

## Synthetics

A synthesis occurs when two or more things combine to form something different than the things were prior to coming together. Fundamental to the industrial revolution and to modern cultural beliefs is synthesis. By altering the natural relationship between two or more things something of superior quality can be produced. From combinations of natural resources modern people produce *synthetic* compounds such as steel, fiberboard, glass, and concrete. People don't accept the world as they find it. They put natural things (e.g., flour and water) together for the purpose of making synthetic things (e.g., bread) that serve them better than things in their natural state.

A common characteristic of modern people is the belief that the purpose of experience is to improve things—to make them better. Modern people are goal-oriented. They act with an object in mind and work toward some end or purpose. Carpenters hammer nails into boards to build a house. Construction crews join steel girders to build a building. Modern people in general are dedicated to progress and improvement.

Modern people characteristically have their sights set on the future. Modern parents nurture and train a child in preparation for school. A child goes to elementary school for the purpose of becoming a useful citizen in society. An adolescent enters high school to make preparations for a vocation. A young adult enters college to begin the process of specialization. A college graduate enters the workforce for the purpose of gaining experience. A mature adult attains a position of respect within a profession for the purpose of acquiring the means to buy a home and establish a family. A middle-aged adult lays away funds for retirement. A retired person makes provision for old age. An old

person prepares a will and estate papers for the purpose of passing on wealth. And finally, a person “at death’s door” purchases a plot of ground for burial. The person is now ready to “pass on” for the purpose of attaining the person’s “final reward.”

Taking time to smell the flowers may be wishful thinking for people who believe themselves somehow at fault if they should for a moment take their eye off the ball. People with a purpose who know where they are going and how to get there can’t take time to be distracted. If these people miss something along the way they make up for it by attaining that “better” thing that lies in front of them. If they look neither to the right nor to the left what is straight ahead of them is all the more necessary and all the more important. One’s belief in the future is especially strong when one can see the crest of the mountain in the distant horizon.

Synthesis assumes that experiences are connected and that no experience stands alone. The separability or inseparability of experiences, however, cannot be definitively determined. One experience is separable from another only to the extent that it is not inseparable from it. The question of whether experiences are separable or inseparable is open-ended. What is the relationship between the experience of working toward retirement and the experience of retirement itself? One works toward an objective without knowing how or the extent to which working toward retirement and retirement itself will relate. The nature of the relationship between future and past or present experience is indefinite. One can never fully put one’s finger on it.

What moderns risk in their desire to get somewhere is not just smelling the flowers along the way. They risk missing the significance of the present. With an eye set on an objective that one cannot be sure about, one may in addition to having doubts regarding it, short change the value of the experience of attaining it. If the object of an education is a job then the education may be secondary to the job

even though the value of the job is uncertain. If the object of a job is to attain wealth then a job may be secondary to the wealth sought even though the rewards of wealth may be questionable. Modern people may covet a bird in the bush to the point that the dozen they have in the hand seem inadequate. Their quest for something better in the future may have the effect of minimizing the value of the present.

The downside of an objective-oriented perspective is not only the nihilistic possibility that “in the long run none of this really matters,” it is a sense that what one experiences today may not matter because it is secondary to what one will experience tomorrow. It is the possibility that what matters is something that only happens in the future. The person who believes the future is what matters may never know what matters because the future is never experienced. What matters may be equated with what is real. If, however, what matters is the future, one may never arrive at reality because the future cannot be experienced. The person who equates future experience with reality never experiences reality because it is always yet-to-be-experienced. One wants to experience reality, but the extent to which reality is the future, reality is beyond what one is capable of experiencing.

Modern “focused” perspectives can obviously lead to disappointment, but they may lead to difficulties more serious than that. They may lead to the conclusion that nothing a person perceives is real and that, therefore, what is real is what is *not* perceived. When modern people bow in reverence to God do they have any previous experience of what they are bowing to, or are they bowing because they believe that what they will yet experience is what is real? Do they bow to the unknown because the unknown is what they reverence? To the extent to which the unknown is believed to be real, to that same extent a modern person may bow to the unknown. The modern person may bow in reverence to God, believing that God *is* the unknown.

Many moderns believe that progress is dependent on the acquisition of new knowledge and as a result of the belief assume that all knowledge is potentially obsolete because all knowledge is dated. Today's knowledge may correct yesterday's knowledge, just as tomorrow's knowledge may correct today's knowledge. Modern beliefs may lead to the conclusion that knowledge is not for now but for the future. Many modern people believe that real or true knowledge is something they are in the process of discovering. They believe that knowledge to be real or true must be new knowledge that replaces what has become obsolete.

Do astronomers today believe that the universe is known or unknown? Do they look through their telescopes to see the known or the unknown? Is there anything that astronomers see that they know now for sure, or is an astronomer looking for future knowledge that has not yet been discovered? Is there something today's astronomers can say about the universe that is unequivocal or that can't be questioned, or do they believe that the truth concerning the universe is something that is not only not yet known but that it is something unknowable?

Upon the belief that knowledge is provisional rests the companion belief that existence is linear. Modern people characteristically believe that their existence consists of a line rather than a circle. Linearity leads a person from point A to point B. Circularity leads a person back to the point of beginning. Circularity is a denial of progress. Progress is a central tenet of modern belief. What modern people may fail to realize is that from the assumption that a person should move forward from point A to point B comes the companion assumption that point A is inferior in comparison to point B. If A is good why go on to B? One does so because one believes in the future. One believes in "greener pastures in other fields" and that the present is deficient as compared to what will come. It's because today is unsatisfactory that one must push ahead. To escape the

inadequacies of today one must “press on” to the better world of tomorrow.

