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My Many Selves

Wayne C. Booth

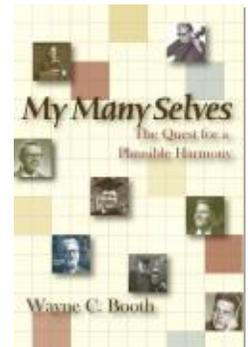
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Chapter Seventeen

Harmony at Last?

There are moments, and it is only a matter of a few seconds, when you feel the presence of the eternal harmony. . . . A terrible thing is the frightful clearness with which it manifests itself and the rapture with which it fills you. . . . During these five seconds I live a whole human existence, and for that I would give my whole life and not think that I was paying too dearly.

—Dostoevsky

*It has amazed me that the most incongruous traits should exist in the same person and for all that yield a **plausible harmony**. I have often asked myself how characteristics, seemingly irreconcilable, can exist in the same person. I have known crooks who were capable of self-sacrifice, sneak-thieves who were sweet-natured and harlots for whom it was a point of honour to give good value for money.*

—Somerset Maugham, *The Summing Up*

Other LIFERS' efforts to pursue harmony of soul have always at least half failed, as mine must do. Sometimes the LIFERS do attempt to present a full harmony throughout, behind the many threats that life presents; careful readers then detect the deception. The more serious LIFERS confess openly to frustrating failure. Most of them do celebrate moments of *feeling* fully in harmony: "Ah, at last, *this* is the harmony, the life I've been longing for." But their efforts to move beyond those moments and produce full harmony by *thinking* about the conflicts always fall short.

This chapter begins with a brief summary of the innumerable moments of centering that might be called *temporary* harmonies. In each of them, the rivalry among Booths is briefly silenced, as some total concentration is achieved, blissful or tragic. Part two is an attempt to explain why no one can escape soul splits. At the heart of "things" is a strong conflict among three "absolutes": Supreme Being "orders" us to pursue Truth *but also* to pursue Beauty *and also* to pursue Goodness—the universal welfare of all God's creatures.

Part three is my final quest for the most plausible harmony among these three inescapably conflicting human goals.

If, like one of my more critical readers, you feel you've had enough evidence about the brief moments of concentrated bliss or grief or despair and enough evidence of inherent conflict, just skip now to part three.

PART I: EMOTIONAL CENTERINGS

Everyone's life, like this book, contains many unfuzzy, unified moments, blissful or awful; the sense of suffering splits simply disappears. Whether or not some thinker later intrudes to label them *illusions* of unity, the fact remains that as we experience them we have no conscious thought about conflict. The bliss or pain takes over the whole of life. Only when other ecstasies or pains or telephone calls or household chores intervene do we start thinking about conflict again and perhaps even pursue a plausible harmony.

Throughout this book you have encountered these four radically different temporary harmonies that simply shove aside ThinkerB's *implausible* quest:



