

SELF-REALIZATION

And the Journey Beyond Ego

by

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Translated by Graham Rooth

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And the Journey Beyond Ego

Hubert Benoit
1904-1992

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Translator's Note

Benoit's original title for this book translates as 'Inner Realization'. He used the term 'Realization' interchangeably with others such as Illumination, Enlightenment, Self-Realization, Liberation, Wakening and *satori*.

It contains a distillation of his ideas on the topic, and the fourth section, published in 1984, is the last that he wrote on this subject.

A great deal has been written and taught about Self-Realization since Benoit died in 1992 and the concept is acknowledged far more widely in the West than it was in his pioneering days.

We have also developed an increasing understanding of the parallels between the emergence of these ideas in the East and what we know of the experiences described by Christian and Islamic mystics, including the alchemists.

However – as far as one can tell – these encouraging developments have not as yet led to an increase in the number of enlightened individuals in circulations, nor have the spiritual values represented by the concept of Enlightenment found their way into mainstream religious, psychological or philosophical discourse. They have not yet been assimilated into Western culture, which retains its strong bias towards materialism.

Benoit's own pioneering attempts to integrate Eastern ideas into his practice as a psychotherapist provide a valuable and illuminating

way of engaging with our great cultural divide between materialist and spiritual frames of reference.

In producing this digital version I am hoping to bring Benoit back into a discussion which he to some extent initiated in the 1950s, and which has not moved on in essence since then.

I am grateful to Anthony Grahame, Editorial Director at Sussex Academic Press, for his encouragement and support, and to my son Alex Rooth for his generous help with the design and production of this e-book. This is a revised version of *The Realization of the Self*, which was first published by the Sussex Academic Press in *The Light of Zen in the West* in 2004.

Readers wanting fuller access to Benoit's work might like to start with [*The Light of Zen in the West*](#). The [Wikipedia entry](#) also gives a good summary of his publications and of what little is known of his retiring life.

SELF-REALIZATION

And the Journey Beyond Ego

Introduction

This book is essentially about the human condition, the possibility of its metaphysical transformation, and the conditions on which this transformation depends.

You may be surprised to find that the book begins with ideas about the origin of the cosmos which are inspired by traditional metaphysics. However mankind is part of the cosmos and shares in its origin. So we will see in due course that traditional knowledge about these matters can shed unexpected and paradoxical light on human functioning (in other words, it contradicts current beliefs).

What interests us most – in our present condition – is what concerns us as individuals, and in particular what can deliver us from the painful form of slavery to which we are subjected.

So I hope that you will not be put off by the abstract metaphysical concepts with which this book begins, because you will not understand the nature of our present condition without them.

Part One - Metaphysical Considerations

1. Metaphysical Insights

Over the millennia people have sought to understand the nature of the universe. The most intelligent realized that we perceive everything within the constraints imposed by the structure of our sense organs and not as it is in reality. So they applied the term 'phenomena' (from the Greek verb *phainein*, to appear) to everything that they could see, hear, touch, etc., and then went on to speculate about '*That*' which revealed itself through these 'appearances', about the nature of the Invisible which manifested as the visible.

Many of these seekers, those whose metaphysical intuition was most highly developed, thought that the origin of all things was One, that a single Principle was the source of the multiplicity of phenomena, and that this multiplicity was its manifestation. This differentiation between Principle and Manifestation forms the basis for traditional metaphysics, the sacred science of what lies beyond the physical world.

The first texts we know of which deal with metaphysics in its pure form, traditional metaphysics, were compiled in India so long ago that we are unable to date their origin precisely. These are the texts known as the Vedanta.

2. The Validity of Intellect in the Domain of Metaphysics

Once we discriminate between Manifestation, what we can perceive, and the One Principle from which it originates, we are faced by a question: is reflective thought capable of reaching beyond what we can perceive, beyond what we can experience concretely? Our intellect can only know things through the medium of language, which is formal in the sense that it is composed of verbal forms, and is therefore clearly an instrument well suited to our knowledge of the

perceptible phenomenal world, which is itself also formal. But can we legitimately use our intellect to explore the non-formal metaphysical world?

I believe we can, providing we know how to treat the conclusions we come to in this domain.

We say that every word *expresses* something; and in itself a word can be likened to a piece of fruit from which the juice has been expressed, when what remains is the skeleton, the structural component which gives it its form. In a sense, every word is the skeleton of what it designates; it indicates, but does not show. Where the perceptible domain is concerned, words behave as though they portray what they refer to because memory has forged a link between the verbal skeleton of the word and the flesh of lived experience. But this does not apply to words expressing metaphysical ideas because we have never directly experienced in our lives what it is they refer to, so memory cannot alter their nature and they remain verbal skeletons. It is easy to look at a metaphysical text and see nothing more than an exercise in verbal juggling where the words have no true content.

Yet it is still possible to speak validly about the metaphysical domain. Though the words used do not refer to anything we can *represent* to ourselves, we are nonetheless able to *conceive of* their meaning. Intellect can conceive of what we cannot perceive. People reading metaphysical texts who are sufficiently endowed with *metaphysical intuition* will grasp their meaning through their verbal expression even though they cannot represent it to themselves. When Jesus says: 'He that hath ears to hear, let him hear,' he is inviting his listeners to understand what his words could only suggest; and when he says: 'Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed,' he is affirming that we can sense intuitively the self-evident truth of certain ideas which are accessible to the intellect but cannot be represented by any perceptible image. Metaphysical ideas can be dealt with using words from this domain, but symbols are also often

necessary, or parables, of which there are many examples in the Gospels.

Intuition, however, is a very individual faculty, so it is impossible for two people to have exactly the same intuitive idea. Such ideas present themselves but cannot impose themselves on everyone in the same way, and they cannot be demonstrated logically by starting from premises which everyone accepts, as happens in the physical sciences. So there will always be differences of opinion where metaphysical ideas are concerned and many people will consider them worthless.

Ch'an^[1] uses an excellent symbol, a finger pointing at the moon, which both shows us where it is and invites us to look. This is an allegory in which the moon represents Absolute Consciousness, which is non-formal and so inexpressible, while the finger corresponds to the formal presentation of the initiatory teaching, which can be expressed in spoken or written words. Ch'an has always affirmed the usefulness and even necessity of formal teaching. At the same time it has always warned its disciples against the all too human tendency to 'mistake the pointing finger for the moon' and idolise words and texts, in other words to believe that what they set forth is Absolute Truth.

So when you read any text dealing with metaphysical ideas, you need to be aware that nothing you read is true from the point of view of the Absolute. Every statement you read should be preceded by: 'Given the limitations of our understanding, this is how things seem...'

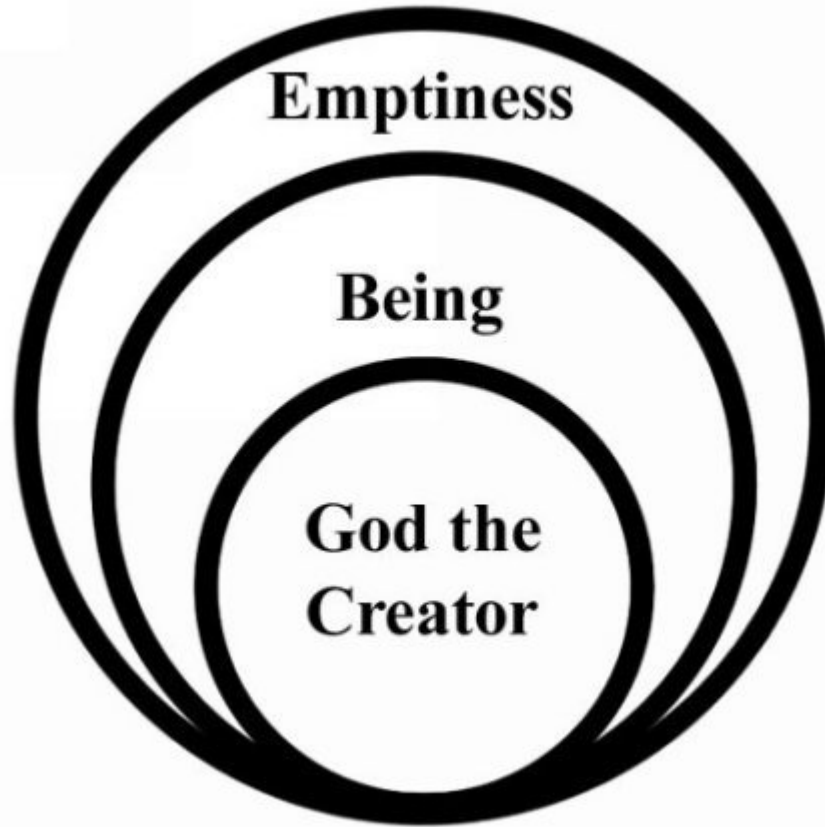
It is essential to be reminded at this stage that we should be aware of the dangers of language. There will be other reminders as we proceed, such are the dangers inherent in our use of words and the multiplicity of meanings we attach to them. This is particularly true in relation to the Absolute Principle: it is non-formal, beyond the domain of form, so no word, being formal, can convey an adequate idea of it. Nonetheless we can still investigate this subject without the use of

such terms hindering our work providing we have a metaphysical intuition of what it is that they are hinting at.

3. The Noumenal Domain

The central concept in traditional metaphysics is that of 'Being' as opposed to 'existence' (which comes from the Latin *ex(s)istere*, meaning to emerge, appear, be visible or manifest). But the Vedanta[2] goes beyond Being to an ultimate which it calls 'Non-Being' (in other words, the Principle and Origin of Being) or *Emptiness*. R.Guénon[3] defines Emptiness as 'the infinitude of possibilities of manifestation and non-manifestation' and Being as 'the infinitude of possibilities of manifestation'. So Being is not the creator, but the creative potential at a level above creation. Below Being is the Creative Principle, to which many names have been given: Brahma, God, Jehovah (from the Hebrew, meaning 'that which must not be named'), Allah, etc.

This hierarchy is not composed of three distinct entities, but represents three aspects of the Absolute, decreasing in fullness from Emptiness to the Creative Principle. I will often combine these three ideas into one, that of the *Noumenon*, which means 'that which can be conceived of but not perceived'. This term refers equally to Emptiness, Being, and Creator. The following diagram represents the situation schematically:



Metaphysical transformation of the human psyche is the individual becoming aware of identity with the Noumenon in its totality, in other words not just with God, but also with Being and Emptiness. Meister Eckhart distinguished God from the Godhead which for him was infinitely superior, and he affirmed that each one of us can realize our identity with the Godhead. Is not the liberated Buddha said to have exclaimed: 'I am infinitely superior to Brahma'?

I had to say a few words about Being and Emptiness, but from now on our focus will be on the Creative Principle while we consider the origins of the cosmos. Mankind is part of the cosmos, and the human state forms part of the multiple states of existence; my intention is to provide an account of the human psyche in its usual, non-liberated state, to indicate the obstacles to liberation and to show how we can reach our goal despite them.

I will now discuss the Noumenon in its inferior aspect as God the Creator. Then I will turn to the phenomenal world and we will see how Creator and creation are linked and the way in which this affects us as human beings.

4. The Creative Principle

God is the Unknowable and it is impossible to speak directly of him. But we can conceive of some of his infinite attributes.

He is *formless*: form reflects the spatial relationship between points and cannot exist in the noumenal domain, which is non-spatial.

He is not *located*: by virtue of his immanence he is present throughout his manifestation and nowhere in particular. Through his immanence and transcendence, in other words in his totality, he is the divine nature of man, his Absolute Reality. He is what we refer to as the Self to distinguish him from the individual self. Ch'an expresses this by saying: 'You seek God in vain throughout the whole cosmos if you do not seek him in man.' This is despite the fact that the Self is only present in man as a potential state before realization has been achieved.

He is *apersonal*: God can be described as the One Absolute Personality but, since our use of terms such as 'a person' and 'several persons' carries the implication of separateness and limitation, God has to be considered apersonal.

God is *limitless* or *infinite* in a precise sense. The term 'infinite' is used wrongly in mathematics, which belongs to the world of phenomena, because every mathematical value is limited. All one can do is pursue an unending succession of expanding or diminishing numbers, but this just amounts to pushing a limit further back without ever eliminating it. So one should really speak of the *mathematical indefinite*, but not of the infinite in mathematics. We can conceive of divine infinity but we cannot represent it. The liberated individual does not see the infinite Noumenon but knows that he or she is it.

God is *eternal*: this introduces the question of Time. We have two words available, 'time' and 'duration', which we tend in practice to use as synonyms with a clear preference for 'time'. India also has two words but they are used differently and kept separate: *Kali* is eternal Time and *kala* is duration. God *is* in eternal time; he had no beginning and will have no ending. In manifestation created things necessarily come into being and disappear, and their existence takes place in duration. But the total cosmos is eternal, with neither beginning nor end. God did not create manifestation on a particular day nor will a day come when he will stop creating it.

Duration consists of the past, the present instant and the future. Time itself is the eternal instant and we therefore sometimes speak of the eternity of the instant.

These attributes I have described apply to all three aspects of the Noumenon. I am now going to speak about the specific nature of Being as creator, in other words of God.

5. The Nature of God

'God' is the name we have given to the Creative Principle. It represents Being as it manifests itself. It is a mistake to speak of God's existence; God *'is'* and transcends everything in manifestation, which exists. As Hui-neng said, 'Not one thing is', in other words created things only exist but *are not*; only the Noumenon *is*.

The problem with the word 'God', as with all the other names which have been given to the Creative Principle, is that it evokes the idea of a person and so tends to personify the Metaphysical Principle and Origin. All religions have fallen into this trap and they are all misguided because of this. Every 'religion' (the word comes from *re-* plus *ligere*, to bind) invites us to bind ourselves to God as though God and man were two things, being or existing in the same way and only separated from each other as different aspects of the same nature. But since God is the Absolute Whole, nothing *is* except Him;

and if one thinks of mankind as *existing*, as emanating from God, it is inconceivable that it could make its way back to God against the direction of the creative outpouring by means of any kind of upward movement in direct relationship to the Divine Source.

We will see that it is possible for us to become aware that the immanent Self within us is identical to the absolute Self and that we are in that sense ourselves God. But *identity* is not the same as *relationship*, nor is it *union*. This mistake is very obvious in Christianity in which the individual stays other than God in Paradise, permitted only to contemplate Him, and indeed resurrected in his or her previous bodily form from the phenomenal domain.

When people believe in God, however subtle their image of Him, the God they imagine is an anthropomorphic figure, a being with all the characteristics of a human psyche, thinking, feeling and intending just as we do.

I have been reluctant to use the word 'God' in this book precisely because of the erroneous meaning we have given it in the Judaeo-Christian West. But I finally decided to use it in the hope that there are people for whom 'God is not dead', who will be able to restore this word to its correct metaphysical meaning.

God is 'That' who said to Moses, '*Ego sum qui sum*,' 'I am That I am (or 'That Which is').' The definition of God is there, in all its simplicity. We can express this in everyday language by saying that God does nothing except Be, that He is sufficient unto Himself in Being. Immutable, unchanging in Himself, He does not act; He is what Chinese metaphysics refers to as 'Non-action'.

What I have just said about God, God as He is and not God as He manifests Himself through creation, might well suggest the image of a supreme 'Thing', something fixed which, being in Itself and by Itself, would be hovering in splendid isolation above and unrelated to the movement of the cosmos. This mistaken view, like so many others, originates in the fact that language is constructed to indicate, study and understand the phenomenal world and its formal

appearances, the apparent multiplicity in which we experience the illusion of things as separate entities. In reality the Noumenon is the one and only Entity. It cannot be described as distinct and separate because there is nothing not included in it from which it could be distinguished.

Once again, however, we can use our intellect to conceive of the Noumenal world and enable us to speak of it. But you must remember that whatever I go on to say about God can only express intellectual views which are based on the ability to discriminate. Abstract ideas which rely on the process of discrimination to give them a separate identity should not be taken literally and thought of as referring to distinct entities. Nothing in a correct initiatory teaching, no phrase, can claim to be a fragment of Absolute Truth, because that is One, just as the Absolute is One. Absolute Truth is the intellectual attribute of the originating One, the Absolute Whole. It is the *Cosmic Mind* of Ch'an. Because it is an aspect of the Whole, it is not made up of constituent elements and so it cannot be broken down into fragments. But when we reflect on these matters we can only understand the issues they raise by analysing them into subsidiary concepts and the relationships between them.

