

DRAFT COPY FOR COMMENT

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January 21, 2021

Query: In the context of the New Story, what is God? Light? Reality? Consciousness? The Self?

Topic for discussion, January 25, 2021.

My Reality So Far

Perhaps this query is more than we can discuss in one evening, but these concepts are so interrelated that I cannot fully discuss one without the other. The New Story group has been discussing these concepts in one form or another for years, so my response is like a recapitulation of our previous work. But it is also something more, because for me the story has a more integrated coherence now than it did before. This is what I want to share with you.

First, the context of the New Story. We often say that the New Story integrates science and religion. But it does so at the cost of alienating materialistic scientists (because of its undeniable spiritual basis) and many religious (because it tramples on some firmly held doctrines). The scientific story of evolution that confronts the religious story of creation is resolved in favor of science. So is the story of the universe and the particles that make up us and everything, everything else. We also favor the discoveries of cell biology, DNA, and symbiosis as a driver of evolution, and listen to what neuroscientists tell us about the brain. Yet, we do not live in a reality that is devoid of spirit. We believe in the reality of mystical experience and a universe of love, a force not measured by science. We condemn science for its lack of a morality based on compassion. This is the context of the New Story that frames our understanding of God, Light, Reality, Consciousness, and the Self.

The Immanent God

My preferred pronoun for God is "it". The New Story webpage states, "We believe the Earth and all Creation are sacred." Since I continue to use the word God to redefine god, I phrase this as "God is immanent in everything ." For this to be true it must start with God immanent in the particles that form us and everything else. The principle of non-duality states that what has been called the material and the spiritual are not separate states, or even aspects of the same reality, but that they are the same. Take a minute for that to sink in. Quakers support the belief that there is that of God in everyone and some accept that there is that of God in everything. But few Quakers can say what part of me is that of God (God is a seed within me?) or say that all of me is that of God without falling into theological confusion. Too many have internalized a dualistic God in order to explain sin, suffering, and salvation. In the world of the non-dual God there is no original sin. The doctrine of "original blessing" is not unique to the New Story. In the non-dual world how the notions of sin, suffering and salvation are interpreted depends on a new understanding of the self, consciousness, and especially conscious self-awareness.

Light

Quakers love the metaphor of light and often use it to refer to God as in “the light within” and “mind the light.” I am beginning to suspect that light is more than a metaphor, that light and electromagnetism are the physical stimulators of creative thought. But I know nothing about the physics, so I will stop here.

Consciousness

Consciousness is here considered to be awareness located in the material, not some property of a non-material substance. Consciousness has evolved, is evolving. So, when I say that an amoeba has conscious awareness, that it moves toward certain external stimuli and away from other, I do not mean that it has the same consciousness that I have. There are degrees of awareness on an evolutionary scale and different states of consciousness, wakefulness, coma, vegetative state, and death. A material understanding of conscious awareness does not have to imply that there is nothing after death. There is more to the human than consciousness.

Self-awareness

Conscious self-awareness is an evolutionary development of considerable significance in the human species and some others. The self is a story created by the mind. Being able to reflect on the self, something we do effortlessly, is an amazing capability. Self-awareness is probably the source of all the stories, both good and bad, that make up our civilization. I like to think that the story of Adam is a species memory of the development of self-awareness. Adam and Eve try to hide their nakedness from God. How could they know that they were naked? The knowledge of good and evil is actually the birth of self-awareness. When they are thrown out of the Garden they are forced to “work.” Paradise was not knowing that it was work.

The self

My true self is that of God within. It could not be otherwise if God is immanent in all things. My purpose in life is to know my true self. The self is a story that creates my sense of identity and continuity. If my story of God is of a judgmental, authoritarian, external being, then my sense of self is divided, and I suffer to find and follow the will of God. In the non-dualistic story of a God of unconditional love, I am whole. All of myself, really all of me, is within God’s love. My challenge is to continue to grow in self-awareness.

The Transcendent God

The transcendent God exists in relationships, the invisible bonds of love that connect everything. In the words of Joanna Macy, there is no permanent, separate self. We exist in each other and within all of nature. Continuity is in change like a flowing river.

Reality

I wish I had time to write about reality, about our perceptions, objects and concepts, and most importantly the reality of mystical experience. Perhaps next month?