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J.S. Krüger

Signposts to Silence

Metaphysical mysticism: theoretical map and historical pilgrimages

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Metaphysical mysticism:
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Volume 2

Signposts to Silence

Metaphysical mysticism:
theoretical map and historical pilgrimages

J.S. Krüger



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Research Justification

Signposts to Silence provides a theoretical map of what it terms 'metaphysical mysticism': the search for the furthest, most inclusive horizon, the domain of silence, which underlies the religious and metaphysical urge of humankind in its finest forms. Tracing the footsteps of pioneers of this exploration, the investigation also documents a number of historical pilgrimages from a variety of cultural and religious backgrounds. Such mountaineers of the spirit, who created paths trodden by groups of followers over centuries and in some cases millennia, include Lao-Tzu and Chuang-Tzu, Siddhattha and Jesus, Sankara and Fa-tsang, Plato and Plotinus, Isaac Luria and Ibn Arabi, Aquinas and Hegel. Such figures, teachings and traditions (including the religions of 'Judaism', 'Christianity' and 'Islam'; 'Hinduism', 'Buddhism' and 'Taoism') are understood as, at their most sublime, not final destiny and the end of the road, but signposts to a horizon of ultimate silence.

The hermeneutical method employed in tracking such pioneers involves four steps:

- sound historical-critical understanding of the context of the various traditions and figures
- reconstruction of the subjective intentional structure of such persons and their teachings
- design, by the author, of a theoretical map of the overall terrain of 'metaphysical mysticism', on which all such journeys of the spirit are to be located, while providing a theoretical context for understanding them tendentially (i.e. taking the ultimate drift of their thinking essentially to transcend their subjective intentions)
- drawing out, within the space available, some political (taken in a wide sense) implications from the above, such as religio-political stances as well as ecological and gender implications.

Continuing the general direction of thought within what the author endorses to be the best in metaphysical mysticism in its historical manifestations, the book aims at contributing to peace amongst religions in the contemporary global cultural situation. It relativises all claims to exclusive, absolute truth that might be proclaimed by any religious or metaphysical, mystical position, while providing space for not only tolerating, but also affirming the unique value and dignity of each. This orientation moves beyond the stances of enmity or indifference or syncretism or homogenisation of all, as well as that of mere friendly toleration. It investigates the seemingly daunting and inhospitable yet immensely significant Antarctica of the Spirit, the '*meta*'-space of silence behind the various forms of wordy '*inter*'-relationships. It affirms *pars pro toto*, *totum pro parte*, and *pars pro parte*: that each religious, mystical and metaphysical orientation in its relative singularity represents or contains the whole and derives value from that, and that each represents or contains every other. This homoversal solidarity stimulating individual uniqueness is different from and in fact implies criticism of the process of globalisation.

While not taking part in a scientific argument as such, *Signposts to Silence* aims at promoting an understanding of science and metaphysical mysticism as mutual context for each other, and it listens to a number of voices from the domain of science that understand this.

This book is original research, and contains no material plagiarised from any other publication, or material published elsewhere.

J.S. (Kobus) Krüger: Research Associate, Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of Pretoria, South Africa.

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List of abbreviations used in the text

ABC	Absoluteness Becoming Cosmos
CTH	Conditionalistic Totalism/Totality in Horizon
MM	Metaphysical mysticism

Biographical Note

After retiring as professor in Religious Studies at the University of South Africa, J.S. (Kobus) Krüger became research associate in the Faculty of Theology and Religion at the University of Pretoria. His work centres in mysticism, particularly of a metaphysical nature as it manifests in various historical religions and outside of institutionalised religion. He is interested in mysticism as an area of potential and real encounter amongst various traditions and creative persons in this field, with particular emphasis on the meeting between Christianity and Buddhism. Throughout, his main interest has been the development of a framework that would accommodate all religions, understood as the human being's need for radical and comprehensive orientation within the universe (with mysticism as its deepest dimension) in one theoretical framework of understanding.

The present publication is an addition to the following methodological, historical and theoretical books from his pen:

- *Studying religion. A methodological introduction to science of religion* (1982)
- *Metatheism. Early Buddhism and traditional Christian theism* (1989)
- *Buddhism from the Buddha to Asoka* (1991)
- *Along edges. Religion in South Africa: Bushman, Christian, Buddhist* (1995)
- *Sweeping whirlwinds. A study of religious change: Reformed religion and civil religion in the city of Pretoria (Tshwane) (1855–2000)* (2003)
- *Sounding unsound. Orientation into mysticism* (2006)
- *Turning-points in Buddhist mysticism and philosophy* (2007)
- *Die waarheidsweg Dhammapada: Vertaal uit Pāli, verklaar, verstaan, vertolk* (2017)

Introduction

Behind the interpretive scheme of this book lies a personal history of involvement in the issues raised and academic teaching spanning four decades, but it is not in the forefront; this is not an autobiographical account. It is a book *about* metaphysical mysticism; it is also a venture *into* metaphysical mysticism, aware of its provisionality. Such books are not necessarily mumbo-jumbo, irrational ramblings or idiosyncratic beatific visions, as some learned among its despisers would predictably see mysticism.

The exploration approximates the outer edge of our human talk, the Horizon where serious talking, religious and otherwise, expires. It is therefore also about the end, and the beginning, of religion. I sensed that the edge, the Horizon of religious talk, its becoming utter silence, is important. Religion at its best issues neither in presumptuous certainty nor frustrated dumbfoundedness, but in a peaceful, understanding silence – a ‘learned ignorance’ (*docta ignorantia*), to borrow the eloquent formulation of the medieval mystic Cusanus (Nicholas of Cusa 1401–1464). It is a silence into which our rational, fact-based words eventually dissolve, but from where we may resume talking, yet conscious of the radical relativity of all such talk.

This is not an exercise in any one specific academic subject such as Theology, Philosophy, Religious Studies, Sociology (of religion), Psychology (of religion), Linguistics, and so on. It does not fall back into a pre-critical naïvety behind academic scholarship with its disciplinary boundaries and its strictures of academic rigour and is second to none in its admiration for the achievements of science and scholarship. Yet it does not intend ‘scientific’ truth, and does not pretend a ‘scientific’ argument.

Neither does it proclaim religiously. The exploration enjoys and participates in the multilogue of human discourses about the ultimate meaning of things. This implies a critical openness towards all that humanity has produced. It is religion-friendly, but not institutionally tied to any specific religion, and not written from within the conceptual framework of any religion accepted as axiomatically normative. Searching religious minds today might be in a situation comparable to that of the homeless wanderers of ancient India and others in similar situations at other times. And like then, something new may be in the offing today, on the annihilating-creating edge of things. Perhaps Horizon cancels all claims to finality of any kind. Therefore, no final position is proclaimed, and no final article of faith confessed. I moved outside religious camps and formulae, with a certain sense of direction, but neither proceeding from nor

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arriving at any fixed, final position. I do that in non-polemical conversation with a number of authors from the past, but without merely repeating any existing view, limiting myself to any one tradition or producing scripture-bound exegesis or application of any existing texts as if truth were a final, fixed given in any of these.

It developed in a context of friendship with the mystically inclined of the past and those of the present. I think I have a sense of how the Roman scholar-theologian-politician Boethius (c. 480–525 CE) could have felt when he, tortured and with his execution by the henchmen of Emperor Theodoric on hand, sought an inclusive, open-ended wisdom. What mattered to him in prison was not the belabouring of the finer points of any existing system, nor the brewing up of something new. What he was in need of was the distillation of the essence and the harmonisation of the best available to him. Let me add that belonging to a specific religion in no way precludes one from being a ‘metaphysical mystic’ in the sense intended here. This will become abundantly clear on pages to follow. Ibn Arabi, Isaac Luria and Jacob Boehme were shining examples, to mention three.

Today there is no way back to a pre-scientific manner of thinking. Religion and mysticism cannot simply be parked in a cosmology (pre-scientific or scientific) like a car in a parking garage and driven out again. The relationship is much more organic. So there is sufficient reason to be interested in the relationship between the knowing of science and the non-knowing of mysticism. Indeed, as trail-blazed by, for example, quantum physics, science contains great promise for the construction of a worldview for the present age. I would want *Abhidhamma* and quantum theory to talk to one another. But it is not done here; the book does not engage with science as such directly, and does not conduct a scientific argument. Science remains in the background (see Ch. 2).

While moving across the terrain covered in this investigation, certain associations kept returning.

The first was that of an ancient labyrinth. I had the sense of exploring its many winding paths with their many choices but no dead ends; in the end, with patience, all of them would lead into an empty but sacred centre, from which we may return, enriched, to the outside world.

The second was that of the ruins of an ancient temple, originally bathed in bright sunlight, but now overgrown by the jungle. Nevertheless, its layout can be reconstructed, and the grandeur of its appearance can be imagined. This was a journey into a half-forgotten, imagined holy place, a sacred space. Cosmos is the outer courtyard of this imagined eternal temple – bustling with life and all its problems, and surrounding, protecting and giving access to an inner space where an eternal liturgy is unfolding itself. That inner courtyard is Infinity and Eternity. At the centre of it all is a most inner, most holy space that is completely empty of object or figure: Absoluteness. Does this empty centre carry any undertones of the fear, the cosmic loneliness, the existential anxiety,

the nihilism of shifting signs as may be present in contemporary (post-) modernity; or does it perhaps read it into the contemporary cultural mood? No, it does not; on the contrary.

The third was that of a beautiful wilderness. One wanders into that, filled with curiosity and fascination and a sense of adventure. There lies the wilderness, without any set routes. One finds one's own way in accordance with the landscape and the availability of nourishment and with one's inner sense of direction. Others – many – have travelled through this landscape before us, and we can pick up their tracks. We study this field, make it our home, enjoy it in the way a tusker elephant may spend years drifting in the wilderness, outside the herd and avoiding the hustle and bustle of the tourist crowd, while tasting and eating at his leisure, getting to know the area far from the often-travelled road as well as he knows himself.

Overall the journey of this exploration is a moving forward, but with considerable doubling back to look again from a different angle, with an ever enriched experience. In the large historical context, the story of metaphysical mysticism is not one of straight progress. Ancient Parmenides remains as relevant as medieval Aquinas, and Aquinas as relevant as modern Hegel, and Hegel as relevant as any post-modern thinker. I assume a homoversal community transcending the various epochs of human history. The traveller in this beautiful wilderness is not trapped in loneliness. On the contrary, one feels at home in an open space, conscious of others finding joy there.

Therefore, the exploration takes part in the historical quest of humankind to find clarity concerning the nature and meaning of things. It does not come up with a preposterous 'theory of everything', but explores a general direction of inclusive (meta-)religious thought. It is also an orientation for others who might be interested in this general problem. For that reason it provides quite a lot of straightforward information, at times detailed, on the various figures with whom I entered into conversation, and it avoids language presupposing initiation into the in-house jargon and fine print of any discourse. Obviously many finer points of detail will not receive their due.

The book is organised around 'theory' in the sense of a hypothetical framework permitting understanding. The categories forming the matrix of this framework are developed in conversation with various historical figures: some in the form of brief vignettes only, others in the form of more extended conversations; some once-off, others continued throughout the investigation. In the various chapters the theoretical and historical lines are intertwined, but can be distinguished easily, owing to the division of the chapters in sections (§s). Chapters usually start with a sketch of the theoretical possibility envisaged there, followed by a discussion with others. The reason for that is obviously not that the argument of this publication arose separately from

history, but because it may make for easier reading. Apart from providing the necessary anchorage in history, such figures provide critical challenge of what I attempted here. Since an earlier monograph was devoted in its entirety to African religion (Krüger 1995), it was not included in the ambit of this already voluminous offering, and I restricted myself to Western and Eastern schools of thought over the last two and a half thousand years.

Presenting and overview of the terrain, there is, for purposes of consolidation, a fair amount of cross-referencing and recapitulation. Throughout, I was gratefully dependent on existing scholarship, mentioned in the text and in the bibliography. Owing to considerations of size, the publication does not contain many or lengthy quotes from such sources. For the same reason it does not in the main text itself always mention or enter into discussion with the authors of such sources who had a deeply appreciated impact on my thinking.

I cannot bring under words my indebtedness to a circle of companions (some also colleagues) of mature wisdom who formed my thinking over years, some of whom have read this manuscript and made invaluable suggestions for its improvement. The weaknesses that remain are all mine.

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Scanning for beacons

■ §1 Interlocking crises and the search for meaning

■ to the Nature of things

Three entangled sets of problems compel us, humans of today, to rediscover and return to the root and nature of things:

- Firstly, there is the ecological crisis announcing the destruction of many forms of life. Nature has unexpectedly appeared to be fragile. Humankind's relationship with nature has become profoundly disturbed. Scientific developments and their technological applications and extensions have not enjoyed the guiding and orienting support of a relevant integral view, and have become a problematic force in the overall tissue of reality. Indeed, at least the biological course of life on earth seems to have entered a new epoch in the modern era of industrialisation. Is humanity and together with it much of life on earth, perhaps doomed, partly (largely) to be terminated by human overpopulation and by the closed, greedy and violent human fist? If this is not necessarily so, what resources might be available to prevent the end of life on earth? If inevitably so, what meaning could be found in, or projected into, such an eventuality?

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- Secondly, there is the social crisis with its many faces. This reminds us that injustice towards children, women, minorities, majorities, the socially vulnerable and the humiliated of all kinds, is today as prevalent as at any time in the past. Human life is ruptured by the mutual alienation of individuals, religions, peoples (as ethnic-cultural entities), nations (as politico-economic entities), races and classes. Interhuman exploitation overlaps with the exploitation of nature. Non-human forms of life also are our neighbours, there to be loved as ourselves. Is this achievable?
- Thirdly, there is the loss of legitimacy of all traditional religious and other value systems, even when they are propped up laboriously, sometimes aggressively. Traditional religions have lost the right to claim moral leadership of society. They are all in crisis. Humanity has entered a new kind of culture, global in spread but shorn of ultimate meaning. Traditional systems of ultimate meaning arose in cultural and cosmological conditions that were so different from present conditions, that to many they seem to have lost all relevance. Let us distinguish two types of 'relevance': the immediate, short-term relevance of closeness, operating close to the coalface of things. This implies real social power or desired power or at least a residue of social power. Then there is the relevance of distance, ultimately seeking orientation from what we shall term Horizon: on the edges, in the margins, seemingly off the page of current events. This is the 'relevance' of the meditations of the homeless Gotama, of the solitary man on the cross, of Muhammad brooding in the desert (Whitehead). The first type of relevance freely dispenses criticism of this and that; the second type, not necessarily having any direct social leverage, speaks quietly on the verge of silence, attempting what may be expressed with the Kantian word 'critique', pushing through to the root of things. Our time seems to call for the second relevance and for 'those who know how to work in perfect stillness, imperceptibly bringing the future into being' (Kingsley 2010).

The three sets of problems mentioned above, occur in various mixes in different parts of the globe. Nightmarish apocalyptic visions announce themselves, but allow me for the sake of argument, to entertain the possibility of a 'bodhisattvic', 'messianic' perspective - one perhaps leading to a manner of pro-existence for all. Let us assume that this could indeed involve revisiting the traditional religious intuitions, seeking to interpret them as somehow mutually related, somehow verging on the ultimate Horizon, and somehow relevant for today. Just as ancient Polynesian wayfinders did over vast stretches of ocean, just so humanity today would have to draw on all dimensions of human experience and knowledge; remember past stretches of water covered and islands passed on the way here. They should be able to read the waves and the winds of the present moment, and have sound understanding of the groundswell and the deep currents in the ocean of human consciousness.

The way explored here centres on the dimension of mysticism, that unconquerable, unowned Antarctica of world orientation. Skipping the history of the word, by 'mysticism' (from the Greek *muein*, referring to the closing of

lips or eyes), I do not mean non-verifiable and non-falsifiable mystery-mongering and extravagant irrationalism. Nor do I have in mind merely individual, inner feelings of peace and calm, ecstatic enthusiasm, vague sentimentality or passive tranquillity. By *mysticism*, I mean interest in gaining an integration of:

- (1) enlightened wisdom and insight into the depth of reality
- (2) lucidity of emotion and will
- (3) a life of transparent universal generosity, and probably
- (4) a spiritual discipline, perhaps in community with like-minded people, that may involve a regimen (of, for example, meditation), aimed at gaining (1), (2), and (3).

This is a treatise on (1). Enlightened wisdom seems to imply intellectual integrity that reaches beyond academic integrity (mere adherence to disciplinary rules). In addition, it also implies 'mystical' integrity, a sense of an ultimate Horizon, reaching beyond religious integrity (loyalty to institutionalised religion with its organisational and conceptual accruals).

Mysticism thus understood, is a continuation of world orientation in the broadest sense, which has always had the basic components of:

- (i) right knowledge
- (ii) right sentiments and attitudes
- (iii) right behaviour supported and facilitated by
- (iv) right institutions and structures to ensure (i)–(iii).

'Right' means suited to the world as it is, being effective and appropriate to meaningful existence.

This investigation listens to the wise and enlightened of the past and the present in all cultures, religions and mystical traditions; the visionaries and explorers of the inner world. The days of monocultural, monoreligious isolation are numbered – our time is crying out for a new, inclusive-pluralistic, totalistic vision, appropriate to the cultural conditions of today and the foreseeable tomorrow, beyond the mere rehashing of traditional views and dogmas. The various wisdom traditions are not to be mingled, but respected in their individual integrity. I also assume some continuity among the various mystical traditions evolved by humanity, and among the great mystics who are conspicuous among that differentiated but continuous stream.

Often the study of mysticism takes its point of departure in concrete, historical religions – for example, it might be the study of Christian mysticism. It could also, but only secondarily, be interested in a generalised phenomenon called 'mysticism'. That procedure is valuable. It contains the truth that historical contexts and continuities need to be respected and preserved. In this study, an alternative procedure is explored. I do not take the primary referent to be this or that historical religion, with mysticism as one of its aspects. I take the primary referent to be the homoversal function of searching for ultimate meaning with mind, body and soul,

of which religious institutionalisations and conceptualisations are derived instantiations. Having said that, the risks and dangers in relating worldviews, religions and philosophies from different times and cultures are daunting, including the possible emergence of false parallels and anachronisms.

What then, could come to the fore as the best possible outcome of this kind of undertaking? It could be an intellectual understanding, an emotional-volitional relationship and a morality connected to the two most basic focal points of the human religious, mystical urge: a positive relationship could ensue, both to what I shall term 'Absolute Horizon', and to concrete Cosmos. Horizon is 'far' in the sense that it is uncrossable, and yet it is 'near' in the sense that everything – every sparrow, every second – is immediate to it. Horizon relativises all entities presumed to be massive and eternal, and yet it also affirms things in their relativity and contingency, including religions and worldviews. Contingency does not imply contempt of things, but understanding of their preciousness. It is love displayed towards individual things in their fragility. This has moral implications: away with might, force, homogenisation and megalomania in every form.

Relating to Horizon and Cosmos – each in its own right and both in an essential togetherness – constitute what I shall refer to as the largely hidden *tendency*, mostly hidden, but sometimes coming to the fore in all systems of ultimate meaning. These are the two ultimate poles of the human craving for meaning, that is, for ultimate orientation. We need to discover our emerging from, our being part of, our return to and our yearning for the dimension of Absoluteness on the further side of all our conceptual, ritual and institutional systems. Furthermore, we need to live joyously in the world, with our minds, bodies and senses open towards the world, in spite of all the drudgery and suffering our world contains. We need each of Horizon and Cosmos in a strong sense and both together. Finding harmony between them is a basic interest leading this journey. They form the final two criteria in the engagement with various systems of ultimate meaning on these pages.

These two poles of human orientation are largely unexplored in religions. It is as if the experience of most believers prefers to settle in the more comfortable areas around the equator. The region of Absoluteness is shunned as too cold, inhospitable and dangerous; and Cosmos, though studied by science as never before, is often experienced as largely barren of meaning. I want to explore both avoided (and evasive) Absoluteness and tainted Cosmos at the same time, suspecting that both are interrelated and of vital importance for human life. We need both radical transcendence and radical Cosmic immersion, together with the sense of a positive link between the two.

The submerged rock on which all neatly designed ships of meaning are finally wrecked during journeys such as ours here, is the question: Whence the subjective sense of evil, suffering and alienation, or even objective evil? Could we avoid such wreckage? How? We will have to face this question.

■ ‘metaphysical mysticism’ and related terms

Religion may be understood as world orientation with an exceptionally radical and integral intention. By ‘radical’, I mean ‘vertically’ deep (or high): penetrating the surface of everyday experience. ‘Integral’ indicates the ‘horizontal’ dimension of gathering as much of life and world as possible, preferably all of it, in religion’s embrace. Striving to cover these ‘vertical’ and ‘horizontal’ dimensions, religion is ‘comprehensive’, even ‘ultimate’ (i.e. to those who accept it). This is religion in a functional sense. This function almost inevitably takes normative structural shape. In addition, this has always included three sets of aspects: prescribed knowledge sometimes vested in sacred books; attitudes and sentiments; and behavioural patterns and institutions. Mysticism, as understood in our study, is religion at its most radical and comprehensive, moving beyond book, convention and institution.

Distinct from mysticism, religion with its normative teachings, socialising rituals and disciplinary ethics is here taken to be the societal outside of the human search for ultimate meaning. It is belief and institution, firm and conservative. A central dimension of the concept ‘mysticism’ in the sense deployed in this book is that it is an individual quest, not a collective enterprise. It was therefore not, generally speaking, a manifest part of traditional societies with traditional religions, but came to the fore in epochs when individuals became conscious of their own singularity. It is by definition an individual journey, or perhaps one travelled by small bands of lightly equipped friends, untrammelled by the baggage and entourage of a large religious caravan. At the best of times, mystics were the respected vanguards of religion; at the worst of times, they were ostracised and penalised by those institutions. Mysticism has social implications; it is a form of social protest, at times with direct social impact. Typically, it avoids being part of a social contract, and of becoming heavily institutionalised in itself.

Why load our leading concept to be *metaphysical* mysticism? ‘Metaphysical’ is intended as a useful mark of distinction from more practical, devotional and emotional kinds of mysticism, such as experiences of love, unity and so on. The kind of mysticism explored here is a form of understanding, ‘metaphysical’ not intended as hyper-abstract philosophy. It is simply used in the literal sense of the word as understanding and saying something – as far as that may be possible – about what may be ‘behind nature’ as experienced in everyday life and captured in the selective net of science.