Modern people have been obsessed with utility, which they believe constitutes the means of achieving their objectives. To most modern people what something is is its function or purpose. What is energy? It is the “capacity for vigorous activity.” What is matter? It is “the substance of which things are made.” Modern people are characteristically devoted utilitarians. They favor the *deed* over the *word*. They glorify the “man of action.” In modern society the people who get things done are the one’s regarded as successful. Today people watch more videos than they read books because to them actions and deeds are better than thoughts and words.

In summary, modern people believe in synthesis. Modern people believe in taking what is natural and making it into something synthetic or “man made.” Characteristic of modern people is their belief in tomorrow. They believe that the future is real. Modern people may regard their present experience as not real because they believe that what is real is something yet-to-be-experienced. Modern people believe in linearity because they believe in progress. The purpose of life is to get from point A to point B. Most modern people are utilitarians. They believe in the “stuff it takes” to get things done.

Most modern people believe in a God they have never seen and in a universe they have never understood. They believe that what is broken today should be fixed tomorrow. They believe their sorrows and disappointments are temporary. They are not real. What is real is something better that they are in the process of achieving. They are reaching out for it. Even though they can’t see it and have no knowledge of what it is, they nonetheless believe they are progressing toward it. Some claim to have caught a glimpse of it. On a belief in the reality of a better day moderns stake their lives and their fortunes. On their future accomplishments they pin their hopes and dreams.

## Synthetics versus Aesthetics

Dictionary definitions of *aesthetics* are about beauty and one's judgment concerning it. A common dictionary definition of *synthetics* is about combining things to make artificial or synthetic compounds. For purposes of the following discussion I use the word *aesthetics* to mean experience for its own sake and the word *synthetics* to mean experience for the sake of something that is apart from an experience.

The statement, "As I struggled to see through the fog, nothing appeared but vague shapes and enigmatic images," is a description of an *aesthetic* experience. It is an experience where the relationship between bipolar qualities, the equilibrium between difference's pushing and pulling, is maintained. Because the difference between qualities is unresolved an aesthetic experience is open-ended. It is only true to the extent that it isn't false, good to the extent it isn't bad, and so on. On the one hand, an aesthetic experience does not reach closure or finality because the difference between the qualities experienced remains unresolved. On the other, because the meaning of the experience has to do with the relationship of qualities as opposed to the resolution of the relationship, the meaning is self-contained within the description. No subsequent statement is required to complete the meaning.

The statement, "Through the fog I could see a car coming straight at me," is descriptive of a *synthetic* experience. A synthetic experience is one where the relationship between bipolar qualities is not maintained, where it is assumed that the tension between difference's pushing and pulling will be resolved. Essential to the description of the experience is the definitive assertion: "a car coming straight at me." The description assumes that what is as-

serted is true. The description has two parts that are separate yet dependent on each other: the person experiencing and the car coming. It assumes that the relationship between the two parts will be resolved but only in a subsequent experience. A synthetic statement makes a point that assumes finality but is dependent on a subsequent experience to reach it.

In an aesthetic experience reality is a relationship. What is real is the relationship of the things experienced. In a synthetic experience reality is the outcome or result of a relationship. What is real is what results from the relationship experienced. In an aesthetic experience what matters is the experience itself. In a synthetic experience what matters is what comes from the experience.

Modern people can be divided into two groups: artists and artisans. The conventional definition of an artist is a person who engages in fine art (something with “aesthetic” value such as Viennese music, Italian painting, or Greek tragedy). The conventional definition of an artisan is a person who engages in an applied art (something with utilitarian value such as pottery-making or fashion design). Here I use the term *artist* to mean anyone whose experiences are aesthetic (for the sake of themselves) and the term *artisan* to mean anyone whose experiences are synthetic (for the sake of something apart from them). Assuming one person could have both aesthetic and synthetic experiences the same person could, according to the above assumptions, be both an artist and an artisan.

The proposed difference between an artist and an artisan raises a question: to what extent can the difference between the two be determined? In other words, is the difference between the two resolvable? There can be no question that the vast majority of modern people are, from the perspective of their everyday activities, artisans. Just about everybody in modern society is engaged in producing something that has utilitarian value and consequently one could assume that just about everybody’s experiences are

mostly synthetic (in which the value gained is apart from the experience) rather than aesthetic (in which the value gained is the experience itself).

There is another characteristic of modern people that makes them artisans rather than artists: the assumption that the difference between truth and error can be resolved. Modern people are used to making assertions, relying on the assumption that evidence supporting their assertions if not currently available will be forthcoming.

The challenge artisans face is that synthetic experiences lack finality. An assertion assumes finality but is dependent on a subsequent experience to reach it. A difficulty arises in that a subsequent experience also contains assertions that must in turn be followed by still another subsequent experience and so on.

For example, if I experience two cars about to collide, following that I may experience a collision, following that I may experience certain consequences of the collision, following that I may experience certain consequences of the consequences, and so on. Each of my experiences is dependent on a subsequent experience to achieve finality.

Synthetic experiences are never final. One synthetic experience follows another in a never-ending series. People think of synthetic experience as reaching finality in a subsequent experience. A synthesis, however, is ongoing. It is never complete. Consequently, characteristic of *both* synthetic and aesthetic experience is open-endedness. In an aesthetic experience bipolar qualities remain suspended, unresolved. In a synthetic experience they are resolved in part in a subsequent experience but never completely. Consequently, synthetic experience is never-ending. It is forever reaching out for a final resolution that never arrives.

That being the case, one can ask: is a synthetic experience *really* synthetic? A synthetic experience is one where a resolution occurs in a subsequent experience. However,

if a resolution is never complete does a synthesis really occur?

