

### **Orientation Week 3 Reading:**

#### **LOK Ch. 17, Interpretation at the Core, pp. 137-144**

I hope that during this two week period you are looking from time to time at the sense of the self (your self) as having a history. The chapter that we will discuss in our next phone call is all about the sense of witness, and in the end it tells us that the self is the only real candidate for a witness who can guarantee the reality of the world that we experience. "Because the self exists, the world is real."

But what makes the self as such real? This is the question we ask when we look at our own past. Think for a moment about Descartes' famous statement, "I think, therefore I am." The 'I' that Descartes acknowledges is a self without a past. This is because our sense of having a past can only be based on our memory of having experienced that past (or perhaps certain external evidence), and memory can deceive us. But that self-without-a-past is not the self we care about, the one "impelled by its own needs and intentions." (p. 144) What is it that the sense of having a past adds to our situation? That is a good question to be asking as we go forward. We sometimes say that the past is gone forever, and in a sense this is true. But isn't the past also here with us, always?

This chapter marks a turning point in our investigation. We have been looking at how the past conditions the self, and at how our knowledge turns out to be based on past-centered models and understandings. We understand, at least in a theoretical way, how we are trapped in a world of our own interpretations, without any access to anything more real, more meaningful. And this in turn means we are trapped in our own patterns, with no real freedom to go beyond the limits we accept as "the way things are."

Now we are going to shift our inquiry. The inevitable answer to the concerns and questions raised in the previous chapter is this: "I'm here. I can do what I want to do. I can experience the world directly. That's just how it is, no matter what your analysis says." So we need to be ready to investigate that. And as the text says, that is like entering a different world. In some ways, it is an easier world to feel at home in, because it seems less theoretical and more "immediate." But because we have been looking at the nature of concepts, we know that this distinction, between theory and immediate experience, is itself theoretical.

I have been asking you for a while to be aware of your self in action. You may have found that this is a difficult practice. The self tends to fade into the background. Perhaps more accurately, the self is the background. It's a little like trying to always be aware of the sky. But there is a key difference. In a very fundamental sense (perhaps not the most fundamental, however), the sky does not change. But the self is always changing, from moment to moment, even while it insists that it always stays the same. Try focusing on that contradiction, or look in other ways. Can you really get familiar with your self? Can you bring it into the foreground in a way that may seem very strange and new?