

Week 6 LOK 279-302, DTS Ex. 4G, 4B

Transition and Orientation

We did not have time to go into the opening pages of the LOK reading for last week, so I will do that now. The themes here, though expressed in a different language, are similar to those in the reading from VOK, which we did discuss.

The chapter opens with an investigation of conceptual knowledge, and more specifically reason. Reason applies “the categories and distinctions” of descriptive knowledge, but reason cannot establish its own validity. In effect, our ability to rely on reason is an axiom that cannot itself be established. I am reminded of the famous quote by Einstein: “The most incomprehensible thing about the universe is that it is comprehensible.”

We can always answer that reason proves its value again and again in daily life, though we might wonder if this is truly as obvious as we imagine. Reason is good at solving problems that can be framed in terms of logic, but are those the problems, the difficulties, that shape our lives? There are many parts of our experience that seem inaccessible to reason; for instance, the realm of feelings and emotions.

The text turns next to another source of conventional truth: observation (what might be called an empirical approach). Here we start to see what is at stake. We are invited to apply a special TSK kind of inquiry, one that is ready to question not ‘what’ we know, but ‘the way’ we know. Relying on this approach, we can inquire into the act of observation—and also into reason, cause and effect, intention, and desire—without accepting as true the conceptual structures inherent in those ways of knowing. In effect, this will be an ‘imaginative’ inquiry, in the sense we discussed during the phone call. Here the point is made differently: we are entering the realm of the unknown.

If we are willing not to know, the ordinary limits on our knowing, including labels, words, thoughts, and positionings all become available for inquiry, which means they do not limit us. Knowledge comes alive. The connections with the theme of imagination in VOK should be clear. In both cases, we are “giving up unquestioning loyalty to the techniques and practices that we are already practicing in every moment.” (274)

However, all this will be possible only if we are willing to question our usual commitments, including above all our commitment to our own existence as a self. That is why I emphasized at the end of the phone call the need to look for places or occasions when we feel afraid, discouraged, anxious, confused, etc. It is one thing to look with clarity at neutral situations. It is another to be able to cut through the ‘gravitational pull’ of the positions that we identify as somehow central to who I am and what is happening to me. This is a challenge to the emotionality that holds us back. Let that challenge to emotionality, whenever and wherever it

arises, be the walkabout for the week. Don't be discouraged if a sense of being stuck remains: our commitments run deep.

The reading for this coming week continues with the theme of questions as potentially threatening to the self (279). It invites different ways to look at emotional responses, which are so often treated as the final word on the matter. The 'rain of questions' here is insistent. If you find yourself resisting it—refusing the invitation it extends—this is of course the place to question next. Are we willing to let “the familiar seem profoundly foreign?” (282).