Looking back at the two examples cited, is there a definitive difference between them? The statement, "As I struggled to see through the fog, nothing appeared but vague shapes and enigmatic images," is aesthetic. It is experienced for its own sake, and no resolution as to the extent to which the shapes were or were not vague and whether the images were or were not enigmatic is implied. The second statement, "Through the fog I could see a car coming straight at me," describes a synthetic experience. The experiencer looks to something apart from the experience for a resolution. To resolve the tension created by the experience a subsequent experience must determine whether the viewer and the oncoming car will or will not collide.

One can question, however, whether the tension created by the experience is really resolvable. A man experiences a car coming straight at him. If the collision is avoided does that mean the experiencer's faculties failed him? If the collision occurs does that mean the experiencer's faculties were reliable? To what extent are the aesthetic and synthetic experiences cited different? Is there a *definitive* difference between "vague shapes and enigmatic images," and "a car coming straight at me"? Was the car coming straight at the viewer or did that only appear to be the case because in the fog everything was "vague" and "enigmatic"?

One can argue that this question is answered by the subsequent experience. Based on what happens next, one can determine the extent to which the experience is aesthetic, in which the experience itself is what matters, or synthetic, in which the outcome of the experience is what matters. The argument that subsequent events validate a person's experience is commonplace in modern society. It assumes that the reliability of a person's experiential capacities can be determined by what happens next. If a man

experiences a car coming straight at him the experience will be verified by what happens next.

That is what is commonly believed, but upon reflection one realizes that the belief is naïve. A subsequent collision or the avoidance of a collision neither validates nor invalidates the former experience. An experience is what it is in and of itself. The event experienced and the subsequent event are not connected in a way that the latter experience either validates or invalidates the former. No matter what happens next the man's former experience is what it is. Only the *interpretation* of an experience can be affected by a subsequent event. In light of a subsequent event the man's experience can be interpreted to be accurate or inaccurate.

But if the outcome can't determine the difference between "vague shapes and enigmatic images" and what is "coming straight at me," what can? People insist on looking to the outcome as a means of determining the difference because they insist that the difference must be determinable and they know of no other way to determine it. Nonetheless, a subsequent experience cannot change a former experience. Each of the two experiences (previous and subsequent) is what it is apart from any relationship the two may have with each other.

At the same time, however, because the two experiences can be experienced in relation to each other they are themselves bipolar entities. They are at once both related to and separate from each other. They can be neither absolutely separate from each other nor absolutely the same as each other. The two experiences when experienced in relation to each other are not experienced as absolute separates but as a relationship. The two are separable only to the extent that they are not inseparable and inseparable only to the extent that they are not separable.

Experiences are complex because in addition to being relationships themselves they are experienced in relation to each other. Each experience is a relationship that re-

quires neither a former nor subsequent experience to make it whole, but is also one of a series of experiences that is experienced in relation to other experiences. Do former and subsequent experiences affect an experience? They do. Neither a former nor a subsequent experience can either validate or invalidate an experience, but they can and do affect the context of an experience. That is why when an experience is repeated, such as for example, reading this book, the same passage will always be experienced differently in each reading. The words are the same but the context in which they are experienced is different.

There is another way in which a former experience can affect a subsequent experience. When a man experiences a car coming straight at him he takes action to miss it. Rather than a subsequent experience determining the outcome of a former experience, the former experience affects the subsequent experience. It does not, however, unequivocally determine what the outcome of the subsequent experience will be. The relationship between the two experiences is not deterministic. What subsequently occurs is affected by what has happened previously but is not *absolutely* determined by it. What subsequently happens does not invalidate or lessen the impact of what was previously experienced, but what was previously experienced may to an extent affect what will subsequently be experienced.

*Every* experience, then, is open-ended. Nothing conclusive regarding *any* experience can be determined by either a preceding or subsequent experience. Consequently, the difference between the aesthetic experience and the synthetic experience cited cannot be resolved. The difference between “vague shapes and enigmatic images” and what is “coming straight at me,” cannot be determined. Neither experience is dependent on a subsequent experience to complete its meaning. Therefore, in both cases the experience is aesthetic rather than synthetic. In each case the experience is self-contained—complete in itself.

Because the assumption that experience is synthetic is essential to modernity, one's inability to confirm that experience is synthetic challenges the foundation of modernity. Could it be that modern people think they are artisans even though they are really artists? Could it be that modern experiences are not synthetic but only aesthetic? Could modern people be deceived into thinking that their experiences are resolved by future outcomes when there is no such resolution? Could it be that modern people are artists rather than artisans and that therefore they may not be modern at all? Could a doubt regarding the fundamentals upon which modernity is structured lead to a doubt as to whether modernity is in fact modern at all?

Modernity is founded on the assumption that knowledge is cumulative. Modern people believe that just as a child learns to walk and talk over time that adults can over time accumulate the knowledge necessary to solve problems and improve living conditions. The inability to confirm that experience is synthetic, however, challenges that belief. To the extent that subsequent experience does not lead to a confirmation of what was previously experienced, knowledge is not only not cumulative, there is no such thing as definitive knowledge. One's inability to confirm the existence of synthetic knowledge leads to the conclusion that all knowledge is aesthetic, that all knowledge is self-contained, and that no knowledge requires a resolution to complete its meaning.

Modernity is founded on the assumption that subsequent experiences lead to definitive conclusions. In making this assumption moderns have failed to realize that synthetic knowledge cannot be confirmed. They have failed to realize that because so-called synthetic experience is just as open-ended and unresolvable as aesthetic experience, all experience and therefore all knowledge is aesthetic as opposed to synthetic.

Moderns assume that a definitive distinction between modernity and what preceded modernity can be made.

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Once one realizes, however, that the experience of all people of all ages is aesthetic rather than synthetic, the difference between the characteristics of one era versus another becomes equivocal. What separates them is the difference in their aesthetic experiences. If they are different it is because their aesthetic values and perspectives are different. The extent of that difference, however, cannot be determined. Therefore, the extent to which one age is the same or different than another is an open-ended question—one that will *never* be definitively answered. From aesthetic experience comes the knowledge of relationships as opposed to knowledge of what is related. Everything that exists is relative to everything else that exists, which means that what individual things are is now and will forever be indeterminate.