So any phrase we use to express what we have understood intuitively is a product of this analytic process and the representation it provides is not endowed with Absolute Reality but reflects a reality which relates to the way our intellect functions verbally and formally. Though this reality is relative, it is not without value and we can build on it with confidence in our search for knowledge. This is how the finger accurately pointing at the moon gradually emerges, and it is the completion of this guiding structure which may one day enable us to experience the inexpressible reality of our Buddha nature, our divinity. This experience is strictly individual and it is incommunicable because there is no possible way of expressing it in words. As you read what follows do not imagine that I am describing the way things are in the Absolute, but simply that my account contributes to the formal knowledge which is a pre-requisite if one day there should

ever take place that sudden transcendence of our mind and the irreversible experience of the fact that we do not *know* Absolute Truth, but that we *are* it.

Please forgive me for these further precautionary comments but they are necessary before we explore what metaphysical intuition can reveal to us about the nature of Absolute Being or God within the constraints imposed by the use of language.

I have said that God is One, though One is not used here in a quantitative sense but to indicate the quality of uniqueness, the One Alone. The Vedanta prefers to use the expression 'Not-Two'. When we say that God is One we mean that there *is* nothing outside of or other than Him. 'One' means the Absolute Whole.

If we were only to imagine God as an all-comprehending Wholeness our intuition could add nothing to its revelation of Him as the One which contains the All. But God has infinite attributes or aspects and it is from this point of view that our intuition will teach us about Him to the best of our limited means. The divine attributes are not elements or parts of God as an aggregate since God is the All, not a total. They are divine aspects which present themselves to our mind according to the way we represent God to ourselves.

God is His Own Cause

Since there is nothing outside or apart from God, He is not caused. In other words nothing created Him. He is sometimes referred to as the *Uncreated*, though Spinoza^[4] said that He is His own cause, that He is *That whose essence necessarily implies existence*, in other words *That for Whom non-existence is inconceivable*.

God is Spirit

These two equivalent concepts of God as *causa sui* and *uncreated* lead us to see Him as *self-created*. In other words, above and prior to what we call Creation, the divine, originating source of creation is God Himself. 'Uncreated' and 'self-creating' are not incompatible

attributes: one means 'not created by anything else' and the other 'created by Himself'. This inevitably raises the question of how God creates Himself.

When we think about *how* things are created in general, there are two components involved: one of these comes immediately before the thing created appears, and consists of some kind of constructive activity. This activity at first sight seems responsible for creating the product. But 'how' also contains a second element which is *conceptual*. Creating something depends on having some prior idea of what is required and it is this idea which is really responsible for what is produced by the activity.

If God is conceived of as a Being sufficient unto Itself, Non-Acting, He is self-evidently not engaged in creation of a kind which would require some kind of intermediary activity. This is inconceivable because it would imply the existence of a mechanism between God and Himself. Divine Creation does not involve any activity of the kind we envisage in our own acts of creation. *It consists of a pure conception of the thing created*. God creates through thought without action. In other words, God is Absolute Consciousness aware of itself. God is pure and absolute spirit.

God is Absolute Consciousness aware of itself

I want to emphasize this point. When it is said that God is His own cause, this means that He is thought into being by Himself, and so is aware of Himself. Since everything is caused (created) in the mind of God, God is His own cause by the same process of divine conception. This line of reasoning leads us to the obvious conclusion that God must be absolute Consciousness aware of itself.

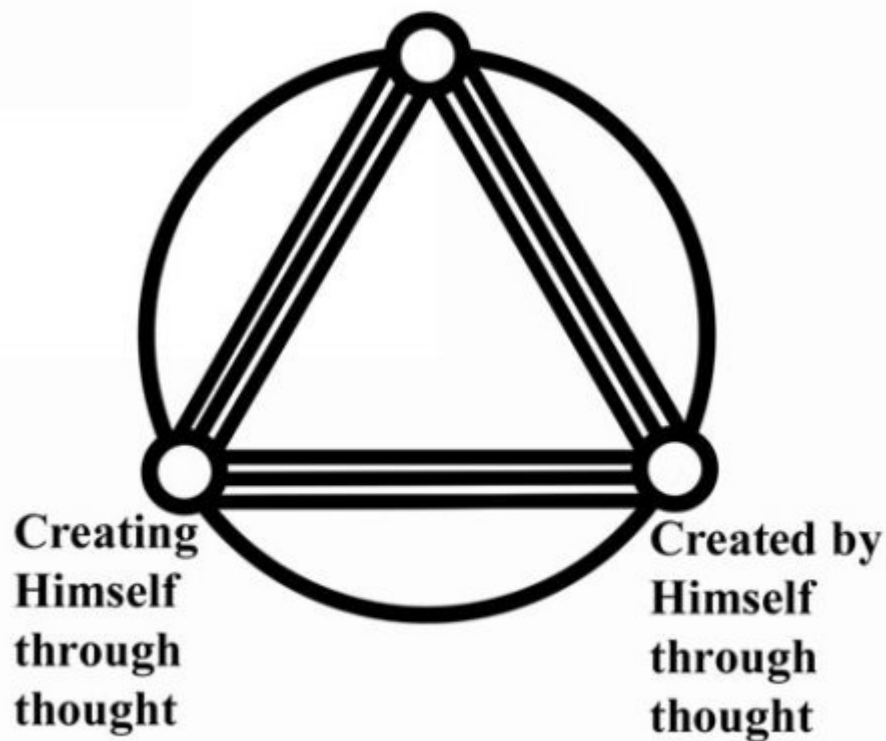
God is the only free cause

God is the unique self-creating cause from which all things take their origin. He is the unique *free* cause because he exists by the mere necessity of His own nature. So Spinoza said '*God is the only free cause*'. [5]

The Divine Triad^[6]

God causing or caused by Himself, and God bringing Himself into being or being brought into being by His thought illustrate the active and passive aspects of God. The divine Absolute, however, incorporates both aspects and conciliates them within a triangular unity. The following two diagrams clarify this:

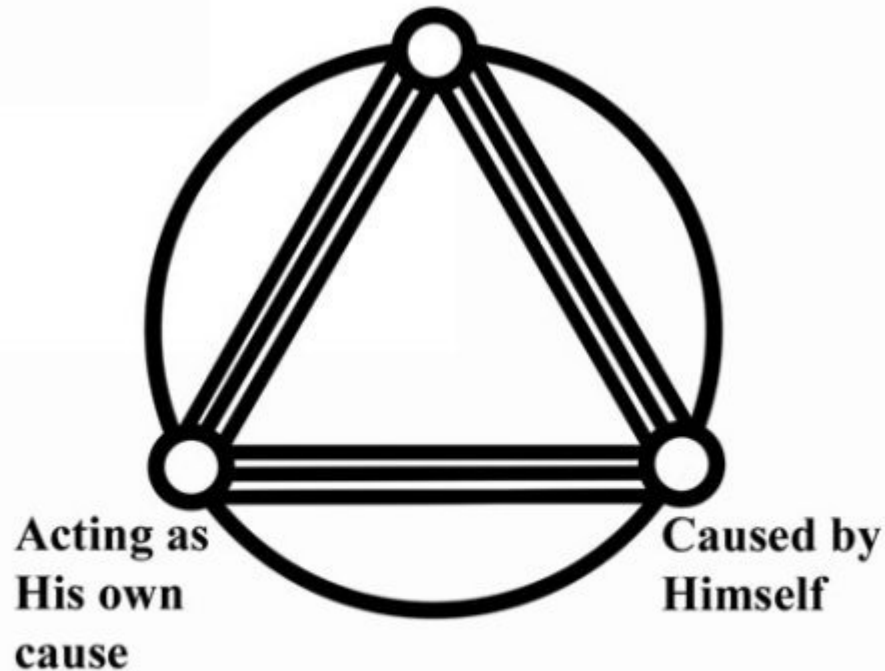
God as Absolute Consciousness



The annotations at the corners of these triangles require no further comment. The circles surrounding the triangles represent the fact that the Divine Absolute, which incorporates all Its aspects or attributes within Its unity, also incorporates all the active and passive aspects of God which are accessible to our understanding. These aspects of the One God are identical with one another inasmuch as they share in the divine identity. The divine Triad is grasped by our

minds as tri-partite but *exists* as One. The triple lines which connect the corners represent the algebraic triple line of identity ($A \equiv A$).

God as Absolute Consciousness



A third way of looking at the divine Triad is expressed by Spinoza when he says '*God loves Himself infinitely*'[\[7\]](#). It is difficult at first for us to understand his use of the word 'love' here because it is a word which evokes the human forms of love with which we are familiar: these are relative kinds of love because they have the relative nature of the phenomenal world in which they occur. God's love for Himself is an aspect of His absolute nature so Spinoza is referring here to Absolute Love. The question is, how are we to understand this?

We will start by considering what we imagine ideal love to be. Love is essentially *attraction*; the lover is attracted towards the beloved. More accurately it is love as a cosmic force which moves the lover towards the beloved. Where human love is concerned, the impulse

towards the other takes the form of wanting the other's existence, of wanting to confirm their existence (either by observing it or contemplating the idea of their existence), and of affirming their existence by encouraging and supporting it in every possible way. It is obvious that someone who loves like this wants for the other what the other wants for himself. Jesus said '*Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.*'[\[8\]](#) Two people in love often dream of becoming one. Identity being impossible in this situation, the force of love drives the lover to identify with the beloved.

We will now turn from the restricted domain of human loves and consider the attractive force of love as a general cosmic factor. The law of gravity or attraction is a cosmic law in which the idea of love as a generalised phenomenon is manifested. In French the word for a magnet, a piece of metal which attracts iron filings, is *aimant*, 'loving', just as if the magnet wanted to be reunited with the filings. All the celestial bodies are drawn to another, to be united, and it is only the centrifugal force of their rotation which prevents this happening.

Absolute love is love as an attribute of the divine Absolute. It is difficult for us to have an adequate idea of it because 'infinite' is an ambiguous word. When Spinoza speaks of the infinite love which God has for Himself, 'infinite' does not refer to its intensity because the word is not used quantitatively in this phrase. When 'infinite' refers to a divine attribute its meaning is always purely qualitative as in the Infinite nature of God and it has nothing in common with the mathematical indefinite.

This is a metaphysical fact which invalidates the idea of attraction, despite its fundamental explanatory power in relation to the investigation of love in the phenomenal domain. All attributes or aspects of God the One, because they share in this oneness, form a single Whole and each one of them, together with all the others, only make one Whole. They are all of the same nature, and this nature is always identical to itself. We may describe them in different terms but these differences only reflect the viewpoint from which our

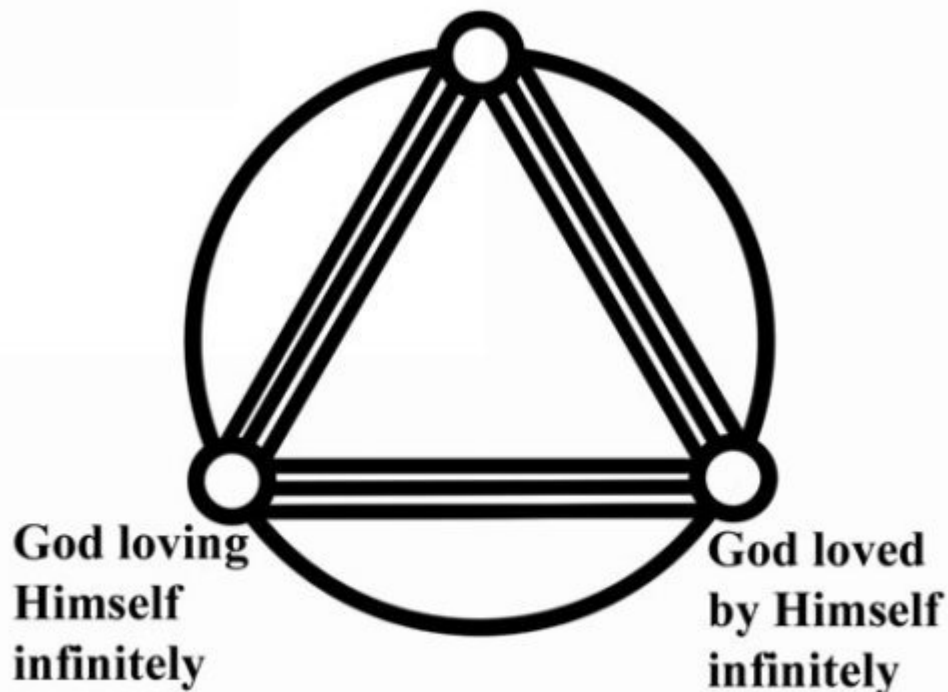
intellect studies the Divine Identity. So 'God loving Himself' and 'God loved by Himself' are identical though they are formulated differently. We can express this by saying that there is a metaphysically infinite attraction between these two aspects which are separated by our analytic thought processes. This infinite attraction is equivalent to identity and it re-establishes the identity of what analytic thought had artificially divided.

A similar process makes us draw a distinction between these two aspects and the 'God as Absolute Love' who conciliates them in their identity within the Trinity.

Our formal intellect functions in a way which makes these discriminations unavoidable and they are therefore artificial, but they are not unreal. They are real relative to how we are constructed and we are right to use them in our quest for understanding.

Divine love can be represented as follows:

God as Absolute Love



We will now consider the Divine Triad in general and the various modalities in which it presents to us. We have distinguished three terms – active, passive, and the Absolute which conciliates them – and these make it clear that God, Being which is sufficient unto Itself, is not a sort of inert and motionless block. At first we are inclined to approach God's non-immobility with the same ideas that we are used to in the world of phenomena, which reflect our experience. So we attribute a special role to each of the three terms of the Triad, with the active aspect engaging with the passive and the latter welcoming this movement towards it. Meanwhile the Divine Absolute would be keeping them together in absolute harmony.

This approach is strictly justifiable only if we were to introduce each description with the phrase 'It seems to us as if..' and only providing we do not assume that 'active' and 'passive' mean the same as they

do in the phenomenal world. From a strictly metaphysical viewpoint we can only speak of the *non-immobility of divine immutability*. If we also replace the negative 'Not-Acting' with its corresponding positive 'All-Powerful', we see God as Infinite Energy, originating, contained in Himself. When we then come to consider Creation we will see that this is in some sense a shining forth of this Divine Energy.

But we have to make the best use we can of the imperfect instrument which is language, and so we will speak of the active and passive aspects of God while striving to maintain a purely abstract usage and avoid the pitfalls inherent in imaginative representation.

The passive aspect of God presents as immobile and not dynamic. It is the principle underlying what I will later refer to as the *immanence* of God in all things created, immanence signifying 'residence', hence non-movement. The active aspect of God is dynamic and is the principle underlying what I will call God's *transcendence* in relation to His manifestation. Obviously if one thinks of God in Himself, dwelling in Himself, then He is not yet immanent or transcendent in relation to anything, but immanence and transcendence already form part of His attributes, latent attributes which will become actualised in cosmic Creation.

If we think of the active and passive aspects of God in relation to Creation, they can be referred to as masculine and feminine because it is the marriage of these two aspects which is the source of cosmic Creation.

Part Two - Cosmic and Human Phenomenology

1. Are Phenomena Real?

Manifestation consists of the totality of all phenomena. Let me remind you that 'phenomenon' signifies 'appearance' and that our perceptions depend on the structure of our sense organs. It can seem a small step from this to the claim that our perception is illusory since the thing perceived is illusory, and we may be tempted to take this step. In fact a number of people have misinterpreted the Hindu concept of *Maya* and maintained that phenomena are unreal. But how can we suppose that any kind of unreality could issue out of Absolute Reality? *Maya* certainly signifies illusion, but what is illusory? It is not the phenomenon which we perceive, but our unqualified belief in the absolute reality of our perceptions. The true choice here does not lie between *reality* and *unreality* but between *Absolute Reality* and *relative reality*. What I perceive and the thing perceived are real for me, relative to me. Even if I dream of a tiger when I am asleep, that tiger is not unreal, but is as real to me as if I saw a tiger when I was awake. After all we only perceive anything through the intermediary of the image which our brain generates when we see it or imagine it, and this image certainly exists. In our everyday practical life we have good reason to modify our behaviour in the light of the information provided by our sense organ

2. Why Does God Manifest Himself?

That Creation exists is an obvious fact not open to dispute, known to us through our senses. But we can reasonably ask why God manifests Himself. If we think of God in Himself, He is One alone, the All, and perfectly sufficient to Himself, so in other words He has no need for anything which might form an extension of Himself, as for instance the sun's rays represent a kind of extension of that body.