Hiking with Phyllis



Clowning with Max Dalby and Phyllis, 1989



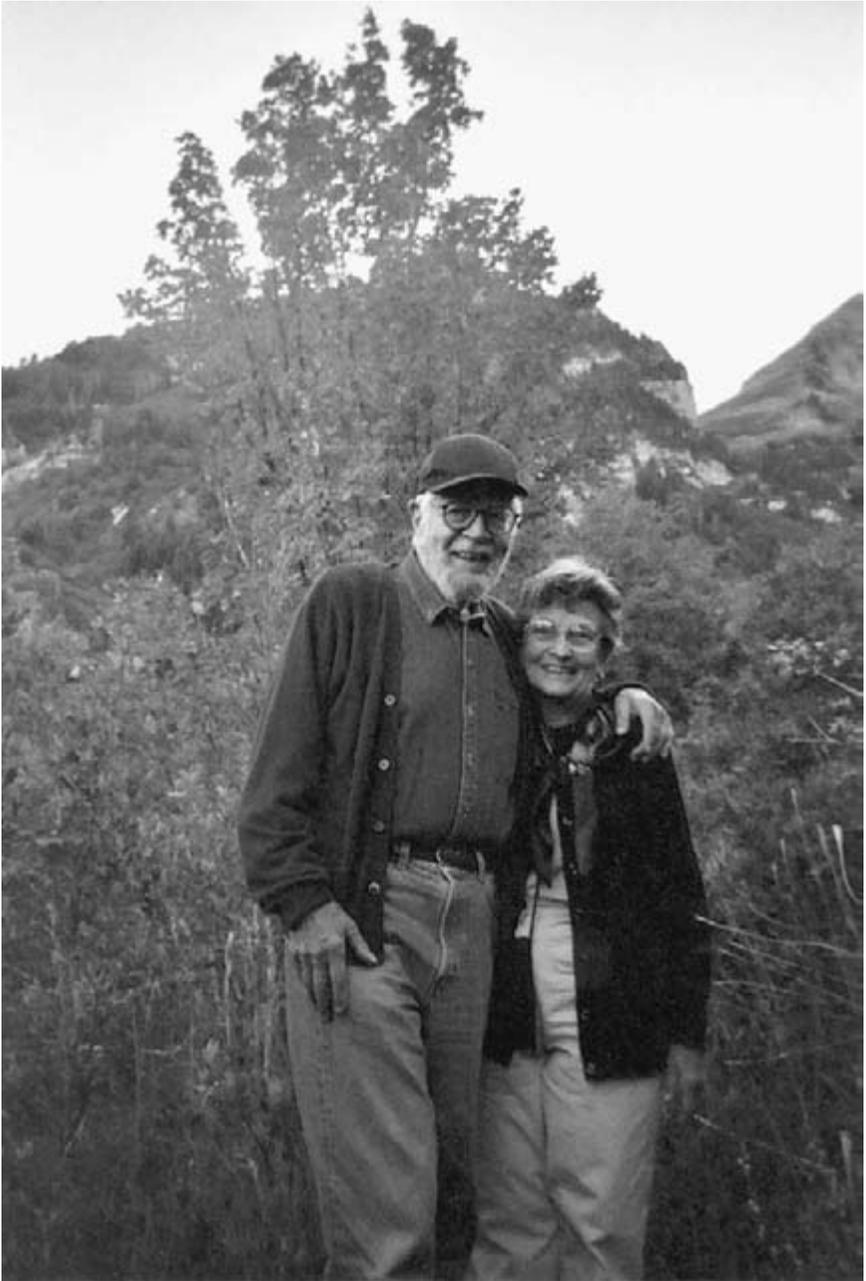
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1. *Temporary Blissful Centerings*—the kind that make me long for more of the same. (Most of them do not quite deserve the label “epiphanies,” but some of them come close to it.)

- Making love—not just having sex but *loving* my lifelong partner, Phyllis
- Cuddling a newborn child or grandchild
- Playing games—with children, with friends, with anybody who is fully engaged with the game
- Listening to powerful music: classical or jazz or even the Beatles (after my son converted me to them)
- *Playing* music, the supreme bliss I describe in *For the Love of It*
- Receiving a letter from Phyllis, especially when I was desperately lonely in the army
- Reading any novel or poem slowly, deliciously, totally absorbed (In the army, with no time pressures as I waited for the next assignment, many days were rescued by Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy*, Fielding’s *Tom Jones*, Wharton’s *The Age of Innocence*—and some murder mysteries not worth mentioning.)

- Writing a draft of something that feels good or even polishing (here) what was before just a messy paragraph or chapter (When things are going well, the blissful escape from time may last for four or five hours; I look at my watch and am shocked that it is not nine AM but already one PM.)
- Working many hours with marvelously collegial friends, Marshall Gregory, Joe Williams, and Greg Colomb on textbooks, for days and weeks and months (Of course, splits frequently intervene, but the hours of actual work usually feel totally concentrated.)
- Teaching a class when the discussion goes *right*, especially when, in the midst of a passionate discussion, a student intervenes to say, “Mr. Booth, we’ve already gone past closing time and I have another class now. Could a bunch of us get together later today and talk it over?”
- Looking at a flower, or a shimmering lake, or a magnified photo of an insect, or a rainbow flash from a prism, feeling a flood of gratitude to the God/Nature that created such marvels
- Lighting a well-laid fire, whether in an inside fireplace or an open (safe) “firepit” in the mountains, staring at the flames as they mount
- Chatting with colleagues at lunch, time flowing so fast that we’re almost late for class¹
- Feeling absolutely radiant, blissful harmony as I walk Granddaughter Robin’s dog Heather through Christ Church Meadow; sunshine on rain-flooded fields; Heather amazingly alert to every detail, including other dogs in the distance; the combo of Nature and the history of Christ Church’s manipulation of Nature—the sheer power and mystery of the *Creation* of all this—and I am *here*, part of that creation
- Experiencing equal bliss as the “boys’ choir” in Christ Church Cathedral sings a Mozart mass (The boys, like the conductor, are really *into* the music. Phyllis and I are sitting within touching distance from them and can observe almost every face. Obviously they—most of them—are equally transformed. In tears, I put my hand on her knee and she puts her hand on mine—always our way of sharing musical thrills.)
- Attending Catholic mass in a tiny chapel in Flavigny, France, singing the hymns, reveling in the deeply probing sermons by the

1. If I provided an index and any one of those friends found himself not listed, he’d no doubt feel hurt, justifiably. But the list would take a couple of pages in itself.