## **Equivocation**

All experience is aesthetic. Synthetic experience assumes the resolution of relationships, but relationships are never resolved. Aesthetic experience has to do with the relationship of things as opposed to the things themselves. All experience is aesthetic because all experience is about relationships. Experience erases the absoluteness of distinction. Essential to experience is bipolarity. In a bipolar unit the difference between qualities is equivocal. Equivocation results from difference, which is both relative and absolute at the same time.

Synthetic experience is not possible because fundamental to it is the absolute difference between bipolar qualities. This assumed absolute difference, if it were possible, would result in a disruption of the relationship between bipolar qualities. Absolute difference would push bipolar qualities apart, the bipolar unit would explode, and the qualities would no longer be experienced. Synthetic experience negates itself because it is founded on the assumption that difference is resolvable, that relationships will be resolved, and that the result will be something that is absolute.

Because experience is relational, fundamental to experience are the principles of relativism. The dynamic force within the bipolar unit pushes qualities apart while pulling them together. These opposing forces, that push and pull simultaneously, make qualities dynamically both separable and inseparable at the same time. They are two yet one at the same time.

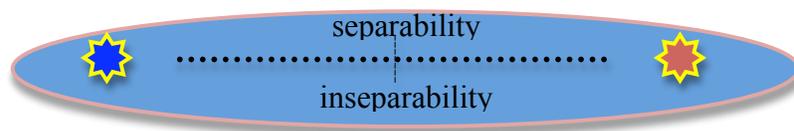
Experience confirms the inseparability of the poles of a bipolar unit in that the line extending from one pole to the other is experienced as one continuous line. No breaks or gaps in the line are experienced. No dividing line of demarcation is experienced that separates the two. Experience

does not indicate a place where one bipolar quality ends and the other begins.

Nonetheless, as one is experiencing the continuousness of the line between the two poles, one is, at the same time, experiencing the distinction between the bipolar qualities. Without this distinction the relationship of the bipolar qualities is negated. The distinction between the bipolar qualities is what makes the continuousness of the line between the poles (their relationship) possible. This enigma or contradiction regarding the simultaneous separability and inseparability of the poles is fundamental to experience.

The bipolar qualities within a bipolar unit, in which separability and inseparability interact with each other, are in a state of dynamic suspension. On the one hand the independence of one quality from the other establishes the bipolarity of the unit. The qualities must be separable for bipolarity to be possible. On the other hand each quality is what it is in relation to the other. Each quality is dependent on the other because the two are relative to each other. The two must be inseparable to maintain the relationship between them. Because bipolar qualities are both separable and inseparable at the same time a bipolar unit is a compound in one.

**Bipolar Unit**  
**A Compound in One**



Bipolar qualities modify objects, and because bipolar qualities are relative to each other the objects they modify are also relative to each other. This means that the absolute distinction of one object from another cannot be determined. It means that the difference between objects is blurred. It means that one object is relative to another ob-

ject and that the difference between them is equivocal. This equivocation is the result of difference's dual nature. Difference is two-faced. It is both relative and absolute at the same time.

From difference's dual nature comes relativity. Everything that a person experiences is relative and therefore all experience is aesthetic as opposed to synthetic. Nothing that a person experiences is absolute and therefore there is no such thing as synthetic experience. Experience isn't synthetic because nothing definite results from experience. Nothing, that is, except equivocation. From difference comes irresolvability and from irresolvability comes equivocation.

To the question what does a person know for certain, comes the answer: equivocation. Equivocation is relative in its role as the opposite of certainty. Equivocation is, however, like no other bipolar quality. Equivocation is not experienced only in relation to certainty. Equivocation is an exception to the bipolar rule. One must take equivocation seriously because in addition to being experienced in relation to certainty, equivocation is inherent in *every* experience. Every experience is relational, and therefore every relationship is equivocal including the relationship between equivocation and certainty. To the question what is there that exists that is not equivocal, comes the answer: equivocation itself. The only thing that is not equivocal is equivocation. Everything exists in relation to something else, and the result of every relationship is equivocation. Equivocation is the *only* absolute!

Accepting equivocation as a reality leads to places where one would never expect to go and to possibilities one would never expect to consider. All the old assumptions about absolute differences are suddenly reconfigured. Such absolutes as life and death, tangibility and intangibility, change and constancy, separability and inseparability, body and soul, and so on are all out—not because people don't experience them but because people *only* experience

them *aesthetically* in relation to each other. They experience them as relative to each other rather than as separate absolutes. Bipolar qualities are equivocal; they are real because they are related to each other. They are aesthetically real because they are real in relation to each other. They are real because from them comes equivocation, the only reality, the only absolute.

Once one accepts equivocation as real one realizes that the only reality is aesthetic or relational reality. Nothing is real by itself. Everything is real in relation to something else. One's experience is aesthetic because reality is not in things themselves but in their relationships.

Relativity results in a blurring of the time-honored distinction between the objects of experience and one's experience of those objects. Aesthetic experience confirms that the one for-sure distinction that modern people make: the absolute distinction between the person and the world, the subject and the object, the in-here and the out-there isn't absolute and therefore isn't for sure. Rather than absolutely separate entities, the person and the world are relative to each other. The difference between them is at once both relative and absolute and therefore equivocal.

What is real regarding relationships is not the outcome of the relationships but the relationships themselves. Relationships are aesthetically significant not because of what can be attained from them but because of the value of the relationships themselves. What is important about an aesthetic relationship is not the product of it but rather the meaning of it. An aesthetic relationship matters not because of how it can benefit a person extrinsically but because of its significance to a person intrinsically.