Midi là-haut, Midi sans mouvement

En soi se pense et convient à soi-même,

Tête complète et parfait diadème,...

P.Valéry[9]

Yet if Manifestation *is* not, it certainly *exists* as an emanation from Being and is intuited through the senses by mankind. Does the phenomenal world originate contingently or necessarily from God? Is it possible that Creation is dreamed up by God, and need not be?

God is One and, though the concept of God may incorporate the idea of three elements in the Absolute Principle and its active and passive aspects, these are reunited in Him by an infinite attraction or love. So the divine Triad includes an infinite noumenal energy which represents a potential outpouring of radiant energy, and every noumenal possibility or potential must of necessity be realized. This means that the divine outpouring of energy into the Cosmos which manifests it is necessary and not contingent. In other words, it cannot not be.

In any case the reasons people ask 'Why does God manifest Himself' are generally irrational, pre-supposing that divine and human psychology are similar! Why do we do things? Because we wish to do them for some reason or other. But it makes no sense to attribute any kind of wish to God because that would imply that He might lack something. Given that He is the All, the Whole, this would be completely illogical.

God creates Manifestation because His nature entails that he does so. This in brief is the best way of replying to a question which should not have been asked in the first place.

3. Two Ways of Thinking About the Cosmos

When we speak about Manifestation, we immediately think about the created things which we perceive around us. Because of our egotism we see ourselves as the masterpiece and sovereign of all creation.

We make use, often foolishly, of whatever we find for our personal convenience as if it had been created expressly for this purpose.

But Manifestation, which includes Mankind, is above all the way in which the Absolute Principle manifests itself, and we should begin by asking ourselves what its purpose is for God, what it is 'in His eyes'. This needs to be done before we investigate how we see it and what scientific research reveals. These are two entirely different points of view.

The Absolute Principle becomes manifest through the Universe or Cosmos. What it creates directly must be something absolute, perfect and eternal like itself. I will call this 'thing', which has the same noumenal nature as God, the Noumenal Cosmos^[10]. (I will deal later with how the phenomena contained within the Cosmos are created mediately, i.e. indirectly).

The Noumenal Cosmos is eternal. From our point of view, in which time has duration, we would say that it had no beginning and will have no ending, that it always has been and always will be, like the Principle of which it is the necessary Manifestation.

It shares in divine perfection. It is a perfect equilibrium among an indefinite number of disequilibria whose conciliatory principle it is. Everywhere and always the phenomenal world is in movement. All movement presupposes an imbalance of energy: waterfalls need a difference in level; electricity will only flow with a voltage difference, etc. All these states of disequilibrium occur everywhere all the time and the world could not survive as it does unless they were perfectly conciliated. We also observe that there are two forces at work in the world of phenomena, constructive and destructive respectively. If they were not in perfect balance the world would not survive, and yet it does. This is true of the eternal Cosmos, not of the created things it contains such as our little earth, which appeared one day and will disappear in due course on some other day.

So in God's eyes Manifestation is the Noumenal Cosmos, perfect and eternal. It is a divine attribute, an aspect of noumenon. It is

Being as it is manifested. We can now understand that God's view of His Manifestation is totally different from how we see it as humans. For God the Cosmos is His own splendour, formless and one.

For mankind the Cosmos is an immense aggregate of phenomena among which we ourselves are numbered. We are only able to perceive created things through our sense organs. The mistake most people make is to believe that things as perceived *are absolutely*.

Manifestation may be His absolute splendour as far as God is concerned but it is radically different for mankind. Ch'an illustrates this with an ingenious allegory^[11]: it invites us to imagine a piece of brocade made of silk and embroidered with gold and silver. The material has two surfaces, front and back, which are quite different from one another, and it symbolises Manifestation presenting its right side to God and its wrong side to mankind. Its right side is divine splendour but the wrong side is composed of threads which seem to be arranged chaotically – it represents the life of human beings as a 'tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury.' However in places the threads on this side show beautiful and terrible forms next to one another. It is a chaos whose contrasts are particularly striking from a moral perspective, ranging from the sadistic torturer to the saint who devotes her life to the service of others.

What does the human intellect consider things to be made of? The constitution of matter has been investigated in increasing depth by contemporary scientists but to consider their discoveries further would take us outside the present frame of reference. I will simply comment that Hindu sages maintained that the Universe is entirely composed of unevenly distributed energy waves and vibrations. This energy originates in the infinite, divine source, the energy potential mentioned earlier which is the infinite Love or attraction of the divine Triad. In the atom (a misnomer since this manifestation is indefinitely divisible) what scientists refer to as 'particles' are minuscule energy fields whose wave-like trajectories depend on the underlying presence of the *Ether*. One cannot imagine waves formed in nothing, though this is what light waves appear to be when they cross what

scientists call empty space. Even so the ether must be present if waves are formed. Sound waves require the presence of air which itself is composed of atoms ultimately dependent on the ether. The Ancients thought that the ether was a weightless, indefinitely elastic fluid and, when I reflect on this subject, I find myself concluding that they were right. There is no empty space anywhere in the universe just as nothing neither is nor exists.

4. The Genesis of Creation

God the Absolute Creator can only be the direct or immediate source of something that is also absolute, and is one of his infinite attributes, such as the Noumenal Cosmos which is an attribute of his made manifest. Indirectly He is the Creator of all phenomena through two intermediaries, one being the *Purusha-Prakriti* duality and the other the Law of Inter-conditioning. They are both noumenal in terms of their origin but act in the phenomenal world as relative principles and they are responsible for the appearance and evolution of its constituent phenomena. So there is a break or discontinuity between the noumenal origin of these two intermediaries and their action in the phenomenal domain. This same discontinuity can be seen between the noumenal Cosmos, and the manifold phenomena it contains. There has to be this discontinuity because there can be no conceivable progressive transition between Absolute Reality and relative reality.

It corresponds to the *abyss* which the old masters invited their disciples to throw themselves into.

Note that this abyss-discontinuity is only an obstacle when viewed from below upwards, not the other way round. It is the final obstacle which stands in the way of our realizing our divine nature but presents no barrier to divine omniscience in relation to the phenomenal world in its entirety.

5. The Purusha-Prakriti Duality

The phenomenal world is founded on duality. According to the Vedanta two relative principles, *Purusha* and *Prakriti*, give rise to all created things. They are relative principles because they act in the phenomenal world of relative reality. Purusha is active and masculine; Prakriti is passive and feminine. They correspond to the concepts of *essence* and *substance* in scholastic philosophy[12]. A thing's essence is the totality of characteristics which make it what it is. Substance is what underlies or sustains the thing created ('substance' comes from *sub-* + *stare*, to stand). It can be compared to the screen onto which a film is projected: the screen underlies the images and they would remain invisible if it were not there. Purusha initiates the formation of an object, but forming an object entails the use of Prakriti: without this primordial duality nothing could be formed.

There is a well-known Hindu parable about a potter shaping clay into various objects. The potter symbolizes Purusha, the active force which changes; the clay symbolizes Prakriti, the passive force or inertia which resists change. Purusha models the clay into all kinds of bowls, cups and vessels. The human eye can only perceive shapes and colours so it sees the shapes and colours of the objects, but not the clay itself. It is the same for everything we refer to as substance. Prakriti is undifferentiated primordial substance. It is self-evidently invisible and it remains invisible in all its various modalities.

God gives the Purusha/Prakriti duality the task of creating things in their suchness in each instant, where 'Time and eternity intersect', in Louis Lavelle's[13] phrase. The Law of Inter-conditioning, however, is responsible for creating things in durational time, in other words for their becoming.

I will spend more time on this law than I have done on the Purusha/Prakriti duality because it governs the evolution and destiny of created things to which we attach particular importance when they concern us or our interests.

6. Divine Indifference

Before we examine the creation of things in durational time and the law which governs this, I want to return to the question of what creation is for God, what it is 'in His eyes'.

I have already said that Creation for God is His splendour manifested (the right side of the piece of embroidery) and that it is in this respect direct or unmediated Creation. On the other hand, what we see is the underside of the embroidery and this constitutes indirect or mediated divine creation. God is indeed the only true Creator of the phenomenal world but He is so through the intermediary action of the Purusha/Prakriti duality and the Law of Inter-conditioning. These are mechanisms which have their own dynamism and they carry out the task for which God has made them responsible.

This does not prevent God knowing the whole world of phenomena in Eternal Time. How does the Absolute Reality of God see the relative reality of phenomena? To Absolute Reality it is all the same in all its aspects. The side that we see, the embroidery's under-surface, presents different aspects to us, some terrible, some marvellous. God knows them all but they are all equivalent to Him and they do not move Him in any way. For Him nothing has a special value: as Ch'an says 'Everything is the same.' The divine perspective alone is real. This is how we should understand divine indifference, as a non-differentiation between phenomena which mankind's dualistic discrimination regards as opposites.

We represent things to ourselves in such a way that the images formed affect us. So we attribute something similar to God, making the assumption that He can be affected by and experience feelings, though this makes no sense. Then how do we reconcile this with talk of *Agape*, God's infinite love for mankind? Let us not forget that we have two natures: one of these, the self, is phenomenal, while the other, the Self, is divine; and the Self which is God loves Himself infinitely. We have already seen that this love is not a feeling but it is how we refer to the identity which unites the divine Triad into One. The distinction between Self as a potential state and the realized

Self has a subjective meaning for us but has no objective meaning for God. So Jesus said: 'For, behold, the kingdom of God is within you.' (Luke 17.21)

7. The Law of Inter-conditioning

People with enquiring minds want to understand what gives rise to the phenomena they observe. One's first impression is that phenomena are produced by other phenomena in a chain of cause and effect, but this is an over-simplification. For a start we must use the word 'cause' correctly if we are to understand the question properly, and this implies using it differently from how we do in ordinary, everyday language. For the present discussion the correct meaning of 'cause' is '*Source and Origin*' or '*Primordial Principle*', so I am using it to signify the Absolute Principle, the Source and Origin of the Noumenal Cosmos, the unique cause of the created Universe. Mediaeval scholasticism distinguished the first Cause from innumerable 'second causes' but this is an unhelpful terminology. It leads one to believe that the Cause and causes share the same nature, whereas the first is noumenal and the rest are phenomenal, and their two natures have nothing at all in common.

I will avoid this difficulty by saying that phenomena inter-condition one another sequentially in a series of chains, which is compatible with the Buddhist phrase 'This being so, that happens' (and not 'This produces that'). This Buddhist formulation gives a good account of conditioning in the phenomenal domain but we will see shortly that this conditioning is really an *inter-conditioning*. The Buddhist *Law of Dependent Origination*[\[14\]](#) makes the same point.

I want to emphasize that there is a radical difference between the Cause-Effect relationship and that which exists between conditioning and conditioned phenomena, because the word 'causality' which is commonly used in this context introduces confusion by implying that a phenomenon could be the Cause of something else. We can only clarify matters by restoring to the word 'Cause' its true meaning of One and Only Principle or Unique Cause. I write Cause with a capital

'c' to indicate its noumenal or absolute nature and to remind you that it stands for That which we in the West call God.

In the relationship between Cause and Effect, the Effect is an attribute of the Cause, sharing in its Oneness and Absolute nature. This is how the Noumenal Cosmos is a divine attribute because it is simply the Unique Cause manifested.

On the other hand, when there is a conditional relationship between phenomena, i.e. when one phenomenon is dependent on another, the two phenomena are not identical in nature. Two phenomena may resemble one another but they are never identical; and conditioned phenomena which depend on particular conditioning phenomena never occur in their absence.

A simple example will clarify the relationship between phenomena: if I light a match under some dry straw it will set fire to it. It is obvious that setting fire to the straw depends as much on the nature of the straw as it does on the flame provided by the match. If I had tried to do the same with an equivalent piece of iron it would not have caught fire: so two conditioning factors were involved in inter-conditioning this particular phenomenon.

We can go further up the chain of conditioning than the match and the straw because they are both the end result of numerous conditioning factors. In fact all phenomena in the space-time continuum are interrelated. One way of visualizing this important point is to imagine a net like those used by fishermen, but one which stretches towards infinity in all directions and dimensions. Each one of all its innumerable knots is continuously affected by every movement that sets the other knots in motion, while its own movement affects all the other knots in return, and so on. *'If Cleopatra's nose had been shorter, the whole face of the world would have been different.'* (Pascal[\[15\]](#))

This is how the coming into being of created things is governed. The conditioning factors are often so many and so subtle and hidden that we attribute events to 'chance', and use this word to draw a discreet

veil over our irremediable ignorance. But it does not refer to anything real: everything which happens does so because it has to. At the roulette table, once the croupier has set the roulette wheel and ball in motion, the winning number is already chosen. The ball cannot come to rest at any other number. It is not a question of chance versus necessity: there is only necessity and the choice lies between its foreseeable and its unforeseeable workings.

Every phenomenon occurs through the operation of a single Law which I call the *Law of Inter-conditioning*. (I prefer this expression to the *Law of Interdependent Origins* because 'origin' in this context might be associated misleadingly with the Originating Principle i.e. the Unique and Only Cause). This Law can be thought of as the mother Law of all the numerous daughter laws, such as those of chemistry, physics, thermodynamics, biology, psychology, etc. which are the ways in which the mother Law is expressed in the human mind. This Law is a thought and creation of the Divine Mind and it must be distinguished from its practical operation, just as one draws a distinction between the legislature and the executive powers which put its laws into effect. It might be compared to an unimaginably complex computer created and programmed by the Divine Mind which puts the programme into effect impeccably and so governs the whole phenomenal world and does this in Eternal Time.

'Law of Inter-conditioning' is an awkward phrase and I will often use the more practical term Demiurge in its place, though not with the same meaning as that of the original Greek. Demiurge is derived from *dēmiourgós*, which meant 'craftsman, artisan', from *dēmios*, 'public', and a stem *erg-* 'work'. In Platonic philosophy the term referred to a kind of Creator God. I am going to use it as synonymous with the Law of Inter-conditioning. The Demiurge can also be thought of as a representative created by God with the task of governing the conditions whereby phenomena arise, but it must be borne in mind that this image should not be anthropomorphized. The Demiurge is a mechanism, a sort of robot which carries out its

work impeccably, distributing good fortune and misfortune and doing so without the slightest hint of benevolence or malign intent.

Where the two intermediaries between the Creator and the phenomenal world are concerned, in other words the Purusha-Prakriti duality and the Demiurge, it is only the latter's role which concerns us human beings. I am not particularly interested in the fact that Purusha-Prakriti has created me as a specimen of humankind, but what does concern me are the incidents, accidents and misfortunes arranged by the Demiurge which lie in wait for me in the days ahead. This is the territory where my hopes and fears are engaged, for I do not know what is programmed for me and is therefore fated to happen to me.

'Fated' is a word which conjures up the idea of *passive fatalism* and the fear that we might be reduced to that state by what we know of the computer-like Demiurge. The same can be said of the Islamic saying '*What is written is written*'. But I might just as well be conditioned to face difficulties with fierce determination and that too would be inevitable because it would also have been written. If you understand fate in the right way there is no reason to be passive.

It is very difficult for us to accept the role of the Demiurge because of the immense value we attach to what we call 'free will', our freedom to exercise choice. This is such an important question that it needs to be considered in greater depth.

8. Our Total Conditioning as Human Beings

God is immanent in everything created but transcendent to His phenomenal manifestations. There is one exception to this divine transcendence and that is the human being. The divine nature (the Self) dwells integrally in every individual human (the self) but as a general rule it is only present as a *potential state* and remains so throughout the whole of life. Only in rare cases where very special conditions are present does the Self pass from a state of possibility to one of realization.

Although the Self is only present as a potential, its effect is to make man the only intellectual animal on earth. Intellect endows us with many possibilities which we sometimes make good use of but all too often waste or abuse.