In addition to allowing space for intuitive cognitive experience, ‘metaphysical-mystical’ here also refers to the attempt to make clear in rational terms the nature of such intuitive understanding. The kind of ‘mysticism’ suggested by ‘metaphysical’ in this exploration should not be mistaken for mystification: it would take it upon itself to express its perspectives in a consistent, coherent, clear, communicable manner. Consistency is taken to mean that its points of

departure and its derived arguments and conclusions should not contradict logic. Coherence is taken to mean that the various parts of the argument should dovetail meaningfully and coherently. Considerations such as these add weight to the desire to remain in the ambit of 'metaphysical'. In addition, it would expect of itself to make meaningful contact with the ordinary experience of reality and with science.

What we attempt here wants to link up with the discipline generally known as *history of religions* or, more broadly, *religious studies*, without limiting itself to the history of discrete religions in relative isolation, phenomenology-types of studies, social studies or comparative studies of various religions. Here we take a step further. While wanting to stay close to and on friendly footing with religious studies, it is not an exercise in religious studies in the disciplinary academic sense.

Metaphysical mysticism is distinct from *theology*, the latter being defined as the self-reflection of an institutionalised religion. It differs not only from *confessional theology*, but also from *philosophical theology*, especially insofar as philosophical theology is usually not conducted in a general sense but in a specific sense: as the reflection on 'God' in the context of *this* religion. Whereas confessional theology bases itself on the authority of normative scriptures and/or on certain creeds, philosophical theology wishes to conform to the generally accessible and binding rules of logic and reason, such as consistency and intelligibility. Yet it remains theology, usually religion-specific (Jewish, Christian, and so forth). This exploration is not an exercise in *comparative theology* either, as has in the recent past been espoused by, for example, Robert Cummings Neville (1991), continuing the work of theologians such as Paul Tillich, Wilfred Cantwell Smith and Hans Küng. This latter programme also boils down to the understanding, expressing and examination of the Christian gospel, from a Christian point of departure. Metaphysical mysticism steps outside that determining framework. It belongs to wisdom literature in a broad sense rather than to technical theology.

For theology as the self-reflection of faith, the medieval Christian theologian, Anselm (c. 1033–1109), coined the term *fides quaerens intellectum*: faith/belief, already certain of its truth, arrived at by authoritative revelation, seeking rational understanding. Anselm was a Christian theologian, but this definition could be applied to all religion-specific theologies. Theology has a strong institutional connection. It is the self-reflection of the religious institution, or at least the self-reflection of faith with a strong sense of such an institutional setting or belonging. Mysticism does not necessarily have any such involvement, neither in institutionalised social reality, nor in subjective individual belief. These meta-religious reflections step outside of any religion-specific restriction. They neither proceed from any such a priori commitment, nor lead to any such

commitment, but they are drawn towards what lies behind, before, after, formalised religion.

'Metaphysics' as understood here is obviously related to *philosophy* as the general human endeavour to understand things rationally. A portion of theology ('philosophical theology') shares that interest, proceeding from faith assumptions. Yet a difference in emphasis between the type of mysticism explored here and philosophy (and theology in the philosophical sense) is that metaphysical mysticism does not shy away from its transrational, intuitive root. Of course, the voice of rigorous reason, of logic and philosophy, as that tradition emerged two and a half millennia ago in various civilisations (cf. Geldsetzer 2010), remains normatively important. Yet, for its own journey, this exploration would prefer terms such as *metaphysical mysticism*, *sophiaphily* ('love of wisdom'), *philaletheia* ('love of truth') and *cosmosophy* ('wisdom of cosmos'), rather than cosmology in the scientific sense, or Philosophy in the disciplinary academic sense. Naturally, there are overlaps between the domains of Philosophy and metaphysical mysticism, not only in Hellenic and Eastern philosophy, but also more recently in the West. Representatives of French spiritualist philosophy, including Blaise Pascal (1623–1662), Henri Bergson (1859–1941) and Louis Lavelle (1883–1951), are cases in point. Therefore, this is not an exercise in either academic Philosophy, Theology or Religious Studies, nor is it in opposition to those disciplines as they are presently mostly institutionalised academically. It seeks to explore the borders that such disciplines may share with mysticism. In doing so, I shall move into the areas of overlap among them and into the space encompassing all of them. It is a search for a capstone, connecting and integrating the four-sided pyramid of science, theology, philosophy and religious studies, while respecting their boundaries and without interfering in their affairs.

The concept 'MM' would not mind being associated with the notions of *gnosis* and *wisdom tradition* either, obviously without identifying with everything that might pass under those names.

Not explored in this experiment, are the distinctions between 'mysticism' and four other cognate concepts: *spirituality*, *esotericism*, *occultism* (Faivre 2000 [1996]; Gibbons 2001; Hanegraaff 2012) and *spiritualism/spiritism*.

Spirituality is generally used as a generic concept, representing the whole range of a person's or a social group's orientation in the world with reference to a transcendent source of meaning. 'Mysticism' I would use in a stricter sense, as an individual's search for and experience of unity or non-duality with the ultimate dimension of cosmos and existence. Seen from the top, we have two concentric circles: spirituality the outer circle, mysticism the inner circle (Kourie 2006, 2008). 'Metaphysical mysticism', referring to the cognitive side of that enterprise, is even more restricted.

The word *esoteric* has a range of meanings:

- Firstly, it may mean secret knowledge, accessible only to initiates into a secretive group. I do not wish to express a value judgement on such a strategy, but mostly it was deemed necessary to escape hostile attention, and in principle, it did not contain any disdain for ‘the masses’. ‘Metaphysical mysticism’ as used here, is not intended to have that connotation. It is inclusive, public and accessible to all, seeking communicability and communion.
- Secondly, ‘esoteric’ may be used to denote a search for an understanding of some inner, deeper, mostly hidden reality or dimension of reality, underlying and implicitly present in ‘exoteric’ which is apparent, easily accessible sensible common-sense reality. In these reflections, ‘metaphysical mysticism’ is roughly equivalent to ‘esoteric’ in this second sense. This book could also be classified as belonging to the category of *wisdom literature*, at times closely related to ‘esoteric’ in this sense.
- Thirdly, whereas ‘esotericism’ always demonstrated a deep fascination with symbolism (such as numbers) as such, the emphasis in ‘mysticism’ has usually been more directly on the experience or understanding of such a deeper dimension of reality itself. The following reflections are not esoteric in this third sense.

The term *occult* is sometimes used as a synonym for ‘esoteric’. ‘Mysticism’ and ‘occultism’ can overlap: in the European tradition, Eckhart was a mystic in the more puristic sense of the word; Boehme, a mystic-esotericist(occultist). The present endeavour aligns itself with mysticism, not with ‘occultism’.

MM is not associated with *spiritualism/spiritism* – neither in the sense that ‘spirit’ is taken to be the only reality, nor that ‘spirit’ is taken to exist distinct from ‘matter’, nor that the dead continue to exist as disembodied ‘spirits’ with whom the living might have contact.

■ clearing space for the convergence of religious and mystical traditions

Ours is not the only time to be faced with the extraordinary invitation, extended by the wider cultural situation, to observe synoptically. There were other such opportune times in the past. One example is the time of the Ming dynasty (1368–1644) in China. Especially the 16th and 17th centuries were a period of intense intellectual activity that saw the fruitful interaction and *rapprochement* of Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, even Catholicism and Western scientific learning coming to China. Like ours, it was an age of critical reassessment of the past, intense awareness of the present, and certain expectations of the future (Yü 1981).

As far as the relationships between various religions are concerned, our day witnesses two extreme positions: the first sees only particularisation, irreducibility and differentiation; the second rushes ahistorically into universality

and non-differentiation. Neither is acceptable. When seeking a hermeneutical route somewhere between those extremes, three broad strategies open up before us:

- Firstly, such traditions in the plural might be acknowledged, but only in separateness. No relationship between them is sought. More than one of these could take turns to receive some attention, even respectful attention. It is more likely that one's interest be confined to one tradition only, avoiding the others and easily turning into isolationism and separatism.
- The second route takes us one step further by studying various traditions or figures comparatively, noting similarities, differences and historical connections. This is important, but does not necessarily provide a bridging, unifying vision.
- The third and most fruitful way is to look at them comprehensively, in their togetherness in one context, allowing oneself to be drawn into their truth claims, as expressions of the same perennial tradition. This is the way of coordination, and it could be done in various ways, some being more promising than others.

One (wrong) turn is superficial syncretism, taking bits and pieces from various contexts and knocking them together. Here we need not enter into an analysis of the word 'syncretism'. What I mean here, is a facile mixing of elements from divergent systems into a superficial agreement. Fusion ends in confusion. From the point of view of this endeavour, a superficial collecting of similar-sounding ideas without sense of context should be avoided at all cost.

A second synoptic perspective is to look at traditional answers simultaneously and yet to do so from a separating point of view, highlighting the differences, the breaks between them. This critical kind of focus is an antidote to superficial harmonising and, while drawing attention to the difficulties that may lurk in various traditional answers, it stimulates further thought. It is a stronger position than the previous option, and expresses an important aspect of a meaningful hermeneutic today.

There is also another turn to take, complementing and including the critical one. It is possible to have a sense of a universal *intelligentia spiritualis*, an essential togetherness of these traditions, like rivers all conditioned by the same forces of gravity, rainfall and so on, all coursing towards the same ocean and meeting there, sharing their waters. This is the strongest position to take.

Following this promising turn, again several options are available. One is to see them as substantially 'the same'. This is an oversimplifying approach, coming close to superficial, eclectic, ahistorical mixing and matching. Another, better way is to see them as tending in the same direction, acknowledging the real differences between them; not mixing them up, and yet realising that they share the same space, address the same problems, have the same destination, and have coinciding features. Mysticism is not native to any religion in isolation. The challenge is to acknowledge the jagged breaks between the different mountains, but to see them as belonging to the same range in the same landscape.

That is the approach followed on these pages. This terrain is like a landscape across which many people travel. The landscape itself is the same. Yet, all these individuals and caravans see it from varying angles, enter it from different starting points, travel in divergent directions, find themselves in dissimilar positions, look at unidentical scenes, are led by differing interests, and offer varied descriptions and accounts of their diverse journeys.

How does one execute this constructive exercise in relatedness? Again, at least three possibilities open up. These, it appears, are not absolutely dissimilar, but only relatively so, and they overlap:

- One is the creation of a brand-new paradigm. In real life it is only possible up to a point. Everyone in known history has stood on the shoulders of others, learning and borrowing from them. All culture and religion build on previous experience. Even so, a few heavenly-graced ones have made relatively fresh starts. Some of these pioneers are known; others, like the original Upanishadic visionaries, are not. The experiment between the two covers offered to the reader has no aspirations of grandeur. It explores the riverbeds of old truths. In this sense, it is a conservative exercise.
- Another possibility is to develop a synoptic perspective from within one existing tradition, assimilating the other traditions into that one as it is. This is not only psychologically an understandable position to take, but could also yield significant theoretical gains. An example would be the Christian programme of Nicholas of Cusa (Cusanus) (1401–1464), who came up with a groundbreaking attempt to reconcile various religions known to him – by integrating them into Christianity, even defining them as more or less deformed or provisional forms of Christianity. As the argument unfolds, we will encounter other similar minds. Likewise, one could take any other existing scheme as normative framework for good integration. This is not such a programme either.
- A third possibility, the panoramic interpretation, may arise from an open receptivity to several existing traditions simultaneously, although not exclusively beholden to any particular one. Any study of a particular religion as a fact (an institutionalised set of ideas, sentiments and actions) presupposes an all-inclusive matrix where homoversal function is primary. Disinterested inclusiveness of soul and mind in the search for meaning is, I believe, better than one-eyed partisanship. Today, as in Hellenism, the Italian Renaissance and the Chinese Ming dynasty, we live in a time that makes this third possibility a viable one once again. This is such a kind of search. Speaking for myself, I detached myself from institutionalised Christianity 40 years ago, yet never rejected Christianity. Likewise, I am not embedded in any formal Buddhist institution, and I have never become a disappointed, disillusioned, institutional Buddhist either.

This is not a ‘syncretistic’ book, but it is a ‘synoptic’ one, wishing at least to see them together; a ‘symphonic’ one, interested to *hear* them together; and a ‘synthetic’ one, piecing them together in a larger systematic framework in the perspective of ultimate silence. There is a price to pay, of course, for an

inclusive interest. Firstly, I will be heavily and happily indebted to existing interpretations and secondary sources for expert information and interpretation. Secondly, working on such a wide canvas blurs precision of detail, not doing justice to each of the individuals and traditions looked at. I accept that price.

Interested in the many, this exploration is driven by a passion for a *pax fidei*. It is interested in clearing a space in which the movement towards convergence in the world we live in today, could be possible. It clears an *agora*: an open space of assembly and democratic discussion, of public speaking and hearing, of negotiation and bartering of ideas, with the possibility of persuasion and agreement. Indeed, it has no higher claim than that of ‘possibility’; at the very best of ‘probability’, and of a sense of direction and orientation. I have neither the means nor the desire to convince against their will the agoraphobic: those fearing the accommodating space, the inclusive conversation and the open community.

Such a clearing of space inevitably has a creative side to it. It is not a passive registering of a state of affairs, but an active construction, a contribution to the development of a new perspective announcing itself today. That is the progressive side of this undertaking. It needs to be factually and historically correct, informed by current scholarship, which is always in the process of development and revision. In addition, it needs to be self-critically aware of its own unavoidable, sometimes idiosyncratic selections and emphases, even as it attempts to understand well and in a balanced manner. The main thing is to be moving in the right direction.

Seeking a theoretical space, these reflections are greatly indebted to the impetus of the Buddha as recorded in the Pāli scriptures. The Buddha’s emphasis on emptiness and impermanence, and his analysis of the constituents of a human person, play a large role on pages to follow. According to current predominant historical opinion (Bronkhorst 2014), the complex cultural world of early Buddhism was dominated by two master metaphysical options. The first, already present to some extent in the Upanishadic tradition and destined to reach its final form in Advaita Vedānta, was eternalism (*sāssata-dit̥ṭhi*): the belief in some eternal substance. The second was held by the *Lokayata* school: the materialistic belief that all is reducible to lifeless matter (obviously with certain implications for a post mortem existence of humans). A third view held by many was a continuation of the old mythological belief in a pantheon of gods, Brahma the first among them. Views similar to these three also dominated Greece of the time. Today they remain three basic orientations, in the forms of modern idealism, scientific materialism and theism (but now in the form of a strict monotheism). As far as the theistic option is concerned, the Buddha adopted a friendly attitude of peaceful transcendence. The idea of emptiness – this particular footprint on the sands of time, as large as that of an elephant and large enough to include those of other game – points in the most promising direction. Overall, and considering all their many deviations, the other footprints point in the same direction as this one: there must be a waterhole somewhere ahead.

Nevertheless a new step, taking into account the stones and thorns of today, must be taken in our own time. Behind us lies the spoor over the long stretch of time, but it is not about the elephant, nor about its footprint. It is about the water. All flowers grow towards the sun; all religions grow towards Horizon.

Distinct from early Buddhism as recorded in the Theravāda scriptures, our wandering has a strong cosmological interest, not limited to the psychological, phenomenological domain of human subjectivity, as was the case in early Buddhism. Early Buddhism is not the *norma normans* of this endeavour, but provides working hypotheses that may be explored in various directions in new contexts. So the factors constituting the human personality are here extrapolated to become factors constituting cosmos. Different from most of early Buddhist teaching, it is also pro-cosmos, pro-life and pro-body. It operates in the context of the contemporary sciences and realises that early Buddhism was embedded in an ancient cosmology which stamped its teaching: the pearl has to be loosened from an ancient bezel by means of historical criticism and imaginatively reset and displayed in another cultural frame. In any event, Buddhism, in its historical intention, is not an authoritarian body of teaching; the students are supposed to test the depth and breadth of the water for themselves.

An example in history of the kind of utopian open space imagined here is Plato's *Timaeus*. Plato is quite friendly towards popular, traditional religion, but not without irony. His political concern for the quality of the communal life of humans ultimately carries his cosmosophy. He leans heavily on and learns from the religious and philosophical traditions available to him, yet integrates and transcends them in his own way. His vision of the cosmos includes the mathematics and science of his day. He makes no claim to divine revelation or higher states of consciousness inaccessible to others, but allows the vision to come from the mouth of an ordinary, educated man, Timaeus, claiming no more than likelihood for his views. He develops his argument in a rational way, open to criticism and correction of his friends, in a democratic discussion at the marketplace of life. He does it all with an unsurpassed myth-creating imagination and speculative, constructive power. He commands respect, but demands no obedience or faith. In today's world, such an integration of art, science, mathematics, civil and popular religion, philosophy and theology in a grand MM design is unattainable. Perhaps they will never really be comfortable in one another's company again. Yet, weary and wary as they are of 'grand narratives', is this not perhaps the kind of utopia many disillusioned (post-) moderns nevertheless dream of?

■ linkage across epochal divides

The synoptic perspective bridges not only the breaks between various MM traditions at a given point in time (synchronically), but also the breaks between various historical epochs (diachronically). This second type of relative

discontinuity may affect the reception of past epochs within a single tradition – for example, the reception of early Christianity within later Christianity. It also affects the reception of past epochs across two or more traditions – for example, a reception of ancient Indian Vedism in contemporary Western culture.

Why bother? Did the old MM systems not have their day before the age of modern science? Did sets of cultural conditions very different from those of our present time not determine them, and are they not completely outdated now? Should we not at best display them in the museum of the history of ideas, as objects of an antiquarian interest? The answer is negative, for they have an abiding relevance that is worth pursuing. In contemporary literature, there is no more eloquent statement of this approach than the contribution of Kingsley (2010) on the historical connections between Mongolia, Tibet, Indian Buddhism, Greece and the Americas. It establishes historical connections antedating the scope of this journey of ours by several centuries, and incorporates a much vaster geographical interest. A broad historical vision of this nature needs to incorporate Africa as well.

It is true that the primary locus of discontent any of the old historical religions addressed some 2000 years ago is not necessarily the primary locus of discontent today. In addition, the primary focus of the ancient message of salvation may not necessarily appeal immediately to the present generation. Therefore, directly applying the answers developed *then* for a set of problems belonging to *then*, to the different problems of *today* is not possible once one has become aware of the sometimes terribly broad chasms of historical divides. This is not only the case within one broad historical stream, but even more so across various streams (Konik 2009). Simplistic repetition today of any of the forms taken by any of the old traditions in a bygone epoch would amount to ahistoric or anachronistic fundamentalism or romanticism. The alternative would be to engage in a process of responsible, reflective mediation and articulation of the many pasts that we are heirs of today, in the context of a larger intercultural multilogue.

Any set of features in any historical epoch constitutes a delicate balance of interlocking relationships, which cannot be disentangled easily. No religious item occurs in isolation. Each is embedded in a religious nexus of great complexity, and reciprocally implied in other factors: social, economic, political, psychological, and so on. Any item then was part of an entire package. Touch any aspect, and the whole web vibrates. Nor is ‘today’ a stable rack on which portions, cut from the body of a past, can just be hung to dry and then be consumed. The present is a constantly shifting set of relations of all kinds: social, political and economic, cultural, philosophical and scientific. Any attempt at reconciling any past with today would require an unpacking of as many of such variables as possible in a conscious process of critical appropriation, of inventive translation and interpretation – a tracing of real and possible connections with the past, an identification of viable growth points and doomed

dead ends. All of this implies the very active and self-conscious involvement of the present-day participant in the human story.

Discovering or inventing living with, or at least finding viable links with strange pasts, moves in the tension between two equally essential poles. Obliterate any one of them, and the fascination with the process of negotiation as such, will break down. It is the tension between distance and proximity: between then and now, there and here, difference and similarity, them and us, transcending and integrating, being outsider and being insider, strangeness and familiarity. If the tension becomes too taut, differences become incomprehensible: the connection snaps altogether. If the tension becomes too slack, similarity becomes identity; interest fades – if ‘we’ have it all right here and now, why bother with ‘them’? Clearly, we could take many positions on such a continuum. Some individuals – by dint of situation, temperament or taste – would be drawn by the fascinating attraction of distance, the otherness; others would want to emphasise the proximity, the virtual sameness. The risk associated with a fascination by distance is naïve escapism into a romanticised past; the risk of a strong sense of similarity is simplistic absorption of one into the other, of conversation reduced to subjection. Learning and dialogue are selective, critical processes of acculturation.

In our day of the convergence of all historical, cultural and religious streams in one public space, such a critical, inclusive appropriation of the past(s) may be pursued by all who reflect on religion, theology, philosophy and mysticism – whatever might be the nature of their self-identification or social and cultural association. Such a conversation (not interrogation) needs to be:

- historically well-informed
- led by fairness and understanding as far as the intentionality of any juncture of the past is concerned
- critical
- theoretically adequate
- progressive-constructive
- critical of the modern scientific worldview, of unconscious or deliberate efforts to raise that to unquestionable norm, and to subject potentially critical inputs from the past to its dominance.

Deliberate myopic self-enclosure in any one sector of humanity is not a responsible option – that is, it does not do justice to the direction of the past, does not follow the perhaps unintended drift present in all serious search for meaning. It does not interpret and address the complexity of the present situation sufficiently and it does not anticipate the requirements of the future adequately and creatively.

I am not positing any identities here, only postulating possible convergences among the great mysticisms, and hoping to find a metaphysical-mystical space where an illuminating, life-giving sun shines.

■ §2 Tendency towards Unground

■ *quatenus* and *quia*

These reflections do not wait for some supernatural revelation, nor rely fundamentally on any ancient documentations or collections (canons) of such revelations, claimed by themselves or their followers to be supernaturally backed. So I shall make no distinction between 'sacred books' and any other book, even though I shall be led by a sound respect for such books, the various religious traditions they represent and the scholarly disciplines which interpret them. I would be prepared to regard them as 'true', but then in a *quatenus* ('insofar as') sense, not in any *quia* ('because') sense. That is to say, I shall take them to be true *insofar* as they appear to be true on the evidence available, not on mere authority. Precious as a historical, institutionalised religion may be in the hearts of its followers, it is not absolute, but a product of history. Supreme wisdom is to be found in books held to be holy by their adherents, but their messages must be tasted carefully, rolled on the tongue, and then ingested – or not.

This does not detract from the respect that is due to those great ancestors from all cultures, the cloud of witnesses surrounding and accompanying us. This journey is a process of remembering, learning and adding historical depth to understanding. The past is relevant to the extent that it may serve the future. None of the constructions of the past are eternally true. Likewise, the path trodden here starts from and proceeds within a particular historical context.

■ historical-critical, social-critical explanation

A *historical-critical, social-critical* interest will therefore lead the understanding of such traditions and texts in this investigation. Such understanding investigates how religious constructs link up with the social contexts, the historical backgrounds and circumstances from which they arose. The embeddedness of specific forms of mysticism in their respective institutional religious contexts and their wider societies must be acknowledged. Sufism is historically an Islamic phenomenon, much as it also transcends the institutional boundaries of that religion, of religion as such, and can be open to modern science (Haeri 2008).

