

In the last unit, we started off with stories and ended with a focus on the self. It's a very natural progression, because the self is the one that makes sense of experience by telling stories and then inhabiting the stories it has told. No matter what we are experiencing, even if it's something as simple as seeing the flowers on the table in front of us or typing on a computer keyboard (not so simple!) we make sense of it in terms of some story. We 'say', or better, we 'know' that we are here, that we are seeing something, and that that 'something' has an identity that interacts in certain specific ways with our own identity. As one of the readings from the last unit said, in every moment we take a position, we posit a situation, and we impose meaning.

Now, the TSK vision tells us that this way of being limits our possibilities. Within the story we inhabit and the self-structures we impose, space can only allow certain kinds of 'things' and events and not others; time can only move from past to present to future, and knowledge is restricted to what the self can know and make sense of. TSK says that none of these limitations are inherent to who we are and what we could become, but they seem very real. So we set out to question this reality: to see how time and space and knowledge might be different from what we usually imagine.

The starting point for this inquiry in our nine weeks together this time is knowledge—knowledge understood in terms of time. To return again to the last program, the final reading for that program distinguished between descriptive knowledge and intentional knowledge. Descriptive knowledge describes the world into which the self emerges; it makes sense out of the way things are (include my own self-image or identity). It looks toward the past, in the sense that it describes what has come to be, what has arisen through a process that began at some moment 'before' now.

In contrast, intentional knowledge is all about the projects of the self: where I am headed, what I plan to do, etc. It is directed toward the future. Based on descriptive and intentional knowledge, we end up with linear time, moving along a line from past to present to future: conventional time, as known by conventional knowledge.

The reading for this week goes more deeply into intentional knowledge and shows how it inevitably leaves us feeling incomplete and dissatisfied. Once we rely on intentional knowledge, we commit ourselves to a way of being grounded in hope and fear, desire and dislike. The analysis of why this approach is doomed to failure is penetrating and well worth reflecting on. It raises the question of what alternative there could possibly be. Our explorations will lead us toward an answer to that question.

In connection with the reading, you may wish to work with the exercise at the end of the chapter: Object of Desire. If you were doing this as a formal exercise, you would visualize an object and work with that. But it may be more powerful to do the exercise when you find yourself desiring something in the course of your day. It may be something strongly desired, but it could also be the little flicker of desire that leads you to reach out and have a second potato chip, etc. The idea here is to get familiar with desire in all its forms. You could also do the same thing with aversion or dislike. For instance, what is the feeling that keeps you from doing some necessary chore?