This is the aesthetic perspective. It is a revolutionary perspective. From it comes the realization that nothing is final except equivocation because nothing is absolute except equivocation. And from it comes the realization that everything is what it is in relation to something else. There is no such thing as life by itself, just as there is no such

thing as death by itself. Life by itself isn't real just as death by itself isn't real. What is real is the aesthetic relationship between life and death.

There is no such thing as absolute life or life in which death is not a possibility. Likewise, there is no such thing as absolute death or death in which life is not a possibility. To the question should one fear death, is the answer, only to the extent that one should fear life. To the question, can one avoid death, is the answer, only to the extent that one can avoid life. Life and death are inextricably connected. They are related, absolutely related, and therefore they are absolutely equivocal. The two are what they are in relation to each other, and therefore their reality is an aesthetic reality. Otherwise they would have no reality at all.

## Religion

Modern people have viewed life as a problem and religion as a means of solving life's problems. This problem/solution approach naturally equates with the belief that knowledge is synthetic—that from experience can come the solution to the singular problem living people face: the problem of death. Modern religion is monotheistic and of the three monotheistic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) the one that concerns itself most directly with overcoming death is Christianity.

Christians believe that Jesus was born for the purpose of conquering death. They believe that he died on the cross and arose from the tomb three days later as a resurrected, immortal being. They believe that Jesus after his resurrection was no longer subject to death and that a person who believes in Jesus, "though he were dead, yet shall he live." Christians believe that from the Gospel or Good News can come (eventually) a life that is free of death.

The purpose of modern Christianity is to save people from themselves. Christians believe that God made the world good but people have made it evil. They believe that God is the source of good and that people, though created by God, are the source of evil. They believe that sin came into the world because the first man and woman disobeyed God and consequently "fell" from God's grace. They believe that all of the descendants of the first man and woman are sinners, that the "wages of sin is death," that sin is the cause of death, and that the solution to the death problem is salvation that comes from a belief in Jesus, the Savior of mankind.

Christians believe that human existence is linear and that humans move from one state to another in a series of steps. They believe that the purpose of life is to gain a final

reward. The grand object of existence is to attain never-ending happiness in heaven.

Monotheism assumes that reality is singular as opposed to plural. Monotheism is a denial of bipolarity. It admits to only one reality: God. Because inherent in God is both life and goodness, there is, from a purist monotheistic perspective, no such thing as either death or evil. Both death and evil are temporary illusions. Neither is real, and the time will come when all apparent negative qualities will cease to exist.

In a strict monotheistic sense negativity is not a possibility. A pure monotheist does not admit to or allow it. In Christian belief such things as sin, sinners, hell, Lucifer, fallen angels, punishment, and damnation are sub-realities. They are not real in the same sense that God is real. Christians believe that God created people as living souls and that, even though a person appears to die, the person is still alive. Christianity assumes that although a person's body dies, the person's soul lives on in a supernatural existence as an ongoing entity.

The challenge monotheism faces is that its beliefs are not confirmed by experience. The Christian religion turns to faith because there is nothing in experience that confirms the monism that is essential to its monotheistic views. People experience bipolarity. Essential to experience is continuous, unresolved difference between bipolar qualities. Why does monotheism deny difference? because monotheistic beliefs are founded on an assumed utopia in which there are no differences and no negatives that arise from differences. In the Christian utopia everybody and everything is one. Because Christianity is founded on absolute monism and because experience is relational the doctrines of Christianity cannot be confirmed experientially. One thing is experienced in relation to another. Monism can't be experienced because it isn't relational; it is absolute.

The classical definition of Christian faith is: “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” Christianity claims that there is a class of existing things that is not experienced. Faith concerns itself with these things, and Christians believe that things that cannot be experienced are real. They believe that 1) what a person *does* experience *isn't* real and 2) what a person does *not* experience *is* real. There is no way to confirm Christian belief experientially and that is why Christians turn to faith.

Christians claim that their religion is based on faith, and yet faith by itself isn't sufficient. Christians require experiential proofs. They require the evidence of miracles and the authority of tradition. Christians believe that certain miraculous events confirm their faith, as do certain writings that are themselves confirmed by centuries of tradition.

Even though Christianity claims to be founded on faith it is dependent on synthetic knowledge. Christians believe that a certain kind of experience can serve as evidence that a subsequent experience is true. They believe that it is by means of a previous experience that the truth of a subsequent experience is confirmed. For example, in The Acts of the Apostles it is claimed that after seeing a light and hearing a voice Paul knew that he should become a Christian. He claimed that by seeing something and hearing something from an assumed supernatural source, he knew something was true, *apart from and in addition to* what he saw and heard.

Christians accept this vision and the claims associated with it without question or cross examination—something no court of law would do. If the prosecution proposed to enter as evidence that such and such is the case because a witness saw a light and heard a voice, the defense would of course ask how the evidence cited, no matter where it came from, relates to the conclusion.

Synthetic religious claims rely on the assumption that a previous experience provides conclusive evidence for and

unequivocally justifies a subsequent experience. Christians believe that Paul became a Christian because he saw Jesus in a vision and that conversely had he not seen Jesus in a vision he would not have become a Christian. They do not entertain the alternative view that he became a Christian for other reasons that were not stated.

A challenge that all synthetic conclusions must overcome is the problem of identity. If Paul had never seen Jesus before how did he know that it was Jesus who appeared to him? If he saw Jesus in a lineup would he be able to distinguish him from among other men similarly dressed and with similar facial features? A person may smile at this mundane means of determining the truth of a religious experience. Christians, however, claim that truth is confirmed by synthetic knowledge obtained by a previous experience validating a subsequent experience.