On Phyllis's Plateau with Phyllis, August 2003



One of my many pictures of the cabin we built in Wildwood, Utah

priest who has welcomed us even though he knows that we are Mormons

- Meditating silently in Quaker Meeting, surrounded by friends who interrupt only infrequently to report what their spirit dictates
- Attending the bat and bar mitzvahs of grandkids Emily and Aaron—total “spiritual elevation” or “religious ecstasy,” even while unable to do any justice to the hymns
- Singing the Mormon hymn “Come, Come, Ye Saints” at my missionary homecoming service

Such moments from my life (and I hope you have had many similar ones in yours) could fill this book, with HypocriteB happily posing as totally, blissfully unified—almost sounding like one of those silly chicken-soup self-help manuals. Often the centerings make me wonder, “What more than *this* need you ask for?” Some of them edge toward the religious harmony we come in part three: we feel “salvationally unified,” raised out of the time-bound world. And many of them produce no sense of internal conflict, even as ThinkerB works on this book asking how to put them all together.

2. *Temporary Comic Centerings*—the kind that now lead me to mildly contemptuous amusement.

- At age thirteen, I manage, after prolonged wrestling, to throw Cornwall Hammond to the ground and sit on him, demanding his apology. Blissful unity: I've won!
- In 1956 I receive a Guggenheim fellowship: total bliss—for VainB.
- In 1960 I receive John Crowe Ransom's strongly favorable reading of the manuscript of *The Rhetoric of Fiction*: I've won!

And so on. Well, these days, looking back on such amusing unified moments, none of my Selves blames the Would-be Winner *heavily* even for such silly egotism. "I" only laugh at "him."

3. *Temporary Regrettable Centerings*—the kind that make my more defensible Selves, especially LOVER, cringe, either with shame or guilt or puzzlement about my behavior, or moan, "*If only . . .*"

- At age eight, I tease my three-year-old sister and make her cry; I'm the boss.
- SluggerB knocks my uncle down with the ax (chapter 15); I've won.
- The would-be thinker snarls at Mama, "Any man who can read Plato shouldn't have to spend his time varnishing this furniture"; I'm the master intellectual of the family, and that's what a *man* ought to be.

4. *Temporary Miserable Centerings*—moments of totally concentrated misery, the kind that have led many philosophers and some religionists to pronounce them as revelations of the full truth about life: life is awful, deadly, and only fools can deny it. I've again and again mocked such extreme cynicism, especially in that abandoned novel *Cass Andor*. But the very impulse to attack the extreme negation means that it has sometimes occurred to me.

- The soldier longs for home and love, fearing that the Nazis will win.
- The college administrator hates his job and longs for escape.
- A favorite colleague dies young: Sheldon Sacks and Arthur Heiserman and Perrin Lowry, in their (and my) late forties, and Ronald Crane (in his eighties) in the same decade. And on to many more recent ones.
- A loved one dies: my father; my grandmother; my best friend Junior Halliday; my mother; my son; a favorite cousin, Thornton Booth (T. Y.); Max Dalby, just last week. (When I heard about T. Y., and then Max, I was shattered each time—though not really

surprised because each had informed me that it was coming soon, and besides, our life is flooded with such news these days. When T. Y. first told me about the illness, for hours my whole soul was concentrated on that “unified” feeling: the approaching loss of a loved one. When I phoned him about it, he turned the unity into a comforting “split.” Since he sounded cheerful, I asked him why. “Well, I’ve been expecting it all along. And besides, this will protect everybody from my becoming senile.”)

- National or international tragedy occurs. (Like many Americans, I was totally “unified” for a while after the 9/11 attack. I felt shattered—my faith in God temporarily disunified—when the recent tsunami struck lower Asia. In the months following our war on Iraq, I have suffered many mornings of total misery about what we have done to “the world.”)

Oh, and there is a fifth temporary harmony, which you have *not* seen here.

5. *Faked Blissful Centerings*—the kind that constitute a large share of what is offered in the flood of self-help books. It’s hardly surprising that our bookstore shelves are obsessed with offerings of harmony, some tempting, many comically absurd. Just after I wrote the first draft of this book, a stranger mailed me a copy of one of the best-selling books on the market, *Chicken Soup for the Soul: 101 Stories to Open the Heart and Rekindle the Spirit*. VainB already felt a bit arrogantly envious of the fame and mildly contemptuous of the work, glancing through the table of contents, introduction, and concluding notes about the authors’ fabulous successes in “saving” people. They’ve published book after book that promised “Chicken Soup” for this or that soul: Christians, Kids, Mothers, Teenagers, and on and on. My first impulse—just ignore such a book!