These reflections want to be aligned to present-day historical, critical scholarship of society and culture. Here too, finality of understanding is neither claimed nor sought. No historical picture, whether loyalist or critical, is ever 'correct'. After all, every interpretation of the past is a construction by the present, a present which will in due time be the past itself, and the object of the same kind of semi-arbitrary appropriation by some new present lying in some future, and one that is construing its own historical pictures, just as our own present is doing today. The past changes with the changing present all the time.

Like a fly on a wall, we see what we see, but that seeing occurs from a very limited perspective, and it touches only the surfaces and angles that are open to us. We live, think and speak within the confines of our particular historical setting. All the same, integrity dictates that we see as sharply and widely as possible what we can see, and describe what we see as honestly as we can.

Speaking of historical and social critique, this approach is critical of reducing the MM search of humanity to social construction, which is assumed to be unrelated to any depth dimension of society and the world. It does not work on the assumption that the great MM constructions (or their religious articulations) were or are naïve, useless or dangerous inventions, as the dominant episteme of our time implies. Fully realising the constructed nature of tradition and cultural products such as religion, it believes that it is time for an old tradition – openness to Silence, to Unground – to be wrought anew for our time.

■ intentionality

The investigation presents a limited survey based on a restricted number of case studies of individual persons who have trod this terrain. The standards of validation and evaluation for trustworthy case study research, such as credibility, dependability and confirmability (Creswell 2013:243–268) have been borne in mind. Religions as collective endeavours are also treated as historical cases. I shall try to be true to the *intentions* of authors and books and traditions of the past – that is, I shall follow a general *hermeneutical phenomenological* approach. This means that I shall strive adequately to describe, reconstruct and analyse that which the initiators and authors of such books and traditions actually, subjectively, experienced and meant. Following on that, I shall respect the *religious interpretations* of such books (from allegorical to symbolical to theological): how, according to their influential thinkers, the messages of corresponding literature tied in with the central teachings of those religions. That is another aspect of an ‘intentional’ reading of such messages.

We assume that all relevant messages need to be *interpreted* in the sense of being *translated* into and for the cultural and social context of today. This task is very much akin to translating or interpreting from one language into another. The choice is to stick close to the donor language, or to elect to say *now*, in the receiving language, what had been said *then* in the original language – but now as if for the first time in *this* language. In other words, how would the original author have said it *if* he had lived today, and *if* he had written in the receiver language? Each procedure involves risks, and a perfect translation is therefore impossible. By staying close to the donor language, the receiver language can be potently enriched; but working more creatively with the source language has its own advantages. Interpreting classical traditions and texts ‘mystically’, one stands before the same challenge. For example, the Buddha presupposed

the scaffolding of the cosmology and social structure of his day; it largely determined his teaching on rebirth, for example, and gods and heavens and hells. There is of course the complication of the reception, formalisation and fixation of his message by his followers in his own time and shortly thereafter – but that does not affect our present problem, so we can let it rest. The challenge is: what do we, who live in very different circumstances today (in which science rightfully plays a most influential role), do with his original message today? The cosmology of his time simply does not apply to our world, which has been shaped by science. So, what about rebirth and so on and so on?

There is not one or any easy solution to this challenge. There are those who wish to stay as close as possible to the original message of whatever religion, at any cost. The line followed in these chapters is different. Here the question would be: suppose the Buddha (to stay with him for the moment) did not live 2500 years ago, but today, would he have articulated his message in the way written up in the *Digha Nikāya*? No, clearly he would not. The gem would have been the same, but the bezel would have been quite different. So the challenge, the experiment, remains: how might what any ancient message *intended*, be translated and interpreted today.

■ **tentionality**

Beyond the three methodological guidelines just mentioned, the interpretation of such books and traditions followed here, will be *tentional*. ‘Intention’ refers to that which is subjectively, consciously intended or meant by people; ‘tention’ here refers to what exceeds the conscious intention, to the trans-intended drift or inclination of a theoretical structure or an argument. It refers to the deepest lessons religions teach, perhaps implicitly and subconsciously. ‘Intention’ refers to the hermeneutical act of interpersonal communication; ‘tention’ to allowing oneself to be drawn into the structure of an argument, regardless of the person by whom it is put forward. This is not to deny that a tentional reading is more than mere reconstruction, and contains an element of transformative interpretation. One takes part in a discussion courteously and respectfully, yet realising that one’s friends are like fingers pointing towards the mysterious moon out there. A tentional reading concerns itself with the moon.

The manner of decoding messages presented in these pages does not assume some know-it-all, having-arrived attitude. This experiment is led by a hunch, reinforced by study, that all people intuitively know where north is and want to move north, and are in fact, heading northwards. This sometimes occurs via strange deviations, oftentimes by dint of circumstance. Some have penetrated further north than others have; some have indeed reached what is reachable by human endeavour. Hence, such MM thinkers, books and traditions

are guides. We are sitting at the feet of the great ones, not patting them on the head. In what is to follow, some play a more seminal, some a more distant and challenging, and others a more confirmatory role.

To remain with the ancients for another moment: Plotinus worked in accordance with a tendential principle. He built his system by synthesising the wisdom of the ancients before him. In that operation he distinguished between those venerable philosophers of old who discovered the truth and those of them who approximated it most completely (*Enneads* III.7.1). Christianity in its entirety did the same, interpreting the Old Testament as essentially oriented towards Jesus Christ.

The assumed tendential drift is a hypothetical construct guiding this journey. I will read these authors as having a certain tendency or inclination – even if such a tendency might be quite hidden in the text itself, even if its author(s) may not be conscious of it. I will read them in this manner even if the tendency is up to a point an extrapolation from our dreams and aspirations of today, and even if my reconstructed tendency may not coincide seamlessly with those authors' outspoken intentions or the accepted interpretations of their commentators. It is a generous, inclusive reading of traditions, assuming their essential tendencies to be generous and open-ended themselves. I am prepared to ascribe it to them as their direction, the moon to which they are pointing, irrespective of whether this clearly manifests on the surface. That moon is Absoluteness. I read such traditions and individual authors as partial rather than as false, if this is in any way possible. Truth cannot be interned in any institution, any localised, national or cultural tradition, or any set of propositions.

The fly might guess or extrapolate what the invisible underside of the table looks like. Iron file dust is arranged in accordance with the magnetic field of a magnet that may be hidden from sight. Likewise, all religions and religious and mystical literature are here seen as arranged over some hidden magnetic field. The point in interpreting figures from the past is to fathom what ultimately, as if via a broken mirror, fascinated them in the first place. Was it not, ultimately, the wonder of their being something at all – something arising from 'what'? Why, and how, and to 'what' does it return? Consequently, I accept that all historical, exoteric religions and their books – whatever their external circumstances and conditions might be – grow towards the ultimate light and warmth that give shape, life and beauty to all things. That is the true, hidden, inner meaning of such religions and their books.

Such religions and their sacred books have an open, potential meaning. That potential meaning is 'unlocked' up to a point (as if showing a hidden but available treasure), but it is also 'imagined' and 'performed' (as in understanding, interpreting and above all performing – however inadequately – music imagined by an unknown composer). The music is the same every time, and never the

same; and it is not reducible to the sensible data, the bars on paper, the instruments, or the performers.

All such explorers from the past proceeded from sophisticated cultural and religious base camps above the more humble cultural and religious villages further down. Otherwise, they would probably not have made it to 'higher'. In addition, more likely than not, they might have felt the emotional and practical need to return to those base camps and villages, the various '-isms', '-ities' and '-doms'. Yet up here, those visitors are of a kind, a band of quite free spirits as far as their cultural and religious points of departure are concerned, sharing the same need to see far in all directions. This, I postulate. So I assume their various and indeed sometimes very different contexts as a given, but that is not where my primary interest lies. I shall attempt to reconstruct and interpret the footprints in the historical order that they were made, but not primarily in terms of religious belonging; I shall interpret the visitors to these heights as a community of friends, sharing the same MM passion across cultural and religious borders. This kind of dialogue, operating at the breadth of range intended here, so necessary in our world of today, is a difficult and hazardous undertaking. The community of those who might want to join in such an adventure is only at the start of their venture.

There remains a huge ambivalence in such a tendential understanding: to what extent is such interpretation discovery of what such books intend (perhaps unconsciously), or are they invention on the side of the interpreter? The readers of such texts find themselves in a circularity of mutual stimulation from which there is probably no escape, but which is virtuous rather than vicious. A tendential interpretation of the past in the sense intended here, allows us to work conservatively and progressively at the same time. We respect the past – that is, the many pasts – and we imagine a future as a creative extension of those pasts. This includes, to be decided from step to step and situation to situation, the possibility of rejection of elements from the past, and revolutionary change – or of an adoption of something from an almost forgotten past. 'Tendentious' with its derogatory association, implying an arbitrary, aggressive, dogmatic imposition of an alien meaning upon such narratives to suit our purpose, enforcing a hermeneutical closure on them, is not intended. Nor is a presumptuous subsuming or inclusion of them into a new system, restricting or reducing the other positions to the one favoured by ourselves, intended. Likewise, we do not intend any deformation of any tradition from our present point of view, as if we know better than they what they (unfortunately unsuccessfully) tried to do.

This approach does not mean that we arrogantly and patronisingly know better than they do. We merely follow the hints and clues given in those traditions themselves, sometimes as if hidden deliberately, sometimes as if lightly, playfully, concealed just under the surface. We wonder, suspect, guess,

try out and play with such possibilities. Above all, we remind ourselves that such attempts are inventions, discoveries of imaginable possibilities, not scientifically provable facts.

We postulate here that the great hidden tendency under and in all religions and MM's, is the bipolar tendency towards Absoluteness and Cosmos.

■ the quest of the human species as one differentiated whole

Understanding the past comprehensively would mean finding a way back to the hidden archetypes and symbols embedded in the biological species that we call 'human'. I assume that mystical wisdom, one of the basic types of human response to things, preceding the various religions and likely to surface at any time, is buried in layers of the human constitution as old as our species itself. Let us in principle allow ourselves to be drawn into a tradition as ancient as the human spirit itself, going back to primordial forms of shamanism. The *arcanum* (secret) is present in us, and is willing to give access to the quiet, patient seeker. It is a kind of *philosophia perennis*, going back to very early layers of the human constitution before humanity dispersed into the different cultural and religious blocs as it spread across the geographical continents. Because of the limitations of this investigation and its understanding of 'mysticism' as becoming clearly manifest with the arising of a certain sense of singular selfhood, the contributions of various archaic and traditional religions from Africa, Australasia, the Americas, Polynesia and so on, magnificent as they are, do not feature in the historical picture of this compendium. Similarly, owing to space constraints, the connections between the personal ecstatic experience of the shaman in a preliterate society and that of the mystic in a literate culture and religion with a philosophical tradition will regrettably remain unexplored. This experiment remains an exercise in understanding the multifaceted Eurasian MM tradition of the last two and half millennia. Nevertheless, I am profoundly aware of the contributions such older traditions made to the spiritual reorientation necessary today.

Hence, this study is by far not a history of transordinary experience. I have chosen to focus on individual MM authors from some of the written traditions of East Asia, India, the Near East, the Hellenic world and the West. Shining in their absence are, for example, Confucianism and Baha'i. This exploration treads a middle path, neither too broad nor too narrow: too broad would be an attempted inclusion of the traditional shamanic wisdoms; too narrow would be, for example, a linkage to the Abrahamic faiths only.

Based on that restriction of scope, problematic as it is, we may now enter into conversation with MM teachers of humankind and the schools and traditions that they founded, perhaps deliberately, perhaps unintentionally and accidentally.

On the following pages we shall touch on the teachings of MM geniuses such as the ones mentioned below. We shall consider:

- In India, the teachings of the Buddha, the critique of Nāgārjuna, the panoramic vision of Asanga and Vasubandhu in Yogācāra Buddhism, the Advaita-Vedanta of Sankara, the poetry of Krishna devotee Mira Bai and visionary thinkers in modern India, such as Vivekananda and Aurobindo.
- In East Asia, Taoism (Chuang-Tzu and the probably composite, legendary figure of Lao-Tzu – where the historicity of the latter figure and others such as Moses is of no great concern to the argument of this essay), and later Buddhist syntheses such as those of T'ien-t'ai and Hua-yen (Fa-tsang), and the Zen teachings of Dogen.
- In pre-Christian Hellenic Europe, Heraclitus, Parmenides, Pythagoras, Empedocles, Plato, Aristotle and the Stoics.
- In Judaism (where not all were believers), the ancient myths of creation and Jahweh, Philo, Jesus, the Kabbalah (such as Isaac Luria), Chassidism and Baruch de Spinoza.
- In Christianity and the West (which was not a straight continuation of Greece, and where not all were Christian), Jesus, Ammonius Saccas, Plotinus and Proclus, Hildegard of Bingen and Hadewijch.
- In Islam, the prophet Muhammad and mystics such as Rabe'a al-Adawiya, Mansur al-Hallaj, Suhrawardi, Ibn Arabi, Rumi and Mulla Sadra.
- Strongly non-aligned ones such as Kabir (wandering traveller on the restless, endless journey of this kind) – who might neither avoid nor settle in any camp, but move appreciatively through and beyond each occurring on his path. In doing so, the roamer, accepting some food and drink, would move on, fascinated by the empty horizon, always shifting yet always defining the landscape in its busy fullness. The haunting image of the lonely rhinoceros drawn in the *Khaggavisana Sutta* of the *Sutta Nipata* comes to mind.

Minds such as the above constitute the family, the genealogical tree from which this venture stems. I freely seek the teaching of all masters, constrained only by time and ability. They lived on various cultural continents, sometimes mutually isolated for centuries, and yet they shared a common ancestry and inhabited the same world. To do justice to any of them in a format such as this is impossible. Ideal typical oversimplifications are the inevitable price to pay for a procedure of this nature. Such minds illustrate many possible combinations of 'metaphysics' and 'mysticism'. Some could devote all their time to it, others only part of their time, even though it might have been the hidden axis of their lives. In line with the 'tendential' approach, one has to acknowledge that some of the individuals mentioned above were more gifted than others and some have made a greater contribution. Yet I am interested in the MM ideas rather than in establishing a hierarchy of personal 'greatness'; in theoretical tendencies rather than in the historical and social 'success' of 'great men' (the story of religion and even MM thought is a story of social discrimination against women) on the hit parade of history. The preponderance of men in the list above reflects the appalling androcentrism of religious history as such. A mystic is a mystic is a

mystic – yes, but not quite. Gender discrimination looms largely. Indeed, ‘in the usual portrayals of religion women are notable by their absence’ (Anderson & Young 2004:ix). This unfortunate state of affairs is not by far rectified in this book, simply because of the limitations of my expertise.

Figures such as the ones listed above form the apex of what we might imagine as a pyramid. Today the shelves of bookstores are stacked with popular books on ‘spirituality’, ‘metaphysics’ and ‘mysticism’. Important things happen there: it is the compost from which new plants grow. Then there is the level where the classical traditions of nations, peoples, cultures, religions and languages are maintained, protected and reinterpreted. Again, this is a magnificent necessary layer. And then there is the level where great breakthroughs are made. The bottom-up and top-down movements that take place among these three levels need to be recognised, appreciated and encouraged.

A journey such as this has to be authentic. No hitchhiking is allowed here, no matter how grand the vehicle. On this road one travels on one’s own two feet touching, experiencing the ground from one step to the next, personally validating each step. I wish to listen to such noble ones without subjecting any of them to anyone else’s teaching, attending, as it were, a conversation among those great equals. They are all ancestors of ours, forming a single, differentiated community of those who meditate and reflect on ultimacy, on the nature of the cosmos, life and humanity. Different as they are, they all incline towards Absoluteness. I wish to do justice to each free spirit in her or his unique singularity and I wish to see them all as arising, like unique yet similar flowers and fruit, from the same root, on the same tree, even if from different cultural and religious branches. We live in a fragmented world; the various MM traditions are like shards of a broken mirror, yet somehow all reflect the light of the same, whole sun.

When attempting to find links among figures such as the above, one could work inductively from a limited number of cases towards the construction of a comprehensive, inclusive frame presented as compelling, because it is based on ‘the facts’. This attempt does not work backwards through time trying to establish some general common core that underlies the diversity of religious and worldview systems. An alternative way might be to work from within some committed religious point of view. Ibn Arabi could say that to have lived one religion fully is to have lived them all. He recognised the relative value of each of the many religions in an open spaciousness – yet, speaking as a Muslim himself and knowing that he was doing so, he thereby relativised his own religion and his own belonging to it. What is offered here is not this second option either, but instead one that relates the various religions to the Horizon transcending, yet integrating all of them.

Encounter with science

For millennia science in a primitive sense was part of religion. From about six centuries BCE, science in the more mature sense gradually emerged and evolved to become a massive tree, not only competing with religion for resources and loyalty, but also growing to overshadow it in modern culture. In its own right and on its own terms and increasingly free from religious tutelage, science strove for radical and integral knowledge of the world solely based on fact and reason. It has become the mightiest factor in determining humanity's behaviour in the world today.

In the secular West, science has taken over certain functions of religion and many, perhaps the majority, deem it more suited to the needs of survival and meaning. In the other sectors of humanity, including the traditional cultural blocs such as the Middle East and Africa, traditional religion is offering stiff resistance. Whether religion will in the long run be able to hold its own, remains to be seen.

The problems of traditional religions have become clear to increasing numbers of people in those countries where science exploded onto the scene. Challenged by science, religion's truth claims have, in the eyes of many, become unfounded, restrictive, prescriptive and proscriptive. That applies particularly to the largest monotheistic religions of the West (Judaism, Christianity and Islam). Religious social institutions – again, particularly in that family of historical

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religions – have become tainted as authoritarian. Religion is looked upon as the last resort for attitudes and sentiments that are broadly regarded as reactionary and out of touch with contemporary reality. Sexism and the like are seen to be associated with religion as an institutionalised force. However, science is not exempt from comparable problems and temptations. At least since Thomas Kuhn, the role that power and the protection of vested interests play in the scientific enterprise have become known.

Mainstream science as conceived in popular culture increasingly developed along mechanistic lines. It is not as though modern science merely stood back from questions of ultimacy. In popular culture, it had a more ominous dimension: a tendency to foreclose such questions; even, by default and sometimes by design, at least implicitly to answer them in devastating ways. Life could become a chance accident in a lifeless and essentially meaningless cosmic desert. The net of mathematics spread over dead matter could coincidentally produce the most fascinating facts, predict events with astounding accuracy, and design the most efficient technologies leading to the most advanced machines – but, finally, also serve the greedy needs of economically advanced nations. Nature could become an exploitable object. Traditional religion seemed powerless to halt this juggernaut.

This treatise does not engage directly with the sciences, so this chapter will limit itself to:

- (1) Outlining five overall strategies in addressing the relationship between MM and science.
- (2) Listing 20 questions of MM importance implied by contemporary science.
- (3) Dealing with the manner in which a few prominent scientists of the last two centuries themselves reflected on some of these questions.

■ §3 Strategies in addressing the relationship with science

Strategies for dealing with the relationship between science (natural science, that is) and religion (and the radicalisation of religion in MM) at the present time, include the five ideal types listed below. They are not an exhaustive set of pigeonholes. Certainly, the mesh of the sieve could be made finer, and obviously in real life there will be various expressions of each type, deviations and mixes and combinations of them.

■ asymptotic parallelism

This position may be taken from the MM/religious side of the big divide between the two discourses. I do not intend the conservatism of the good folk who have not really been confronted by the challenge of science and who – even in

pockets of present-day culture – simply continue to believe as if scientific accounts of the world are of no concern. Epistemologically, it may be assumed that an ancient mythological account of the world has been revealed supernaturally and is literally true down to the last detail. Many people, still living innocently in geographical and cultural isolation, follow this route. However, where the innocence has been destroyed beyond a certain point, it turns into pseudo-innocence, leading to cultural and religious obscurantism.

Beyond naïve conservatism, at the level of informed reflection, an attempt may be made to evade the challenge of science by the tactic of strong separation of the two discourses. Any link between science and ultimate meaning is severed. The believers withdraw into the untouchable stronghold of faith, tradition or the experience of God. This kind of faith – perhaps untroubled, perhaps panicking – opts to ignore science, and not to address the genuine MM issues raised from within it.

The Reformed Christian theologian Karl Barth (1886–1968) followed an asymptotic line of religious reflection: faith and its self-reflection (theology) shall not seek a synthesis of any kind with science. That view has an ascetic motive: protection of the purity of faith and its self-reflection; it also has a prophetic motive: protest against the quasi-religious escalation of science. Science, sticking to its job and staying clear of grandiose worldview presumptions, has great dignity and value, this position holds. Notwithstanding, any systematic hybrid of science and theology is anathema.

One cannot doubt the integrity and resolve of this kind of faith, in whatever religious context (Christian or otherwise) it may occur. Yet this position cannot be maintained. Science is not merely a collection of facts with low-level empirical and theoretical relevance; it has meta-empirical implications at a fundamental level. Science may not be ignored as if it is of no MM concern.

The divide may also be looked at from the other side: the split may be effected from the side of science. Biologist Stephen J. Gould (1941–2002) took the position that religion and science do not speak to the same things. It may take the form of scepticism, effectively shutting science off from any search for transcendence: nothing can be said about a metadimension, but if people really insist on trying their luck, whatever they say or believe can only have the status of private, subjective opinions. Here too, the strong separation is difficult to uphold. This approach is easily sucked into the worldview of materialistic atheism. To assume that science and MM operate at two completely different levels or in two completely different provinces of meaning without any connections and mutual implications between them, oversimplifies complex issues.

In passing, asymptotic parallelism is also a strategy often employed to determine the relationship between various religions. Then it is the functional equivalent of what *henotheism* or *monolatry* were, for example, in the ancient

world: the existence of many gods is affirmed or admitted or at least not questioned in myth or belief system, but 'for us', for all practical purposes, there is only one God. Otherwise, there was the possibility of *kathenotheism*: concern with one god at a time, without rejecting the others. Today the same strategy is often followed: the value, even the truth of various religions 'for their adherents' is admitted, but 'for me' or 'for us' there is only religion X: *suum cuique*. It may be tolerant, but it is not inclusive, and it does not offer a theoretical solution to the conundrum of religious or MM truth.