After this brief introduction concerning human nature, let us consider how the Law of Inter-conditioning operates within it.

We are conditioned by three groups of factors: hereditary, biological and circumstantial.

Hereditary Factors

We are conditioned by these from the moment of conception. When we consider how the chromosomes divide and what genes are passed on, we are inclined to assume that the process is governed by chance, though this simply reflects our ignorance of conditioning factors which are beyond our understanding but must be involved in producing these phenomena.

The innate or congenital essence of a human being is determined in this way. 'Essence' suggests the essence/substance pair, Purusha/Prakriti, but in this context its meaning is less general: Purusha refers to all the characteristics which make a created thing what it is in the instant now, but innate essence means all the characteristics which an individual being will manifest in the course of normal development. It determines those features that gradually emerge as persistent character traits as well as differing levels of ability across the range of human activity.

The issue of ability or talents is particularly important in relation to intellect. This is a very complex field because the intellect is a kind of optical device with numerous functions which are relatively independent of one another. On the one hand there is intellectual intuition which is a direct and unmediated kind of vision and can be sub-divided into various levels of ability depending on the domain in which it is operating; and then there are a whole number of intellectual operations such as deduction, induction, differentiation,

etc. which are intermediary in the sense that they provide the intellect with conclusions acquired indirectly rather than directly. As far as getting rid of false and illusory opinions is concerned, what matters is the ability to understand psychological mechanisms. This starts from observing oneself and others and leads on to the interpretation of the mechanisms observed and the discovery of the general laws governing the human psyche. This whole process is illuminated by the revelations of traditional metaphysics.

This is not the place to develop this topic further, but I want to clarify the difference between theoretical understanding and Knowledge. I have used these terms before but now I want to indicate what an enormous difference in meaning there is between them. Only Knowledge in this special sense is able to get rid of what the Buddha called Ignorance, the source of all our suffering. Someone who has an accurate and exhaustive theoretical understanding, and nothing else, is learned but ignorant, and will go on living according to all the illusory opinions which he should in theory have unmasked. Understanding of this kind can be expressed formally and can be spoken or written about; this is not the case with Knowledge, because illusory opinions abolished in reality are not replaced by correct ones. True Knowledge is inexpressible because there is no longer anything to express. How could one express the solution to an illusory problem? One could only say that there never had been a problem: there is no solution to a false problem, so how could it be put into words?

Innate essence is like a seed which will, providing it grows normally, produce a particular plant. But how this plant grows will vary according to the environmental conditions.

Biological Factors

Biological factors affect the development of the human psychosomatic organism from birth to death, with its component organs showing characteristic changes at particular stages. This is sufficiently obvious not to require further discussion.

Environmental Factors

The human psycho-somatic organism develops for about twenty years and then it stops growing. Thereafter it may go on to achieve its potential or it may undergo changes for the worse. Early childhood, when the child is weak from every point of view, is the time when unfavourable circumstances can present the greatest obstacle to the unfolding of essence. When the young being grows up in an unfavourable environment, one which negates it, potential aspects of its essence are inhibited to a greater or lesser extent and psychic mechanisms develop which do not belong to essence and are appropriately called neurotic. Since no one's circumstances are ever entirely favourable it is fair to say that every human being is more or less neurotic, though the concept of true pathological neurosis only applies at a level where the impairment is sufficient to hinder adaptation to what we know as 'reality'.

When we examine the part played by the Demiurge it is particularly relevant to consider it in relation to our three functional centres. Let me remind you where and what these centres are:

- the instinctive centre is situated at the lower extremity of the vertebral column and it controls the mechanisms which we share with animals.
- the affective centre lies in the cardiac region at the epigastric level and governs our affective mechanisms.
- the intellectual centre is situated in the brain, where it controls conscious and unconscious thought.

The phenomena which arise from these three centres are the inexorable result of the demiurgic Law and the individual freedom which we think we have does not correspond to anything in reality.

Instinctive Centre: This is already partially active at birth. The question of free will does not arise at this point because awareness is lacking.

Later, at puberty, erotic desire awakens - obviously not in response to the individual exercising free choice in the matter.

Affective Centre: This is also in operation from very early on in life. Here it is also obvious that our feelings, our likes and dislikes, are not decided on the basis of freely made decisions. When we love or detest something, we do not do so because we have made a free decision to do so. We can conceal our feelings but we cannot generate them at will. Everything affective is subject to inter-conditioning.

Intellectual Centre: What about our minds? Are we at least free and unconditioned in our thoughts? The answer has to be 'no', no more than we are in the other centres.

Whenever we are engaged in some automatic activity or are doing nothing, our imagination always plays an imaginary film which is most often about something completely useless and therefore silly. It is seldom about anything useful or beneficial. In every case, ideas *come* to us: we do not create them freely.

I am well aware that we can direct our attention to a particular subject and bring it back despite associations which have a tendency to distract us. But why do we engage in introspective activity like this which requires some tiresome effort on our part? We do so because our wish to resolve some problem or other prevails over the disagreeable quality of the effort we have to make. All wishes are affective, in other words they are conditioned.

We can strive to obtain mastery over the mind and achieve inner silence in this way. But fighting against the mind's activity like this is obviously itself the expression of an intense desire to escape this enslavement; so once again we find that the source of these efforts is affectivity, and totally conditioned affectivity at that. In other words, what we discover is another form of bondage.

The problem of *choice* is connected to how the intellect functions. When we have difficulty choosing between two solutions, we subject

them to intellectual scrutiny and analyse their pros and cons (at least we do so if we are not slaves to our impulses). Intellect can function independently of affectivity, with the same impartiality towards our own situation that we could show towards someone else's, functioning in other words like a disinterested judge. When we consider matters in this way and exercise our potential for this kind of deliberation, does this amount to what we popularly call 'free will'? Note that I am only referring to the deliberation that precedes the choice. So what happens at the actual moment of choosing? If one of the alternatives will produce a reasonable and agreeable outcome while the other will result in something unpleasant and disagreeable, we are conditioned to choose the former. But there are other situations where one choice seems reasonable and disagreeable while the other is attractive but irrational. If we opt for irrational pleasure, our choice is obviously determined by affective factors and these are not free. If we choose to do what is rational but disagreeable, we can have the impression that we have freely come to a decision and freely put it into effect. But we can only believe this if we fail to recognize a conditioning factor of great importance, which is that we need our self-image to be morally pleasing. Our moral narcissism can urge us towards the satisfaction we derive from doing our duty and prompt us to avoid acts of moral laxity which would be a stain on our image and cause us to suffer the pangs of remorse. This concern we have for our image can be seen at work in many situations. An example would be someone who does something unreasonable because this is what they want to do: their intellect is then influenced by emotion to produce dishonest rationalisations which legitimate their choice by lending it a false veneer of rationality. Does not every one of us want to be 'in the right' about what we do?

If we are honest with ourselves and search in good faith for the origin of our acts, we will always find an affective component at work and beyond that we will detect the influence of conditioning factors which operate at the demiurgic level.

The emotions in general tend to have a dynamic effect, in the sense that they are associated with feelings of attraction or repulsion. The intellect, however, simply delivers information and, providing it is operating honestly, tells us what the right and useful course of action must be without taking our feelings into account. Its sphere of activity is that of information-gathering and deliberation but it is powerless when action is required. This is where our emotions take over and these, of course, cannot in any way be free.

What we call 'will' is in fact the resultant of the forces of desire, and these may be numerous and indeed at times may be in conflict with one another.

Is there anything to be surprised at in this? Because the Absolute Self is only present in us as a potential state, the person that we are, our psycho-somatic organism, amounts in practice to an aggregate of phenomena. We have already seen that all phenomena in the Universe are subject to the 'mother' Law of Inter-conditioning through its intermediary 'daughter' laws. Realization of the Self is called 'Liberation' precisely because we are not free until it takes place, but remain slaves of the Demiurge.

To summarize, ordinary people, those in whom the Self has not been realized, which means practically everyone, can reasonably be compared to puppets in which body and mind are controlled by an unimaginably complex system of wires. Since the wires are invisible, we cannot help being convinced that we do what we do because we choose to do so freely and think freely about whatever we chose to think. Readers may be somewhat shocked by what I have just said about 'puppets' and they may be inclined to dismiss it, but nonetheless this is how things are.

The presence or absence of free will is a question of fundamental importance which is obscured by a failure to discriminate between interior and exterior freedom. Everyone wants to be free from oppression by others, and this is something which can be achieved in principle. What about freedom in relation to our interior

mechanisms? In the days of slavery, slaves had to do as their master commanded but considered that they were free to think silently just as they wished. But, though they thought the thoughts that came to them or that they chose to think about, were they in fact free to create their own thoughts? The reality was that their minds were conditioned. However we look at this question, however hard we try to find some example of physical or mental activity free from conditioning, we will always be disappointed if we think things through honestly. We will always find that conditioning has played a part in governing our behaviour.

If this is the case, how can we still believe in 'responsibility'?

9. The Role of the Demiurge

I have compared the Demiurge to a computer programmed by God and it carries out this program rather like someone given an assignment to carry out. The task in question is infinitely complex and we will only deal with the aspect which concerns us humans.

Its mission involves the whole of humanity and I want to consider this in the light of the Hindu concept of endlessly repeating cycles of creation and dissolution, each of which is divided into four phases. According to René Guénon the whole of recorded history has taken place in the fourth and last phase, the *kali yuga*, of the current cycle, and we are even now close to its apocalyptic end. Guénon's book *The Reign of Quantity and the Sign of the Times*[\[16\]](#) deals with this subject and I cannot recommend it too highly, though the reader is warned that the first part of the book takes for granted an acquaintance with traditional metaphysics. When the *kali yuga* has ended, a new cycle begins which starts with a golden age.

Man is a most complex creature. In the first place he consists of a psychosomatic organism similar to that of animals (with the huge difference that the human psyche contains an intellect which animals lack). We usually refer to this psychosomatic organism as 'Ego' or 'self' with a small 's'. It belongs to relative as opposed to Absolute

Reality and it is this ego or 'me' with which the individual develops an illusory sense of identity. But the Divine Noumenon also dwells within corporeal man. This is our Absolute Reality and we refer to it as the *Self* as opposed to the *self* or ego.

The self is obviously individual while the Self is universal. When we reflect on the Self as it is objectively in itself, its universality is apparent. However, we see individual differences in the Self-realized personality (an exceedingly rare phenomenon) as it is expressed in different people. The fact is that abrupt or sudden Self-Realization requires many years during which changes take place in the individual's conditioning and eventually give rise to a very special form of conditioning ('spiritual death') in which the potential for Self-realization is actualized into Realization itself. As far as the Self is concerned, there is no difference between being in the state where Realization is a possibility as yet unfulfilled and being Realized: they are both one and the same state. The difference is purely subjective and consists of an upheaval in the psyche of the individual in whom this state of Illumination suddenly arises.

But we must move on from this topic since the role of the Demiurge does not include liberating man from his bondage to demiurgic conditioning. Its primary task is to bring about and maintain life. It implants in man the conviction that life, even a wretched life, is a treasure of inestimable value. It is the source of hunger, thirst, sleep, and erotic desire (conservation of the species). I am well aware that some people maintain in good faith that their death is a matter of indifference to them. But they imagine death in the abstract and if they were threatened by imminent death in reality they would be deserted by this relaxed attitude which they claim to possess. The fear of death dwells deep within the human psyche. If we really succeed in imagining the destruction of our own body, we experience an organic feeling of horror which is so powerful that such a thing, quite irrationally, seems unlikely or at least improbable. Because we are conditioned like this, each of us is compelled to protect our life. When the Demiurge acts on us in this way, it is not however working

against the possibility of Illumination, because, as the proverb counsels, *'primum vivere, deinde philosophari.'* [17] It takes an exceptionally wise person to say as St John of the Cross did: *'Come, Death, so stealthily that I do not sense your approach lest I be restored to life by the joy of dying.'*

Our attachment to life goes hand in hand with our *compensations*[18]. I want to take a closer look at these, and what it is they compensate for. Although in the vast majority of people the Self is only present as a potential state, there is an intuitive awareness of this potential at an unconscious level. There is evidence for this in the fundamentally unsatisfactory nature of our compensations, whatever they may be. We always want more: if money is the object of our desire, we will not stop with our first million but strive to acquire another, then another, and so on. Don Juan has never conquered enough women. The politician deceives himself when he believes he would finally achieve fulfilment by becoming head of state. These are just a few examples but they make their point. What is being compensated for in these and other cases is the absence of that Divine Beatitude which is eternal and indestructible. In the depths of our being we all yearn for this. But our response is not to try and discover the diamond in its purity; instead we chase without discrimination after all kinds of fakes and substitutes in the belief that they represent our supreme value. It is an endless pursuit, and all the time the pure diamond is within us. In this respect we are like someone riding around on an ox and looking for it all over the place.

Since ordinary people are ignorant in the sense that they take illusory beliefs to be true and since they consider other people's compensations satisfying and desirable, they expect to find in false substitutes that Beatitude which is ultimately their true need. If we take Christians, who among them lives according to the words of Jesus, that only one thing is necessary and that is the Kingdom of God within?[19] Ordinary people spend their lives playing and hoping

to win; in that respect they remain children and only the realised individual is an adult.

I would like to return to the role of the Demiurge and the nature of its mission by relating one of the allegories told by Gurdjieff[20]:

The earth was struck by an enormous meteor whose impact caused part of it to break away. Gravitational forces caused both the fragment and what remained of the earth to become spherical again, thus forming the earth and moon as they are at present. The Great Cosmic Individuals gathered together to decide what radiations the earth would provide to nourish its satellite as the sun nourishes the earth. They realised that a very special kind of radiation was required which could only come from human suffering. 'This may be true,' commented one of the Great Cosmic Individuals, 'but a creature which can only suffer, and is unable to hope for anything else, will simply kill itself.' So the council decided to graft a special organ onto the base of the human spine. This was a compensatory apparatus whose function was to blind us to our situation with the result that we wrongly accept false substitutes in place of our sole true need.

What would our fate be without this compensatory device? Because the Divine Self is hidden from us, being only present within us as a potential state, and because we do not know the way to Realization, we would suffer the pain of divine abandonment which is the anguish of Hell itself. The present situation is that we are all in hell but do not realize it, because we cannot recognise the difference between various forms of imitation jewellery and the pure diamond itself. (Rodin[21], who was writing about sculpture at the time, said to a friend: Whenever I have to write the word 'sculpture' I feel like writing 'God'.)

Because of our compensations and our own blindness, we are able to experience what we call pleasures, joys and even happiness, though our experiences of happiness are quite different in nature to Divine Beatitude, which we cannot conceive of. We also tend to experience inner states as though they were eternal, so we often

forget that these substitutes are always transient and we spend our lives beneath a whole cluster of Damoclean swords held up by fragile threads.

The demiurgic programme is only concerned with the phenomenal world and has nothing to do with the Realization of the Self. God has not instructed it to either favour or hinder Realization. What happens is that it endows some individuals with an intelligence that is lucid and independent of their emotional life, and is associated with an intense need for truth and an ability to develop an accurate, intuitive understanding of metaphysical issues. These characteristics are seldom found in the same person. Most people in our present kali-yuga epoch are distracted by the Demiurge's programming into compensatory activities and beliefs in which they imagine that the meaning of their lives is to be found. Realization remains an unfulfilled possibility.

Parallels can be drawn between the idea of a Demiurge and the myth of Satan. There are really two aspects to Satan, one relating to God and the other to Man. Towards God he acts as a faithful servant: in the book of Job, God summons him and charges him with the task of testing Job, which Satan does in many ways, fulfilling his mission impeccably. In relation to mankind, Satan is the Deceiver, the Negater, and the Tempter who turns us away from the true path by offering us compensations - what Pascal referred to as '*divertissements*'[\[22\]](#) - such as gold, sensual pleasures, power, etc. This is the Satan who leads us all in a dance, Satan the Prince of this world. The Demiurge behaves in this respect as if it wanted to prevent Realization of the Self, yet it is God, or the Self, which has programmed it in this way. To us this seems incomprehensible, but it cannot be understood from a human perspective. This would require an understanding of the cosmic order, which we clearly do not have. Everything that exists in the Cosmos has its cosmic reasons for existing there and this also applies to the human condition.