But then I caught myself in a bit of conflict. ThinkerB felt that to be honest he should read some of this to see what offerings of harmony are really popular with Americans. VainB moaned, “Why should such stuff have so much success, when my own efforts to improve the world have been so badly neglected and my book, if ever published, will never sell more than a fraction . . . ?” And on with other voices. ThinkerB leapt back in and laughed contemptuously at VainB: “What a fool you are to feel anything but amusement at a book like that.” “I” calmed them down by reading the book’s epigraph, a Chinese proverb about harmony.

If there is light in the soul,
 There will be beauty in the person.
 If there is beauty in the person,

There will be harmony in the house.
 If there is harmony in the house,
 There will be order in the nation.
 If there is order in the nation,
 There will be peace in the world.

ThinkerB whispered, “Bullshit!” (With one of Phyllis’s Theraplay conferences going on in a nearby room, he couldn’t shout it.) “That poem, full of wishes, some of which I share, is crazy in the claim that the search for internal light or beauty or peace will yield total peace in the world. And these guys—the Chinese poet and the chicken-soup salesmen quoting him—are ignoring all of the problems I’m grappling with. You guys never mention how much real good is done in the world by people who pretend to be harmoniously cheerful when they’re actually torn apart.”

PART 2: DIALOGUE AMONG THE SELVES, MOVING TOWARD HARMONY

The word “plausible” in my subtitle carries a lot of weight for me; I can’t hope for anything decisive. One dictionary definition of plausible is “giving a deceptive version of truth.” But let’s take the other one: “apparently valid, likely, or acceptable”—acceptable to both sides after discussion. Any full pursuit of that version of plausible harmony will lead us on to part three.

In chapter 6, I portrayed the missionary experiencing a rising awareness of the inescapable conflict among genuine values and diverse rhetorics, with the resulting need for casuistry and hypocrisy-upward. I was thus won early into a pursuit of diverse forms of dialogue, diplomacy, conciliation, and reconciliation. Sometimes it has been sheer bargaining, sometimes contemptible hedging. But at its best it’s what I’ve dubbed rhetorology: the pursuit of genuine reconciliation.²

Whatever we call it, it is the joint pursuit of common ground shared by disputants in the hope that some sort of genuine discussion of the conflict becomes possible.

What happens when this rhetorologist works to achieve real dialogue among a batch of rivaling Selves? He soon discovers that all of the disputes boil down to a simple conflict of three irrefutable, ultimate, universal values, oversimplified with the labels Truth, Goodness, and Beauty. Most serious LIFERS have had to deal, though usually only implicitly, with the inherent conflict among those three values or “absolutes”: the pursuit of truth,

2. See my Introduction to *Roads to Reconciliation: Conflict and Dialogue in the Twenty-First Century* (2004).

however defined; the pursuit of “goodness,” improvement in one’s self or in some part of the world; and the pursuit of beauty or the perfecting of “beautiful” or “sublime” feelings burning with a hard, gemlike flame. Truth should *never* be violated. *But* one should *never* deliberately harm others or fail to attempt to do good in the world. *But* to violate beauty and to further ugliness is *always* wrong.³ Yet circumstances present us every day, almost every hour, with conflicts among these three absolutes, requiring choices that violate one or the other (which is why many have declared that there is no such thing as an “absolute”).⁴

As you’ve seen, my actual life has moved back and forth as this or that one of the three supreme values temporarily reigns. Most often, both as a fringe Mormon and as a teacher and scholar, MoralB has led me to talk as if for me, in contrast to many others I admire, the supreme value of the three is “goodness” and that the pursuit of goodness dictates negotiation—and that negotiation dictates some forms of hypocrisy—pretending to accept fully what, in your heart, is considerably lower on the list. Unlike St. Augustine, who worshipped truth so passionately that he would refuse to lie even if the lie would save the life of a friend, I would put saving my friend ahead of truth.⁵

I may be sure, for example, that a friend is just plain wrong in her *literal* reading of the Tower of Babel story. I fear, deep down, that she is absurdly dogmatic—that she can never be expected to see how impossible this story is if taken literally and how marvelous the story is if read metaphorically. I must choose between flat, rude expression of my actual contempt for her reading or a smiling, friendly, hypocritical invitation to discussion. She may reject me flat out; my “pose” has failed, and I simply give up. But sometimes a genuine “good” is achieved: reconciliation, progress on both sides. She may manage to get me to see just how much pleasure and devotion a literal reading can yield. I may manage to get her to see that she doesn’t have to violate nature and reason to discover the rich truths in the story. Whatever happens, it is my belief that when any two contestants—whether two real persons or two of my Selves—come out of an argument with some degree of agreement, achieving

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3. Throughout Aristotle’s *Ethics*, he often seems to put “beauty” at the very top of the values.
 4. For a really penetrating recent exploration of how supreme values conflict, see Michael Ignatieff’s *The Lesser Evil* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2004). His center is the conflict between violence that is justified in self-defense, though still evil, and violence that is unjustified.
 5. Suddenly I remember a moment of grotesque lying that I forgot to include in chapter 2. A friend whose wife agreed to a divorce had to prove in court, under Illinois law, that one of the two had committed adultery. He talked me into lying under oath that the nonexistent affair occurred. “Goodness”—my friend’s happiness—counted for more than truth.

that harmony is more important than the question of whether they have arrived at some absolute truth. (Note how I am increasingly forced to use “I” and “my” in place of the third-person Booths; we’re moving toward a plausible harmony.)