■ **positivism-materialism**

This strategy, not inherent in science itself, often amounts to a comprehensive, quasi-religious, quasi-metaphysical worldview. The 'a' in its self-professed 'atheism' seldom denotes mere withdrawal from the meta-empirical level. It seldom amounts to a purely methodological agnosticism ('weak' positivism), but easily drifts beyond that point, becoming a 'strong' position with heavy overtones. The 'weak' position would declare: for scientific purposes, we restrict ourselves to the empirical facts. The 'strong' position would deny all meta-empirical meaning, or derive all meaning from materialist presuppositions. In doing so, it readily exhibits its own meta-empirical, quasi-metaphysical overtones.

The vacuum left by the disqualification of the traditional concept of a personal Creator-God is often quickly filled by a subpersonal set of forces understood in a mechanistic sense, often grown into a complete materialistic worldview, explaining all. In ancient India, philosophical materialism was well developed, and adopted in various ways in philosophies such as those of Kakuda Katyayana and the Lokayata (6th century BCE) (Bhattacharayya 1983:188ff; Frauwallner 1973:215-266). Early forerunners of this position in the Hellenic world include Democritus (c. 460-370 BCE), Epicurus (341-271 BCE) and Lucretius (c. 99-55 BCE). Since the 17th century, materialism has slowly but surely become the dominant model in modern culture.

This strategy is not to be equated with the caricature of it often presented by religious people, as if materialism as such implies vulgar hedonism and the like. As its history shows, its sophisticated supporters have always thought it to be compatible with art, humanism, morality and all other expressions of high culture. In contemporary discussions this strategy either denies that the questions that will be raised in §4 can be answered in any meaningful way at all, or answers them in ways that would keep the enquiring mind within the limits of empirical science. This may be termed the route of *positivism* (sticking to observable facts only), *scientism* (sticking to scientific procedures and results only) or *reductionism* (ultimately reducing all reality to matter).

■ fundamentalism

Fundamentalism – a social force of considerable weight in contemporary society – is not to be identified with conservatism, as little as asymptotic parallelism is. Nor is it simply a blunt, uninformed rejection of science. It is the strategy of selective acceptance of some scientific results, and their absorption into traditional religion. It is the adoption of such items into the frame of a traditional theological position, and the often ingenious adaptation of such scientific notions within the religion's confines, often narrowly and strictly defined. Those elements that cannot be made to fit onto this Procrustean bed by stretching or shrinking are then lobbed off and cast away. This operation often relies on good information; it may have the measurements of the guest. It is the religious bed that will not accommodate this visitor in its full, living integrity.

The point of the fundamentalist exercise is the attempt to try and save as much as possible of an outlook that is based on ancient, pre-scientific, mythical documents. Fundamentalism is usually associated with an ahistorical, uncritical scripturalism. The religious book speaks directly to scientific issues on the level of science. Mainly forms of Judaism, Christianity and Islam are treading the way of religious fundamentalism, although it is not confined to those 'religions of the book'. A well-known example of such conflation or confusion of science and religious faith and myth is the equation of the six days of the Creation story according to the witness of faith in the book of Genesis, with the periods of geological time. Another example is the direct, simplistic equation of the scientific postulate of a Big Bang with the act of creation in Genesis. The point is not to strip old mythical accounts of the world, or the various MM traditions expressed through such myths, of their value. On the contrary, they should be taken seriously, but they need to be interpreted.

The most basic assumption behind fundamentalism is the belief in a personal divinity, anthropomorphically understood in an uncritical sense: God is human-like, loving, jealous, acting and reacting, rewarding and punishing and intervening in nature as it pleases him, sometimes in response to human pleas.

There are many shades of fundamentalism, from relatively progressive to extremely reactionary. One such possibility is the *deus ex machina* ('god out of the machinery') model. This is named after a procedure in Greek and Roman drama: if the author did not know how to resolve a complex plot, he often allowed a god to be lowered onto the stage by a crane to speak the last word. Small wonder that this procedure was later criticised as showing a lack of skill on the side of the dramatist. It remains a favoured procedure in certain religious quarters when settling theoretical complexities. A supernatural divinity of the traditionally theistic variety is lowered into the debate. Miracles are a stock device in the fundamentalist arsenal.

Scientism and fundamentalism can become strange bedfellows by the simple device of dissociated thinking. The human mind can somehow manage to contain theoretically incompatible ideas under one blanket. The two discourses are then not synthesised theoretically, but simply stuck together or left alongside each other without talking to each other. Fundamentalist believers may even be scientists hoping to find a safe haven in eternal or traditional religious certainties.

Such eating one's cake on Sunday and having it on Monday is no solution. The challenge posed by science is too radical for a pick and choose approach to ancient religious scriptures. One cannot abandon the 'how' of biblical creation while retaining the 'who'. The inevitable implication of accepting the 'how' of science, is the radical problematising of the 'who' of traditional theism. 'God' can never be the same again. A complete MM overhaul is necessary. Traditional theology as a master paradigm, adapted here and there, is no longer a way to go, and this venture, sympathetic as it is of the Christian tradition, dispraises that approach. The same applies to Buddhist or any other form of fundamentalism.

■ liberal integrationism

In liberal integrationism, some traditional religious framework, however attenuated, remains the frame of reference and interpretation. Its attitude to science and culture in general is not as narrow and selectively exclusive, but inclusive and accommodating. In its interpretation of its scripture it is not as bound to the letter, but allows for more freedom – either reading texts historically critical as nested in their time, or allowing for a variety of allegorical and spiritual interpretations, or both. It regards at least some traditional beliefs as dispensable in the light of modern science, or at least as reinterpretable. In its continuity with its own tradition, it is not reactionary and backward looking, but progressive and forward looking. It is more creative, bold and free than fundamentalism is as far as its relationship to the mother or host religion is concerned. It is prepared to adapt that framework, even considerably. However, both theoretically and emotionally, it continues to move in the ambit of such a mother religion.

Presumably, there are limits as to how far liberal integrationism might go in its grafting of science onto a religion – or (and this is more often the case) their religion onto science. Not anything goes. To what extent must it comply with the letter or spirit of the old, normative tradition? When is some opinion beyond the pale? The shibboleth's dividing fundamentalism and liberal integrationism may vary. Must women be subordinate to men? Can water be changed into wine? Do dead bodies return to life? To mention one example from the sphere of Christianity: Rudolf Bultmann (1884–1976) found it relevant to reinterpret

the resurrection of the believer in existential terms; the traditional article of faith in Christ's bodily resurrection means that Christ has created the possibility of a new existence.

In the monotheistic faiths of the Middle East and West, the most basic ontological assumption of liberal integrationism is the belief in divinity. Its assumption of or belief in a divinity may come in a number of varieties. Mostly, but not always strongly, the view of divinity that is held, has a personalistic flavour. Yet the personhood of divinity may be stripped of some features of human personhood. The risk run in this strategy is that religious reflection may be reduced to the ashes of a once-burning bush of faith enthusiasm. As theology, it could become *-logy* without *theos-* as a living reality. In mimetic desire to be scientifically respectable, the academic engagement with religion could successfully inscribe itself in the established scientific field of force, but at the cost of the critical and creative role of religion.

The same would apply to other religions, such as Buddhism. Here too, the vigorous, strict, challenging classical teachings could be atrophied to the level of non-nutritious savouries, merely pandering to the contemporary consumerist palate. This approach too, is turned down in our contemplation. The original teachings of Christianity and Buddhism (to stay with these two for the moment) are to be studied and appreciated in their original embedding contexts. Their explicit intentions are to be respected and not whittled away, and only then the arduous step towards a creative tendential extrapolation suitable to the deepest needs of the present cultural crisis can be undertaken. That should certainly not simply amount to a mere surrender to contemporary cultural and social dictates to ensure money, institutional growth or survival. It would be the ultimate betrayal.

■ naturalistic totalism

A fifth possible strategy in negotiating the relationship between MM and science may be termed 'naturalistic totalism'. That is the one sought here.

This approach would want to transcend the ontological break between 'nature' and 'supernature' and seek organic interrelationships of all levels and forms of being – and may (or may choose not to) refer to that All as somehow 'divine'. Seeking a way to express an alternative view, beyond theism and atheism, yet imbued with mystical significance, I shall explore terms such as *trans-theistic*, *meta-theistic*, or *a-theistic*. As far as the last term ('a-theistic') is concerned, these reflections distinguish between 'atheism' and 'a-theism': the former refers to a flat, mostly materialistic reactionary denial of 'God' and every possible functional equivalent of such an idea; the latter is not a position of denial, but extension of the mystery.

This strategy would be open to science and would admire and delight in its insights. Even if this inquiry does not venture into science itself as it explores a path to a mysticism of nature, we dare not – in fact, we cannot even if we wanted to – withdraw from the powerful sphere of science, for it determines the cultural landscape on which all of humanity exists today. Over and above, we do not want to. This strategy would also promote an alignment of science and MM, while respecting the distinctiveness of the competencies of both spheres (Clayton 2007:95). MM is awarded its own dignity, its own course and is regarded as at best partly dovetailing with science. Undoubtedly, some positive alignment between the two discourses is the challenge and invitation of our day, but this strategy would opt for a meaningful conversation and integration above a mixture spoiling both. Having to read the dated science presented as part of an MM argument, can make for embarrassing reading. The great Hegel is a case in point. So is Bergson. Such subjection occurs in contemporary Christianity, where the reduction of religious reflection to the status of a series of footnotes to modern science, is a problem. The same threat is present in, for example, the appropriation of classical Eastern Buddhism to the dictates of contemporary Western tastes (cf. McMahan 2008), reducing Buddhism to the status of a toothless tiger, tamed, paraded and (mis)used for palliative purposes. MM and science should at best be discussion partners, neither absorbed into the other, each critical of the other. No doubt MM has a lot of catching up to do as far as science is concerned. Equally, the great MM insights of humanity over millennia and cultures have a lot to offer.

In terms of foundational Western antiquity, an MM for today would appreciate not only Plato, but also Aristotle. As philosopher, Aristotle was as tough as nails, and a label ‘MM’ would have hung skew around his neck. One of the most influential metaphysicians, he was not exactly a mystic. Still, how would the kind of attempt made here measure up to his uncompromising scrutiny? Of course, it would be anachronistic and in a sense pointless to ask what the report of the examiner Aristotle would have looked like. Yet, it is an interesting experiment. Would he have faulted its procedure on the grounds of it being insufficiently inductive (working from the bottom upwards)? After all, was he not the founder of what would become the Western scientific methodology? Indeed he was, but in his own scientific work he was not satisfied with the mere gathering of information, upward generalisation and a level of theorising directly linked to observation. Lover of empirical detail and master of induction that he was, he also came up with a metaphysical theory, modified over many years, but one that was certainly not unconnected to his science.

Naturalistic totalism would encourage serious effort positively and directly to engage MM and science. Yet in the reflections presented here, it is not done; this plate is full as it is, and it has no ambition to be branded amateur science. Science is a background presence in these reflections; it does not become constitutive content, but remains context, just as MM is thought of as being

context, not content of science. This experiment emphatically does not erect an MM that is an extension of science, does not develop its argument from within science, and does not enter into dialogue with science in the context and on the methodological (experimental, mathematical) terms of science as such.

■ §4 Science and questions of ultimacy

The scientific picture of nature implies questions reaching outside the domain of science itself. Such questions concern not only fact, number, empirical chains of cause and effect and explanatory models and theories, but stir on the edge of contemporary natural science. They include:

- ‘What’ ‘was’ ‘before’ the beginning? How absolute was the beginning? According to contemporary science, time banged into being with the Big Bang (yet, see Greene 2004:272). Whether true or not, that does not disqualify the question concerning ‘what’ might lie ‘before’ the Bang. Might the Bang be part of a larger picture? Is there a yonder?
- Will the universe utterly end?
- If so, ‘what’ will ‘be’ ‘after’ the end? Again, the same difficulties arise as in the case of the beginning.
- Is the universe spatially finite or infinite?
- Are there more universes than one, existing simultaneously and sequentially?
- What is the relationship between ‘matter’ and ‘life’?
- Is the world process driven, or led, by anything else, anything more, than physicality?
- What are the forces driving evolution?
- What is the relationship between ‘life’ and ‘consciousness’?
- Are life and consciousness fortuitous outcomes in the process of material nature?
- Does the world process proceed blindly along aimless contingencies, some resulting in something new and some not, or is it pushed or drawn towards an end, a predetermined destination? Is there some other dynamic?
- What is the relationship between determinism and freedom?
- What is the position of humanity in nature?
- What are the origin and role of suffering and evil in it all?
- How does the emergence of religion fit into the evolutionary process?
- Does the entire process have any meaning (any ‘why?’, ‘whereto?’), and if so, what might that be?
- Is the deep structure of the world one of harmony and co-operation, or one of struggle and conflict?
- What morality, if any, is implied by it all?
- On the basis of science, might, could, must a dimension of ‘divinity’ (in whatever sense) be taken seriously into account?
- Will ‘good’ ultimately triumph over ‘evil’?

Can science answer those questions? Can they be answered at all? Is something approaching a dimension of ultimacy hovering just under the surface of the present picture of science – some understanding of nature that would recapture the kind of all-inclusive vision still possible in premodern times? The parts and powers of nature according to a Kanāda and an Empedocles had a metaphysical depth and touched people at a mystical level. Early Buddhism and its extensions into Hinayāna and Mahāyāna as rafts of salvation were intimately tied to the science and the cosmologies forming the cultural and scientific matrix in which those schools developed (Kloetzli 2007 [1983]). At the height of the European Middle Ages, Dante could express an almost seamless integration of nature and such a transcending dimension. He could conclude his mighty vision of God with a reference to divine ‘love which moves the sun and the other stars’ (*Paradiso* XXXIII.145), and it had the backing of the science of his day, going back centuries. Yet, already in the 14th century, nature was receding into the background of religious interest as theology narrowed its focus effectively to encompass only divinity and humanity. Modern science did not arise as organically interrelated with the dominant religion of its time. Science and theology became two very different discourses. As far as Western society was concerned – and that was the context in which science in the strict and strong sense of the word developed – the old synthesis of nature and divinity was only really kept alive in the esoteric tradition, to resurface with some force in Romanticism. Today no simple return to or repetition of outdated cosmologies, whether ancient Indian or Semitic or European, is possible. What is more, the ancient cosmologies were not merely external husks that could be peeled off and discarded easily. To some extent, they structured the messages of salvation themselves.

■ §5 Voices of modern scientists

The 20th century witnessed at least two revolutions in physics, making incursions deep into the territory of understanding the ‘ultimate’ nature of time, space, matter, causality and other basic ideas: the special and general theories of relativity, launched by Albert Einstein (1879–1955) and quantum theory, of which Werner Heisenberg (1901–1976) was a pioneering figure. Both of them thought deeply about the possible MM implications of their physics. Their struggles to understand the deeper essence of nature evoke all the complexities and perplexities underlying any investigation such as the one attempted here.

■ Albert Einstein

Einstein was a meditator – neither on the small human condition, nor on Ultimacy as such, but on cosmos in both its micro- and macro-dimensions. Those meditations of his on cosmos were backed by MM assumptions (Isaacson

2008). At the beginning of his career, when his great breakthroughs occurred, he was an empiricist and a positivist, building on the work of particularly, David Hume (1711-1776) and Ernst Mach (1838-1916). He was not interested in any reality that might lurk behind what could be observed experimentally and expressed mathematically (Einstein 1933:346). He was also averse to religion, which in his case meant Judaism, into which he had been born. In fact, Einstein never associated himself with the Jewish religion, or, for that matter with any institutionalised religion.

From the time that he developed his general theory of relativity onwards, a significant change took place in his thinking. An MM author, whom he had studied carefully as a young man at the same time as his avid reading of Hume and Mach, came to play an increasingly important role as years went by. That author was, like Einstein, Jewish by ethnic association, but, again like Einstein, not Jewish by religion. It was Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677). The philosophically and mystically mature Einstein approximated no one else as closely as he did Spinoza.

Over several decades in his confrontation with quantum mechanics, he increasingly adopted a realist position. There is a physical reality apart from our observations, he believed, and that can be known objectively; its secrets can be unlocked by sufficiently broad theories. A real, even deterministic causality determines the relationships between real, discrete things that occupy real locality in space-time. That philosophical position of his had MM undertones. As he saw it, quantum mechanics, with its uncertainty principle, wreaked havoc. It was also irreconcilable with his own idea of a God who did not intervene in human and natural affairs, but who was nevertheless the guarantor of an eternal order. An often-repeated phrase of Einstein over the years was that God (or 'the Old One', as he liked to call him) 'does not play dice'; the natural order was completely deterministic as Spinoza had maintained. Einstein adopted a deistic position: there is a God who somehow created the universe, but he does not involve himself in the day to day running of that universe, and least of all does he perform supernatural miracles. As Einstein put it, not miracles overriding the normal laws of nature, but the very absence of miracles proves the existence of God. The universe reflects an elegant, harmonious, simple, divine design. In addition, to him there is hardly a distinction between this idea as an article of faith on the one hand, and, on the other hand, as an active guiding principle for the construction of scientific theories and a criterion in evaluating such theories. On MM grounds and in line with Spinoza, he did not believe in free will. Apart from his scientific misgivings, this played a role in his view of quantum theory. His resistance against the implication of uncertainty in quantum theory was enmeshed in his metaphysical faith in an orderly universe and an orderly God.

Einstein did not concern himself with the origin and nature of life. He was not interested in the nature and emergence of consciousness either. Yet, he did assume that some superior consciousness was behind physical nature, and

that physical nature operated according to the eternal laws laid down by that consciousness. For all of his life, Einstein maintained an uneasy combination of empirical observation and experiment on the one hand, and mathematics on the other hand. Throughout his career, his strongest point was the execution of brilliant thought experiments. These imaginative leaps he, with the assistance of friends and colleagues, then articulated in elegant mathematical formulae. To him mathematics contained the rules of an eternal order, an order of great simplicity and harmony. Those were essential criteria in his evaluation of scientific truth. It seems that Einstein did not believe that there was just a happy but fortuitous coincidence between reality and mathematics; rather, that mathematics was inscribed in the texture of reality itself.

Exactly how did Einstein arrive at his scientific theories? By empirical uncovering of what is there – by speculative invention – by trans-rational intuition, in the sense of somehow being graced to see and pluck a handful of flowers from a mysterious branch – by a combination of these? Whatever the case may be, they do not differ fundamentally from the ways in which philosophers or metaphysical mystics of the kind in which we are interested here, arrive at their ideas.

Einstein subjected scientific theories to four main criteria:

- (1) demonstrability in terms of the axiom of the strict causal coherence of all phenomena
- (2) mathematical expressibility
- (3) experimental confirmability or falsifiability
- (4) overall elegance, simplicity and beauty.

The first (1) is still a point of debate among physicists (the quantum problem); (2) and (3) are shared by physical theorists. Once again, there seem to be points of contact with philosophical and MM insights, at least as far as (3) and (4) go. Of course, MM systems never claimed experimental confirmability or falsifiability with the same rigour and even in the same sense as physical theories do. Yet they have always been expected to work with experience. Of the great thinkers in this field, the Buddha (to mention one) presented his teaching as *ehipassika* ('come-and-see-able'): experientially testable. Also, incidentally, he presented his teaching as a radical understanding of all-pervasive causality.

Looking at Einstein, particularly in his debate with quantum physics as a case study, we may conclude that the problems of theoretical physics, by their inner momentum, overflow into MM problems. Einstein's older contemporary, A.N. Whitehead (1861-1947), is another case of an accomplished scientist (mathematician) to whom science was closely connected to MM. The theoretical physics of the 20th century and since then, grappled at least by implication with the perennial ultimate questions of humankind. There is

sufficient reason to believe, as Popper (1968) suggested, that scientifically unwarranted assumptions are involved in all scientific enquiry.

A basic problem debated by Einstein and quantum physicists concerned the question whether, in or behind the scientific observation of empirical phenomena there is the rock bottom of a 'real' or 'objective' reality, or whether 'reality' might exist in the scientific perception, the act of observation and measurement. In the case of Einstein, the first position (increasingly espoused by him) amounted to a meta-scientific, metaphysical realism; the second could amount to a form of empiricism or positivism (held by the early Einstein himself). In fact, throughout his career, Einstein remained strongly indebted to Descartes' type of thinking insofar as it rested on the assumption of a break between the knowing subject and an objectively knowable reality.

■ Werner Heisenberg

Heisenberg was a particularly able philosopher among the early champions of quantum theory. Judicious and balanced, he had a sympathetic understanding of the metaphysical and even religious side of the dynamics of the science-religion interplay. His approach, when extended, has no fewer MM implications than that of Einstein. He drew the conclusion that our speech (in whatever form) does not merely reflect reality, but constitutes reality (Heisenberg 1958:167-186). Heisenberg did not adhere to a reductionistic type of positivism. He was not a realist in the strong sense of the word either. He approached a kind of middle position. This entails that, for all practical purposes, there is an 'objective' reality; but that there are no grounds for a dogmatic, metaphysical realism, which makes all sorts of claims concerning an objective Reality in the big sense of the word. Humans construct reality in interplay with a field of forces, of which the ultimate nature cannot be determined. In the perspective of Heisenberg, the ultimate status of all such 'knowledge' would be one of uncertainty, coupled with pragmatic testability and usefulness. There is no absolute objective truth. Yet Heisenberg's interpretation of quantum theory, at least by implication, does seem to favour a worldview in which chance is an important factor.

The point of this brief analysis was only to discover how scientific thinking and MM thinking met in the minds of two particularly creative and influential scientists forming our world. In the final analysis, it appears that both Einstein and Heisenberg were aware that fundamental physics implies metaphysics, perhaps even mysticism. That sets them apart from the present broad stream of scientific opinion, which by default lands in the pitfall of a mechanistic worldview. Notwithstanding, neither of them developed the MM dimension in a comprehensive sense. It remained in the background. A younger contemporary of theirs, quantum physicist David Bohm (1917-1992), did actively investigate

such links, and with great promise. We shall return to him in due time and acknowledge his contribution. When relying only on the words of eminent physicists themselves, could we correlate science with a *mappa mundi* of a different kind? Could nature become Nature? It appears to be so.

* * *

The biological sciences over the last two centuries have brought about a revolution in contemporary thinking equal to that of physics-chemistry. Putting the phenomenon of biological evolution beyond reasonable doubt, these sciences challenged the very foundations of a worldview that had been dominant for millennia. The Big Bang was not the only absolutely dramatic, inexplicable fact in the history of the universe. Another one of a similar order was the emergence of life itself. Was this miraculous intervention from elsewhere or luck in the chemistry of matter, or something else? These factors cause a fair measure of discomfort in contemporary discussions on religion.

