

Justifying the Spiritual – Unification Perspective on Self and Reality 2021

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The worldviews of all human societies are informed by two major contrasting perspectives. These two perspectives define the manner in which humans conceptualize reality and the self and determine the manner in which they interact with one another and with their surrounding ecologies. The first is the perspective that holds that all things are connected and integrated to such a degree that everything shares in one unified identity. This is the spiritual/subjective/synthetic/intuitive/communal/unification perspective. The second is the perspective that holds that reality is composed of separate entities that relate to one another only when certain conditions are met. This is the material/objective/analytical/rational/individual/discreteness perspective. Every human society determines the nature of the input of these two perspectives both in its relation to its surrounding ecology and in its various social, economic, political, judicial, educational, religious, and technological/scientific domains or institutions.

In modern complex society, the material perspective dominates and justifies the primarily competitive way in which individuals, communities, states and nations relate to one another economically, politically, and militarily. By contrast, and as a mostly secondary influence, the spiritual perspective offers cooperative/egalitarian input primarily in the social, political, judicial, religious, and ecological realms.

The justification for the material/discreteness perspective is embedded at a fundamental level – biological survival and reproduction. The justification for the spiritual/unification perspective is much less well recognized – especially in modern complex societies, and it is the subject of this essay.

There are at least four ways the spiritual/unification perspective on the self, society and reality can be justified. Three of these promote the spiritual experience of unification itself.

All human societies recognize a subjective as well as an objective dimension to the self and reality. In aboriginal societies this is often represented in the acceptance of a sacred “Life” principle – animism – which must be respected in all of existence. This underlying principle gets much further elaborated as societies become more complex – from spirit, to separate spirits, to separate spirits with independent agency, to separate divine entities with full agency, to full blown independent gods with “societies” of their own, to religious institutions

with their accompanying prophets, gurus, saints, and saviors supported by elaborate narratives and rituals and controlled by a hierarchy of priests, ministers, imams, lamas, monks, swamis, etc.

Spirituality refers to the basic acceptance and experience of a sacred/subjective principle as pervading all of reality, including the self. The spiritual perspective arises when the human intuitive mental faculty is active, and the intuitive faculty is most active when its opposite – the intellectual/rational faculty – is less active. This state of mind can be promoted in its more extreme forms in two ways: in conducive ritual behaviors like meditation/mindfulness, chant, or repetitive rhythmic movement/dance, or through the ingestion of substances that have psychedelic effects like LSD, MDMA, etc. The ultimate spiritual experience in this mental state is unification – the experience of all of reality including the self as so completely connected and integrated that everything becomes one – resulting in the discrete self being transformed into the expanded universal self.

While spirituality is at the core of all religions, religions construct elaborate belief, ritual and social systems on top of this spiritual core, often becoming more social control institutions than vehicles to carry individuals to the unification experience. And because different societies develop different religions, these religions, each of which usually claims to offer the exclusive path to the “truth,” have a decided tendency to become competitive. The result can be some of the worst human behavior imaginable – warfare, the antithesis of what the experience of unification in spirituality is about – sharing a mutual, totally inclusive, and loving identity with all of existence.

So, within spirituality, there are two avenues to the more intense core spiritual experience of unification: rituals and “drugs.” Religion provides a third avenue, but each religion confines the meaning of the unification experience to validating its specific belief system, and competition among religions contains the potential for promoting very negative, non-spiritual social behavior.

Interestingly, the fourth source of justification for the spiritual perspective on the self and reality is to be found in the implications of the material perspective itself when this perspective is fully understood in its most developed, modern, scientific iteration. I have argued in the accompanying essay, “The Fundamental Human Problem – Perceptual Limitation,” that from the material perspective itself human perception of reality is so limited that it renders humans acutely unaware of the extent to which they exist in a totally connected reality. Through its impressive development of technology, science – as the primary investigator of reality from the material perspective, is responsible for revealing the 99.999% of the material and energetic reality that humans do not perceive. When the

vast system of interrelationship that defines all that is included in material and energetic reality is properly understood, the very notion of discrete entities appears more and more as an illusion.

So, science has pursued the material view of reality to the point of exposing the questionable nature of the basic assumption of discreteness upon which science itself has been based. While internally the physical sciences are slowly emerging from this problem, the commitment of humans in modern complex society to the dominant material perspective on reality remains solidly in place. But the fact is that when science pursues the material perspective to its extremes, it discovers itself largely transformed to the point of supporting the basic principles of the spiritual perspective. As such, in the end, the material perspective becomes a fourth avenue to the justification of the spiritual perspective and to recognition of the condition of unification.

See the companion essay, “The Fundamental Human Problem – Perceptual Limitation,” for a more detailed consideration of the spiritual – unification implications that arise when we recognize the extraordinary limitations of human perception from within the material perspective.