As I probe my conflicts more and more deeply, I discover that I am ultimately (though often uncomfortably) more of a “goodnesser” than a “truthist” or “aestheticist.” But life has taught me that to be what I am is not to be inherently superior to those who place either of the other two at the top. Is the artist who spends her life devoted to painting while neglecting family and friends any less defensible than someone like Jane Addams who spends her life rescuing the troubled and deprived, neglecting art and—often—neglecting her love of philosophy?

Rhetorology thus lands us in religious questions. In claiming that the three values are real, not merely cultural constructs, I am clearly invading the territory that all believers claim as their own.

PART 3: JOINING THE DIVINE CHORUS, IN SPIRITUAL HARMONY

A majority of religious questers have dodged the conflict among ultimate values by simply asserting one grand indubitable Truth, leaving the conflicts in the hands of the one true God. Thus the harmony pursuits that feel most successful, at least to the authors themselves, have most often been an absolute discovery or revelation, a full conversion to some ultimate, single, unified truth. For the individual quester, such conversions can feel like total solutions to all problems. C. S. Lewis, in *Surprised by Joy*, reports a youthful life of conflicted thoughts about religion, the conflicts finally and totally resolved when he arrives at full belief not only in God but in Christ’s divinity. Reading his book, one receives no hints of the conflicts that he must have experienced afterward in everyday life.

If I believed most religious tracts, I would simply have to confess that all my Selves are simply versions of two sides: God’s will vs. Booth’s sinful temptations. Yet implicit always is the notion that somehow God’s will includes a command to honor all three values—as if there were no problem of conflict.

The history of such dogmatic quests for more-than-plausible harmony would have to include every religion, every belief in any kind of hierophany, whether a “manifestation of the sacred” or the claims by Communists or Fascists or Free Marketists that they have arrived at the ultimate goal of society. The plot of any *LIFE* written about such manifestations would be simple and clear: I sought it, and I found it.

Any rhetorologist who has ever tried to start a dialogue among these Totalists discovers why the outcome too often is violence rather than conciliation. The search for a common ground is in itself a challenge to the

claim that “I have *the* one true truth.” And the searcher soon confronts the fact that the search for common ground is not just something that this or that misguided thinker imposes on reality. The search is built into the nature of what reality *is*. My diverse Selves, toward so many of which I’ve expressed contempt—too much ambition, too much cheating, and so on—have always lived with a plain fact about human values: even the best ones, the totally defensible ones, are often forced into conflict by this or that circumstance, this or that “case” of rival “commands.”⁶ The conflict emerges not just in my rival goals but also in everybody’s day by day lives. To obey any one genuine value or to pursue any one “divine” revelation of the whole truth will almost always require violating another one.

Such unavoidable conflicts have led some naïve disciples of the founding “deconstructionists” in recent decades to misinterpret the case, claiming that there is no such thing as a *genuine* value or moral judgment. They are quite right if they mean “there is no value that cannot, in some circumstance, be overridden by some other value.” Casuistry is required, not only when dealing with other people, but when dealing with “God.”

It is true that some, like Plato and many theologians and my Religious Self (once or twice a month), have seen the three as inherently somehow harmonizable in some lovely picture of the One. While being trained as a “clerk-rifleman,” I was often proudly reading Plato in my spare hours—though also often mystified.⁷ One night I had a beautiful dream that I remember recording with some excitement—somewhere.

The night heavens are alight, with three huge overlapping circles, one red, labeled in huge capitals, BEAUTY, one blue, labeled GOODNESS, and one yellow, labeled TRUTH.

In the center the overlapping primary colors are yielding pure radiant white; its intensity overwhelms the others. And in the background is a wonderful chorus singing Bach’s *Credo in Unum Deo*.

Obviously that dreamer is convinced that if he thinks long enough and hard enough about it, he will find the One that will harmonize Truth, Goodness, and Beauty. They rival one another at the fringe, but in the center they join.