Then there is the projected scenario of a sixth mass extinction of life on earth, at least partly resulting from human greed that exploits nature for its own selfish enjoyment. What may be the metaphysical-mystical implications of all of this? General scientific opinion admits that the human factor is having a cataclysmic effect on life as we still enjoy it today at this late hour. Human culpability has become a topic of global concern. The ecological disaster signals a crash of what humans always unquestioningly accepted as permanent and enduring, causing the human species to perch on the precipice of a biotic disaster. Life might be snuffed out anyway, even if there were no human culpability. In fact, life, earth and the universe itself will, as science predicts, in one way or another, come to an end. What might be the meaning of the present flash of life in the great darkness? Even if the vast majority of people, hedonistically minded, would want nothing better than to enjoy what can be enjoyed as long as it can still be enjoyed, the best among them will not allow this species to do so without any reflection and soul-searching. For, paradoxically, this species is doomed to choice – choice led by thought.

Let us now take a step back and turn to what a few biologists themselves have to say about this. Obviously, it is impossible to deal with this comprehensively.

■ Charles Darwin

If any one individual had to be singled out as typical of this dramatic shift in thinking, it would be Charles Darwin (1809-1882), who wrought his revolution in the biological sciences half a century before Einstein. Darwin's revolution would prove to be comparable to the one that Einstein was to launch in physics.

Darwin had no rabid antireligious fixation. A cautious, patiently thoughtful, liberal man, he, in principle, did not banish an MM interest from an interest in the evolution of life. He bracketed it out methodologically from biology. Yet, certain interesting assumptions and implications emerge from his science of life.

At the time when Darwin's *Origin of Species* was published (1859), his cultural milieu (Victorian Britain) was still largely dominated by a conservative type of Christianity, running across denominational divisions. This broad consensus included the belief in an all-powerful, all-knowing and all-good God, who created the world at some point in the not too distant past (a few 1000 years). God was ontologically very different from his creation, and between the various kinds of living beings that he created ran unbridgeable lines of species demarcation. Humankind in particular, having been created in the image of God, was of a very different order than the various species of animals. Not only was it intelligent and free, but it also introduced evil in a previously perfect creation by Adam's historical deed of disobedience. Humankind was also given dominion over the rest of nature. In spite of Adam's disastrous act, God continues his loving preservation of his creation and intervenes ad hoc in its workings by means of miracles, often as a result of the prayers of humans. In the person, life and death of Jesus Christ, God supplemented his self-revelation in nature by a revelation in his only-begotten Son. Christ's death in principle removed all sin from humankind, and his resurrection had the additional cosmic implications of a new life in a resurrected body for those who trusted his love and teaching, on a new earth – and eternal punishment in hell for unrepentant sinners.

At the time, liberal forms of Christianity were also a social presence of some significance. It circumvented several of those beliefs, and had already shown itself open to the idea of biological evolution. To many, traditional Christianity had become like an old overcoat: threadbare and not really fit to keep out the new cold winds of the modern world, but comfortable and still loved for sentimental reasons, and worn particularly on certain ceremonial occasions.

The quasi-religious romantic reverence of nature impressed by its beauty and assuming its inherent goodness, but stripped of traditional religious imagery, was another stance taken at the time.

Then, at the other extreme, the rejection of religion in general and Christianity in particular was already quite a powerful social and cultural force. In such quarters, evolution would be honed as a weapon against religion of any kind. From the start, Darwin's theory was caught up in those crosswinds.

As his thinking developed over decades, he continually wavered between various possible explanations of the indisputable facts of the historical relatedness of all forms of life and the changeability of species. New species emerge, and existing ones die out. But why? And how? What was the mechanism

operative in this process? The organic model of evolution suggested by his older contemporary, Alexander von Humboldt, initially impressed Darwin. To Von Humboldt, nature was an organism with a diversity of interrelated parts; nature itself – not a transcendent divinity – was creative, and that natural process was not devoid of a certain moral quality.

Intermittently Darwin also entertained a deistic idea, somehow faintly continuous with the Jewish-Christian-Muslim tradition: God did create the world and the natural laws, but then retired and became quite idle (*otiosus*, to use a classic term for this kind of god), allowing nature to work itself out without interference from his side. As pointed out, Einstein entertained a similar notion.

Once Darwin hit on the notions of natural selection and survival of the fittest, it became the dominant set of ideas, eclipsing others. Evolution worked without moral motivation or intelligent reason. Chance replaced design. New biological possibilities arise fortuitously. If such random modifications by accident happen to facilitate the survival of a species, they become part of that species through successful mating and reproduction of offspring better adapted to the environment. If not, they disappear. It is a blind, aimless, mechanistic tangle of forces run by one unintended and unending criterion: survival in the competition for scarce resources.

This idea was picked up by some and hammered into the already fissuring rock of religion, like a splitting wedge. It could be – and in due time was – developed into the opposing ideologies of liberal social concern for the weak, and ruthless competition, exploitation and elimination of the weak. It soon became the main thrust of what would become known as Darwinism and neo-Darwinism.

In his *Origin of species*, Darwin restricts his attention to natural processes (on a par with gravitation, as he says) and deliberately refrains from speaking about nature as an active or divine power (Darwin 1952a [1859]:40ff., 230ff.). He grants that, speaking about the dynamics of evolution, recourse to metaphorical language (appearing to personify an unplanned process) is inevitable. Nevertheless, he regards it as negligible. Therefore, in using a phrase such as ‘workmanship’, he is at pains to point out that he does not mean it literally. The same applies to the ‘selection’ in ‘natural selection’. On the contrary, evolution is not a conscious, teleological process at all. It is merely a process of blind elimination of the weak, of which the ‘survival of the fittest’ is the unplanned outcome. Natural selection is the weeding out – or rather, simply the disappearance – of those individuals and species that cannot meet the challenges of their environment successfully.

On the one hand, Darwin states that his theory need not shock the religious feelings of anyone (1952a [1859]:239). He does not deny the existence of a Creator, but has decided to restrict his interest to the realm of secondary causes.

On the other hand, his theory tends towards a certain worldview – one to which Darwin ascribes ‘grandeur’ (1952a [1859]:243). Indeed one cannot deny him that achievement. His vision – yes, it is that – has a certain ambivalence. He can speak in the *Origin of species*, almost deistically, of the powers or laws ‘having been originally breathed by the Creator’ into nature. These laws include growth with reproduction, inheritance, the struggle for life, natural selection, divergence of character, and the extinction of under-achieving forms of life (1952a [1859]:243). The Creator does not interfere with that process initially set in motion – a process proceeding by the accumulation of innumerable slight variations; one governed purely by what facilitates the survival of the individual possessor of any trait. Even sentiments of social solidarity and loyalty are, in the final analysis, reducible to their survival value. Subtly he conflates an idea of a Creator and an original creation with a metaphysic assumption of ‘the war of nature’ as point of departure (1952a [1859]:243).

Nevertheless, Darwin clothes this implicit metaphysic of conflict as the basis and rule of life with a utopian optimism. As far as the past and present are concerned, the slow process of planless selection through competition has led to the more complex organs and instincts, including morality (with aspects such as love and sympathy) and religion in the human being. Forms of life ‘most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being evolved’ (1952a [1859]:243). Moreover, it will, Darwin believes, ‘intend to progress towards perfection’ (1952a [1859]:243).

In Darwin’s thinking, humanity – descended from some less highly organised form of life – is one species, differentiated into several sub-species (Darwin 1952b [1871]:342ff., 590ff.). The difference between animals and humans is one of degree, not of kind. In fact, as far their mental faculties are concerned, there is no fundamental difference between humankind and the higher mammals (Darwin 1952b [1871]:287ff.). His final statement concerning the human mammal indubitably reveals, on top of a disinterested concern with scientific fact, a certain passion and awe before a profound truth (Darwin 1952b [1871]):

[M]an with all his noble qualities, with sympathy which feels for the most debased, with benevolence which extends not only to other men but to the humblest living creature, with his god-like intellect which has penetrated into the movements and constitution of the solar system – with all these exalted powers – Man still bears in his bodily frame the indelible stamp of his lowly origin. (p. 597)

Was this delicate balancing act an attempt to reconcile his Christian inheritance of theistic creationism with an implied new metaphysic and ethic, based on struggle and conflict pure and simple?

Darwin could be read to point in two directions: towards some kind of MM leading towards greater compassion and perfection, or towards a hard philosophy (also *in nuce* a metaphysical position) of ruthless competition, leading in no particular direction. He should not be censured for that ambivalence. As it was he had enough on his plate, and achieved immensely.

Yet, not only did he not lead into the promised land of a synthesis of his new biological insights and MM; he did not clearly point out the direction in which that land lay. Darwin's ideas would later merge with those of Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud and Friedrich Nietzsche to form a strong antireligious swell in science and popular culture. And it could, and did, play a role in the motivation of social movements such as late 19th century to early 20th century imperialism and extreme capitalism, as well as Nazism. On the other hand, strands of his views could also be interpreted to allow a morality of altruism.

■ Richard Dawkins

In the recent past, nobody advocated the modern evolutionary synthesis with more verve than Richard Dawkins (b.1941). This he promoted in a number of books, such as his *The God delusion* (2006). In this book, he draws out the implications of Darwin's idea of natural selection to uncompromising conclusions, not brooking the idea of 'God'.

To be fair, Dawkins makes it clear that he is attacking only the belief in 'supernatural gods' and its associate, namely conventional 'supernatural religion' (2006:15). In other words, he is using what is known as a 'substantive' definition of religion (focusing on content), not a 'functional' definition (focusing on function, on what it does). His collaborator, A.C. Grayling, does the same (Grayling 2013). By 'God' Dawkins means the conventional notion of a very anthropomorphic 'God': a petty, interventionist, jealous person; 'religion' is the uncritical belief in such beings or such a person. Dawkins' atheism is the rejection of *that* theism and religion as delusional, and is not aimed at views such as deism and pantheism. Confusion of such metaphorical uses of the word 'god' with the theism and religion of the scriptures and religious institutions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam and of ordinary language, is 'intellectual high treason' (Dawkins 2006:19). Dawkins himself does not explore such alternative avenues to understanding.

Dawkins is a scientist, not a scholar of mysticism, religion or philosophy. Nevertheless, his entering into the border zone between science and MM must be welcomed as necessary. Yet, placed in a wider context, the overall impression his book leaves is not unproblematic, and highlights the difficult questions facing humanity today in its search for meaning. In the final analysis, the views he puts forward in his book, by default seem to conform to the materialistically positivistic type of thinking (see §3) – by default, because he fails to deal with other possibilities, even if he says that he is not advocating a narrowly scientific way of thinking. There are even hints that he, after all, may be interested in the margins of science and in non-theistic systems of ultimate meaning (2006:155ff.). His argument rests on a rather narrow historical basis, setting up the ideas of 'God' and 'religion' as easy targets that he then proceeds to shoot down with

accuracy and relish. Overall, his work is a mix of biological science, inadequate social, philosophical and historical analysis, and a measure of what resembles resentment. That is not to say that theism of a certain simplistic variety is not still a powerful reactionary social force today. Of course it is. Yet, intellectually there are more important and more challenging aims to achieve. His book is quite restricted in its vision, and does not demonstrate an interest in the broader, and I dare say, more profound stream of alternative MM reflection, as this manifests in a variety of traditions. On the other hand, he does not preclude such an interest either.

Proceeding from his scientific basis and bias, Dawkins concludes that God 'almost certainly does not exist' (2006:111ff.). 'God' is understood to be a larger-than-human person, although quite similar to a human person, but outside and unaffected by the processes of nature. If someone wants to restrict the meaning of the word 'God' to such a being, it is fine; and to then decry or deny its real existence, would be correct. But that restriction fails to acknowledge that the word 'God' is really only the tip of an iceberg drifting in a wide ocean in which humans thrash about in their search for comprehensive, radical meaning. The strength of Dawkins' narrow (substantive) definition of religion is that he can be very clear and firm. The price he pays for not using a broad (functional) definition (e.g. religion is the search for comprehensive meaning), is that he overlooks the generic character of 'religion'. He also fails to dwell on the comparable but sometimes very different forms the search for comprehensive meaning takes across a very broad spectrum, and the comparable (sometimes different, sometimes similar) structures it may assume in various parts of the world and in various historical epochs. So by dint of his definition, he would not be able to engage with non-theist systems such as Advaita – they are just 'not religion'. It may prevent him from spotting the semi- or quasi-religious role that science may play. Some larger issues and significant connections across a broad spectrum are missed and so the scope of necessary debate is narrowed.

We should not discard 'religion(s)' of the monotheistic type. Interpreted tendentially, they contain vast MM treasures. To mention an example: the Christian teaching of the Trinity is not simply bad arithmetic ('1=3'), but a profound model of the mutual inherence of different principles, applicable on a larger scale (see Ch. 17). The question about 'God' and his 'existence' cannot be answered directly by science on the basis of empirical evidence. On such logic, it would simply be of the same order as deciding whether the Abominable Snowman really exists out there somewhere. Yet it is not quite that simple, even if most religious believers probably believe exactly what Dawkins believes they do. To his credit, Dawkins enters into debate with the traditional arguments for the existence of God. However, the context of his argument remains quite limited. In the larger historical frame of MM reflection, such theism had already been disposed of in pre-Christian Greece, India and China, and in the millennia since. Ideas of ultimacy change with the times, in a historical process for which

the term 'evolution' might be suitable. Ours is a time for new designs, but then the issue has to be taken up in a sufficiently broad framework.

Dawkins seems to stop where the going gets interesting. His argument can be appreciated – as far as it goes; but is that far enough? Clearly, ideas of ultimacy (of comprehensive and radical truth), expressed uncritically in anthropomorphic theistic terms, are no longer adequate and must be transcended. The meaning of physical nature and life cannot convincingly be captured by such concepts any more. They must be left behind. Dawkins' kind of response is understandable and necessary, but it is not sufficient. In the terms of §3: he settles for positivism-materialism, as if that were the only alternative to anthropomorphic theism.

Compounding the problem, Dawkins seems to award a remarkable degree of finality to science. Science is presented as the end of mystery, the sooner the better. Of course, people differ in their personal inclinations. Some might be attracted by mystery, others, repelled by it, might wish to overcome it as quickly as possible. This is no problem, as tastes vary. When (any)one – that is, science, religion (in any sense), or art – is put forward as the only legitimate interest, problems arise. His book, as it stands, does not reveal a full and frank acceptance of the fact that science, like any religion and other types of cultural discourse, is a collective human achievement, embedded in all the social forces and conditions (such as politics and finances) that mark all human discourse as epoch bound, and not final and absolute at all. Of course, science made and is making huge advances in our understanding of the world. We dare not fall back behind such gains. In another sense, science of a certain type could become another absolutistic, totalitarian grand narrative, with the same illusions of grandeur as any religion. Evolutionary materialism's claim that it has arrived at the ultimate foundations of life, is premature. Dawkins does not erect sufficient safeguards in this regard against the temptation for science to assume quasi-religious, even messianic, overtones.

The debate should not be reduced to the format of a duel between positivistic religion and positivistic science, both glaring at each other. Wider issues are at stake. Dawkins is to be commended for his insistence on the civic rights of religion and the right to free speech. It certainly is more than religion (of the kind he chastises here) has customarily granted the theories of modern science over the last century and a half.

A book such as the one by Dawkins (2006) is a thought experiment. On the last page of his book, in the concluding paragraph, he comes up with this final sentence, startlingly, unexpectedly so:

Could we, by training and practice, emancipate ourselves from Middle World [...] and achieve some sort of intuitive – as well as just mathematical – understanding of the very small, the very large, and the very fast? I genuinely don't know the answer, but I am thrilled to be alive at a time when humanity is pushing against the limits of understanding. Even better, we may eventually discover that there are no limits. (p. 374)

Suddenly a potentially sunlit glade opens up before the reader. Having disposed of a simplistic idea of 'God', the real journey lies ahead, and what a fascinating journey it may turn out to be. A sentence such as that would have been a good one to start a book with, and to take the quest from there. I would like to think that it points in the direction of the exploration of the wilderness of Arche beyond outdated ideas of God and religion – that is, of a kind of non-supernaturalistic, bio-phylic, cosmo-phylic MM, in touch with all of humanity's reflection on its own destiny, and aware of its own provisionality.

■ Intelligent Design

There is another approach to the issues of the origin, nature and meaning of life, carrying the flag *Intelligent Design*. Since the 1980s, quite a diverse body of thinking has arisen, dealing with questions such as the following: Was or is there 'intelligence' at work in the origin and development of life? If so, what is its ontological status – is it part of the process, or outside it? Assuming evolution, is it haphazard, or does it have a planned direction (is it a random process, or a purposeful, teleological one)? If some intelligence was or is present in this process, could it be called 'God'? If so, how does this God relate to the God of traditional religions, particularly Judaism, Christianity and Islam? Again, assuming some such intelligence and design, how did, or does, it manifest itself – by distanced deistic design, continual ad hoc intervention, or in some other way?

The debate surrounding these issues has become a religio-political battle zone with wide ramifications (including, in the USA, the issue of whether evolution should be taught in public schools and, if so, what version of evolution). This context largely explains the polemical rhetoric of scientist Richard Dawkins on the one hand and Christian apologist Alvin Plantinga on the other. Theism and atheism are at each other's throats, but neither is an adequate MM explanatory strategy. There is a space beyond both, more inclusive than either of them is.

Those carrying the banner of Intelligent Design seem to be following a number of broad strategies. These include:

- On the far right, those who say nay to evolution, arguing that species were 'designed' and created separately as completed and essentially unchangeable products of God's handiwork a few 1000 years ago. The theory of evolution is not only, religiously speaking, unbelief, but also false science. This false science rests on misleading interpretations of the evidence – and perhaps, it might even be suggested, on hoaxes. Intelligent Design is here simply another word for old-style biblistic creationism. Leaning towards the right flank of Intelligent Design would also be the conservative position of Reformed philosopher of religion, Alvin Plantinga (Pennock 2001).

- A broad central position that holds that evolution as a biological theory might somehow be accommodated in a theory of a personal divinity as creator and sustainer of life. This position could take on a variety of modalities, ranging from more 'right' (conservative) to more 'left' (liberal). On the right flank of the central phalanx the position taken long ago by Augustine (354–430 CE), the great church father, has been adopted for Intelligent Design purposes: God planted certain potentialities in his original creation, and these potentialities have been allowed some leeway to work themselves out.
- On the far left of the Intelligent Design army, a phalanx that is not personalistically theist and creationist, but that may be satisfied by referring to Intelligence in the abstract as designing evolution – probably intervening in the process – from the Outside.

The programme of Intelligent Design has a strong aftertaste of personalistic theism, even when it is defined – without explicit reference to God – merely as a 'hypothesis that in order to explain life it is necessary to suppose the action of an unevolved intelligence' (Dembski & Ruse 2006:3). This amounts to a restatement of Thomas Aquinas' fifth argument (proof) for the existence of God: natural beings do intelligent things – things they themselves clearly do not have the intelligence to plan. That proves the existence of some intelligent being outside of it all: God (understood as a supernatural Creator). Does it really? Is it the best, or the only conceivable, explanation? The postulation of some unexplained, inexplicable entity or being (by whatever name, including 'intelligence') *outside* of nature and the process of evolution, is part of the problem rather than a solution. This kind of argument remains a *deus ex machina* pseudo solution. Moreover, who designed the designer? Such regressive arguments do not lead to a rock bottom of some indubitable Ground. No, by infinite regress it leads nowhere. Inevitably, it collapses. Some other way has to be found. The dilemma set up by Intelligent Design proponents, namely either design from without or else materialistic chance and blind natural selection on the inside, is an oversimplification. In addition, the blanket idea of Intelligent Design is too narrow to cover all non-materialistic positions, and it offers too easy a shelter for religious fundamentalism. To my mind, the concept also smacks too much of the mindset associated with the brilliant architect, spaceship designer or breeder in the modern West.

Having said all of the above, it appears that Intelligent Design contains much to contemplate, and that it is a stimulating participant in the present debate about the origin and meaning of life as studied by the biological sciences.

If the origin and evolution of life is not adequately explained by any of the models sketched in this chapter, then how may we proceed? The idea that elements of knowledge, of desire, and of will are co-present in matter from the very beginning, announces itself. Not as fortuitous by-products of a blind

process of sheer matter, and not as something extraneous to matter, preceding matter, attributes of a Grand Anthropomorphic Person or Designing Intelligence either, but *there* with matter ab initio, part of the cosmic process as such. The general direction of the approach followed here would place biological evolution in a wider cosmological frame. The processes of evolution studied by the sciences are seen as part of a larger process of devolution and involution: of cosmos itself emerging from an open, inexhaustible field of forces, ultimately deriving from Absoluteness (devolution) and returning to Absoluteness (involution). This view does not imply the acceptance of a supernatural creator, reduced to the format of an anthropomorphic, personal individual, ontologically separate from nature.

* * *

In the scientific view of the world (Zelazo, Moscovitch & Thompson 2007), the emergence of consciousness was a third phase in the emergence of things. Important issues came to the fore, including the following: the relationship between mind/consciousness and energy-matter; the relationship between mind/consciousness and life in general; the relationship between human mind/consciousness and animal mind/consciousness; and the relationship between consciousness and what might lie 'above', 'outside' of or 'beyond' consciousness – that is, *if* there 'is' anything. Then, if there is, what might that 'X' be?

In the modern epoch, thinking that is based on the natural sciences has developed increasingly sophisticated models of consciousness as a product of brain activity – that is, in the final analysis, of matter. It continues a venerable materialist tradition, which has mostly taken two forms: a more severe *eliminative* position (there are no mental phenomena) or a more accommodating *epiphenomenalistic* position (there are mental phenomena, but they are secondary, deriving strictly from material phenomena). Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) was the pioneer of modern monist materialism in the study of human behaviour: there is only one substance, namely, matter. Initially he taught that mental phenomena are epiphenomenal, but later in his long life he shifted towards a more uncompromising eliminative stance. The Western modern tradition in its various modulations in turn, rested on ancient models. Recently the staggering developments in the construction of computers have added huge impetus to this manner of thinking. It would be fair to say that it has probably at present become the dominant mode, coming in many varieties, far too numerous and various to interpret here.

It is not the only type of model. At the opposite extreme, for example, lie a host of varieties of another grand strategy that may include *idealism* and *panspsychism* ('everything-is-psyche'-ism). In a weaker form, this kind of position may merely argue that all explanations of reality need some reference to consciousness; that we have access to reality only through consciousness. In a stronger form, it may hold that all things, including matter, are manifestations

of consciousness. Strong forms of idealism or panspsychism may argue that the world is the product of some collective social mind; or of the individual, personal mind; or of some cosmic mind; or of a mind outside of and behind the cosmos. Furthermore, that this mind is assumed to be the sole reality, of which all things are manifestations. Of the modern pioneers, George Berkeley (1685–1753) held that both physical and mental phenomena are perceptions in the mind of God. Idealism, insofar as it absolutises consciousness to be the sole substance of all, does not determine the direction in which the reflections and meditations of this pilgrimage is moving.