10. God and Man

Omniscient God knows everything which has been, is and will be on this earth. All phenomena, as I have already mentioned, possess relative reality and are equivalent in the eyes of Absolute Reality. God loves infinitely the Self which is in each one of us since the Self is God Himself: the pronoun 'Self' is used to distinguish this from the 'me' or 'self'. In the eyes of God the 'me', the self, is equivalent to any other created thing. What we call good and evil are equivalent for God, as are all the opposites generated by our dualistic viewpoint.

We relate everything to ourselves and we think of God as some infinitely superior person, but a person nonetheless. When people pray, they imagine that God listens to them and takes account of their prayers. Most prayers take the form of requests as if God controlled events in response to emotional considerations, even though He is free of all affect. Imagine a mother whose beloved son is seriously ill, who begs God for her son's recovery. The fact is that her son's death or recovery will depend on biological laws which are themselves expressions of the Law of Inter-conditioning and the outcome will determine whether the mother is filled with grief or joy. But in the eyes of God, the boy's recovery or death and the mother's joy or grief amount to exactly the same thing. The Cosmos is like an enormous machine whose operation God is watching. He may observe a tiny wheel turning in one direction while another turns in the opposite direction. The directions in which they rotate are equivalent, both participating equally in the machine's perfect activity.

Human morality is simply a set of aesthetic responses. Deeds may be beautiful or ugly but what we call sins and virtues are equivalent: the word 'sin' should be replaced by 'error' and it is undeniable that error is a human characteristic since we are conditioned to get things wrong. Merit and demerit merely correspond to different kinds of conditioning for which man the puppet is in no way responsible. Hitler was conditioned to destroy while someone like the Curé d'Ars[23] was conditioned to be constructive, but in this perspective

they were both equally not responsible for what they did. God is amoral, pure Spirit without affective involvement in phenomena, for whom the beautiful and the ugly are equivalent.

The kind of petitionary prayer mentioned above, where a request is made of God, is useless. However it can influence the person praying in the sense that they become more hopeful and this subjective emotional effectiveness is all it can achieve.

When prayers are 'granted', believers are convinced that their prayers have succeeded. When on the contrary they are unsuccessful, they think that the ways of Providence are unfathomable but this will not stop them turning their thoughts to prayer again on some other occasion.

There is another kind of prayer, contemplative or meditative prayer, where the individual contemplates and adores the divine perfections. This kind of prayer can lead to ecstasy, but that is a transient state in no way comparable to Realization. It is still a compensation, though the most perfect of them all. So it is still an obstacle to Realization, though one which will disappear providing Knowledge continues to progress. It has the advantage, however, of ensuring unshakeable faith. Instead of being something which is only *thought*, the divine splendour is *seen* in a quite new light which is devoid of forms and colour. It is of infinite intensity though the eye of spirit can sustain its brilliance. It is not beautiful, it is Beauty itself. One might contemplate it for ever and never tire of it.

The illusory idea that there is a direct relationship between man and an anthropomorphized God is found in the belief that God rewards good deeds and punishes evil ones even in this life. We must all have heard expressions such as 'What have I done to God that He should send me such trials and tribulations?'

We must not forget the abyss which separates the Noumenon from phenomena. Despite all their striving towards God, believers cannot cross this abyss. At best they achieve a mental image and, though it may be considered perfect in every respect, it is still formal in nature,

belonging to the phenomenal order. Beliefs which are founded in emotion can never give rise to Realization.

Part Three - The Agony and Death of Human Egotism

1. A Critique of Systematic Methods

The Self which dwells within us can make the transition from being a potential state to the Realised state. Realization occurs abruptly and instantaneously, but it must be preceded by changes in our conditioning which take place over time. The length of time required will vary from individual to individual.

At the beginning of its existence, the little child is still incapable of metaphysical intuition so it cannot avoid falling into what Buddha called Ignorance. 'Ignorance' as used by Buddha does not refer to a lack of knowledge or understanding but to a mass of deceptive convictions which are taken to be obvious truths. How, for instance, can the child not fail to take it for granted that his organism, his body and mind together, constitute his true identity? How could he not believe in his freedom to obey or disobey, to do good or evil in keeping with the moral values of his family circle, and to deserve praise or blame from them accordingly? It is simply not natural to observe in one's own person the workings of a totally conditioned puppet.

To progress from these early conditioned states to the state which enables Realization to occur requires some very considerable changes.

The first stage in this development occurs if, as an adolescent or adult, the individual obtains a correct initiation into the theoretical understanding of traditional metaphysics. In this, as subsequently, the most favourable conditions are provided by a Master who has already obtained Realization. In practice nowadays the search for such a Master and teaching would be unlikely to succeed because of the lack of *true* Masters. There are many who pretend to be such in

India and Nepal... but taking on this role is all too tempting. A further difficulty is that Realization is not susceptible to proof. Fortunately a great deal of written material has survived which has preserved the Vedantic texts and the teachings of the first Ch'an Masters.

Bodhidharma^[24] arrived in China during the sixth century A.D. and his teachings were assimilated and adapted by his pupils according to the style of Chinese thinking, which was influenced by the Taoist religion. Between 600 and 800 A.D. the teaching remained pure, based uniquely on the understanding that mankind should abandon its illusory beliefs. It remained faithful to the Buddha's teaching which affirmed that all human suffering arose from Ignorance and that Realization could therefore only arise when Ignorance had been dispelled.

Unfortunately, and this is an implacable law, all initiatory teachings gradually lose their true meaning, as indeed have those of Jesus Christ and Mohammed. They become debased until they amount to no more than a mass of superstitions. This is what happened to Ch'an Buddhism which arrived in Japan via Korea and fragmented into a number of different sects.

About two centuries after Bodhidharma arrived in China, the Ch'an Masters observed with sadness that their pupils were engaged in endless wrangling over theoretical points. They wanted to re-direct this activity in quite the opposite direction and this they did by advising their students to engage in the practice of the *koan*. Here the task involves understanding a cryptic dialogue. For example, the question 'Why did Bodhidharma come to China?' was answered by 'The cypress in the courtyard', and the student's task was to fix his attention on this strange dialogue until he had understood it. The koan cannot be resolved by the rational intellect. It acts as a kind of wall and the student's mind continually comes up against it, sometimes for as much as eight consecutive hours without sleep. The purpose of the koan is to exhaust the subtle cerebral 'musculature' engaged in this mental work, just as carrying a load without respite would exhaust the muscles of the body (always

assuming that the student has the courage and determination to go through with this kind of torture). The outcome is that the intellect reaches a point where it can no longer function, and has transcended the domain in which the rationality versus irrationality dualism applies. Since this dualism is the aspect of the mind's habitual functioning which prevents access to Absolute Truth, transcending it enables the Truth which is beyond all form to become accessible. For a moment formal thought is extinguished and the mind functions as though the Self were awake; and the Self does awaken and the student has an experience of Divine Beatitude. But this achievement is transient because the vital principle re-establishes the brain's ordinary modes of functioning, together with all its habitual conditionings. The Self returns to its previous state of merely being a possibility. Even if the student were to begin the process again by using some other koan, the results would always be temporary.

The practice of using koans is still recommended today. A young woman told me of her reception in a Zen monastery in Japan. She was told right away that the intellect was of no use and that there was nothing to be understood intellectually, and she was given a koan to solve. People who achieve a temporary pseudo-liberation are in any case few in number, and she was not one of them.

The koan was the first of the *methods* which must have been recommended in order to obtain what the Japanese call *satori* (Realization), and there are many others. An old Zennist squatted before a wall for thirty years. Getting no results, he sought out Hui-neng, the sixth Patriarch, who convinced him in a few sentences that he had wasted his time.

Shen-hui^[25] recommended *thought without dwelling*, meaning that the student should not let the inner monologue develop in relation to any particular subject. Unfortunately it would take too long to explain why this approach is bound to fail, because to do so would require a lengthy account of the complex mechanisms responsible for our dreams.

Many different methods were, and still are, recommended. They involve fixing the attention on a single, unchanging object such as one's breathing and are referred to as *meditation techniques*, though it is a little strange using the term 'meditation' in this way given that it really means a state of deep reflection, of profound thought. In the West today another recommended method is practised under the name of *Zazen*, in which the student is required to adopt a very precise posture. This has to be observed and maintained faultlessly, with the obvious effect of making it more difficult for the mind to wander. None of these methods is more likely than any of the others to lead to Realization but some at least have the virtue of promoting greater mastery over one's behaviour and a greater degree of inner tranquillity.

I am also open to criticism in this respect: towards the end of my book *Lâcher Prise*[\[26\]](#) I recommended a method which I called 'divergent language' and in due course this turned out to be as ineffective as all the others. The mistake, which is all too human, is to imagine that there is some procedure, some method, some kind of 'trick', and that this is the direction in which we should be looking.

We should rather listen to Hui-neng:

I, Hui-neng, do not know of any method;

My thoughts are not suppressed;

The objective world excites my mind forever,

And what would be the point of making Illumination come to ripeness?

Illumination has ripened in Hui-neng but he has not *made* it ripen by some kind of systematic work. He has not *done* and there is nothing to *do*.

I want to say something about *hatha yoga* despite its having come to us from India rather than the Far East, because it is enjoying a certain vogue over here. I was talking to Professor Suzuki one day

and the topic of hatha yoga was raised. Professor Suzuki said to me: 'You have to be human to think of such bizarre postures. Look at animals: none of them do anything like it.'

It is perplexing that people who seek Realization have such an uncritical predilection for systematic methods. The fact is that people who are brave enough to think by themselves are unusual. Take an everyday example of someone who has lost something in his flat: often he will prefer to turn everything upside down rather than sit down and ask himself calmly where and when he used the missing object and where he might have left it. We seem to be very reluctant to think things over by ourselves. We will read a whole number of books uncritically and attend lectures which shed little light. We will go to them because they are given by an Oriental, without taking into account the possibility that they may be worthless. If Realization was guaranteed for everyone who had moved ten thousand paving stones over a distance of one kilometre, then no doubt a lot of people would set to work at this agreeably stupid task. But working things out on one's own is a different matter! This might be explained as a fear of being mistaken and getting things wrong. But our error would be revealed sooner or later and so there would be progress towards the truth as a result. So what is there to be afraid of?

I have mentioned and criticized some methods but what is far more relevant is to recognize that any method whatever which our intellectual mechanisms can conceive of will be produced under the control of the Demiurge. No method could therefore function outside the Demiurge's realm, which is the realm of phenomena. No method could change 'puppet man' in any way other than into a puppet whose conditioning may be different but who is still located on the phenomenal side of the afore-mentioned abyss, without ever being able to cross it.

Recommending a method also suggests that there is an *ascending* path to follow, a progressive route where one improves every day and advances towards Realization, like some traveller who would find Shangri-La at the summit of some mountain, providing he had

the requisite courage and perseverance. As one climbed, so would life become progressively truer until finally one attained that True Life of which Rimbaud spoke when he wrote: 'True life is absent; we are not in the world.' This is to forget what Jesus told Nicodemus:[\[27\]](#) 'In truth I say to you, if a man does not die, he cannot be reborn.'

The true way, which I will shortly be considering, is a *descent* which leads down until, at the lowest point, the individual touches and takes possession of the *axis or tree of Heaven*, and is then borne aloft into the infinite heights of the Void.

2. Theoretical Understanding at the Intellectual Level and Knowledge as a Living Experience

What part does the intellect play in the inner developments which precede Realization? There are those who maintain that pure intellect has no part to play, and is in fact more of a hindrance than a help. For them only Knowledge experienced by the whole being is fruitful. There is some truth in this claim but it raises the question of how this trans-rational Knowledge would emerge if ignorance had not first been dispelled in the rational domain, and if unchallenged beliefs based on illusory and misleading convictions were still held to be true because at an unconscious level they were considered unchallengeable?

No, the ordinary, everyday opinions which surround us have a paralyzing effect and it is absolutely necessary to subject them to a critical analysis. The dangers that lie in theoretical intellectual understanding are not intrinsic to it but arise from its misuse. Purely intellectual understanding must be penetrated and worked through until its essential truths have been mastered. Among these is the truth which shows us that we are somnambulistic puppets by nature, dreaming our lives away.

When we finally reach this point, we observe that the way we live our lives does not accord with our new clarity of mind and we realise that the situation will never change as long as we continue to approach

the problem posed by our condition through the intellect. Intellectual work is necessary but after a certain point it becomes an impasse. Our yearning for the True Life is then transmuted into a questioning attitude without form, in which we are like a question mark which is neither preceded by a question nor, as yet, followed by an answer. We live our ordinary lives as though they were the true koan and this mysterious 'thing' for which we yearn is felt to be beyond the everyday.

The difference between Knowledge as a living experience, which will be an instantaneous accompaniment of Realization, and purely theoretical understanding is *qualitative*. It is not that the Intellect becomes less active, but that it no longer operates as a philosopher. It simply functions in the awareness of each lived instant.

3. Dying in order to be Re-born

Ch'an and Zen literature is disappointing on this subject, giving accounts of a number of cases of Realization which are very different from one another, and it often has little if anything to say about how individual Masters achieved their liberation. This is in keeping with the ineffectiveness of all techniques and methods. If this were not so, liberated individuals could give an account of how they set about achieving their goal and how long it took them to attain it.

All we can claim to know is that people destined for Realization are in the first place, at some point or other in their lives, free from all compensations^[28] and wholly devoted to this single objective. Their minds do not ever seem to be distracted towards anything else. This detachment seems to be something which they all share, but the paths they follow are extremely varied. One thing, however, they have all experienced and that is failure or a succession of failures if they have pursued a number of different ways. This is the *downward way* of repeated failure culminating in the final failure. Here I would like to quote Dag Hammarskjöld's remarkable intuition about this:

‘Drawn into the labyrinth of life, I come to a moment and a place where I understand that the way leads to a triumph which is a catastrophe and to a catastrophe which is a triumph...and that the only possibility of our being raised to a higher level lies in the depths of humiliation.’ [29]

Death of the ego and rebirth happen simultaneously. The moments which precede this ‘death’ are the same for everyone who undergoes it. The inner state is one of complete humiliation, fully accepted; in other words a vision of oneself being nothing, not being. Thought becomes unimportant and stops. Emotional activity also ceases because the individual experiences two feelings of equal intensity: on the one hand there is despair about the possibilities open to oneself, on the other there is total confidence in the Self in whose favour the little self is abdicating. This is the point where the individual finally stops *doing* anything towards Realization while desiring it with all his being.

Let me quote a Zen saying:

‘Satori comes upon us unexpectedly when we have exhausted all the resources of our being.’

The resources referred to are the powers with which the Demiurge endows us, and they are constantly directed towards earthly happiness, compensations, affirmations of self, and success. Together these forces amount to the desperate centrifugal orientation which directs us into the labyrinth of life. They also ensnare the intellect when it sets itself up to develop practical ways of resolving the enigma of the human condition (these are the methods and techniques discussed earlier).

The instant when all the resources of our being are exhausted is the instant of Realization. Here is an account from the Ch’an literature: *‘A taut thread, a light touch, and then an explosion shakes the earth to its foundations; everything hidden in the spirit explodes like a volcanic eruption or bursts forth like a flash of lightning.’*

The labyrinth in Greek mythology can be used as a symbol to help one understand the individual's evolution towards the death that precedes rebirth, though not without some important qualifications. [30] Our labyrinth is horizontal and built on the surface. It has no exit on this level. The only way out is at its centre, where the Minotaur is. It goes vertically downwards through the middle of the Minotaur and it corresponds to what traditional metaphysics calls the axis or tree of Heaven. [31] Right from the moment of birth we are in this centre but without the ability to be aware of it. With the emergence of intellect, we start to explore the external world in search of compensations. Sooner or later, without exception, these centrifugal excursions turn out to be dead ends. As each of these possibilities is ruled out, the subject is gradually driven towards the centre. For the Greeks, who readily humanised their gods and deified their heroes, the Minotaur was killed by Theseus. But in our symbolic and metaphysical labyrinth, the Minotaur devours Theseus. It is this that enables Theseus to rediscover the axis of Heaven, and he is then drawn up to the Divine Absolute and freed from the prison which the labyrinth represents. From our usual point of view, this account of exploring the labyrinth and going from one dead end failure to another before finally being devoured by a monster has to be a *descending* path. The way to infinity passes through zero.