6. Most major thinkers about ethics have confronted my point here: Aristotle, Machiavelli, modern probers of “situation ethics.” Much of Isaiah Berlin’s career was spent trying to deal with the essential “incommensurability” of genuine values. Stephen Toulmin has also devoted himself to the problem. I’m surprised by how few have made use of the tradition of “casuistry,” the Jesuits’ effort to deal with *case conflict*.

7. It might just as well have been Parmenides or Plotinus. But at that time I hadn’t even heard of them.

That longing for a vision of the central One, totally harmonizing all the conflicts, is revealed throughout my life. In September of 1952 I dreamt again—after a couple of other dreams about being a convicted murderer and being myself murdered—that “someone is singing Bach’s B minor mass, ‘Credo, in unum’ Suddenly a booming voice interrupted, chanting ‘How many would you expect?’”

That skeptical voice predicts the debates among “supreme” values that we’ve pursued here.

Too many established religions dodge the inherent conflicts by openly embracing one or another of the three—and then privately using casuistry to deal with the actual conflicts. Too often the conflicts are resolved thoughtlessly, simply ignoring or sacrificing a greater good in the name of a narrow commitment to another one. The most extreme version of this distortion is the act of a terrorist who kills thousands pursuing the supreme good: bliss in heaven. In millions of other cases through history, the believer in this or that supreme value happily sacrifices others, just as we are today killing innocents in Iraq in the pursuit of a “good” that some are calling “holy.”

That statement might be taken as a hint that I stay strictly on the absolute-truth side. But I think the history of my hypocrisy-upward in the service of what I have seen as “welfare” or “happiness” or “goodness” illustrates my point here: I believe in pursuing truth, but I’m not a *dogmatic* “truther.” The multiple truths are themselves too often in conflict, and when they conflict with this or that “good” that I believe in, then thoughtful casuistry, in the *good* sense of the term, must enter the picture.

My favorite allegory for how we Homo sapiens fell into these conflicts is the story of Adam and Eve, which it’s just possible you may have encountered elsewhere in some other form.

Some millions of years ago God created those two and planted them in a purified garden where there were no conflicts. All was harmonious—except for one problem: they could either eat of the tree of knowledge or obey God’s command against it. They ate, down there in Africa someplace (or as Joseph Smith taught us Mormons, in Adam ondi Amman, Missouri). And suddenly they fell (or as I would put it, rose) to become conscious of all the conflicts that the very possession of such consciousness creates. Driven out into the real, the fallen, the shit-laden world, they faced—as even the brightest of the chimpanzees had never done—the incommensurabilities I’ve been describing.

Having thus confessed that I see no conceivable form of complete, ultimate harmony among the three, each of them partly responsible for the Self-Splits

I've reported, I find it interesting that life produces so many moments that go a bit beyond the blissful unities described in part one of this chapter—moments when, like the young soldier dreaming of the ONE, we do feel illuminated by a sense of achieved harmony. They are not just moments of unified bliss but moments filled with an awareness of and sense of gratitude for the very multiplicity of Selves that produce the conflicts. Supreme-Being-Itself seems in some mysterious way to *harmonize* what we cannot intellectually manage to harmonize. “I have grasped, or glimpsed, or been occupied by, and believe in UNUM DEUM, the divine ONE, without Whose Being Nothing would Be. But He/She/It will never be found *fully* realized within me.”

WHY THE HARMONY IS NOT TEMPORARY—INDEED IS EVEN A BIT BETTER THAN PLAUSIBLE

Often when meditating about all this, I feel flooded with gratitude for a “fact” I’ve so far only hinted at here; it’s by no means a hard fact in any demonstrable way, but I believe that it’s real.

Though the “I” who will never fully harmonize everything will die, no doubt quite soon now, the truth is that the “I” who on occasion has pursued any one of the three genuine values does not die; that value, whether one of the three or the mysterious, incomprehensible chorus of them, is immortal, eternal. Whatever part of it has been in me was there before my birth and made possible those fragments of it that I have reveled in—and often struggled with. They were *discovered*, not invented, by me and by the thousands of predecessors who passed their discoveries on to me. And they will live after the complex, body-laden, conflicted, circumstance-structured, unique “I” has decayed. My diverse soul splits will die off, while Truth, Goodness, and Beauty, and my small share of them—the best of me—go on living not just in other actual living creatures but in the Whole of Things. It was their actual existence in the total range of possibilities in Supreme Being that enabled any one of us to come along and discover them.

A zany way of putting this would be to say, “Aha, at last I have found the One: the Supreme Dialogist who has tried to teach us Rhetorology, the one supreme, unchallengeable fusion of Good/True/Beautiful”—Booth’s “God.”

Here I join Plato, as many of you will have recognized, in his claim that whatever redeems human life preexists it. Wordsworth puts it beautifully in his “Ode on Intimations of Immortality,” stanza V, which I was required to memorize in high school—and still remember.