When people claim to believe in Jesus, how can they be certain that it is Jesus they believe in? A claim of recognition always assumes a previous experience. All the person who claims to believe in Jesus has to go on is previous experience, and to make the claim meaningful, the person must assume that some previous experience is a confirmation of what the person subsequently believes. The synthetic experience that the person relies on does not, however, consist of a single previous experience confirming a subsequent experience. It rather consists of an infinite chain of previous experiences, each one assumed to be a confirmation of the one following it. Each previous experience is dependent on still another previous experience for validation. The infinite, unending, length of the chain is a spoiler. Because the chain of experiences never ends none of the experiences is validated.

Claims regarding synthetic knowledge as it applies to religion are problematic in two ways: 1) they rely on a previous experience to confirm that a subsequent experience is true even though the two experiences are different; and 2) synthetic experience sets up an infinite regress of previ-

ous experiences none of which confirms a subsequent experience because the regress is infinite.

Christians turn to faith because their religion is based on synthetic experience, which is inherently inconclusive. They do this because they know of no viable alternative to synthetic experience. There is one: relational or aesthetic experience and the aesthetic knowledge that naturally results from it. From relational experience comes relativism. Christians are afraid of relativism. They are afraid that it leads to anarchy. They think that relativism leads to the belief that one person's opinion is just as true as another's and that one person's acts are just as good as another's. They think that relativism is a denial of the difference between truth and error and good and evil. It is instead a confirmation of difference and of positive and negative qualities in relation to each other. What relativism denies is *absolute* truth, right, goodness, etc. From a relativistic perspective truth and error and right and wrong are relative to each other.

From relativism comes aesthetic perspective, which focuses on the meaning or significance of experience. By grasping the meaning of experience one recognizes that it has value in its own right. It is the value of experience that confirms its reality. No other confirmation of reality is available or necessary. Experience confirms its own reality.

Monotheists are both deferential and defensive. They believe that what is both good and real is something they are not. The reason they believe that God is the source of both goodness and reality is that they believe that they are neither good nor real. They naturally defer whatever is best to someone else. And, in addition, they see themselves as vulnerable. They are subject to disease, degeneration, and death. They believe that whatever is good and real must be above the weaknesses inherent in humanity.

A sense of vulnerability arises out of a belief in separateness. Monotheists believe that they are separate from the forces they experience in their environment, and they

consequently believe that those forces may be allied against them. They believe that they must somehow overcome those forces. Unable to do so they turn to an assumed higher power to do it for them.

This sense of defensiveness goes away when one realizes that there is not an absolute separation between experience and what is experienced. When I look out into the world I cannot draw a line between the world and myself. On the contrary, there is no place to draw the line. Where is the field that lies before me? Is it in my mind or in the world? Nothing in my experience answers this question definitively. It may be in my mind; it may be in the world; or it may be *both* in my mind *and* in the world. My experience doesn't tell me which of these is the case. What my experience does tell me is that all of the above are possibilities.

The world is neither against me nor for me any more than I am either against or for the world. From one perspective the world and I are one. Where does a sense of vulnerability come from? It comes from a belief that the world is other than I am and that I am inferior in comparison to the world. It comes (in accord with Pascal) from a belief that the universe is mammoth and that I am minuscule. It comes from a belief that the world is a foe that is prepared to do battle and I must be prepared to defend myself against it.

But once I view myself as an experiencer and view my experience as real I see that the world can neither create me nor destroy me. I am an experiencer and my experience is real because it is all-inclusive. I am both the experiencer and the experienced. I am myself and the world. I don't look to something apart from me for reality. I am reality. Yes, I experience sickness, degeneration, and death but I also experience health, growth, and life. I experience the one in order to experience the other. Yes, there are negatives but with those negatives are positives. Reality is balanced. The cup is half full.

Monotheists are pessimists. They see the natural world as their enemy and so take refuge in an assumed supernatural world. They drink supernatural water to quench pessimistic thirst. This is water they never experience. They can't see or taste it. They cannot know it is there. To make up for their lack of knowledge they exercise what they call *faith*.

By contrast, the person with an aesthetic perspective lives not by faith but by experience. From an aesthetic point of view the person experiences the world for what the experience of it is rather than for what can be gained from it. An aesthetic person is exclusively neither an optimist nor a pessimist. The aesthetic person faces both the good and the bad at the same time. The person who lives life for what it is encounters both good and evil and acknowledges both good and evil.

Both are necessary. Without both meaning is impossible. Without both nothing matters. Out of the difference between the two arises the conflict that makes every battle worth fighting and every quest worth pursuing—not to overcome the difference but to experience it. The experience of life is what makes life meaningful, and the difference between the good and the bad is what makes meaning.

Religion cannot be established on an ideology. Ideologies assume synthetic knowledge. Every ideology is founded on assumed evidence acquired from another experience that either precedes or follows the experience to be confirmed. The attempt to validate one experience by means of another always falls short. The result is that all ideologies are founded on assumptions for which there is only assumed evidence. All synthetic religions are founded on ideologies the supporting evidence of which is only assumed.

The only religion that cannot be disproved is the one that requires no proof. It is the one that arises out of aesthetic experience—experience that has value in and of itself and therefore is its own proof. It is the religion that relies

on the one true ideology—the one that says there are no ideologies. Relativism is the only true ideology because it is the only ideology that doesn't need an ideology. Aesthetic experience confirms that ideology is unnecessary. It confirms that external proofs are unnecessary. Once one knows the value of experience one needs no evidence apart from the value itself to prove it.

## Science

Modern science, since its birth four-hundred years ago, has assumed that an observer and an object observed are separate and distinct entities. It has assumed that an observer experiencing an object acquires knowledge regarding the object. In addition, it has assumed that knowledge is synthetic. It assumes that knowledge acquired from an observational experience must be preceded by a previous, non-observational experience, which is necessary because it provides the context in which an observation is to be made. A preceding experience tells the observer what to look for, which of the details to emphasize, and the relationships to be expected. It tells the observer how to interpret what the observer experiences in a subsequent experience.