Various positions between materialism and idealism, trying to juxtapose and perhaps even combine elements of both, have been adopted over the last four centuries. Descartes is the father of a position in modern thought, holding that there is an essential *dualism* of matter and mind. Mind (not-extended in space) and matter (extended in space) are two separate substances, but they nevertheless meet and link up mysteriously in the pineal gland in the brain, and interact inexplicably in a two-way psychophysical process of causality. Descartes bequeathed an unresolved dilemma of a rationalist idealism (the human mind is a reservoir of ‘ideas’) versus a mechanistic materialism (Dunham, Grant & Watson 2011:34–46). The latter would eventually win the day. Two generations later Leibniz (1646–1716) accepted the two-substance dualistic metaphysic of matter and mind, but rejected the idea of interactive causation between the two. Instead, Leibniz postulated that the two separate substances merely operate alongside each other in an unconnected parallelism, by means of a mysterious pre-established harmony. A third in-between, harmonising position, *phenomenalism*, might hold that neither matter nor mind is ontologically reducible to the other. Nevertheless the things of reality, real as they are, are somehow constituted by the mind; the knowing mind has no access to ‘objective’ things in themselves (perhaps because there are no such things in themselves), but only to ‘phenomena’ (things merely manifesting as ‘appearances’ to the senses).

The father of modern evolutionary theory, Charles Darwin, did not settle for the modified dualism of Descartes. It seems fair to conclude that Darwin increasingly saw himself as a materialist and determinist: mental actions are functions of the brain, fully caused and explicable on materialist grounds; free will is an illusion. It meant that in effect Alexander von Humboldt’s notion of the cosmos as an organism (which had fascinated the young Darwin) was gradually replaced by the materialistic, positivistic model of August Comte. For the mature Darwin, human moral behaviour, emotional expression, reason and religion were outgrowths of animal instinct, which was itself an outgrowth of purely material conditions. Consciousness is somehow emergent from the brain, and the brain evolved as an adaptive measure. This must not be understood to mean that Darwin denied or denigrated morality, aesthetics and religion. Nature itself developed morality, aesthetics, and sublime emotions such as awe and loyalty. In short, he turned to biological and physical nature as

the only necessary and sufficient explanation for even the most complex problems raised by consciousness, culture and society.

What did physicists have to say about this problem? In the 1960s, quantum physicist Erwin Schrödinger kept physics (specifically quantum physics) very separate from consciousness (specifically its hallmark, free-will); indeed, he said, 'quantum physics has nothing to do with the free-will problem' (Schrödinger 1961:67). This amounts to the asymptotic parallelism discussed in §3. Circumspect as usual, fellow quantum physicist Werner Heisenberg (in 1958) cautiously granted that psychological phenomena could, up to a point, be explained by recourse to physical, chemical and biological processes – but not 'ultimately' so. As a matter of fact, he intimated that quantum theory challenged such a reductionistic assumption, which he found to have been a 19th century one: 'There can scarcely be any doubt but that the concepts of physics, chemistry and evolution together will not be sufficient to describe the facts [of human consciousness, or "psychology"]' (Heisenberg 1958:106). He neither separated matter and consciousness bluntly, nor wanted to fall victim to materialistic reductionism. He hinted that the experience available at present is not sufficient to decide firmly against the reductionistic strategy and in favour of a complementarity model, firstly as far as physics, chemistry and biology are concerned, and secondly as far as physics, chemistry, biology and 'psychology' are concerned (1958:102-106). He left the question open as to exactly how such complementarity might be envisaged. In general, quantum physics probably does not necessarily endorse the materialistic vision of everything.

■ Daniel Dennett

In his materialist argument, Dennett (b.1942) proceeds from the hypothesis that 'mind' is a recent by-product of matter; the burden of proof rests squarely on those who would want to argue differently (1996). From matter to life, to consciousness, to human consciousness, there is no qualitative or quantum leap and there are no discrete staircase-like steps. There is only, over billions of years, slow incremental evolutionary development upwards, as if moving up a slowly sloping ramp showing no hiatuses: mind is matter organising itself in degrees of complexity. According to his line of thinking, a conscious robot is in principle possible; and all conscious beings are the sums of large numbers of minuscule automata (robots) operating in larger systems of the same kind – there is no 'extra' substance, no quasi-separate mind stuff, involved. Let such a model of consciousness, basing itself on physics and chemistry and related sciences, be explored to the full to see how far it leads. Therefore, on the next few pages, we shall trace Dennett's version of a science-based argument. Then I shall ask to what extent his argument may also involve a constructive element, introducing a basic worldview bias. That would be fine, as long as it is done openly – the agora is public. That is indeed the way in which Dennett works, inviting the reader into his workshop as he undertakes proving the validity of his model.

Materialistic evolutionary thought treats consciousness as a relative novelty, continuous with the physical and biotic processes described earlier. Consciousness is merely a manifestation, or (attributing slightly more self-sufficiency to it) perhaps a by-product of matter-life, occurring in various modes and degrees among various species of living beings, but not in all of them. It somehow emerged from increasing biological complexity (as life had emerged from increasing complexity of matter) at a certain stage of evolution, being sculpted by natural selection as a mechanism to adapt to environmental challenges.

In his version of this strategy, Dennett views bacteria, amoebae and ants as 'mindless', equally so as rocks, discarded slivers of fingernails, carbon atoms and water molecules. Four to five billion years ago, there was no consciousness at all; early forms of life were merely macromolecular robots, and we, contemporary conscious humans, are made of tiny robots. Even so, there are 'reasons' for the 'purposive actions' of macromolecules, but they are unaware of them. There was 'information' in early life, carried by fluids. There was even a rudimentary 'intentional' stance in such forms of life: a sense of 'aboutness', of responding to stimuli, much like chess-playing computers. Nevertheless, this intentional stance was not reflective; it is 'as if' they were somehow rational agents without, in fact, being so. They had no 'reflective appreciation' of the 'reasons' for what they were doing. They did not 'think', but there were reasons for what they were doing.

Such forms of life – including of course the brain – are artefacts that get their reason following intentionality from the larger system of which they are part – that is, from the 'intentions' of 'Mother Nature' (the process of evolution by natural selection) (1996:53–54). Plants take up an interesting position in Dennett's hierarchy of emerging mind: they have no minds, but, their taking things into account and reacting, indicate that they do possess a certain intentionality, on the border between mere sensitivity and sentience. Yet they are, in his terminology, only 'Darwinian creatures': they still occupy the bottom of the edifice; they are solely determined by what they inherit via natural selection.

Dennett makes the point that, below a certain level, forms of life do not have minds; they do not think reflectively. There is no argument about that, but how does he account for the behaviour of even the simplest forms of life, without them being aware of any reasons? Are phrases such as 'Mother Nature' merely innocuous anthropomorphisms, or do they perhaps suggest a rationality present in – perhaps inherent in the larger system of nature?

Two main emphases seem to hold sway in contemporary discussions of the relationship between human and animal consciousness. The first focuses on what is taken to be an essential continuity between the consciousnesses (minds) of humans and other forms of life, particularly primates. This approach would not only want to define itself as fully in line with the natural sciences,

but might argue that – ultimately – human consciousness is fully explicable in terms of physico-chemical-biotic processes. The second emphasis, while not necessarily denying continuities between human and other forms of consciousness, would tend to focus almost exclusively on human consciousness, viewing it as unique. Today, not many would subscribe to Descartes' dualism of matter (*res extensa*: 'extended substance') and consciousness (*res cogitans*: 'thinking substance'), with the implication that animals, for all their complex behaviour, are (like plants) exclusively defined in terms of *res extensa*. Devoid of consciousness (i.e. rational thought) they are, according to him, mere machines and mere matter. As far as animals are concerned, he was a complete eliminative reductionist. Somehow he entertained the notion of the embodied nature of (by definition, human) consciousness; but he could not accommodate the notion that animal life may contain consciousness.

Descartes attempted to resolve his dualism of matter and mind by taking recourse to a deistic idea of God: God has created both matter and mind, exists outside of both, but has made some connection of both possible. That idea of God has today largely been abandoned, leaving a huge vacuum. It seems doubtful that the relationship between matter and mind – even understanding either of them in its own right – can be resolved without some inclusive framework of understanding. Materialism is not merely the equivalent of science. It is a foundational worldview option in which a great deal of intellectual and emotional energy and commitment are invested. It approximates a metaphysical stance.

Dennett presents his materialistic starting point – 'the orthodox choice today in the English-speaking world', as he states (Dennett 1987:5) – up front as a tactical choice, at least to some extent determined by 'taste'. Presenting his philosophy as 'allied with, and indeed continuous with, the physical sciences'(1987:5), it is nevertheless not, in the final analysis, proven 'science'. He attempts to connect and extrapolate various undecided dotted lines. A phrase such as 'the materialist's best hope' (1996:73) for the claim that the material network itself is the master of consciousness, is quite revealing. What are the implications of such a throw-away phrase? Probably it points to the role of extrascientific preconceptions and biases. Dennett's materialism-atheism is a worldview choice. Such positions are not settled solely by scientific proof. A materialistic model is not necessarily the most convincing one to connect science with wider assumptions concerning the ultimate nature of things. Materialism does not offer the best overall explanatory framework for consciousness.

From Chapter 3 onwards, I shall explore the possibility that matter, life and consciousness are fundamental, coherent and mutually inherent aspects, ultimately co-emerging from a dimension of inaccessible, non-substantial emptiness, becoming the world.

Part One

Unground

Arche

A picture of (Meta-)Nature in and behind empirical nature is essential to an integral understanding of things, yet this need has largely been forgotten. In one way or another and more or less clearly, such intimations are being carried in the religious, mystical and esoteric traditions that have come down to us through the centuries.

■ §6 Synoptic map

This chapter will outline the structure of *Arche* (see §11 below), unfolding in following chapters. Reading it can be postponed until later, but beginning with the synoptic overview may have its advantages, like seeing a landscape from the air, before starting to explore it on the ground.

In the explanation of *Arche* below and in the rest of the book, key concepts operating at a certain level (such as ‘Absoluteness’, ‘All’, ‘Eternity’, ‘Infinite’ and ‘Cosmos’) will regularly start in upper case to indicate and emphasize their significance in this model. They operate at the level of a word such as ‘God’. To highlight the linkage of such concepts with certain other concepts used in existing religions, the first letter of such concepts (such as ‘Trinity’, ‘Father’ and ‘Son’ in Christianity) when used in contexts that I interpret as equivalent to the key concepts in the model presented here, will also regularly be capitalized. For the same reason key concepts from religions other than Christianity and

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from other MM systems, operative at the same level as those in the model presented here (such as the 'Names' of Allah in Islam, 'Mercy' in Kabbalah, 'Emptiness' in Buddhism, 'Ideas' in Plato and 'the One' in Plotinus) will obviously be treated in the same manner.

The All is like three concentric zones emerging from, circling around and returning to the core, empty Absoluteness, while remaining permeated by Absoluteness. It is like a holy fruit: Absoluteness is the seed, Cosmos the outer skin, Eternity and Infinitude the layers of flesh in between. Absoluteness is the centre of the world, a centre that is everywhere, in every instance of time or place. In this analogy the inner zone, the least dense and circling outwards, is Eternity. The outer zone, the most dense, is Cosmos, perceived by the senses and studied by science. Between Eternity and Cosmos: Infinitude.

The three zones radiating from the empty centre are not separate, but they are interconnected in an eternal circulation from centre to periphery and back and out again, for the empty centre is both creative Origin and receiving End. All individual things in the Cosmos, from sub-atomic particles to stellar galaxies, are part of that eternal circulation, swung outwards in the movement of concretisation and drawn back inwards in the movement of disintegration. The emergence from, the existence in and the return to the empty centre by All, occur in every moment of time. History as a movement through time is part of that process.

The All can also be described as the process starting from an inaccessible, uncrossable Horizon on the outer edge of human experience, taking on denser shape inwards through Eternity and Infinitude and becoming concrete in Cosmos. Eternity manifests in nine principles; Infinitude, in four aspects; and Cosmos with its myriads of individual things essentially expresses four basic features.

The challenge is to find or achieve an optimal, balanced integration of all of these dimensions, and not to emphasise any one or more at the expense of the others and the entirety.

On the next page the reader will find a diagram outlining the basic categorial scheme underlying the book as a whole. This diagram provides a framework for profiling various MM models emerging in different cultures over time. It also serves as a context for identifying the relative strengths and weaknesses of significant figures from the distant and more recent past.

■ Diagram: Arche

I. Unground

- A Absolute Horizon
- B End
- C Origin

II. Eternity

- A Pre-/meta-consciousness
 - 1 Witting (knowing)
 - 2 Wanting (desiring)
 - 3 Willing (intending)
- B Pre-/meta-being
 - 1 Becoming
 - 2 Canning (can-ing)
 - 3 Conditioning (condition-ing)
- C Pre-/meta-existence
 - 1 Singularising
 - 2 Pluralising
 - 3 Totalising

III. Infinitude or Spirit

- A Infinite energy-matter
- B Infinite life
- C Infinite love
- D Infinite thought

IV. Cosmos

- A Energy-matter
- B Life
- C Soul
- D Mind

■ §7 Unground

Unground is the First. As far as we can go, we are aware of a Horizon. The word 'Horizon' as used in this introduction does not have the connotation present in the original Greek *horos*, namely a bounding circle, a definite boundary, a clear landmark, separating two different regions. Here the term means a certain non-reachable, non-fixable point where all things peter out and disappear from view. Yet that encircling Horizon provides coherence and hence meaning to all things. The fact that this and other terms in this context

are capitalised, is an expression of the awe in which this particular human person, the author, stands before this absolute depth; it is not a name of Something or Someone, of some eternal *nunc stans*. The problem is that such nouns run the risk of becoming reified, substantialised, personalised; it is a problem of language. Therefore, when the term 'Unground' is used for the mystery of the becoming and ending of things, it intends the absolute limit of human thought and experience. This word is borrowed from 16th-17th century German cobbler and mystic, Jacob Boehme, and it intends not an ultimate 'Ground' of things, but the utter transcendence of any notion of firm Ground.

Nothing can be said or known about Unground analogously. To be able to say, 'my love is like the melody that's sweetly play'd in tune', I already have to know both my love and the melody, at least up to a point. Cosmos cannot *not* be known, at least at a common sense, conventional level; it is in one's face all the time. Infinitude can be known, experienced, apprehended to a degree by some who have the inclination and perhaps training, and a talent developed over time, like travellers with good eyes in a desert who are able to see some distance ahead of them: things can still be made out, but only just. That is what mystics do. Eternity cannot be seen (experienced, known) definitively.

Things emerge on Absolute Horizon. That process of emergence is referred to as *Origin*. By 'Origin' and 'emergence', I do not mean the 'historical' beginning of things, as may be taught by science or some religious revelations; this argument does not concern itself with how the world actually started. In that sense too, it is aligned to ancient Buddhism, which admittedly largely restricted itself to what may be termed phenomenological psychology. We postulate an argument compatible with contemporary science. It is a phenomenological argument, attempting to understand how the world in its essential structures emerges, for the contemplative eye, from the mystery of Absolute Horizon. And all things are also seen to return to that Horizon. This disappearance into Unground is termed *End*. The chapters that follow will attach equal importance to the two movements of Origin and End on the edge of Absolute Horizon. Together, the threesome: Horizon (Absoluteness), Origin and End form a triad of *Unground*.

Whatever is, happens in, is part of, an eternal continuum of emerging from and collapsing into Unground – but it is not mere return; the end is not the same as the beginning.

■ §8 Eternity

Eternity is the Second. By 'Eternity' (etymologically related to the Latin *aevum*, Greek *aeon*, literally meaning 'age') I do not intend the common meaning of temporal extension without end. 'Eternity' here has the connotation of

timelessness, implying absolute non-determinedness, non-definiteness (non-distinctness). Eternity also emphasises radical openness, undetermined potentiality. Adding to the usefulness of 'Eternity' is that (particularly in Gnosticism) *aeon* also contains more specific reference to phases in the emanation from the absolute Abyss. Without subscribing to Gnosticism in any of its forms, let us admit eternal effluences from Horizon, which are also enduring influences into, and in, Cosmos. This notion comes naturally, once the idea of Cosmos emerging from Emptiness (to use the Buddhist term) is accepted. Nine such primordial elements of emergence – referred to as 'Principles' – will be distinguished.

In Chapter 1, 'evolution', as a model used in science to describe the gradual development from simpler to more complex forms of life, has received some attention. That magnificent achievement may be absorbed into a larger MM frame, which would involve abrading the rough monistic, materialistic edges sometimes attached to it as if they were necessary implications of science. Thus, instead of defining evolution as a blind process of pure chance, we could see it as part of a larger process that we might simply call 'appearance' or 'emergence'.

'Appearance' signifies the way, not out of matter, but from Horizon on the edge of the phenomenal world. Cosmos and all its forms and species of beings and individual beings flash forth. 'Disappearance' refers to the reverse process. It contains an element of sequence, but also of the essential nature of things. Cosmos came, and Cosmos will go. There is therefore a double and simultaneous movement: from Unground to Cosmos ('appearance') – that is, from Eternal and Infinite Potential to the concrete; and from Cosmos back to Unground ('disappearance'). Appearing and disappearing will not be presented as occurring alternatively, separately, one after the other. They are two aspects of the same structure. While some things appear, some disappear. Within individual things and species, both tendencies occur at the same time. The process of physical and biological evolution demonstrated by the sciences is thus driven by a more basic energy in a larger circuit.

Cosmos does not appear 'outside of' Absoluteness. Rather, the process of interrelated Eternal Principles and Infinite Aspects becoming Cosmos that will be discussed later can be imagined as a process of thickening, concentration, relative densification emerging from Absolute Horizon. Cosmos is the result of a process taking place on that Horizon; it is permeated by Absoluteness, and bound to dissolve into what it has always been. An implication of this train of thought is the possibility of more than one cosmos appearing and disappearing both concurrently and consecutively.

Three triads of Eternal Principles (see Diagram) are not imagined to be substances (things, persons, spirits, and so on), but functions underlying all that takes place in the universe. Yet it is understandable that such functions may be expressed in mythological forms (e.g. as semi-divine beings, such as Sophia, Logos and so on), as has happened in history.

Internally, each of these triads is thought to consist of three interdependent, complementary, mutually constitutive dimensions, adding up to a relative unit with its own internal structure and dynamics.

The first of these triads may be termed the triad of *Pre-/meta-consciousness*. It consists in what we, at this early and still inarticulate stage, may refer to as the functions of *Witting (Knowing)* (Ch. 8), *Wanting* (Ch. 9) and *Willing* (Ch. 10).

The second triad consists of the dimensions of *Becoming* (Ch. 11), *Canning (can-ing)* (Ch. 12) and *Conditioning (condition-ing)* (Ch. 13). This is the domain of *Pre-/meta-being*, which is distinct from Pre-consciousness yet linked to it and interdependent with it.

The third triad (*Pre-/meta-existence*) consists of the dimensions of *Singularising* (Ch. 14), *Pluralising* (Ch. 15) and *Totalising* (Ch. 16). This is again distinct from Pre-/meta-consciousness and Pre-/meta-being, yet linked to both and linking them. Here the aspect of individuation (of 'standing-out', *ex-stare*) makes its entry.

Together, these three triads form a coherent whole. The 'Pre-' does not refer to any Substance 'before' Consciousness, Being or Existence. It refers to the non-existing dimension of Eternity 'prior' to the emerging dimensions of Consciousness, Being and Existence.

In the three triads of Eternity, contradictions are not assumed between the first two Principles, to be reconciled in a higher conjunction in the third. For example, in the triad of Pre-consciousness, Witting and Wanting are not assumed to be such contradictory opposites that are reconciled in Willing. The logic of our analysis of the dynamics of Eternity does assume that there are differences and counteracting movements among the constituting Principles. It also assumes movement forward from the first through the second to the third, carrying forward the whole triad as such. The triad has not become a closed unit. It is begging to be carried forward into a next triad, in a circular movement in which none has absolute priority over the other.

Being timeless, there is no temporal order or sequence among the threesome of Pre-consciousness, Pre-being and Pre-existence. Eternity with its nine primal categories 'is' 'outside' space-time, interlocked as if in a chain reaction, flashing forth from impenetrable depths, and eventually cooling, as it were, in the concrete things of space and time making up Cosmos. They are eternally co-emergent, in an eternal spiral dynamic, emerging from and disappearing back into Unground.

This movement, variously conceived, has over centuries been variously termed – such as origin and end, appearance and disappearance, love and strife (Empedocles), emanation and return (Plotinus), integration and disintegration, ascent and descent, procession and recession, evolution and involution, explosion and implosion, explication and implication (David Bohm). The return is not merely the retracing of the procession in the opposite direction, as Neoplatonism assumed (Proclus 1963 [1932]:propositions 35–37). Novelty is added. Moreover, emphatically contra Neoplatonism, appearance (emergence) is not devaluation. Nor do I intend ‘return’ to refer to the manner in which the universe will end as anticipated by science; by ‘return’ I do not mean physical contraction or something similar in a physical sense, but the assumption that eventually Cosmos, like all its constituents, subsides into Absoluteness.

■ §9 Infinitude

Infinitude is the Third (refer to Diagram). By ‘Infinitude’ I again do not mean mere ‘endlessness’ (‘infinity’), but a dimension in which the emerging Principles assume a stronger ontological character, yet are still formless, unlimited, undefined, undetermined, unrestricted. Unground, on the way to becoming Cosmos, becomes Eternity, becomes Infinitude. Four Aspects are projected to arise from Unground. In traditional terms, they may be called *Infinite Thought*, *Infinite Love*, *Infinite Life*, and *Infinite Matter*. Finely tuned individuals may sense them beyond the manifold multiplicity of the things of the physical senses. The human species has brought forth exceptionally gifted people in this respect: visionaries and prophets. Today there is a growing awareness of this possibility – even necessity – in contemporary culture. This sense does not militate against the drift and the findings of contemporary science. In addition, the sense of unity with the dimension of Infinitude, providing depth and perspective to people’s lives, cuts across religious traditions.

I take the word ‘Spirit’ as an equivalent of ‘Infinitude’, to apply to these four in their togetherness. Here it is not ‘a’ Spirit or ‘the’ Spirit; both the definite article ‘the’ and the indefinite article ‘a’ are too definite, specific, individualising. Through lack of a better word, ‘Spirit’ suits the purpose I have in mind: neither as Supreme Being nor personal ‘soul’ nor Substance in the singular or plural, but simply primal, undifferentiated energy, with indeed some of the associations of the Latin root (*spirare*): ‘to breathe’. ‘Breathing’ with its inhaling and exhaling also suggests an element of great importance: the rhythm of coming and going. From Absolute Horizon an inspiring breath emerges and into Absolute Horizon, it expires. That ‘breath’ inspires Cosmos, and eventually Cosmos expires. It is similar to the Indian concept of *prāna* and the Chinese concept of *ch’i*. It must be stated emphatically that ‘Spirit’ as used here, also has no connection with notions of immateriality. The contrary is more applicable.

