need for firm boundaries and intelligible structures to our world we also have a longing to *break out* of them occasionally lest we die of suffocation; a story can satisfy this latter need only if it continually impels us and our worlds toward a *self-revision* commensurate with all our deepest desires and needs.

Iconoclasm is the predictable reaction to a story fixation.

The dilemma of both (a) needing stories and (b) needing to know raises the question as to whether or not we can ever arrive at a point where we can rationally say it is right and reasonable on the one hand and therapeutic on the other to submit to a particular story.

### The Critical Component in Narration:

The critical imperative is as much alive in the primal fields as in the theoretic: but the method of criticism is one of *dialectic and confrontation*, of '*passing over*' to other standpoints, and of testing their fruitfulness, rather than the method of detached scientific verification.

Story-telling relates us to reality by conjoining our (individual and communal) *givenness*, accessible to us through *memory*, with our *possibility* anticipated in *imagination*.

It is primarily through narrative intentionality that the urge to face reality takes us into encounter with *possible being*.

Note that the viewpoint which insists that being critical automatically means being theoretical is itself an uncritical position.

Imagination is capable of being solicited by the pure desire to know as it strives toward being as possible.

Illusion, however, always remains a possibility; i.e., we must be alerted to the possibility that the gratifying affectivity associated with one's story may be so intense that the story is no longer a medium for enlargement of the self and its world.

*Criticism* of one's story or of any social story of 'reality sense' is most appropriately carried out from *within*, not from outside of the narrative experience itself.

What theory can do is to recognize the ongoing, dialectic, self-corrective tendencies innate in narrative consciousness itself.

## **Chapter FIVE: The Problem of God-Language**

"We must attempt to make explicit that which renders the God question possible at all. Otherwise we are vulnerable to the contention of the analysts that such explicitation is impossible because the question appears to be directionless. Can the preliminary awareness that gives aim to questions be intelligently and convincingly discerned or in any way 'verified' in the case of the God question?"

#### Linguistic Analysis: Verificational and Functional

Analysts view the distinctive word of philosophy as that of setting forth the *criteria for meaningfulness* in language and attempting as far as possible to discern whether or not the languages of common sense, science, ethics, or religion measure up to these criteria.

'*Verificational analysis*' – a statement is meaningful only if that to which it refers is discernible as 'factual' in the sense of being *accessible to observation*.

The fundamental problem in this notion of meaning is that it *assumes* (ironically without verification) that the same type of observational/empirical elements constitutive of scientific meaning are required in the language of common sense, ethics, and religion if these are to have meaning.

'*Functional analysis*' – meaning is defined in terms of the *use* of language in the total context of life.

The analyst within this school recognizes that he has no right to impose a scientific standard of meaning on the 'language-games' of religion any more than he does on those of ethics or common sense; instead he should assist in the clarification of the language within each distinct field of usage.

The question remains: what does religious language mean, what does it intend, to what does it refer?

#### Meaning:

*Meaning* is above all else an operation or a series of operations flowing out of an *actively intending subject*.

In the *subjectivity* of acts of meaning we can disclose an ingredient of meaning largely overlooked by analytical philosophy.

'*Intelligent subjectivity*' as an active source of meaning may be 'referred to,' may be meant, even though it is neither objective in the scientist's sense nor merely a 'useful' linguistic device.

If it is not meaningless to refer to the immediacy of subjectivity, we need not hold that the verificational analyst's 'factual' or the functional analyst's 'useful' fiction exhaust the scope of meaningful reference.

Each person can grasp what is being referred to by 'intelligent subjectivity' only if he reflects upon his own questions and his own acts of understanding and meaning.

We stress the importance of alluding to and *grasping one's own interiority*, one's own cognitional and intentional operations because we find in such reference to subjectivity a possible model for suggesting how religious and theological language purport to be meaningful.

Because the worlds of common sense and theory have seemed to exhaust the possible realms of meaning, religious language appears to have no place, no context, no horizon within which to have meaning.

'Interiority' is a realm of meaning approachable only through the conscious subject's appropriation of his own cognitional and intentional performance.

For this, *intellectual conversion* is required.

#### Conversion and Horizon:

*Horizon* = the field embracing the totality of possible objects capable of being grasped or known from a particular standpoint.

*Conversion* = a radical shift of horizon.

In order to represent the question of God as other than aimless we must be able to allude meaningfully to the foreknowledge that would summon it forth from our questioning intelligence. We must be able somehow to grasp what the horizon of the God-question would be. But personal conversion is indispensable for entering into any new horizon.