In summary, at the microcosmic level Realization is indeed a strange revolution: in the ordinary, unrealised individual, the affectivity that dominates all our behaviour is under the control of the Demiurge; Realization effects an about-turn, bringing the intellect, which has now become Cosmic Mind, above affectivity, and giving it infinite bliss. The Demiurge is now limited to controlling the animal or vegetative part of the individual. It is the disappearance of the whole dominant ego structure of the self that justifies the term 'spiritual death'.

The length of time required for the inner evolution which takes place from the first desire for Realization to the final moments of dying into rebirth is extremely variable. It may only have taken two years for Sri

Ramana Maharshi, but it is much more usual for it to be a matter of decades. Perhaps this is what Buddha had in mind when he was asked to name the greatest virtue in man, and replied that it was *patience*.

The first stages in the *descending path* are characterized by the compensations becoming less attractive. When we picture ourselves engaging in some compensatory activity, a voice within us immediately says: 'And then what?' or 'What is the point?' and the illusory pleasure we have considered is no longer attractive.

As the psychic screen on which our compensatory fantasies are projected begins to lose its opacity, what the eye of spirit perceives beyond it is profound night, meaning that fundamental yearning arising from our abandonment by God. This is what the crucified Jesus expressed when He cried: 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?'^[32] To speak in Plato's terms, it is when we are born, when the soul falls into a human organism, that everything happens to us as though we really were abandoned by God.

As we begin to become aware of this fundamental yearning – and this is a slow, gradual process – we feel a new sadness which seems to be without cause. We try to discover its source, but either we cannot or we come up with reasons which are out of keeping with our deep sense of sadness. Besides, if we are to make use of this suffering^[33], we have to start by purifying it, which means clearing our mind of all this associated material. This will not have the effect of diminishing the presence of suffering and it means that we will be able to experience it consciously, *without thinking*. It is a diffuse disquiet, experienced throughout the whole being, in the whole body, and sometimes localized to some extent at the level of the heart. What makes this initial purification possible and ennobles it is the understanding that *all spiritual suffering, whatever its degree, expresses our yearning for God*. Those who live in a state of liberation, in whom this yearning is objectively no longer present, are invulnerable to suffering, and this is precisely because the source of suffering is no longer present.

This is true acceptance of suffering, which has nothing in common with resignation. It is perfectly expressed in the words of Jesus: '... not my will, but thine, be done.'[\[34\]](#)

When the individual reaches the depths of *the night of the senses and of the spirit*,[\[35\]](#) feelings and thought are moving towards a state of complete cessation, which will, once it is reached, release Realization.

When a disciple asked what is the ultimate word in Ch'an Buddhism, his Master replied: 'It is YES.' The attitude of ordinary people when they are faced with suffering is one of 'No,' and they fight against their situation. When they do so, their struggle is often ineffective, and they bring more suffering on themselves. Let us learn, in all circumstances, to have an attitude of 'Yes,' and to accept our misfortunes as equably as we do our good fortune. Happy events provide very useful moments of release, but let us also be grateful for and experience to the full our misfortunes, sufferings and boredom, since only by maintaining this attitude will we enable our egotistical condition to suffer the blows which will bring about its eventual disappearance. This approach will allow work to take place within us at an unconscious level which our intellect would be quite incapable of undertaking, and which can only be accomplished by the Self.

What do we mean by our misfortunes? We rightly draw a distinction between *psychological suffering* and *physical pain*. People who are liberated are no longer susceptible to mental pain, but will still experience physical pain. However they will not experience it in the same way that ordinary people do: they feel it but are indifferent to it. This indicates that physical pain affecting ordinary, non-realized people is always accompanied by mental suffering. In effect what people want for themselves, and even feel entitled to, is a permanently pain-free body and, when this demand on life is thwarted, they fight against their situation, experiencing mental pain in the process because their protest is often powerless to achieve anything.

I want to focus on mental pain in particular. Why it should present is less easy to understand than is the case with physical pain where sensitive nerves are irritated and their activity communicated to the brain and hence to consciousness.

In order to explain mental suffering we need to go back to Hamlet's fundamental question, to that *uncertainty about the nature of our being* which dwells in each one of us. We rightly have an intuitive awareness of our divine nature, of the Self which is our Absolute Reality, but at the same time our self-definition is construed in terms of ourselves as separate persons, and in this respect it is an obvious and enduring fact that we do not possess any divine attributes. Nonetheless our intuition of our own divinity is irrefutable because it is correct (despite the fact that the Self only exists as a possibility in our ordinary, unrealized state). The simultaneous presence of these two conflicting facts within us leads inevitably to our uncertainty about the nature of our being, and once the problem has taken this form, it is insoluble. Yet we go on seeking to resolve it all our life in favour of our claims to personal divinity, in other words by means of successes which provide the self with affirmation.

Unrealized people make continuous internal and external efforts to be 'happy' and strive after compensations. If they are struck by misfortune, they either rebel more or less ineffectively against their lot and in the process suffer intensely or they resign themselves and take refuge in an attitude of silent, passive protest which results in less suffering and allows the passage of time to give some relief.

When we suffer psychological pain, this indicates the presence of disharmonious energy within us. This is characterized by a marked bi-polarity and it develops into a vicious circle, forming a loop between emotion and imagination. How this happens is that energy escapes into the imagination and triggers the release of more disharmonious energy from the affective centre. The effect is that this energy is not available to be used for achieving Realization unless the vicious circle, the feedback loop, is interrupted at the level of imagination, in the conscious mind, and so no longer forms a

mass of formal energy, like a foreign body which should be rejected by the organism. The raw material from which this polarized energy is derived is a portion of the individual's own homogeneous vital energy. Once I begin to devote my attention to what my body feels, without accompanying thought, the energy of suffering loses its disharmony and no longer tears me apart between two poles. It becomes available to the Self which draws closer to its awakening as the self's claims to its own divinity grow less.

If we know how to make use of our suffering, the self becomes less conceited and importunate. Our inner state moves downwards in the direction of that fundamental yearning to which Rimbaud alluded when he wrote:

'O mille veuvages

De la si pauvre âme...' [\[36\]](#)

We also begin, with increasing frequency, to experience the inclination to feel in our body that malaise which our sense of being abandoned by the divine induces. Our compensatory mechanisms usually disguise this malaise, as though it lay in a direction which should at all costs be avoided. But this invaluable malaise is easily revealed if the gaze we direct towards it is clear and free of bias. It is invaluable because it will gradually lead us towards that fundamental yearning which is a hell that suddenly transforms into paradise the moment it is reached. The way to the Divine Kingdom within us must truly be preceded by the illusory fact of its absence; and the way of true Happiness, infinite and eternal, must pass through the loss of all hope in it.

All our sufferings are humiliations. Once they are accepted, they are transcended in true humility, in visions of our self having less and less *being*. Then, just as we finally see it as being nothing, the Self is realized and wholly takes us over, revealing that, without having been aware of it until that moment, all along we had been the Self in the full splendour of its Absolute Reality.

Part Four - Humility and Deliverance

The following pages were added in January 1984 as a supplement to the original text published in 1979.

1. The Search for Happiness

Everyone seeks happiness. In the vast majority of cases, their search takes place in the phenomenal world, in other words in the domain of what ordinary people take to be the only reality. Metaphysics is seldom referred to in books or conversation nowadays, and ordinary people take it to be a kind of intellectual game, a form of activity which has nothing to do with reality and is completely unproductive. Anyone who makes an attempt to study metaphysics is simply a dreamer whose mental health is questionable.

Yet all of us, in the depths of our psyche, yearn unconsciously for an absolute happiness. For want of anything better, the happiness we seek in practice is relative and partial and quite insufficient. People often make do with this if they are 'philosophical'. There is a proverb which expresses this: 'You can't have everything.' The English have another saying which expresses a more extreme pessimism: 'Life is just one damn thing after another.'[\[37\]](#) The partial happiness which we can experience may at times be very great, but it is always under threat, and in any case death will put an end to it.

A lot of people are not 'philosophical' in the popular sense and they are driven by a burning ambition to achieve some particular form of success which they expect to bring enormous happiness. Sometimes they achieve their objective but with the passage of time they grow weary of it. Solomon possessed everything a man might desire but at the end of his life he concluded that all was vanity and chasing the wind.[\[38\]](#) To seek absolute happiness, total and eternal, in the world of phenomena makes no sense at all, because it is impossible to achieve.

Metaphysics teaches us that Realization alone is able to bring about the inward awakening of the Self, and hence of Absolute Happiness and all aspects of the Divine. The individual who lives in a state of Realization is immortal and eternal. It could be objected that this person's body will die and with it his ego, his self. This is true, but this phenomenal body, the self, has already died at the instant of Realization. Let us remember again what Jesus said to Nicodemus: [\[39\]](#) 'In truth I say to you, if a man does not die, he cannot be reborn.' In the instant of Realization (or Deliverance, or Liberation, or Wakening, or Illumination) it matters little that the animal body will have to die later on, because what dies then does not affect the Living Enlightened one; an abyss separates the illusory corporeal ego, from the Self which is the Liberated person's unique Reality.

Realized individuals have a body like you and me, but in their eyes their body is not an individual self. They have achieved Selfhood, and the Self does not differentiate between one body and another, or even between the body and any other phenomenal object.

Here is an example: I was visited by a doctor who had been to India and had had the privilege of meeting Sri Ramana Maharshi. (Bear in mind that everything we know about Sri Ramana Maharshi indicates that he was Liberated). At that time the Maharishi was approaching the end of his life on earth: one of his arms had been amputated because of cancer and he was suffering bouts of acute pain from a metastasis affecting ganglia at the base of his neck. While the two men were conversing, the Maharishi's face changed abruptly. Now there is an acknowledged relationship between the upper and lower parts of the face (above and below the nose), such that the lower part expresses emotional states while the upper is expressive of intellectual and spiritual states. When the visitor noticed the sudden change in the Maharishi's face, he observed that the lower part contracted in pain, while the upper part kept its habitual expression of perfect serenity. One of the Maharishi's disciples said: 'Master, you seem to be in pain?' The Maharishi replied: 'Indeed, this body is suffering.' The disciple went on: 'But you seem to be suffering

cruelly!' 'Yes,' replied the Maharishi, 'you could say that.' Then, as the disciple expressed his distress at seeing his Master suffer in this way, Sri Ramana ended the exchange by saying: 'But how is that important?' What this anecdote demonstrates is that the Maharishi might continue to appear as a body, but was no longer that body. His brain *felt* and, since what it sensed only concerned the body, he did not *experience* anything consciously (except absolute and eternal Happiness).

Let us take another look at the incomplete and partial forms of happiness known to ordinary people who are not liberated. They are happy when their desires are met. They are often aware in advance of what it is they want, though this tends to be an approximation because, when people desire something, they frequently paint an unrealistic picture of the satisfaction which they think they will feel when they succeed in their wishes. Sometimes circumstances combine to bring satisfactions which were not anticipated and so had not been wished for in advance.

The quest for happiness is expressed as the search for the satisfaction of one's desires. Desires are forces which impel us to strive as effectively as we can for their satisfaction. The situation is complicated by the complexity of the human psyche which often contains opposing desires operating at the same time. Psychologists who appreciate this are also aware of the senselessness of the general belief in an internal force independent of our desires, an imaginary force referred to by ordinary people as the 'will'. What we so name is only the resultant of the various competing forces of desire. So, for example, simply saying that a child lacks will-power is wrong. To understand a child properly, one must have a clear idea of the forms taken by its various desires. Psychologists even write books about 'the education of the will' without first trying to discover what 'the will' might be.

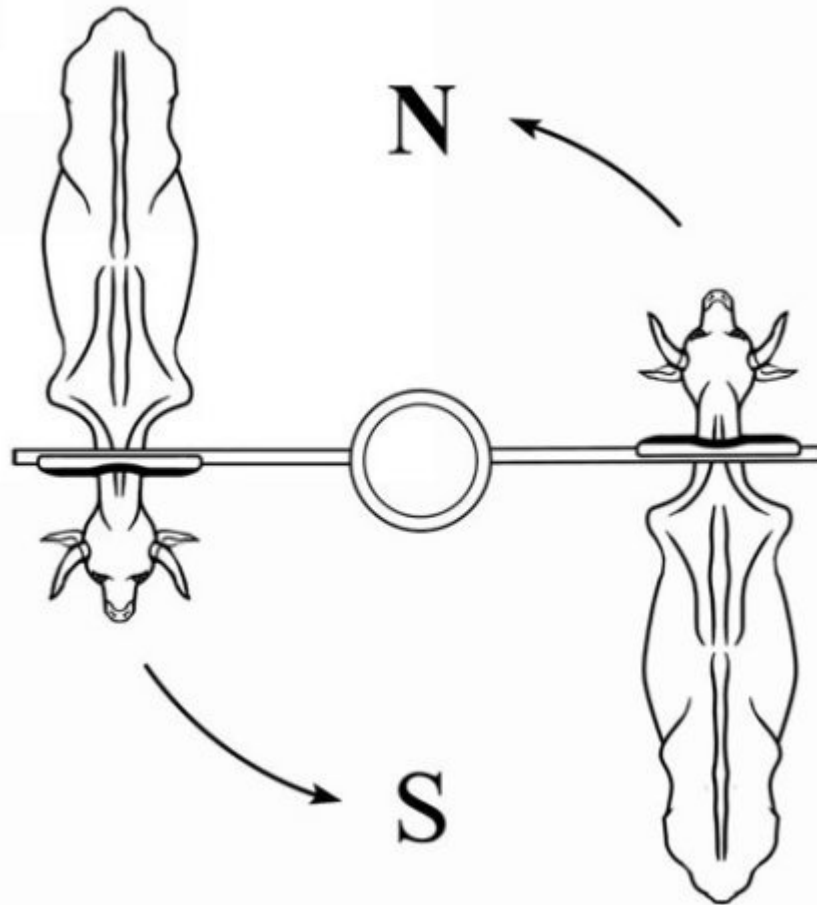
Let us finish with this non-existent will and get back to desires, which do exist. What is their origin? And what gives rise to their particular

nature? As with all our tendencies and inclinations, they are conditioned by heredity and the circumstances of our lives.

2. Duality and Dualism and the Possibility of Perfect Humility

In Part Three of this book, I introduced two essential ideas, humiliation and humility, and I stated that perfect humility was the road to Deliverance. The basis for this assertion cannot be understood without having first fully resolved and understood a number of issues. It is central to this whole work but I must set it aside for the time being and deal with some other issues. While I may seem to be digressing from the single most important topic, one which is crucial to understanding, I am only doing this so that when I return to it later I will have available the ideas necessary to establish its significance.

The concept of humility will become clear if we understand its inverse, pride. You may be surprised that I use the word 'inverse' instead of 'opposite', and it is true that the phenomenal world is constructed in terms of dualities (hot/cold, light/dark, big/little, good/bad, intelligent/stupid, etc.). But duality is not the same as dualism. The fact that we contrast what we like with what we dislike, and what we admire with what we despise, is due to the workings of our subjective affectivity. But our pure, objective intellect, which is independent of our emotional life, recognizes no opposites. Take a stick, for example: it has certainly got two different extremities, but, although they have an inverse relationship, it is no sense an opposition. Both are equally necessary for the stick's structure and use. The notion of inverse/complementary relationships can be represented schematically by the following diagram, which shows two oxen turning a vertical pole boring into the ground.



The two oxen are attached in an inverse direction to either end of the horizontal bar which is fixed to the drill. At a given moment, one might be moving to the north, while the other would be moving south. Obviously they are compelled to walk in a circle by the transverse bar, but at any moment their efforts are directed towards the tangent of the circle. One might imagine that by going in the opposite direction to one another, each would neutralize the force that the other was exerting. This does not in fact happen and the two forces combine to cause the central post to rotate. In other words, the two oxen work together and their actions, far from being opposed, are 'inverse-complementary'. The things that we refer to as opposites in the phenomenal world are in reality inverse-complementary pairs.

Pride and humility fall into the same category: they are not opposites but an inverse-complementary pair.