■ §10 Cosmos

In addition to the dimensions of Unground, Eternity and Infinitude, there is *Cosmos*. 'Cosmos' is the terrible, beautiful world of nature, from stars in the process of being born to stars dying, and all things at all levels of reality. It is 'Nature' as an entirety, in which we live and of which we are part.

This, our Cosmos, our universe, is the Fourth: an impermanent and insubstantial thing, with a beginning and an end and the possibility of others existing before, after and alongside it. Its space and time emerge from Infinitude as its continuation. Time and space are 'included' in timeless, spaceless Infinitude – even if 'included' is inevitably an inadequate spatial metaphor to suggest something transcending space and time. It is almost unavoidable to present Infinitude (and Eternity and Absoluteness) as 'before' and 'outside' Cosmos, even if that is not what is intended. Cosmos with its space-time is a moment in the movement of Unground.

Cosmos will be taken to be an integral whole of four: Energy-Matter, Life, Soul and Mind. Energy-Matter and Life together form Body; Soul and Mind together form Consciousness; Body and Consciousness together form Cosmos. Altogether Cosmos will also be called 'Spirit' – but now (taking it a step further than was the case with Infinitude) in the definite sense of 'a' Spirit; the word 'Spirit' will therefore here be used in the domain of the finite, not Infinitude. The meaning of each of these terms will be explored as the train of thought moves along.

Cosmos is the outcome, manifestation, of the *Arche* of Unground-Eternity-Infinitude. The ancient Stoics distinguished the whole (*holon*), that is, cosmos, from the all (*pan*); the latter is the infinite void surrounding, and including, the whole. Listening to them (Brunschwig 2003:206ff; Gosztanyi 1976:116–120), let us speak of the existing Cosmos as 'Whole' (*Holon*) – for this, we may also use the terms 'Nature', 'Totality' or 'Spirit'. Let us reserve the term 'All' (*Pan*) for Unground, Eternity and Infinitude – and including Cosmos (Spirit/Whole/Totality/Nature). For the first (the cosmic 'whole'), the medieval Christian MM Eriugena used the word *totum*, for the latter (all existing things plus a transcendent dimension), the word *universitas*. (He was not entirely consistent in his use of terminology.)

Cosmos disappears, not into 'Something', let alone something 'Else'; not into Nothing. Its disappearance is simply: End, Absolute Horizon, from which it also emerges. Absoluteness is neither 'more' nor 'less' on the same scale, neither 'identical' nor 'different' from Cosmos. Time-bound Cosmos is part of a timeless Whole. Timeless Eternity is implied in time, and time is implied in timeless Eternity.

At the level of Cosmos – that is, of concrete empirical nature – a temporal and spatial spiral process takes place. This Whole came into being, and it

will disappear. This process is patterned on and expresses the eternal Principles of Eternity and the eternal spiral process taking place in Infinitude. The achronic process in the heart of Unground-Eternity-Infinitude takes diachronic shape in the process of the coming into being and disappearance from the realm of being of the things concatenated through the different levels of being.

Cosmos as it develops and unfolds from moment to moment, is an ever-changing singularity. It is this specific Whole (cf. Smuts 1927:100ff.), here, now and thus. The term 'Event' wants to capture this aspect.

As existing singularity, Cosmos is also, at the same time, an internally differentiated entity – not merely a mechanical sum of parts, but a 'society', an 'organism'. That is, by virtue of its interdependent parts, it exists in a manner comparable with and analogous to human societies and the living things of our everyday experience. We shall treat Cosmos as consisting of innumerable small singularities, each of which is a society, a whole, a concretum. Put differently, the cosmic Whole is made up of many beings. Each is both an individual singularity and a society containing individual singularities, linked up and down through many ontological levels (Wilber 1996), from the simplest elements of nature at the bottom of the ladder of being, to higher than common human beings, up to the totalistic All (Pan).

Everything (every singularity concretum), from the minutest to the largest (Cosmos), expresses the underlying blueprint of all. It is shot through with Unground-Eternity-Infinitude. It is not a matter of a union of two distinct natures, hypostases (of 'God' and 'nature', to borrow classic Christian terminology), but of a non-monistic, non-dualistic *Archephanay* ('manifestation of Arche').

Everything that is, manifests 'concretely' (in the sense of empirically 'real') in a foursome: the functions of Acting/Being; Sensing/Living; Feeling/Loving; and Knowing/Understanding (speaking structurally: Energy/ Physicality/ Matter; Life; Soul; Mind). By 'concrete' and 'real', the type of brute hardness associated with sticks and stones is not understood. 'Con-crete' is taken in its etymological sense of 'grown together': the things of experience, even sticks and stones, contain various dimensions (the ones just mentioned above), all mutually implicit. Cosmos is 'real', not an illusion: its reality is not denied, but is understood as 'concrete' and as 'relative', that is, not separate from, but a manifestation of Absoluteness.

At the level of concrete empirical nature, this perspective would see every empirical singularity (wholeness), from the smallest to the All, somehow partaking in Acting-Living-Feeling-Knowing. The conventional definition of life is here, analogously, extrapolated to the Cosmos as a whole. Cosmos is a living 'organism'. There is an analogy (an *analogia entis*, here not taken in the usual Christian theological sense) between the great cosmic context and the small context of plant, animal, and so on. In the order of our human knowledge, the

small context comes first. It is our starting point. In the larger ontological order it is the other way round. Cosmos is 'alive'; 'feeling' and 'intelligent'; it is 'divine'. This idea was postulated in principle by Plato in Greek thinking and picked up in later times by others, such as Giordano Bruno (1962). In our framework, evolving biological life participates in that cosmogonic process, which in turn participates in the 'theo'-gonic process of emerging Arche.

At the level of Nature (Cosmos), in the process of cosmic evolution, the functions of knowing, feeling, living and material being emerge simultaneously. This is an extrapolation of the MM of ancient Theravāda Abhidhamma (Nyanaponika 1998 [1949]) to Cosmos as an entirety. However, these four are not equally manifest at all times in all cosmic events, such as in the various species of life emerging over time. To use the microcosmic analogy again (as the Stoics did a long time ago): my body as a whole is alive, but my fingernails are 'less' so than my heart. In this historical process of evolution, 'life' seems to have made its manifest appearance only gradually and in a long process of refinement. Likewise, only later, 'knowing', 'thought', seems to have become manifest in the process of life. Going back in time through the process of cosmic becoming, we humans tend to make strong distinctions between humans, other primates, other mammals, less complex forms of life going back to mindless prokaryotes, even lesser inorganic beings, and so on, right back to the blind chemical forces raging in the bellies of stars. The implication of such perspective is that mind (consciousness) arose out of not-mind, just as life is assumed to have arisen out of not-life. Ultimately such reductionism runs into serious difficulties: blind matter, assumed to have spewed out with a big blind bang, mindlessly produced living, feeling and knowing. From the perspective of these reflections such an assumption is inadequate. To think that we could save ourselves by a blind leap of faith into supranaturalistic divine intervention in this blind process of nature, at its beginning and along the way, is equally unconvincing.

These reflections explore an assumption opposite to both reductionism and supranaturalism. It assumes that living ('life'), feeling ('soul') and knowing ('mind') emerged concomitant with energy-matter, from the depths of a mysterious Origin; and that it is heading towards End into which it will eventually submerge. The entire process is permeated with responsive feeling and adaptive, creative intelligence, manifesting themselves in the finch's weaving of its nest and the crocodile's nurturing of its young and a myriad other miracles, as much as in the human's self-conscious design of all sorts of things. The human being's existence and achievements are at the surface of a depth of feeling and knowing inherently spread throughout the realm of being, working themselves out in various ways through the various species and individuals in those species - whether the individuals are aware of that or not. Shot through with intelligence from its very Origin, evolving Cosmos designs itself in accordance with certain Principles emerging from Unground itself.

The standard popular scientific view assumes a reductionistic view of reality, according to which everything that is, is collapsed ‘downwards’: consciousness, in the sense of ‘mind’ (thinking), is regarded as at best a side-product, an epiphenomenon, of primitive ways of reacting to the environment (‘life’), which is in turn regarded as a side-product of ‘matter’. Life and mind only emerged later from chemical processes, utterly devoid of all consciousness in any sense (Seager 2007:11ff.). Here a different line of argument is proposed.

■ §11 Arche

We have now arrived at the first, overarching, all-determining category, termed *Arche*. Here it stands for the basic, multi-faceted primordial pattern, expressed in all things. This is perhaps the most suitable word for what is intended in this argument, partly because it is quite neutral and avoids the heavy burden carried by a traditional word such as ‘God’ in all its permutations.

‘Arche’ is here used in its original Greek sense: ‘beginning’, ‘origin’, ‘first principle’. Plotinus elevated it to a term of supreme importance in the MM context. Much as Plotinus is admired in these chapters, the word is not used in the sense that he made normative for Neoplatonism. The meaning of the word ‘archaeology’ resonates in the manner in which it functions with us here: digging into foundational layers of reality; also, meanings resonating in ‘archetype’: a prototype, pattern, original model, all-present stamp. What I have in mind is the original blueprint, the exemplar, underlying all of reality, and manifesting in that reality. Nature is like an ever-developing and ever-changing language, with Arche as its implicit grammar. It does not refer to some Substance, of which all things are modifications, which is what *arche* meant in ancient Greek philosophy. What we are aiming at here might have been termed *Archetype* as well, since it is understood to be the original model ‘in’ or ‘behind’ reality.

The paradoxical qualification *anarchic* (borrowed from Christian patristics) expresses another idea implied in our usage of ‘Arche’ here: that ultimately the *arche* of things is not grounded and fixed, but groundless and boundless (‘absolute’), and without ruler, so to speak. Everything that is, exists as expression or manifestation of Unground-Eternity-Infinitude-Cosmos. Every such concretum – whether it is as large as a universe or as small as a snail – can roughly be understood and explained with reference to that *anarchic Arche*.

What I am aiming at here, is that the brief song of the single bird – as much as every human individual person and every human society, whether large or small, every work of art, and so on – is to be understood as in relationship to every other thing. It is to be understood in relation to the Cosmic Totality, to Infinitude and Eternity; and as appearing from and disappearing into Absolute Horizon. From that vast network and that ultimate Emptiness, the concrete

thing – again, single or collective, small or large – derives both ultimate relativity and penultimate dignity.

What has been sounded as anarchic Arche here, is neither a generic name for a kind of being nor a personal name for a Substance or an individual Personal Being. It may belong to the same category of words as the Tao, Original Nature, Buddha-Nature, Emptiness, or Godhead, all in their most radical sense. Premature and unwarranted closure is the problem with the word ‘God’, for example, when it is reified and reduced in the form of an anthropomorphic personification. The same possibility lurks in words such as ‘Spirit’ and ‘Buddha-Nature’. So I prefer to avoid them, or at least use them sparingly, pruned of uncritical anthropomorphic overtones where they might occur. Such a stripping to the barest essentials does not exclude that the mystery might be expressed in mythological, anthropomorphic language and imagery. It might serve such a purpose well. Art, literature and traditional religions are full of such treasures. Nevertheless, it needs to be appreciated for what it is: allegory, symbolism. It cannot be literal, referential truth. It is only a word for a movement intimated and postulated to underlie both macrocosm (the universe) and microcosm (individual existence). The empirically ‘real’ world as a whole from top to bottom, beginning to end, and inside to outside, is assumed to consist in energy-matter, life, soul and mind, all four inseparably interwoven, and to be a manifestation of Arche, which is suffused with Infinity, Eternity and Unground.

This conceptual space admits the echoes of many teachings, such as Neoplatonic notions, elements of Gnosticism, Jewish, Christian and Muslim mysticism, the Yogācāra Buddhist teaching of the triple body of the Buddha, the Hindu *Trimurti*, and Advaita Vedantic distinctions. These will emerge more clearly in following chapters. At this early stage of our journey, a few brief glances sideways will serve to illustrate the point.

For example, the idea of Unground is not irreconcilable with the idea of God-above-God, as found in the Christian thinker Meister Eckhart (c. 1260–1327), allowing space for Eckhart’s phrase as tendentially sound. The ideas of Eternity and Infinity may be presented as, in broad terms, functional parallels to the idea of the Trinity in Christianity (see Ch. 17).

Arche also allows for an alliance with the Buddhist teaching of the *trikāya* (the ‘three bodies’ of Buddha-hood). Here the idea of Unground, centring in Absoluteness, is the equivalent of the notion of *dharma-kāya* (‘essence’ body); the ultimate, essential *Buddha* as radical Truth is nothing less than the notion of radical Emptiness. The ideas of Eternity-Infinity seek to operate at the level of the *Sambhoga-kāya*, lying between, and linking, the heart of emptiness with the world of the senses out there, enabling the external world to be. Moreover, the idea of the concrete cosmic Whole links up with the notion of the *Nirmana-kāya*: the historical, empirical Buddha – surrounded by and part of – the empirical world of sensory experience.

At a mythological level the popular Hindu notion of the *Trimurti* (Brahma the creator; Vishnu the preserver, asleep between creations; and Shiva the destroyer, making space for new creation in the cycle of birth and death) express the basic understanding of the cosmic cycle.

Taking into account the divergence and postulated strange convergence of traditions such as the above, I sense the opening up of a space referred to here as Absolute Horizon – transcending all of those traditions. From that Absolute Emptying at the heart of all things, at the heart of Arche itself, such religions may receive a relative endorsement. Nevertheless, that Absoluteness will also undercut the pretence to being absolute in any sense that any one of these religions may harbour in itself. Absoluteness is the absolute Origin – and the absolute End.

Somehow struggle, conflict and suffering – in short, evil – need to be located on this map. In chapters ahead, we shall be aware of the dark shadows in the valleys of the landscape surrounded by Horizon. Darkness and cold, evil and suffering, negative as we humans see them, are also part of empirical nature. The model explored here widens the early Buddhist view of human suffering to Cosmic life as a whole, as revealed in the theory of evolution. In early Buddhism, human existence grows from three roots (*mūla*): greed (*lobha*), hatred (*dosa*) and delusion (*moha*) concerning its own non-permanence (*anicca*), and non-substantiality (*anattā*). The result is suffering (*dukkha*). Extended to Cosmos: all Cosmic forms of life (like all things) are impermanent and non-substantial, they come about and disappear. Yet every living being, from bacterium to human, is driven by the desire to maximise itself, involving self-centredness, competition and conflict. This leads to suffering. This is here taken as equivalent of ‘evil’. Something is deeply wrong and for some inexplicable reason deeply embedded in the nature of things. There is also sympathy and co-operation among humans and in the rest of nature, but in empirical nature the rule of selfish power reigns. Notwithstanding, it is not a closed circle, but imagined as containing the possibility of moving towards peace. In this process the *bodhisattvic* dream that every person shall be a Buddha (the *Lotus Sutra*, see Watson 1993) and every being happy, and the Messianic dream that all things shall be saved, play a key role. Such *bodhisattvic* beings are the locus where an alternative manner of existence is realised. They actualise the want in all of existence: peace.

■ §12 The human being

The human being is part of the process of originating and ending of Cosmos; and yet it also has a certain unique position in Cosmos, as witnessing eye and mouth. To ‘know yourself’, as the ancient adage urges, is to know yourself as part of that large process. The connecting of microcosmos and macrocosm is

not an uncritical mixing of the anthropological and cosmological dimensions, committing the fallacy of ambiguity or equivocation, using the same words misleadingly for totally disconnected realms of being. The connection is based on the assumption that reality is of one piece, and that microcosm and macrocosm share the same basic structure, like seed and fruit. The ontological splits between human, cosmic and divine are tragic implications of forms of traditional theistic religion.

As microcosm-spirit, participating in and reflecting Cosmos-Spirit, the human species carries the seed of ennoblement in itself. The responsibility of the human being, the meaning of its seemingly exceptional intelligence and its freedom, is to break through the encasement of *ego* (individually and collectively) standing over against a world, and to mature into *ipse*, realising its being part and expression of Arche. Yet, somehow, the human being is also, as far as we can see, a prime instance of evil in the world. The upshot of the argument of these reflections is that the self-centred human being (*ego*) is capable of maturing into an Arche-centred *ipse*: thinking, feeling-willing, acting with wisdom and compassion. This occurs towards the self; towards the individual other human; towards human groups from small and intimate to large and seemingly impersonal to humankind as a whole; towards animals; towards plants and sub-vegetative life; towards the Cosmic Whole. It implies a morality of human and ecological solidarity and responsibility, cutting off domination and exploitation at the root.

The process of maturation occurs at the levels of individual existence as well as species development. In contemporary thinking inspired by science, the human being is cosmically insignificant. Yet, more than one mystical tradition sensed that the human being has cosmic significance. In a sense we cannot avoid being anthropocentric; thinking ants would inevitably look at the world from an ant-centric point of view – and why not? So anthropocentrism is not to be suppressed or avoided (which would be impossible anyway); it is to be filled with humility, love and responsibility. It is not only the single individual human being who may develop to higher forms of insight, feeling-willing and action. Among humans as a biological species, exceptional individuals are the vanguard of an upliftment of the species as a whole towards a clearer realisation of Arche. The development of the individual contains the evolution, biological as well as mental, as well as spiritual, of the human species. More than that, such individuals are the growth points of Cosmos as it spirals in its eternal cycle of emergence and return, like a tree growing upwards through cycles of winters and summers, periods of drought and abundance. Even as they enter the realm of death, such creative individuals drop seeds, which sprout, grow and draw the entire species forward. An analysis of the history of humankind reveals the annual growth rings of spiritual drought and the rings of spiritual abundance.

So where are we now in the large movement? Is humanity, life, on the way up or down? Our vantage point is too small and peripheral, our perspective

too narrow, our vision too myopic to make any grand pronouncements. Yet, even in the scenario of the end of life on Earth (partly as result of human folly and greed), may we assume in an act of intuitive faith rather than promulgated belief, the following: that Cosmos is spiralling forwards in a process that incorporates disintegration, and that some individual human beings are agents of that process? Such kinds of postulates would be, well, kinds of postulates, ultimately dropping away into the annihilating darkness of Absoluteness. This kind of speech has a performative possibility that materialistic reductionism does not have. That is to say, this scenario provides a basis and a motivation for values and attitudes of solidarity with all things and service to all things that reductionism cannot. It has a utopian quality: it is not a descriptive, realistic (scientifically-proven) speech, but transformative speech, inspiring people to follow certain courses of action. It has a creative quality: it brings about what it is talking about. Ultimately, the ideas of the cynic and the ones put forward here may be equally unprovable in purely rational terms, but the two sets of ideas work out very differently in the actual living of life.

■ §13 The status of our understanding

The human mind cannot know totally and finally; but it can create, in an imaginal sense, more or less fitting models for orientation and principles guiding human existence and action in the world, such as that which has been sketched above, and that will unfold step by step. It is not 'the truth' promulgated based on either supernatural revelation or science.

That is what MM's have always done, and it has always been part of religions. The visionaries of our species in all religions saw as widely and deeply as human short-sightedness permits, and said what they saw. They or their followers often extrapolated beyond the limits of human abilities and awarded eternal value to their limited insights. Any description of any landscape has to begin somewhere and end somewhere, but the landscape itself is inexhaustibly varied and it allows for many intersecting perspectives, many criss-cross journeys and many accounts of such journeys. One function of the model put forward here is to provide a 'map' on which such journeys, as found in various cultures, can be plotted, and it is in itself such a journey, fully conscious of its own relativity.

Human reason and speech are structured by the limitations and organisation of the human mind and human sensory experience. We cannot lift ourselves out of these by our own bootstraps. Intuitively, humans may reach higher. The moment they start reasoning and speaking, they get tied up in knots. Rather than cutting out mystical intuition altogether, it seems better to accept the inevitability of the shortcomings of the human mind and tongue. Analogies breaking down are better than nothing. It may be true that we should not attempt to say what cannot be said; and yet we dare not *not* attempt to say

what cannot be said. That is, given with being inquisitive, puzzled, awestruck human beings. We can only see from here, from the 'bottom-up', as far as we can. Yet in the exposition of what we see, it is possible to adopt, as it were, a bird's eye view, to reconstruct the scene from the 'top-down'. The risk in such an undertaking is that the false impression could arise that we may come to believe to be somehow endowed with a God's eye view. That has been the problem with most religions and theologies. Nāgārjuna's making people aware of this error, were rare. What we see and say, are seen and said from nothing but a paltry human perspective, from the human side of things. To emphasise the human centeredness of our understanding (different from ant or imagined 'universal' mind) I shall from time to time use the word 'homoversal', but not 'universal'; humankind is a speck in the universe.

Notions such as those put forward here have a heuristic value – that is, as being context-providing, significant in MM terms, useful to make sense of nature, that is, of empirical cosmos and history, and at best critically alignable with, not reducible to, the natural and human sciences.

Apart from science, there is another connection, namely with art. Ultimately art, like science and MM, is directed at and expresses a sense of Horizon, and good art opens deeper levels of experience than surface sense experiences and enjoyments; it is directed at not only entertainment, but at truth. Like art, MM models are compositions, constructions, poetry (also in the etymological sense of *poiesis*: 'a making'). A certain aesthetic quality could be counted as a criterion for good MM. Like good art, good models of this kind are neither purely arbitrary, nor simply reflections of reality as it is. Like good art, they are somehow in touch with the deep structures of the collective human spirit, and in touch with the deep structures of Spirit/Cosmos. There is some profound resonance between the human being and Spirit/Cosmos. MM speech at its best can be expressive of that relationship. It can be 'original' in the sense of tapping into the origin of things.

Such understanding is also akin to religious faith, understood as a basic trust and an understanding of the essence of things, the ultimate test of which is the difference it makes to how people live and die. Nobody taught this and existed this as exemplarily as Jesus. Growing up 'fatherless in Galilee' (Van Aarde 2001) and living in the margin of the institutionalised religious Jewish tradition in which he grew up and outside the Greek-Roman intellectual academic establishments of his time, he did not come up with metaphysical or theological schemes. Instead, he saw deeper, cut through all presumptions to the bone of religion and through the bone to the marrow of life, adapting the religion of his tradition to suit the needs of ordinary, humble people. Whatever learned scholars did before him inside and outside his inherited religion, and would attempt to formulate in grand designs after him, he reduced to the non-presumptuous analogy of a caring Father. Could Jesus have used another term, such as 'Mother', to express his central idea? In his historical context,

probably not. Would it be conceivable in a wider context, ultimately in the widest context imaginable? Yes. Indeed, at the edge of Horizon all conceptual constructs dissolve, but meaningful speech such as his can emerge, the truth value of which is not reducible to proof or disproof on scientific grounds.