The quest for self necessary in order to appropriate one's interiority is the adventurous heightening of the pervasive yet inarticulate awareness we all have of a basic desire to know.

Subjectivity is an immediate datum that can be mediated to reflective consciousness and referred to as a most significant element of the real world.

Like intelligent subjectivity, *divine transcendence* may be understood as a fact *by which, or in virtue of which* our ordinary awareness and knowledge occur. Like interiority, God need not be referred to as an object of common sense and science. Like the subjectivity out of which these two worlds of meaning are engendered, the divine may be grasped essentially as illuminating rather than as illuminated.

Whether language about God is meaningful or not depends upon what one envisions as the realm or realms of possible meaning. The latter in turn are constituted by one's horizon. The extent of one's horizon, in turn, depends in part at least upon the degree to which one is willing to risk himself.

From our knowledge of what has been required in the shifts of horizon undertaken in ordinary expansion of consciousness, we cannot rule out the possibility that the capacity to accept religious language as meaningful also depends upon a 'conversion' experience.

#### Conclusion:

The potential meaningfulness of religious language may be elicited only in terms of a horizon constituted through personal conversion.

### **Chapter SIX: Belief in God and the Desire to Know**

The *convergence* of the objective of my desire to know with that of my desire for meaning is the essential condition which must be fulfilled if we are to allow for the possibility of a *realistic story*.

#### Duality of Desiring:

Dual desires for:

- > meaning
- > truth

Many (e.g., Albert Camus) confess their passionate preference for a coherent universe; they would like a religious outlook to be the correct one. But their need to know the real 'as it is' precludes such wishful thinking.

### Hidden Meaning:

The absurdist maintains that 'facing reality' demands that he place himself outside of any narrative framework; his courageous pursuit of honesty, however, is itself modeled upon an archetypal story whose pattern provides the tissue from which a hidden meaning is apprehended without usually being theoretically formulated.

This indefatigable loyalty to the demands of experience or reason reveals a courage that is made possible only by way of a silent sense of participation in some story beyond the fragmentary self – this is the *story of the hero*.

Even while engaged at a highly theoretical level in probing our blind and senseless universe, the absurdist participates in this narrative sequence at a primal level of world-involvement.

*At a spontaneous level consciousness continues to function on the premise that order prevails over chaos.*

Participation in the power of being is the source of our vigorous proclivity for ordering the world through stories.

### The Desire to Know and the Affirmation of God:

That our universe is coherent, rational, 'intelligible,' and not absurd cannot be demonstrated scientifically.

The case for God's reality may be argued not simply in a primal way but also in a *post-theoretical* way on the basis of one's awareness of his own desire to know.

In post-Darwinian science the question is whether this world is pervasively ordered, or whether its order (especially in the complexification of organisms) is an evanescent and local backward fluctuation in an essentially indifferent, entropic movement of matter.

Any answer to the question whether the world is ordered or not requires clarification of what is meant by *order*.

The world-to-be-known discloses varying styles of intelligibility corresponding to the various modes of anticipation inherent in Lonergan's 'four *methods*':

Classical method:




Statistical method:



Apprehends the world-to-be-known in the patterns of regularity, mathematically conceived, which pertain in a world reduced to primary qualities.

Intelligibility is that in which probability of recurrence within schemes made up of large numbers of individual elements constitutes the world-to-be-known.

<i>Genetic method:</i>	Apprehends the world-to-be-known as one in which development or shifts in the type of regularity grasped by classical and statistical method is taken into account in our anticipation and questioning.
	
<i>Dialectical method:</i>	Allows us to tolerate momentary absence of intelligibility because it anticipates (without specifying) eventual resolution of apparent absurdity.

Instead of arguing from 'objective' evidence of order in the universe (corresponding to any particular method) I propose that our starting point be simply the question whether reality is intelligible.

The question: *Is the universe, the whole of reality, absurd or intelligible?*

We would like to build a response, not by the frustrating search for concrete objective clues in the world of nature and man, but by an analysis of the *conditions that make it possible* for us even to ask the question we have just asked.

The hidden premise upon which the desire to know undertakes its audacious excursion in questioning is that *the real is intelligible*.

When we ask whether reality is intelligible we have already posited such intelligibility as the horizon of our questioning.

There are two options: either the universe is (1) fully intelligible and has some ultimate explanation, or else (2) it is an accident and therefore, as a whole, without intelligibility.