There is another very important idea in this respect which relates to duality. I mentioned Perfect Humility earlier and this might seem to contradict the widely held view that 'nothing is perfect in this world'. To understand that humility can be perfect, it must be recognized that the extreme points of a dualistic pair in the phenomenal world are qualitatively different. I will take the phenomenon of heat to illustrate this. We distinguish hot from cold; they form an inverse-complementary pair. They are obviously different in a way that everyone is aware of, but there is an additional difference between them which is at first sight rather surprising. When physicists study temperature, they realize that the top end of its range is impossible to determine. The maximum temperatures they produce are regarded as provisional limits, because there is nothing in theory to prevent them exceeding these limits at a later stage. When a substance is heated, it volatilizes and turns into a gas. If new methods of heating this gas further are discovered, a point will never be reached where one can say for certain that an impassable limit has been reached which represents 'absolute heat'. Hot though the surface of our sun may be, there are other larger stars which are doubtless hotter. On the other hand, a scientist researching cold (and we must bear in mind that cold and hot are only opposites in subjective experience) can, under laboratory conditions, almost reach -273.15°C , 'absolute zero', but can neither get below it nor reach it exactly.

We can use this example symbolically. The manifestations of pride are limitless. There have been 'great men' who have attempted to subjugate all of Earth's inhabitants, and it is easy to imagine that this same arrogant madness would drive someone to conquer any heavenly body which men or analogous creatures could inhabit. The complementary inverse of pride is humility. There is an impassable lower limit to the latter which we might call 'absolute simplicity' (or absolute humility). Perfect humility is attainable and is equivalent to the death of the self. Someone who reached this level, pride's absolute zero, would have achieved perfection and from then on their ego would be a matter of indifference to them. Let me add that

the objective observation of oneself and others enables humility to achieve near-perfection, but that a final leap is necessary to transcend this nearly absolute humility and convert it into absolute, perfected humility. The acceptance of death (which Sri Ramana Maharshi realized) would be absolute humility. The final leap in question comes like grace from on high, from the Self, and the ego plays no part.

In the early part of this chapter I have used symbolic examples belonging to the domain of phenomena. It is important to recognize their limitations, but there is nowhere else to take examples from, since by their very nature they must exist on the phenomenal plane or in our minds. In fact they can help us understand the difference between dualism (opposites) and duality (inverse-complementary pairs), as well as the possibility of perfect humility. These qualifications will be indispensable as our discussion proceeds.

3. Good and Evil

In the first part of this book, we saw that human life was ruled by two laws, heredity and inter-conditioning. Both are expressed through a multitude of inherited and circumstantial factors whose possible combinations are incalculable. Even though identical twins share the same heredity, their life circumstances will be different and their psychological resemblance will decline gradually throughout their lives. We have already looked at the non-existence of free will and responsibility, and we also need to see that fatalism makes no sense. A fatalist has desires and dislikes like everyone else. If his fatalism takes the form of doing nothing to satisfy the former or neutralize the latter, he is still intervening to modify the normal course of human reactions. He thinks he is doing nothing while the fact is that he is actively going against the current of human nature.

Next I want to examine the idea of 'sins' and 'virtues'. This will lead on to a much vaster concept, that of good and evil.

'Sin' implies free will and responsibility neither of which really exists. It is a word that needs to be banished from our vocabulary if we are to understand the truth. It should be replaced with 'error', whose inverse-complementary is the action that is exactly appropriate to the situation. The fact that morality has such a fundamental place in Christianity can be attributed in part to the extreme insistence with which St Paul preached about it, though the tendency to develop moral systems seems to have been a basic human characteristic since the beginning of time. Genesis tells of the tree of knowledge of good and evil in Paradise, whose fruit Jehovah forbade our first ancestors to eat. Led astray by the Serpent, first Eve, then Adam, disobeyed Jehovah's edict, and were severely punished. This was the 'original error' that was unjustifiably reformulated by morality as 'original sin'. Genesis may be a myth but it expresses great truth in symbolic form.

When Moses imposed 'God's Commandments' on the Jewish people he gave morality a powerful impulse. Once something is forbidden by law, good and evil are affirmed according to whether or not the prohibition is observed. Note that different societies have different moralities, and what may be forbidden by some societies may be approved and customary for others. Hitler promoted a morality which preached the denunciation of Jews and their murder. The extent to which some actions are seen as good while others are considered evil is entirely relative because the actions arise out of what people believe. According to the translations we have of the Gospel, Jesus said to the woman taken in adultery: 'Go, and sin no more' [\[40\]](#). I do not know the languages spoken by the Jews at that time but I think it very likely that what Jesus said was: 'Go, and do not make this mistake again.' Morality has changed since then and no one now thinks of stoning adulterous women. Let me quote another Ch'an statement: *"As soon as you have good and evil, confusion results and the mind is lost."* [\[41\]](#)

Let us consider the list of what we wrongly call 'the seven capital sins': Pride, Envy, Lust, Gluttony, Avarice, Wrath, and Sloth. I do not

know whether Pride was put first intentionally, but it deserves this position. It deserves the name 'foundational sin' or rather 'foundational error'. Let us look at this more closely:

Envy: we envy someone else because they possess something which gratifies their pride while at the same time humbling us in our own eyes and in the eyes of others. So someone who is envious hates the person who humiliates them.

Lust: all our pleasures affirm us; at any rate this is true of any kind of enjoyment which is taken to excess.

Gluttony: the same is true of Gluttony.

Avarice: avarice is the love of money, its pursuit and accumulation. Money is a powerful source of affirmation for the self.

Wrath: when what we regard as one of our prerogatives, in other words something that is a source of pride for us, comes under attack, we react with anger.

Sloth: this is opting for inaction instead of doing something that we know we should be doing, so we feel ashamed of our idleness and we are not proud of ourselves.

To summarize, everything which affirms us in our own eyes and in the eyes of others is a product of pride. This is true when we compare ourselves to others, which is what happens more often than not.

Hence someone who is progressing towards humility is gradually escaping from the other 'capital sins' as well.

'Capital sins' are really '*capital errors*' or '*illusory opinions*,' and pride is at the root of these illusions.

It is essential to understand the causes of pride.

An ordinary person is an ego which exists; immanent in each one is the Self which IS. As we have already seen, it is as though the Self

in us is dormant while at the same time we have an intuition of it at a profoundly subconscious level. We yearn to possess its attributes of omniscience, omnipresence, omnipotence, eternity and absolute happiness. A friend of mine remembered believing that he was God when he was aged four. He thought that his family did not say anything about it in case he became too vain.

Although the immanent Self is dormant in the individual, it becomes confused with the ego. Of course we are forced to accept that we do not possess divine attributes, nonetheless we strive to get as close to them as we can. Since people differ greatly in the extent to which this dim intuition of the Self exists within them, the intensity of their efforts towards the divine varies correspondingly, with many making a minimal attempt while others engage passionately in the struggle.

What, therefore, the original error amounts to is the false viewpoint which fails to see the difference between the self or ego and the Self. Subjectively speaking, each one of us is 'the centre of the world'. Other people have no real value in our eyes other than in terms of their closeness to us (through the ties of friendship, family or love).

'Original sin' is basically a mistaken attitude (or error) which did not deserve to be punished. What it needed was a correct and appropriate instruction in traditional metaphysics. In any case, even if this error had in fact been a deliberately sacrilegious act, it is hard to see why all the descendants of the first man should then be condemned to suffer.

No, we were so created that we were destined to fall into the trap which the original error represents. This, like everything else, results from how the Universe is constituted, and this was conceived by God Himself from the beginning of time, and its causes will forever remain beyond our reach.

Let us take another look at the myth in the Book of Genesis, which has so much to teach us. The Serpent, Tempter and Liar, assures the naïve pair, Adam and Eve, that *they will be as Gods* if they eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and that

Jehovah's threat that they will die if they do so is an empty threat. But they were punished and so were all their descendants: death became be their lot and they would know many misfortunes in the course of their fleeting lives. The idea of the ego and its senseless conceits makes its appearance: Adam and Eve conceal their nakedness in the belief that what they hid was ugly. The Self was now transcendent to them and all that remained of their divine potential was the Self's immanence within them, but in a dormant state. It was inevitable that they should develop ideas of good and evil with all their unhappy consequences: evil is attended by remorse and good by pride.

Let us note that pride did not wait for the 'original error' before appearing in the human psyche. In fact, Eve's error, when she fell under the serpent's influence, occurred in response to its promise: 'You will be as Gods.' It is easy to see how such an enticing promise pandered to the pride of our first parents. Jehovah had created man in his own image and likeness but had not made him his equal.

I have considered the symbolism of the Genesis myth at some length because it sheds light on man's resemblance to God and on the original error which renders man infinitely inferior to God because of his Ignorance and all his mistaken opinions. It also shows how pride is not only a 'capital error' but also one which plays a fundamental part in the origin of the others.

The moment we fall into deceptive and mistaken points of view as a result of pride, the way in which our intellect functions undergoes a complete change. It confuses a correct appreciation of the phenomenal world's duality with a dualism which generates wrong views on everything. People in their diversity see everything differently and their lives are such an inextricable labyrinth that Socrates came to the conclusion that the only thing he could be certain of was that he knew nothing.

In conclusion, pride is the fundamental error, the source and origin of all the other 'capital errors', and it has a pervasive effect on how

ordinary, non-realized people function. We are always doing something, except during deep sleep, and all our activities, even our thoughts and our internal monologue, affirm us, because they all give substance to our illusion of being, and blind us to our real role, that of conditioned puppets who simply exist. Descartes took 'I think, therefore I am' as his starting-point and developed his whole philosophy on the basis of this famous statement, which is totally false. As far as self-affirmation is concerned, walking is just as good. Whatever I *do*, however trivial, affirms me.

If we call pride by the seemingly more modest name of self-esteem, the extent to which pride permeates the human psyche becomes even more obvious (think how hard it is to imagine someone totally devoid of any form of self-esteem). Pride brings varying degrees of Ignorance in its train, using that term in Buddha's sense of the totality of misleading and illusory opinions which are at the root of suffering. If the quest for happiness is undertaken in the right way, it can only be brought to a successful conclusion through the hard-won disappearance of deceptive opinions and beliefs, and, above all, by getting rid of the pride which is their chief source and origin.

4. The Conditions which Precede Realization

In the next section I will be discussing how one achieves perfect humility, and it is possible that you will see a contradiction between the idea that one can do this and the idea that we are 'conditioned puppets' without free will or responsibility. I must now explain this apparent contradiction. With the exception of Sri Ramana Maharshi who only had to simulate his own physical death (which he did in the full acceptance of his death) in order to begin a spontaneous evolution which continued until he achieved Realization two years later, all the Great Masters had to spend time engaged in approaches which turned out to be dead-ends, which they then had to extricate themselves from so that they could continue their search in different ways. Buddha himself wasted years studying philosophy without success, and then spent further time as an ascetic during

which he nearly died, before he finally sat beneath the Bodhi Tree and suspended all thought, thus finally achieving Realization.

Four factors are the main pre-conditions for Realization:

1. Knowing about it as a theoretical possibility;
2. A tenacious desire to obtain it and thus be sheltered from all suffering;
3. Finding correct teaching;
4. The strength and sensitivity of the individual's metaphysical intuition.

It was the destiny of those who achieved Realization during their lives to be provided with these conditions. They would otherwise have remained like every other ordinary person. This is not a question of injustice; we are all the product of different conditions and some of us are beautiful and others ugly, while some are intelligent and others stupid. I mentioned earlier that conditioning takes an infinite number of different forms. This is an area in which there is no equality of opportunity.

Let us now take a closer look at some aspects of the four kinds of conditioning mentioned above:

1. Most people are completely unaware that it is theoretically possible to achieve Realization and that this would deliver them from all suffering and confer eternal, absolute happiness.
2. The tenacious desire to achieve the Realization that one knows about in theory is a matter of some complexity. I refer to 'tenacious desire' because no one learns about the possibility of Realization without at the same time gathering that it is extremely rare and very difficult to obtain.
3. Those people who seek deliverance are not completely exceptional. Their motives can be very different.

Professor D.T.Suzuki has proposed a motive in one of his books which I do not find persuasive: he suggests that many people seek Realization so that they can communicate it to others. But I question whether they know that they are going to behave like converts once they have achieved Realization. Ch'an is not a religion greedy for conquests and realized individuals see everything as equal in the phenomenal domain where their fellow humans live.

Does the desire for absolute happiness motivate people? We cannot have the slightest idea what eternal, absolute happiness would be like. More to the point might be the desire to be delivered for ever from all possible suffering. But even here the conditioning factors that we are trying to understand are absent. Every desire presupposes the ability to conjure up some particular inner state in our imagination, and we cannot when we are happy imagine and desire its opposite; neither can we, in misfortune, conjure up and desire a happy state which could return to us at some point. Our inner states seem eternal to us at the time that we experience them.

4. Some people are motivated by pride and arrogance, because they believe that Realization would enable them to be superior to ordinary people. Pride lurks everywhere.

The fact is that the four conditioning factors mentioned at the beginning of this chapter cannot provide a completely satisfactory account of the pre-conditions necessary for Realization, which is not to say that they are completely without effect nor is it to deny that their presence is indispensable. But it is beyond our powers to fully understand an individual destiny in all its aspects. Let us simply say that all the individuals who achieved Realization did so of necessity by following the twists and turns of a predestination which remains as closed to us as does every 'future'.

I want to say something about our present times: it is obvious nowadays that scientific research in the domain of phenomena is triumphant, having altogether vanquished metaphysical enquiry. We are intoxicated by the claims that are made for progress achieved in

the phenomenal plane. Some of these claims are justifiable to a degree but, even so, can one say in general that people are any happier or wiser because we can move ever more rapidly between places, or because we can now disintegrate and fuse atoms? So-called progress of this kind is irresistible to our more perverse instincts. The improvements which some advances bring into daily life may briefly surprise and impress but they do not improve the way we behave. From time to time idealists such as the late Aldous Huxley believe that mankind should be making progress in wisdom and kindness, etc. They actively promote their viewpoint in what they say and write, and by getting groups of wise people together. But it is all too obvious that all these good intentions are but a drop in the ocean!

Our 'progress'-oriented development at the phenomenal level suggests that the contemporary cultural environment is becoming increasingly unfavourable to human spirituality and the emergence of realized individuals. Present-day humanity's pride in the progress it has made on the material plane is causing it to sink deeper and deeper into Ignorance; and the frequency and intensity of hostilities between and within nations results from this. It is obviously not impossible that one or more individuals in some remote and isolated part of the world (more likely to be in Asia than anywhere else) might have achieved Realization and live in their realized state without having any reason to draw attention to themselves. Those people who are known about and claim to be realized are relatively numerous in India and Nepal but everything that I have been able to find out about them makes me doubtful about their claims. The way in which humanity is developing at present comes as no surprise to anyone who knows that ours is the age of the *Kali Yuga*. This catastrophic age seems to be drawing to a close, and its ending will herald the return of the first age, the Age of Gold.

These are events which belong to the cosmic order of things and, even should we realize that we have had the misfortune to be born towards the end of the *Kali Yuga*, there is nothing we can do to

remedy the situation. In any case, it has to be acknowledged that the obstacles confronting anyone seeking Realization nowadays are particularly formidable.

5. How to Bring About a Progressive Reduction in One's Pride

Here we come back to a question of central importance, how to move from a theoretical or intellectual understanding to that Knowledge which is lived and expressed in practice. I have already discussed this in Part Three, but there are certain points which I need to consider in more detail.

Once we have grasped that perfect humility is the key to Realization, our first thought is that we should actively cultivate humility in ourselves. But this approach is out of the question: self-esteem exists as a constant presence in ordinary people and truly humble behaviour is an impossibility for them. Before Realization, from the earliest age, from the moment intellect appears, we identify with our ego. Even if an attempt were made to explain about the Self to a child, it would be impossible for it to understand. Only when adolescence is reached can a master or a book sometimes convey the idea of the Self, though this will obviously only be understood at a theoretical level. So the ego is always present, constantly present and active from the moment intellect develops in the baby with its initiation into language; and we can summarize the situation by saying that we never experience a single moment of true humility before Realization. So how could we cultivate humility when no trace of the real thing exists in us?