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:
The Soul that rises with us, our life’s Star,

Hath had elsewhere its setting,
 And cometh from afar:
 Not in entire forgetfulness,
 And not in utter nakedness,
 But trailing clouds of glory do we come
 From God, who is our home.

I've heard many a secularist scoff at that stanza. Indeed, taken literally—as if you and I preexisted in our particularities, fully “ensouled”—it makes no sense to me.⁸ But I've loved it from the beginning, initially because it fit into my Mormon picture of our literal preexistence and now because—well, because it coincides with my conviction that Something Bigger than the Big Bang preceded—and made possible—the Big Bang.

All I'm claiming now is that whatever harmony has been achieved in my life, the chorus of all those divided Selves will not disappear from the universe when I die. My having joined everyone (well, *almost* everyone) in biting into that apple and thus becoming conscious of the difference between good and not-good has joined me not just to fellow human beings but to the very inner nature of all things.

When I die, what happens to all of that? Nothing happens to it; it remains where it always was: everywhere. And it will be rediscovered by other Selves, whether on this planet or on innumerable other ones that exist “out there.” Evolution—one of Supreme Being's cleverest creations—will create, on planet after planet, other creatures who bite into that apple. They will discover that there is a real difference between good and bad, and then *some* of them will engage in the quest for the difference and pursue harmony among the diverse goods.

For those who detest such wild speculation or who resist religious language, this dream of a kind of immortality, with “the whole of things” mystically harmonized, may seem absurd. It can never be adequately described, will always be unpersuasive to secularists, and will seem offensively mushy to many who think of themselves as *really* religious. But as I embrace the harmony, as I revel in my too rare moments of peace, I see myself as *joining*, though metaphorically, the vast number of religious believers whose *literal* claims I reject: I join those who believe in Christ's redemption and describe

8. The claim that *in some sense* each of us has existed even before conception cannot be denied even by the most rigorous genetic evolutionist. And it's hardly surprising to see how many religious speculators come up with something like Tolstoy's nonorthodox reading, in a diary entry written in his final year: “We speak of the life of the soul after death. But if the soul lives ‘after death,’ it should have lived also ‘before life.’ Onesided eternity is an absurdity.” *Last Diaries*, ed. Leon Stilman (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1960), 45.

such moments as the simple discovery of Christ's love; I join my Mormon brothers and sisters as they sing "All is well" at the end of the hymn "Come, Come, Ye Saints"; I join even those who claim to have visions of divine personages—except when those Spirits order massacre or stoning to death of prostitutes. I join (in totally different language and with equal inability to persuade any "outsider") the Buddhists and Taoists and hundreds of other groups who find their beliefs and practices to be somehow an embodiment of, or at least connection to, the Whole.

What happened in evolution is just one of innumerable possible realizations of the glories that my God provides and provided long before the Big Bang.⁹ He/She/It did not just set things up, as in the clock-winding metaphor that many Deists employed after Newton's discoveries. He/She/It is the total range of possibilities and impossibilities: the *Is* without which nothing would Be. That Being, once you think of what supremacy really means, must include every actual fact about evolution—the requirements and possibilities of locomotion, of flight, of germination, of mental complexities. How to walk on two legs was not invented by "us"; it was *discovered*, as was our passion for Truth, as part of Being. Everything that works was always *THERE*, waiting.¹⁰

It was that Being that laid down the infinitely complex conditions that created my pioneer ancestors who could "invent" and sing the hymn "Come, Come, Ye Saints" and the T. S. Eliot who could finally write the poem I quoted in chapter 3.

Does this mystically speculating Booth have visions and hear "voices"? Not at all. In fact—perhaps deflected by too much "Enlightenment" rationalism—I have had too many prolonged periods in life when none of the above thoughts

9. A group of scientists called neurotheologians are claiming these days that they have found in the brain the physical source of such ecstasies—physiological explanation of why religious quest seems never to be killed by scientific discoveries. Some write as if this neurological discovery shows that religious impulses are simply the result of evolution. My way of putting it would be "evolution *discovered* religion."

10. In my decades of speculation about how to define my God, the influences have been too many to list here—or anywhere. Rudolf Otto's *Idea of the Holy* was deeply influential when I was a missionary. Spinoza, especially with his *Ethics*, and Anselm with his ontological proof were among perhaps a dozen philosophers from Plato and Aristotle on to yesterday who deconverted me from the atheism I described in chapter 5. Various "process theologians," or "pantheists," especially Alfred North Whitehead and Charles Hartshorne, have come closest to full evocation of the God—or Allah, or the Eternal—whom I now worship.

even occurred to me. As I've reported, for a few years I was a sometimes proudly professing and more often surreptitious atheist. Even in my many periods of sincere private meditation, going beyond efforts of Deep Thought to what can honestly be called prayer, I have heard no "voices" proclaiming divine truths, seen no visions of divine personages. All claims to such immediate contact with the divine I still take as at best metaphorical or analogical.