If one of the alternatives corresponds structurally to my desire to know reality, then I can accept it intelligently and critically without having to amass exhaustive data from the observable world.

#### The Basis of the Argument: *Implicit Trust in the Desire to Know*

Our world cannot be held to be absurd and unintelligible if we have any faith at all in our desire to know. For to hold that one cannot trust his desire to know, or to hold that one's intelligence leads inevitably to spurious results is itself a judgment which can arise only from implicit and spontaneous faith in one's powers of intelligence and criticism. We have already submitted respectfully to the mind's imperatives at the same movement in which we doubt their worth. Our performative appeal to the integrity of our thinking and judging always refutes any explicit suspicion of their value.

The absurdist interpretation of the world is ruled out if and when a person can say out of his own depths: "I am a knower!"

This self-affirmation, however, is not easily or automatically achieved; the argument of this book has been that this self-knowledge is realized most readily in a religiously narrative context.

An Inevitable Objection: though the real world must be an intelligible one, this does not mean that the data of my experience in this world are already understood or ever will be by human beings.

The awareness of complex new questions arising from enriched experience can become so dizzying at times that a curious extrapolation is made: from the obvious fact that I have not fully understood my limited experience of the universe I am tempted to jump to the contention that the universe is in itself not fully intelligible.

Such an inference is often made in the service of some other desire than the pure desire to know.

The only explanation of my desire to know which is coherent to me is the one which holds that I would have no desire to know were reality not intelligible as a whole in spite of its obvious elements of chaos and evil.

An *appropriation of religiously symbolic language* by primal consciousness may be a necessary de facto condition for undergoing the horizon shifts required for apprehending the meaningfulness of God-talk in a post-theoretical way. The validation of God-talk, therefore, first requires *conversion to that horizon* in which such talk would at least be meaningful. But conversion is not an automatic operation of the mind. It is a *radical personal shift of horizon* demanding *risk of self* and, above all, *openness of character*. And, finally, this openness of character may need to be brought about by what we have called '*religious conversion*.'

#### Conclusion:

The desire to know is not opposed to the desire for meaning. But it constantly shatters the specific contents of our stories lest we deem them absolute. The two desires are in constant tension, but as the will to meaning opens itself to the desire to know, the goals of the two drives converge. And in the end the will to meaning will find the promise for its realization to lie in a full commitment to the desire to know.

#### **Chapter SEVEN: Religious Story and Self-Acceptance**

The desire to know can easily be suppressed with respect to the very self out of which it emanates.

'Man's enormous capacity for *self-deception*.'

Sensing the gap between possibilities and actual moral achievements can lead to overwhelming guilt and despair. And if one is not capable of handling the anxiety of *guilt*, i.e., if one cannot accept himself in spite of guilt, then various forms of self-deceit, often pathological, may take hold of consciousness.

The refusal to accept oneself is the most puzzling instance of repression of the desire to know.

Self-deception is the state in which *a person narratively or theoretically understands himself in a manner out of joint with his sentient, interpersonal and aesthetic stance*.

Self-deception paradoxically implies a blossoming *aspiration toward values and possibilities* not previously assimilated by consciousness.

Acceptance of self requires most generally speaking a realignment of my self-understanding with the intention of my desire to know.

Only in the framework of some story will I be able to embrace the awareness of guilt from which I flee and so be liberated to embrace my possibilities.

The flight from guilt-awareness is motivated by my reluctance to face myself as having possibilities transcending my given condition. And these possibilities take root only in an imagination steeped in some narrative pattern of world arrangement.

### Religious Myth and the Problem of Self-Deception:

*Myths of evil* narrate how people were *led astray*, seduced, blinded and, as a result, brought into *evil*. The myths tell how this event of evil is followed by a sense of *self-rejection* (exile, despair, blinding). But they then go on to relate how *redemption* from or within such a state is possible also. And in the telling and acting out of the myth, the participants gain a sense of *renewal*.

In motivating people to self-acceptance in spite of fate or guilt such myths can be seen as emanating from, rather than resisting, the pure desire to know.

All myths of evil posit a duality between the *actual* state of guilt, suffering, evil, etc., and the *essential* condition from which the actual is a deviation, and toward which the acts of redemption narrated by the myth are directed.

### Religion and Cover Stories:

Flight from insight into self would not occur did I not already somehow know that my actual condition is painfully distant from an ideal toward which I aspire but which I also seek to evade. Restoration of insight requires a 'spelling out' of this dim and repressed awareness of myself.