Without a previous experience to use as a guide, the findings of an observation are random and inconclusive because there is no standard with which to make a judgment concerning them. Newton's formulation of the law of universal gravitation and his three laws of motion constituted a revolutionary breakthrough in science because these "laws" provided a guide regarding the interpretation of a broad category of subsequent observational experiences. They told those who made the observations how to interpret what they experienced.

To the question whether these interpretations are true is the answer: it depends on what you mean by the word *true*. If one means that the interpretations lead to the successful prediction of certain future outcomes, the successful control of certain elements or circumstances, or the successful explanation of certain phenomena, then one can say without reservation that the interpretations are in this sense true.

Newtonian science could successfully accomplish what had never been accomplished before. Using Newton's principles a person could predict the future location of a celestial body, calculate the force needed to lift an object of a given weight to a given height, determine the required strength of a truss to support a roof or bridge, explain details regarding the moon's orbit around the earth and the earth's orbit around the sun, and so on.

The accomplishments and the increased understanding that resulted from a relatively few general principles that Newton formulated made an indelible impact on popular beliefs and attitudes in the decades and centuries following the introduction of the principles. This impact led people to conclude that Newtonian science is true not in a limited but in an absolute sense. Many believed that Newtonian principles were true in the same sense that religious doctrines were believed to be true. They were believed to be true in the absolute sense that 1) in no case could they be false, 2) in no case could they lead to wrong or incorrect conclusions, and 3) they were descriptive of and consistent with the fundamental workings of the natural world. In short, people believed that Newtonian principles provided knowledge of reality.

Experience regarding Newtonian science and its application to natural phenomena helped cement the view that the world is a separately-existing entity. Fewer and fewer people, from Newton's time forward, questioned the absolute existence of the world. Almost everybody believed the world to be an absolute entity that depends on nothing apart from itself for its existence. There were those who recognized a conflict between this scientific view and the Christian or monotheistic view that the world is dependent on God for its existence. Some people, however, including Newton and many of his educated contemporaries, set this conflict aside believing that God created the world but that once it was created it was a separately-existing entity.

Although Newtonian science assumes that synthetic experience is possible, Newton's principles had hardly settled into people's minds before some began to question the fundamentals on which they were based. Prominent among these was David Hume who, upon careful examination of his own experience, realized that nothing in his experience confirmed the notion of cause and effect. His experience included a conjoining of an assumed cause with an assumed effect (e.g., fire and heat) but nothing in his experience could confirm that one thing (fire) *causes* another (heat.) Hume's critique led to skepticism regarding the concept of causation. It led to the question of whether people's belief in causation has any experiential grounding.

Causation is an example of synthetic experience, an example of a subsequent experience being dependent on a previous experience. By questioning the concept of causation Hume was raising doubts concerning a broad category of assumed experience: synthetic experience in which a previous experience confirms a subsequent experience. He was asking whether the assumed relationship of a previous and subsequent experience is productive of knowledge.

When one fast forwards to the present day one sees that while people's beliefs in synthetic experience and the absolute existence of the material world are not as rigid or set in stone as the beliefs of their predecessors, they are nonetheless strongly biased in that direction. Most people still take the assumption that a subsequent experience is confirmed by a previous experience and that the world is a separately-existing entity for granted.

Science looks to a previous experience to provide the context for and the interpretation of a subsequent experience and to a subsequent experience to confirm or validate a previous experience.

The problem with synthetic experience is that it assumes that an infinite chain of experiences both precedes and follows an experience that is to be confirmed, which infinite chain negates confirmation. What anyone who re-

lies on synthetic experience must acknowledge is that no conclusion is final because no experience either preceding or following a given experience is final. A conclusion based on synthetic experience is never final because an additional preceding and subsequent experience are always required to achieve finality, which requirement, because an infinite chain of experiences extending forward and backward is assumed, makes finality impossible.

The question of whether an interpretation of an observation is true because it conforms to the principles of a previous experience can be reversed. One can ask whether the interpretation of a certain observation proves the truthfulness of the previous experience? In other words, does a finding from a subsequent, observational experience prove that knowledge acquired from a previous, non-observational experience is true? To cite a specific example, does the experience of observing an apple fall from a tree prove that Newton's law of universal gravitation is true?

The answer to this question is, of course, no, because the conclusion of no subsequent experience is final. Each subsequent experience is subject to a succeeding subsequent experience and so on. In answering this question, however, one must realize that when Newton formulated his theory of universal gravitation he did not ask what makes the apple fall. He asked how he could describe the forces, which he assumed made the apple fall, in a way that would be universally applicable to all falling objects. Anybody who wants to know if scientific knowledge is possible, as most scientists still today claim, must first ask what knowledge they are talking about. Are they talking about knowledge of things themselves or knowledge of the way things behave in relation to each other?

Once one realizes that it is the latter knowledge that scientists claim to have, one understands why a dictionary influenced by people steeped in the cultural effects of science would define the word *energy* as "the capacity for vig-

orous activity,” and the word *matter* as “the substance of which things are made.” Modern people define things using terms that describe uses or purposes as opposed to terms that describe the things themselves. Once one recognizes the limits of scientific knowledge one realizes that science concerns itself with the behavior of material forces and substances as opposed to the forces and substances themselves. What the material forces and substances are is a question science puts aside. It does not concern itself with what things are; it concerns itself with what things do. It is about functionality. It pays no attention to what it is that functions and focuses exclusively on the functions themselves.