But I did have one "sort-of vision," one that powerfully dramatizes both my picture of "the" truth and the necessity of plurality in any vision of Oneness.

Meditating one day, back in the 1960s, I was probing my Selves for answers about how, as a dean, I could deal with the various student uprisings, especially the conflict between my duty as an administrator and my sympathy with the students. Walking along Lake Michigan, hoping to calm myself down, suddenly I had a vivid image—not of the kind many report, when a voice speaks directly to the visionary, but a picture as vivid as a night-time dream—but with my eyes wide open. It was simply a transforming image of "the whole world" (a bit like that soldier's dream of Truth, Goodness, and Beauty more than twenty years earlier). I'm tempted to call it an epiphany—something like the "spiritual highs" that James Joyce labels in *Stephen Hero* (the early draft of *A Portrait of the Artist*)—but I don't see it as quite *that* spiritual.

I see, in full detail, twelve mountain peaks in a huge circle, each peak occupied by a white-haired, crouching guru in a flowing white robe (most of them, I'm embarrassed to say, were bearded males). Lightning flashes of truth, seemingly of twelve different "stripes" or "colors," are shooting out of all twelve minds, each mind flashing eleven different but genuine truths to each of the other gurus: truths about truth, truths about goodness, truths about beauty. All twelve are somehow receiving, taking in, never rejecting, the flashes from the other eleven.

So—multiple truths were flowing in all directions, in one sense not fully harmonized and never fully harmonizable, but all fitting into a scene in which everyone was communicating fully with everyone else. Each guru was taking in the flashed truths from all the others—practicing what I only now label rhetorology. That seemed to me then and seems to me now the ultimate ideal of human life. No one of the gurus has "the" truth; each one has only a fragment of it. No human being will ever totally grasp the One. But if we try hard enough, we can share diverse views of Him/Her/It.

Something like that image is what the attempt to write this book has reinforced. But I'm still emotionally gripped by other far less metaphoric moments of full harmony—not just the better hours when writing the book but

the moments that probing the journals bring to light. Somehow they extend the merely blissful moments with which this chapter began, taking them into harmony with every thought about life.

August 26, 2000, still in Wildwood, with ten more days before returning to Chicago

Saturday Phyll completed a demanding essay; I “edited” a next-to-the-last draft and found it so impressive that I was in tears at the end: wotta blessing to be married to a woman who not only does her kind of therapy, rescuing that adopted kid “Luis,” and then writing about it so beautifully.

So by yesterday morning, we both felt totally free to “do a morning Sabbath” according to our own definition: hiking in the mountains. Scheduled to meet Max [Dalby] and his second wife Marjorie for lunch in SLC at 1:00, we got up early, appraised what looked like a certainly rainy day, said “what the hell will it matter if we’re rained on?” and decided to do our favorite hike, up Timpanogas trail to a point we’ve always called “Phyllis’s Plateau.” Drove up toward the summit, still expecting more rain, and suddenly as the car climbed out of the mist we were surrounded with one of the most beautiful scenes ever: Wildwood below was totally covered with the radiant white clouds that had made us predict more rain. But above those clouds, where we were now, was nothing but a more brilliant radiance, every high peak, every leaf, every cove, every cliff dripping with the night’s rain and flashing in the rising sun. We did not need a camera to “capture that scene” forever.

As we climbed up the rather muddy trail, above Camp Timponekee (sp?), the bliss continued, both of us feeling that this is what we came for, this is what we *are* for. We hiked up two miles, amazed that our knees and hips and hearts were “taking it” (we carried two canes, mostly for me). Light lunch at the top, looking blissfully out over the still incredible glowing scene (including one moose below). Blissful kissing, spiritual ecstasy.

Viewed from the perspective of the emerging Book, all of that could be called total harmony; my Self-Splits were wiped away. This is what life is for, this is, to repeat, what we came for—to the mountains—to life itself.

Maybe some such moment could make the climax of the chaotic *LIFE* . . .

And now that epiphany does. Four years later, that still seems not just a *plausible* harmony: it’s the real thing.

Not quite yet The End



Phyllis, Kathie, and Wayne at home, March 13, 2005



Alison, Phyllis, and Wayne at home, March 13, 2005

This autobiography, in the works since before the turn of this century, was essentially finished by the beginning of 2005. In March of that year, Wayne was diagnosed with an unknown form of dementia. The course of his decline would make a long story, but it was relentlessly short; over a few months he had to give up one by one the things he had done with pleasure all his life. He died on October 10, 2005.