The person in self-deception creates a *narrative structure* ('cover story') with which to link his (insincere) self-understanding; sincerity with respect to myself also requires spelling out through a story in which is imprinted the dynamic self-revising intentions of a disinterested yet passionate desire to know myself.

The only story of God that can fully satisfy the requirements of the basic drive is one which narrates His *unconditional acceptance of man*.

To affirm the reality of God in the fullness of oneself must be functionally equivalent to acceptance of all one's desires and inclinations without embarrassment.

### A Critique of God-Images:

We are not permitted to make any definitive statement about the function of truth-value of an image or story of God without simultaneously taking into consideration the peculiar quality of the feeling-response evoked by the image in any particular individual.

Whenever the image of God is a factor in promoting sentient consciousness toward the attitude of self-appreciation it may not be casually disregarded by the philosopher whose primary interest also is the subject's coming to grips with himself.

### The 'Atheistic' Moment in Self-Acceptance:

The child's image of God is *heteronomous*; the child experiences the norms of his mind *extrinsically*, and God then becomes the screen on which he projects his desire to be governed from outside.

Eventually there may come a point when the pressure toward *autonomous assimilation of the imperatives of the mind* impels one to *rebellion* against the "God" who has prevented him from being himself.

This is the "atheistic" moment in growth toward self-acceptance.

There then may come a phase in which one still feels compelled to *wonder in gratitude* at the freedom that dawns when he begins to associate himself ever more closely with the imperatives of the mind that have always been present to his consciousness but from which he has hidden in a variety of ways.

“*God above God*” appears when one is able to give thanks for his freedom, when he accepts the imperatives of his mind not as a restraint but as a *gift* (the experience of grace).

The total otherness of God (theism) is transcended and God is experienced as transpersonal, as the ‘ground of personality’ rather than totally subsumed by personalistic categories.

The mind’s imperatives must be experienced as *intimately my own* if they are ever to lead to unaffected freedom of thought and action. But in order to gain this freedom I must cease experiencing them as though they are imposed on me from some Source totally outside of myself.

In a religious consciousness attuned to the silence of the Absolute the world is allowed to be itself. And each individual may then freely and unrestrainedly delve into the depths of his own desiring.

More faithful attention to the data of religious life would show that the exigencies of the human psyche and human striving have often been satisfied by the involuntary dialectic in religious life itself. But theologians and teachers of the tradition have often apotheosized specific phases of the evolution of the God-image without being alert to the whole pattern of its unfolding. And this has been to the detriment of human growth and self-acceptance.

#### Creation and Redemption:

St. Paul’s appropriation of the story of Jesus of Nazareth reveals the power of narrative to *dispel self-deception* and to *inspire the courage of self-knowledge*.

Before his conversion, the story that shaped the identity of Saul of Tarsus was the one in which righteousness or personal fulfillment consisted in adherence to Jewish law as interpreted by Gamaliel and the Pharisaic tradition.

But as his conversion testifies, elements of Paul’s desiring and striving were not fully satiated by the Pharisaic rendition of the Hebrew story.

The decisive element in his self-transformation from heteronomy to a new feeling of *freedom* was apparently a sudden and dramatic *shift in the image and story of God*. The transition to a new sense of God as the Father of Jesus allowed him to confess and avow his previous self-deception and bad faith. In other words, a *narrative revision*, a new turn in his quest for meaning, a revised story of God as Creator and Redeemer was necessary for Paul’s insight into himself.

The God of Jesus’ story was suddenly seen by Paul as a *God of unconditional acceptance*, a God who accepts man in spite of evil and inadequacy, irrespective of man’s attempts to achieve salvation by works.

Perhaps in a moment of reflection of the God proclaimed by the followers of Jesus, Paul suddenly felt the *congruity* between their dramatic accounts and the *repressed* elements of his own sentient consciousness. His conversion, then, took the form of a sudden flooding into *harmony* of the various levels of his self-involvement.

Paul’s writing clearly illustrates the feeling that follows the release from life in which spontaneities are repressed and one is lived heteronomously by a ‘law’ outside oneself.



Acceptance of self always requires some immersion in a story in which the whole self can be reshaped.

The desire to know is fully liberated only in the spontaneous act of entrusting one's life to a story embodying unconditional acceptance. The quest for truth requires the quest for such a story.

Conclusion:

By naming with symbols of joy the depth toward which our restlessness penetrates, religious language gives man the courage to affirm his striving without resentment at the fact that he never comes to a point of final immobility.