The reason science does this is that scientists as they go about their work realize that they cannot discover what things are. For the same reason that Isaac Newton didn't know what made the apple fall, James Clerk Maxwell didn't know what made magnets attract each other. Scientific knowledge concerning functionality extends far and wide. The “scientific method” has invaded every aspect of modern human endeavor. And yet when it comes to the simplest of questions regarding the things people experience, science has no answers and claims no knowledge. What makes the sun come up? Why is it cold outside? What makes the sun shine? What makes a fire feel warm when I stand by it? What makes my arm go up when I raise it? Why does a lemon taste sour? To these and a thousand other questions that a child might ask, science has neither answers nor opinions. It can say something about functionality but it can't say anything about fundamental forces or existing things. And, in addition to that, science doesn't have conclusive knowledge regarding the way things function. All scientific findings are dependent on future findings, and because every scientific finding is subject to a subsequent experience, no scientific conclusion whatever is final. A scientific finding can't be regarded as true because it can't be regarded as conclusive.

The answer to the question of whether science is true is that it is not true in the sense that most scientists and lay-people believe it to be true. Most people believe that science is true in the pragmatic sense that it works, but they also believe that the principles of science are themselves fundamentally true. By that they mean that science is productive of knowledge concerning the fundamental workings of the material universe and that a person can acquire knowledge by making observations of the natural world using the principles of science as a guide.

The reason that popular beliefs regarding scientific knowledge cannot be confirmed is that the beliefs are based on the assumption that synthetic knowledge is possible. People believe that by making an observation of something one can arrive at a truth not of the observation itself but of what is observed. The scientist assumes the absolute separation between the observer and the thing observed because the purpose of an observation is not the observation itself. It is rather to gain knowledge of what is observed.

Whether or not there is a definitive separation between the observer and the thing observed is a key question that science has chosen to ignore. Scientists have not taken bipolar relationships into account and have consequently failed to acknowledge, assuming they are aware of it, that experience is relational. Although all scientific findings are concerned with relationships and consequently science itself is dependent on relational experiences, scientists have never conceded that science is itself relational or relative. It is true that both relativity and uncertainty have played an important role in twentieth-century science, but that has not led to a general recognition that science is itself relative as opposed to absolute.

Because mathematics is fundamental to the language and the concepts of science, and because mathematical formulas are absolute, scientists have claimed that science is absolute. In making the claim they have, however, failed

to acknowledge that while mathematics is used as a guide in interpreting scientific findings, the guide is other than the findings themselves. A mathematical formula is an idealization formed in the mind. The findings, however, are not idealized; they are observed—experienced. The idealization of the mathematical formula cannot be transferred to the finding. It can be used as a guide to interpret the finding but is not the finding itself.

The engineer's work is one of applying absolute, ideal mathematical concepts to practical, real-life circumstances. The application is never exact or complete, not because ideal mathematical principles don't apply but because real-life circumstances are never ideal. The mathematical principles used to build a bridge are ideal, but the materials used to build the bridge, the foundation that supports the bridge, and the earth that supports the foundation are not ideal. The principles are ideal; the bridge is experiential and therefore relative. The bridge is subject to the vagaries and equivocation of experience. Only the principles are ideal.

The acknowledgement that no scientific finding is final, which scientists acknowledge, is another way of saying that what science is about is relationships as opposed to separately-existing entities. It is another way of saying that fundamental to science is relativism, that while the "laws" of science are absolute, the application of those laws is relative, and that all scientific claims to knowledge are equivocal. Although scientists have claimed a strict separation between the observer and the observed, the recognition that science is subject to the equivocation inherent in relativism leads one to doubt the claim. Nothing in experience confirms it. Rather, because no line of demarcation between bipolar qualities is experienced, experience leads one to the opposite conclusion: that the observer and the observed cannot be regarded as two absolutely separate entities.

Once absoluteness is set aside science becomes something altogether different than what it has historically been assumed to be. Once the absolute distinction between the intangible and the tangible, the subjective and the objective, the in-here and the out-there, and the person and the world is no longer assumed, none of the past assumptions regarding science is possible. The opposite is the case. Every claim to scientific knowledge must be taken with a grain of salt. Inherent in everything that science does is risk of error. Every scientific prediction, explanation, and method of control is subject to surprise and unexpected eventualities. Things may not go as planned. Rather than absolutes science deals with probabilities. No matter what a scientist claims the claims are only probable. They are never for sure.

The uncertainty of the modern world is universally recognized, and nothing contributes to that uncertainty more than the uncertainty inherent in science. Science is foundational to modern cultural beliefs, and because science is uncertain, modern beliefs are uncertain. These uncertainties are ubiquitous. Modern people cannot escape them. They are in the food moderns eat, the houses they live in, the technology they use, the medicines they take, and so on. Everywhere a modern person turns is uncertainty. Moderns claim to believe in the certainty of God, but the uncertainties of science that are so pervasive, so universal, and so all-encompassing dwarf their claims regarding religious certainty. The voice of religion in modern society is like a distant murmur compared to the roar of the secular risks and hazards that overwhelm it.

Science is not productive of knowledge but it nonetheless persists and will continue to persist because it is the singular and most apparent avenue open to modern people to express themselves. When one is in the throes of making a new technological discovery or breakthrough, the uncertainties, risks, and potential pitfalls associated with it seldom take center stage. That is because there is another

side to the coin of uncertainty. It is opportunity. With every uncertainty comes the opportunity to minimize it if not to overcome it.

The modern world is filled with challenges, and every challenge is an opportunity. So many of these challenges have to do with science and technology. Modern people revel in them because every challenge is an opportunity not only for personal gain but for personal expression. Here is the chance for the modern person to say, "This is what *I* can do; this is what *I* am." Science appears to be a permanent fixture in the modern world. It appears to be here to stay and with it the risks, hazards, and uncertainties inherent in it. These leave open the question of whether and the extent to which there is an underpinning of modern society that can, notwithstanding all the uncertainties, serve as an anchor that will hold it in place and allow it to be what it is.