You may find what I have just said surprising and you may even be repelled by it. You will start to think of many people you know who make no particular show of their self-esteem, and it is true that it will not be particularly obvious in polite, 'civilized' individuals. But the non-manifestation of pride, the pride which judges others and disparages them, is not the same thing as humility. When I was quite

small, I remember being carried by a female relative who stopped at a farmhouse and chatted with the elderly farmer's wife, who had no teeth. I suddenly said: 'Look, the lady's got no teeth,' and the poor old woman responded: 'Aren't children naughty!' I was still not trained how to behave, not 'civilized'.

Social life would be impossible, full of strife and hatred, if people went around saying what they thought of each other to their face. However, behaving discreetly like this in order to maintain peaceful relations in society has nothing to do with humility. What it does show is that we treat each other's self-esteem considerately and try not to upset it in order not to make an enemy of someone who might be able to harm us. What a lot of friendly remarks fail to prevent those who make them from thinking rather less charitably of those to whom the remarks are addressed! What a lot of pious lies! It is their self-esteem, not true humility, which makes polite people think and behave like this.

To summarize, self-esteem, the fundamental concern for oneself, is established so deeply and firmly from the very beginning in our psyche that pure humility is impossible as long as the spiritual death of the ego has not taken place. Realization alone brings the only true, pure humility into being.

It is useless intending to consolidate true humility gradually if we do not possess it in the first place. We should devote our attention to our self-esteem, in order to flush it out and identify it in the certain knowledge that this is what brings so much suffering into our lives, suffering which alternates with those precarious moments of happiness derived from self-satisfaction.

Realization brings about a total and instantaneous upheaval in the psyche, and humility in its only true and perfect form enters abruptly and totally. However, the fact that this is a sudden event does not mean that it cannot be preceded by the progressive development of a partial and imperfect humility.

When people have understood deeply and repeatedly that humility is the only desirable goal, and that their self-esteem and its manifestations are silly and vulgar and are distancing them from absolute happiness, they become reluctant to waste time on anything that feeds their vanity. To love humility because it alone can lead us towards happiness and to hate pride because it achieves the opposite, this is the correct attitude.

Theoretical understanding will gradually be transformed into lived Knowledge if, during the course of our life, we do our best to watch out for external or internal manifestations of our pride, and condemn them as disagreeable and harmful.

The appearance of partial humility in oneself cannot be observed because it has no observable manifestations. What can be noticed is that events which are usually a source of flattery and considerable pleasure hold less attraction for someone who has made progress. But I hesitate to recommend this observation because the danger is that it will stimulate pride in having made progress in becoming humble. The idea of 'pride in being humble' reminds me of an amusing story about a bishop who was heard to say: 'As far as humility is concerned, I have nothing to fear from anyone.' St Francis of Assisi is a typical example of someone who took pride in being humble.

Let me summarize by saying that all our efforts to observe ourselves and others should focus on pride and its various modalities, self-esteem, vanity, conceit, presumption, touchiness, boastfulness or self-promotion, etc.

Why does right understanding enable us to watch out for our congenital pride without being able to observe whatever partial humility has been attained? Unfortunately it is because pride is the norm when the ego is struggling to produce at least a simulation of Realization. When I say it is the norm, I mean this in the sense of 'usual', 'habitual', a general finding across the whole of mankind subject to the consequences of the 'original error'. Because in

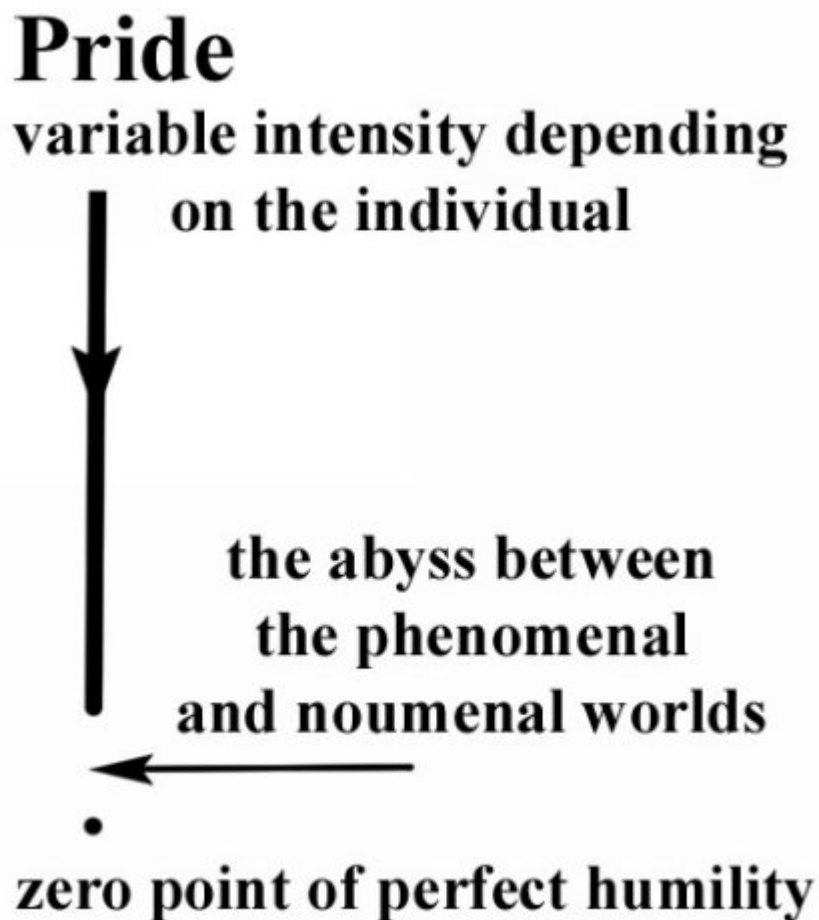
practice pride is the rule, its manifestations are familiar and easy enough to recognize; humility on the other hand is only a momentary breach or an overall lessening in one's usual self-esteem so it is easy to be aware of the constant self-esteem which remains, and not of any evidence that it has diminished. Basically one can define humility as a reduction in one's usual self-esteem, or, as in the case of a liberated person, its total disappearance.

Humiliations are another excellent way of striking blows against pride. To make use of a humiliation, one must strive to accept it by acknowledging without reservation that the circumstances of one's humiliation were completely deserved. On the other hand, one will try not to ruminate about one's suffering and its cause and will endeavour to fix one's attention on any other matter, but without forgetting in the process that one has received a very important piece of helpful information. Welcoming a humiliation in this way and guarding its valuable memory is not something one usually does. I have often had to say to one of my patients: 'In other words, you were angry,' and got the reply: 'Angry? What do you mean? It was nothing of the kind, it was just that I was very upset.' This is such a common response that I always expect it. Sometimes an individual who wants to get rid of his pride will recognize for himself that he has been offended by someone else's attitude, and it will benefit him to undertake this same labour of acceptance, which may need a great deal of patience.

Perfect humility is a characteristic of Realized individuals. What this means is that their ego is spiritually dead and in a spirit of simple acceptance they welcome what would previously have wounded the ego, which has now become a matter of complete indifference to them.

I need to add something to round off what I have just said about pride being reduced. It might be thought that humility would advance as pride diminished. This is not quite right and I will use a diagram to clarify the matter. Perfect humility, as we have seen, is zero pride, which I indicate by a point at the bottom of the diagram. A line runs

vertically down to this point and this represents diminishing pride. As it approaches zero it is separated from the point by a tiny gap and this represents what Ch'an calls the *abyss* separating the phenomenal and noumenal domains. I have already spoken a bit about this and about the instantaneous leap brought about by the awakening of the Self in someone who has reached this stage. What it means is that everything we can do to reduce our pride belongs to the phenomenal world and cannot have the slightest effect on the leap which crosses the abyss and attains the noumenal. We cannot conquer Realization; we can only open ourselves to the awakening of the Self through nearly perfect humility.



This diagram and the discussion which it illustrates shed some light on the so-called *Via Negativa*.[\[42\]](#) If we were aware of the extent to which we had developed partial humility and could perceive it

existing on the fringes of the self-esteem which is always busy at work within us, then we could direct our efforts towards increasing it. That would be a *via positiva*. But, as we have already seen, it is impossible for us to perceive our level of humility. We can only increase it by destroying our pride through a slow process of attrition. Let me illustrate the situation with the following analogy: let us imagine a piece of land covered with many buildings (these symbolize pride). I have a passionate wish to make use of the bare earth (humility). Directing my efforts at the land itself is not an option. It cannot help me achieve my desire because the whole area is cluttered up with buildings. So I will have to strive to get rid of all these dreadful buildings. I will have to demolish them and get rid of the rubble. At that point I will have achieved my goal and will not have to do anything else. I will have achieved the flat, bare land I wanted without having had to bother in any way about what was happening to the land itself. Since to demolish is negative, the way I have followed must be called a *via negativa*.

So I will conclude this final chapter as follows: ‘Destroy your pride progressively. Your true goal is humility, but let that take care of itself and let it grow without even attempting to be aware of it.’

[1]¹ The name ‘Zen’ is often mistakenly applied in the West to this initiatory teaching originating in the Far East. When Boddhidarma travelled to the Far East towards the beginning of the 7th Century to convey the Buddha’s teaching, he went to China. There Buddhism was understood and adapted to the Chinese character under the name of Ch’an, which is the purest form of this teaching. In due course, Ch’an reached Japan via Korea and gave rise to numerous Japanese Buddhist sects, whence Zen. The fact is that those we refer to as ‘the old masters’ were Chinese and lived in China. Zen soon became degraded and when Europeans go nowadays to a Zen monastery they do not come across the pure teaching of Ch’an. So in this book I prefer to speak of Ch’an rather than Zen. HB

[2] The *Vedanta* comprises the end texts of the Hindu scriptures known as the Veda. They include the *Upanishads*, the *Brahma Sutras*, and the *Bhagavadgita*.

[3] René Guénon (Abd al-Wahid Yahya) (1886-1951). French writer whose work spans a wide range of subjects from metaphysics and symbolism to a broad critique of the modern world and traditional sciences.

[4] Baruch Spinoza (1632-77). Dutch Jewish philosopher who made crucial contributions to every major philosophical topic. His *Ethics*, published

posthumously, is described as one of the most influential works in Western philosophy.

[5] *Ethics, First Part, Concerning God Prop.18, Corollary 2*: 'Hence it follows that God alone is a free cause. For God alone exists from the mere necessity of his own nature (*Prop. 11*; and *Coroll. 1, Prop.14*), and by the mere necessity of his nature he acts (*Prop. 17*). And therefore (*Def.7*) he is the only free cause. *Q.e.d.* (from *Spinoza's Ethics, 1967, London. Dent*).

[6] This is a triangular triad which should not be confused with the linear Holy Trinity of Catholicism. HB

[7] Op. cit.: *First Part, Concerning the Power of the Intellect or Human Freedom. Prop.35*. 'God loves himself with infinite intellectual love.'

[8] Romans, 13.9; Gal. 5.14; James 2.8.

[9] Noon above, Noon without movement

In itself conceives itself and is sufficient to itself,
Complete head and perfect diadem.

From Le Cimetière Marin in Charnes (1922)

[10] HB's expression is *le Tout Cosmique Un*, which translates literally as 'the One Cosmic Whole' or 'the Whole Cosmic One', i.e. the totality of the cosmos as a unity. See p.12 for HB's explanation of 'Noumenon'.

[11] Compare p.56 in *The Zen Doctrine of No-Mind* (D.T.Suzuki, 1979. Rider. London): 'It is like appreciating a fine piece of brocade. On the surface there is an almost bewildering confusion of beauty, and the connoisseur fails to trace the intricacies of the threads. But as soon as it is turned over all the intricate beauty and skill is revealed. Prajnā consists in this turning over. The eye has hitherto followed the surface of the cloth, which is indeed the only side ordinarily allowed us to survey. Now the cloth is abruptly turned over; the course of the eyesight is suddenly interrupted; no continuous gazing is possible. Yet by this interruption, or rather disruption, the whole scheme of life is suddenly grasped; there is the 'seeing into one's self-nature'.

[12] The philosophical tradition developed in mediaeval universities. Its major exponents were Aquinas, Scotus, and Ockham.

[13] Louis Lavelle (1883-1951) Professor of Philosophy at the Sorbonne.

[14] The doctrine of *Patīccasappāda* (Pali).

[15] *Le nez de Cléopâtre: s'il eût été plus court, toute la face de la terre aurait changé.* From *Pensées* by Blaise Pascal, French mathematician, philosopher and writer (1623-62).

[16] *Le Règne de la Quantité ou les Signes des Temps*. For an English introduction to Guénon's work, see *Prophet For A Dark Age* (2008) by Graham Rooth, pub. Sussex Academic Press, Eastbourne and Oregon.

[17] 'Live first, then philosophize.'

[18] For a fuller account of Benoit's concept of compensatory mechanisms, see Hubert Benoit *The Light of Zen in the West*, 2008, pub. Sussex Academic Press, Eastbourne UK and Portland, Oregon USA p.122ff.

[19] 'But seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.' Matt. 6.33; '...for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you.' Luke 17.21

[20] G.I.Gurdjieff taught that we are asleep and our personalities fragmented, and that '(ordinary man) has no soul and no will'. His pupils engaged in 'conscious labours and intentional sufferings' to promote inner development.

[21] Auguste Rodin, French sculptor (1840-1917) whose best known works include *The Kiss*, *The Burghers of Calais*, and *The Thinker*.

[22] The particular significance of '*divertissements*', meaning diversions or distractions, for Pascal was that they prevent us thinking about our true condition.

[23] Saint Jean-Marie Vianney (1786-1859), priest at Ars near Lyons for forty-one years, celebrated for his holiness and the crowds who came to hear him. He is the patron saint for *curés de paroisses*, parish priests, in France.

[24] The legendary founder of Zen, an Indian monk who was supposedly the 28th Indian Patriarch in direct succession from Buddha, and became the first Chinese Zen patriarch.

[25] Meditation master at Ho-tse monastery, who lived from 668-760 and was a famous disciple of the Sixth Patriarch, Hui-neng. He emphasized the particular importance of not thinking about what was aimed at i.e. enlightenment. In *The Way of Zen* Alan Watts quotes a dialogue between Shen-hui and another meditation master, Ch'eng, which suggests that Shen-hui's approach was not dissimilar to Benoit's. The dialogue concludes with Shen-hui observing: 'All practice of *samadhi* is fundamentally a wrong view. How, by practising *samadhi*, could one attain *samadhi*?'

[26] *Lâcher Prise*, 1954, La Colombe, Paris. First English version: *Let Go*, 1954, George Allen and Unwin, London.

[27] This is something of a misquotation, though it captures the sense of the story. 'Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.' John 3,3.

[28] See p.69.

[29] Dag Hammarskjöld *Markings* pub. Alfred Knopf 1964. New York

[30] Cf. *De l'Initiation* by Jean d'Ecausse. Pub. Le Courrier du Livre. Paris. (HB)

[31] Cf. René Guénon *The Symbolism of the Cross* Ch.XXIII. (HB)

[32] Matthew 27, 45.

[33] It should be quite obvious that the idea of using suffering carries no implications of asceticism, let alone masochism. (HB)

[34] Luke 22.42.

[35] 'In order to reach perfection, the soul has to pass, ordinarily, through two kinds of night, which spiritual writers call purgations, or purifications, of the soul, and which I have called night, because in the one as well as in the other the soul travels, as it were, by night, in darkness.

The first night is the night, or purgation, of the sensual part of the soul, which is the privation of all desire, wrought by God... The second night is the night of the spiritual part, which is for those who are more advanced, when God wishes to bring them into union with Himself.' From *The Mystical Doctrine of St John of the Cross* ed. By R.H.J. Steuart, S.J. (1946) Sheed & Ward, London.

[36] 'The thousand widowhoods of the pitiable soul...' Extract from *Chanson de la plus haute tour*.

[37] Or 'As one door shuts, another one closes.'

[38] Cf Ecclesiastes I. vv. 2, 3: Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity. What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun? and V.v.16: 'and what profit hath he that hath laboured for the wind?'

[39] See p.40, footnote 19.

[40] John 8.11

[41] Cp. D.T.Suzuki's version of this couplet in the *Hsin-hsin Ming*, quoted by Alan Watts, op.cit.: 'The conflict between right and wrong is the sickness of the mind.'

[42] Negative Way