In the case of Jesus, from an early stage onwards, starting in the writings of the New Testament and continued in church theology, his person and teachings were embroidered in various ways to add to his status and meaning. In trying to cancel the nihilation of his life and death, they often missed the point. Their constructions were often impressive and probably even inevitable (I shall return to examples), but mostly unaware of their own constructedness and relativity. Jesus did not engage theoretically in MM, that is why no separate section is devoted to him here. He emptied all intellectual and social power constructs, and for that reason he is of the highest relevance to MM. Even the minimalist theology of a loving Father that he used, came to End on the Cross, and with that he turned into the Origin of self-giving love. That is the essence of religion and mysticism, including the metaphysical variety. If the latter variety has any meaning, it would be to serve authentic, loving existence.

Continuous with faith in the broad sense, the reflections in chapters to come nevertheless present themselves as argument. On succeeding pages, we shall meet the 'imaginings' of many MM minds and their efforts to give such 'imaginings' intellectual form. It would be a serious mistake to treat such imaginings as obfuscating blather, feeble science or arbitrary fabrication. Not for a moment forgetting its own constructivist nature, this attempt stands clear of the reduction of all valid theoretical discourse to scientifically provable discourse. It is also removed from the repetition of traditional religious doctrine and reputed supernatural revelation, immunising it from critical discussion.

The procedure followed, largely conforms to the parameters for acceptable reasoning set by early Buddhism (Ñānananda 1976). In addition to the application of analytical, differentiating thought (*vitakka*) and its concomitant, the finer investigation and deliberation (*vicāra*), at least two other concepts are distinguished. The first and positive one is *paññā*, meaning wisdom or insight, transcending the domain of reason. The second and negative one is *papañca*, the unguarded proliferation of conceptual constructs, transgressing the limits of applicability of reason. This latter tendency of the human mind carries unwholesome implications in its wake, such as setting the thinking subject ('I') over against objects; the attachment to that 'I' and its thought constructs; conceit, and inevitable entanglements in disputes and conflicts. This Buddhist perspective gives great scope to reason (*vitakka* and *vicāra*); is fully aware of its limitations and dangers (*papañca*); and allows for the possibility of transrational insight and understanding (*paññā*), which is quite different from reason running wild.

At most, even the keenest eye can only hazard guesses at shimmering outlines on the edge of vision on Horizon: perhaps trees, perhaps camels?

There are no axiomatic certainties indubitably established in processes of deductive reasoning. By close inspection, revelations turn out to be penultimate human constructions. Inductive reasoning is valid up to point. Analogies fizzle out. Then follows Absolute Horizon, absolute non-sightedness, as if in total darkness. Silence.

The argument of this inquiry is neither inductive nor deductive in a strong sense, neither fully empirical nor completely a priori. It does not seek some first, indubitable principle from which all can be deduced. What is presented here is rather like a landscape dimly emerging as a thick fog partly lifts, and the onlooker tells of a picture that he sees with a mixture of scrutiny, memory, imagination, projection and chatting to fellow spectators. To borrow the term of C.S. Peirce (1839–1914) (Olson 2002:85–101), the procedure followed here is a kind of abductive reasoning: the model developing here would present itself as meaningful, useful, sufficient for the purpose in mind, compatible with science, and in line with the deep drift of humankind's MM longing.

Contemporary scientific ideology is deficient in that its explanatory ceiling is too low, refusing to admit the possibility of science-transcendent dimensions. Theology is encumbered by problematic oversupply. This occurs through its mostly inflated postulation of the reality and the definitely accepted features of an Other Reality. It bases this postulation on an assumed *other* side of the edge of human experience and thought as essential condition from which the world is deduced. My inquiry remains on *this* side of the Horizon. Aware of its own expiry on the edge of things, it tentatively seeks provisional words to give some coherent conceptual expression to its intimations; does not present its position as final, dogmatic or exclusively true in any sense, but explores coherence and convergence at every step.

What would be meaningful criteria to gauge the quality of MM perspectives on the world, as developed over the last two and a half millennia? The following are put forward, as adding up to an integration of truth, kindness and beauty:

- a sense of wonder, issuing in ultimate not-knowing and non-knowing
- a realisation of the value of the imaginal dimension of meaning-providing macro-perspectives
- combining and balancing the foregoing with critical intellectual rigour and a respect for logic
- integrating, totalising range and ability
- linking up meaningfully with the contemporary experience of the world, including science – but not with science alone or in particular
- a historical understanding of a wide range of predecessors and contemporaries from various, even widely diverging, religious contexts – but not from any religion alone or in particular
- an aesthetic quality
- the difference it makes to the quality of human existence in the world.

Absolute Horizon

■ §14 Non-reference

We hover before absolute silence. It is a sense of sound dimmed completely, not of a ceiling above our experience with something above it. The words ‘Something’ and ‘Nothing’, ‘Being’ and ‘Not-Being’, do not apply.

So we are not following the realism of, for example, the late classical philosopher and theologian Boethius (c. 480–525) who would play such an important role in the medieval debates. According to him, every noun, including ‘nothing’ (*nihil*), is a predicate, and therefore must signify a ‘something’ (*aliquid*). More subtly, in his *Sophist*, Plato explored a distinction between ‘being’ (*on*) and ‘not-being’ as the direct negation of ‘being’ (yet still parasitising on ‘being’), and ‘non-being’ (*me on*) as negation of both. As will become clear, Eastern Taoism and Buddhism pursued this disappearing path even further than Plato and his followers in Western MM.

Be careful with nouns and adjectives. Not only the words and thoughts (soundless words) are imploding, but also binary logic, of positive and negative, present and absent. Only ‘something’, however attenuated or superlative or hidden ‘it’ may be, can be ‘absent’. So, the negative is, in the end, just as inadequate as the positive. Everything, every word, every thought

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simply peters out. Yet, it is not the same as mere denial, cynicism (in the modern sense of that word), indifference or nihilism. The road on which we are travelling, is awe, taken to the very end of our human capacity, where unsound reigns.

The turn of phrase, 'the Absolute', sometimes occurring in this sort of context, is deliberately avoided. With its definite article 'the' and its capitalised noun, it is too definite, as if it were referring to some Absent but Real Substance. In the end our abilities to understand, think and speak referentially fray and unravel into signlessness. The terms used here, 'Absoluteness' and 'Horizon', do not 'refer' to something aside from, in addition to, 'ordinary' life. There is just the flow of 'ordinary' life, appearing and disappearing, and its Horizon. 'Absoluteness' has no substantialist association. It is intended as an equivalent of the Buddhist 'emptiness' (*suññatā*), which is just another way of noting the ontological non-substantiality of things.

Another term to consider could be 'transcendence' (Smart 1996:196–205). Its etymology is promising. It comes from the Latin 'trans' ('beyond') and 'scandere' (to 'rise'). Perhaps it is handy for our purposes, but it parasitises on an opposite, which would be something like 'staying on this side'. That is precisely what its twin concept 'immanent' ('remaining inside') means. Transcendence might imply that another side, for example a transcendent Subject, is supposed as semi-known. This inquiry does not presuppose that. Eventually merely a shimmering Horizon is sensed which cannot be transcended, to which the notion of 'beyond' with any implication of either 'is' or 'is not' no longer applies. No Kantian *Ding an sich*, no *One*, no *Brahman*, no substantial God, no Nothing, no mythological Person or Seed or Egg can be proven or postulated on sufficient grounds. Anyway, any such notion would be a human construction. Such conceptual constructions, fabrications, are tolerable up to a point, but should not be pushed too far. Simply come to the end of the road and admit it. Not a boundary with an Other beyond; not oneness with a transcendent referent; just disappearance. Neither sensory experience nor science, neither speculative reason nor mystical intuition can 'transcend' it. Go as far as you can, then you and your ideas fizzle out. Notions such as 'transcendence' and 'immanence' break down: both 'moving outside' and 'staying inside' become meaningless.

Absoluteness should not be thought of spatially as 'above', 'beneath' or 'in the centre'; it should not be thought of temporally as 'first' or 'last'; or numerically, as 'one' or 'the one'; gender ('He', 'She', 'It') does not apply. Inappropriate as the following words may be, Absoluteness 'is' 'before' time, 'outside' space. 'It' 'is' unknown, unknowable. There 'is' 'nothing' to know. Such non-referential concepts may, at their best, be like the tools of the mountaineer, helping one to get to a site of insight, where the only appropriate response is utter silence – yet a silence that people

may want to talk about to express and share their sense of wonder. Those who have been 'there', are not necessarily disadvantaged in terms of normal, everyday intelligence. Some were highly gifted in science, literature, visual arts and practical affairs. Yet, they seem to have moved into a different kind of understanding altogether. Nicholas of Cusa coined the term *docta ignorantia* ('learned ignorance') for the paradoxical knowing of what cannot be known; the category 'know' as we know it in everyday life becomes inapplicable.

There seem to be degrees of (non-)understanding Absoluteness. Some see further, hear the Unsound clearer, than others. There seem to be longer and shorter sojourns in the awareness of 'Absolute Horizon'. To this momentary or extended transcending of ordinary consciousness, the term 'ecstasy' may apply. Here it does not mean frenzy or overwhelming feelings of any kind, just silence in the margin of things. In following §§ I shall visit some explorers who spoke about the process of their sliding into non-knowing. Here we are interested in the outcome of that slipping into some dark abyss. That seems to be the passing into a dimension where feeling and thinking lose all content and reference. It is not the vacuity of death, but can occur in highly rational people in the midst of life. Going on what such mystics tell us, it may perhaps be called a non-self-conscious awareness without an object, an 'absolute' awareness; not unconsciousness or infra-consciousness, but superconsciousness, consciousness overreaching, demolishing, itself.

In the sense that every single thing in the world and the world as a whole is voided, all such things may be taken to be diffused with incommensurable Absoluteness. In that sense, all things and all words, mental pictures and everyday experiences used by us to connote that mystery, are empty. Absolute Horizon transcends all historical religions and science. So does the notion of Absolute Horizon have any relevance? Yes. Does it not amount to an escape away from, a denial of the brute and beautiful realities of life? No. Even if it signifies a Horizon, where everything *dis-appears*, reality and life are unthinkable without it. Absolute Horizon is non-dualistically distinct from Cosmos: neither identical, nor different. About the Fullness of Cosmos much can be said - it can never be exhausted; about the Emptiness of Absoluteness nothing can be said. Nevertheless, there is a mutual interdependence of speaking and non-speaking, seeing and non-seeing, understanding and non-understanding (Collins 1998:159ff., 196ff.; Sells 1994; Sobti 1985; Welbon 1968).

Clear, open sky above, inviting us to drift, float, fly into eternity may symbolically represent the disappearance of sets of ideas that were previously clogging our minds. The dizzying physical features of an abyss dropping away in front of and beneath us from a great height, triggering our primordial fear of falling, is another evocation of this impenetrable dimension. The haunting Abyss holds an abiding fascination for the human mind.

■ §15 (Not-)naming the unnameable, (not-) speaking the unspeakable

■ *nibbāna*, impermanence and non-substantiality in Early Buddhism

The Buddha was the first historically known pioneer of those who became fully aware, in a reflexive (theoretical) sense, of Absoluteness. In his terminology according to the early Pāli suttas, it was hinted at as *nibbāna* ('cooling', 'extinction'; English *nirvana*). That was, in his teaching, the highest achievement. It stands to reason that the Buddha, when pushed – by those who wanted to understand better or by the drift of his own thoughts themselves – to explain what that state entailed, could have made a distinction between the situation of the sage (*arahant*) while alive, and the situation of such a person after death. That is about as far as he went.

Concerning the state after death of the saint (*arahant*), the Buddha – according to the Pāli suttas and the *Abhidhamma* – called it *khandha-parinibbāna* (the 'full extinction of the groups of existence') and *an-upadisesa-nibbāna* ('*nibbāna*-without-[psycho-physical] basis'). After death, the saintly sage as psycho-physical individual no longer continues to 'be'. This was intended as a middle way between 'eternalism', that is, eternal continuation of existence on the one hand, and 'annihilation' in the sense of materialistic reduction (just being reduced to lifeless matter) on the other hand. As for the attainment of *nibbāna* by the perfect sage while still alive, it was referred to as *kilesa-(pari-)nibbāna* (the '[full] extinction of defilements') and *sa-upadisesa-nibbāna* (*nibbāna*-with-[psycho-physical] basis). In this case, the saint is fully alive, but morally and epistemologically, has become fully purified. The 'feeling-willing' and the type of 'knowing' of ordinary, suffering people, have been transcended. The Buddha was reported to have remained in this state for 45 years after his enlightenment.

So, what does the living, fully enlightened sage 'know'? Such a person knows that, deep down, everything – including himself or herself – is not only *anicca* (impermanent), but also *anattā* (non-self, insubstantial). That does not amount to a denial of the empirical reality of self and the world. It refers to its ultimate status. Our 'Absoluteness' is intended as an equivalent of *anattā*: in the final analysis, any presumed core of the world has dissolved. Into what? The privative prefix 'an-' ('a-') does not give any content, as little as does the privative 'nir-' ('out') in *nibbāna* (*nirvana*). The living sage knows that, in the final analysis, the core of the fruit is empty; there 'is' nothing to be known, even though, empirically speaking, such a one still 'is' and is alive. With exhaling the last breath, the sage as such 'ceases' to 'be'. At this point reflection on the status of the *arahant* after death seems to suggest that such a person finally 'enters' into ultimacy, Absoluteness. At that level, the notions of idealistic eternalism as well as

materialistic annihilationism have been transcended, according to early Buddhist teaching. The question of the status of the deceased saint blends with the question concerning the ultimate nature of the experienced cosmos. The corpse or the ashes of the deceased *arahant* are still there, but essentially such a person has entered the domain of ultimacy, beyond eternal life; beyond eternal death.

The notion of ‘conditionality’ (*paccayatā*) was put forward as the positive equivalent of the negative notion of non-substantiality. The individual thing is seen as part of a larger conditionalistic context. It points towards the concept of organic ‘Wholeness’: the single thing is stripped of any presumed individual ultimacy by being co-ordinated in ever-expanding wholes of successive and simultaneous connections, finding its culmination in an all-encompassing nexus, so radical and comprehensive that there is no place for hard individual knots (‘substances’).

There the Theravāda *arahant* sits quietly. In the perspective of ‘being’, such a one, however quiet, is very much present empirically. At a deeper level, the *arahant* is a manifestation of mysterious non-substantiality. The *arahant* is a saint, having disposed of the defilements of greed and hatred, tied up with the false notion of *attā* (‘self’, ‘substance’). In the perspective of ‘knowing’, such a person is the true sage, realising the true status of his own (non-)‘being’. When such a person dies, the last remnant of a membrane separating him or her as an entity, imagined to be separate from Wholeness and Absoluteness, finally drops away. The interpreters of the Buddhist message knew how difficult it was to say something – anything was too much. To say enough (evoking a sense of mystery but not killing it with words) is impossible. In early Buddhist terms, to fall into either ‘eternalism’ or ‘materialistic nihilism’ would be too much; to maintain the ignorant silence of the worldling would be too little. As far as the ultimate metaphysical questions of his day were concerned (there were 14 of them), the Buddha did not present any view. The ultimate nature of reality cannot be conceived of in rational terms. He remained silent.

■ the emptiness of emptiness in Mahāyāna Buddhism

In Mahāyāna, nirvana is not dissociated from empirical reality. Somehow, it is in the midst of ordinary life (*samsāra*). More than that, it is ordinary reality: nirvana is *samsāra* in a certain perspective. Absoluteness is not found elsewhere; it is in, coincides paradoxically with, the relative, that is, with all the interconnected things making up reality. Nirvana coincides with, is, the ‘suchness’ (*tathatā*) of reality. It is that same reality as ‘empty’ of substantial own-being – it is *sūnyatā* (‘emptiness’). Of all Mahāyāna MM thinkers, none emphasised the qualitative transcendence of Absoluteness and, at the same time, the non-difference of Absoluteness from ordinary reality more strongly than Nāgārjuna (founder of Mādhyamika) in the period between 2nd century and 3rd century CE. Yet it

was in Far-Eastern (Chinese, Japanese, Korean) Buddhism that the non-difference between the absolute of nirvana and the relative was emphasised most strongly. This non-difference was extended to include blades of grass, frogs plopping into ponds, and bamboos.

Nāgārjuna makes it clear that 'emptiness' (i.e. 'Absoluteness') itself is empty – that is to say, it is a mere word, a construction, and does not refer to, describe or designate anything. It has no ontological content. There is no such thing (or Thing, or Person). Nirvana (our 'Absoluteness') is not some (semi-)separate Super-reality; it is the radical implosion, the utter annihilation of any such fabricated idea, even emptiness. As he said in his *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (XIII.8):

The wise men [*i.e.*, *the enlightened ones*] have said that *sūnyatā* or the nature of thusness is the relinquishing of all false views. Yet it is said that those who adhere to the idea or concept of *sūnyatā* are incorrigible.

The implication of this trend of thinking is that everything is ultimately suffused with, non-different from, Absoluteness. The only difference between people is that some realise (i.e. know) it, and some do not. Those who realise it are the enlightened ones. They are the ones who realise Absoluteness (i.e. somehow express it) in the midst of life. Thus, we find that, in Mahāyāna Buddhism, the idea of Absoluteness was pushed to the outermost limits, at the same time paradoxically identified with the mundane world lived in and experienced by all.

From a psychological point of view, it is understandable that the *nirvāna-sūnyatā* complex of ideas could place a 'negative' ('pessimistic') as well as a 'positive' ('optimistic') emphasis on Absoluteness. The first would tend towards seeing it as a form of annihilation; the second, towards the affirmation of some form of happiness. It would have been very hard to avoid either of these two approaches, and indeed both accents occurred in Buddhism. The Unground as Absolute, following Buddhism, intends transcending both. It transcends the notion of being, as well as that of not-being, of happiness as well as of unhappiness, of positive knowing as well as of negative not-knowing. It could instead, at most be (non-)referred to as non-being, non-feeling (non-happiness/non-unhappiness), non-knowing. 'End' refers to the end at the edge of things; 'Origin', to the beginning at the edge of things. All we can approach (not *have*), is the Horizon of disappearance of being, feeling and knowing and the Horizon of the emergence of being, feeling and knowing. 'Beyond' these events, we cannot be, feel or know (say). The categories 'is', 'feel' and 'know' do not apply; they lose all reference.

The *Mādhyamika* of Nāgārjuna is Absolutism at its most consistent. No system, Indian or non-Indian, has surpassed or equalled its radicality. Yet in Indian MM there were those who presupposed Nāgārjuna, even as they tried to build systems of thought on the (non-)basis laid by Nāgārjuna, following as he was in the footsteps of the Buddha. Most prominent among such Indian systems of reflection were the Buddhist Yogācāra school (mainly Asanga and

Vasubandhu in the 5th century) and the Hindu Advaita-Vedanta school (mainly Gaudapāda and Sankara in the period between 8th century and 9th century). The question is whether (and, if so, to what extent) they might have compromised the absolute Absoluteness of Nāgārjuna in such attempts.

As far as Yogācāra is concerned, even as their scholars turned to speculative thinking, they did not abandon the notion of Emptiness (Absoluteness), as pioneered by the Buddha and Nāgārjuna. Yet they managed to see it as the womb of all things. We will return to this. In the case of Advaita-Vedanta it may be somewhat different. Sankara's position may be termed a version of critical realism: critical as it is, it seems to remain a form of attenuated realism. The Absolute, Brahman, stripped of all limiting qualifications, nevertheless remains Being (*Sat*), albeit Pure – that of which all things are manifestations. In our present context, the problem here is not how the world of things may have emerged from the Absolute, but what the nature of that Absolute is, and what the relationship between Absoluteness (the ultimate) and the empirical world/nature (the phenomenal) is. In Advaita-Vedanta the Absolute did not transcend the notions of being, knowing and feeling-willing (*Sat-Chit-Ananda*) altogether. However transcendent the Absolute might be, it still is primordial being-knowing-feeling – in the categorial system of our model: aspects of Infinitude (see Part Three).

The 5th century (CE) Mahāyāna classic *The awakening of faith in Mahāyāna* (Chinese: *Ta-ch'eng ch'i-hsin lun*; Sanskrit: *Mahāyānasraddhotpāda*) (Asvaghosha 1967), providing a summary of the essentials of Mahāyāna, uses the term *pu-sheng* (*an-utpanna*) for what we are envisaging here. It suggests a dimension beyond all determination. It is used both as an adjective ('Unborn', 'Unproduced') and as a noun ('No-birth', 'No-production'), not intended as the diametrical opposite of birth or production, but as transcending that order altogether. It is the equivalent of Nāgārjuna's *Sūnyatā*. Sankara's East-Asian Buddhist (Hua-yen) contemporary, Fa-tsang, sought a different route than Sankara to relate Absoluteness and the world (nature), without compromising the radical incommensurability of Absoluteness. This he did by mutually, dialectically including empty ultimacy (Absoluteness) and the phenomenal (nature, the empirical world). Even as Absoluteness absolutely transcends the phenomenal, it coincides with it and the many things in it. In no sense is it another, a deeper or higher Reality. Not only is it not a 'separate' reality, it simply 'is' not, in no sense whatsoever. We will return to Fa-tsang.

■ Nishitani Keiji

This same paradoxical view, proceeding from the Buddhist view of absolute emptiness (*sūnyatā*) but now transgressing the boundaries between 'Eastern' and 'Western' thought, was expressed by Nishitani Keiji (1900–1990), one of the foremost figures in the Kyoto school of philosophy. As this school demonstrated, 'East' and 'West' are rapidly ceasing to be separate categories.

Everything is poised on the brink of an abyss of nihility, says Nishitani. Yet this absolute nothingness is not a 'something' behind the everything (Heisig 2001). The human person is only a mask (a *persona*) of absolute nothingness. Not only is there is no 'true' or 'real' thing (God, or Ideas, e.g.) behind it; the absolute nothingness itself is no such thing-in-itself. Nor is the human person a mere illusionary appearance. In its being a manifestation of absolute emptiness, it is very 'real'. This is the paradox of nothingness-*sive*-being (*sive*: 'or', not as alternative, but as synonym). Like Fa-tsang and Dogen in this tradition, Nishitani contracts the phenomenal and the ultimate emptiness to the point of virtual identification, without totally collapsing them (Nishitani 1982):

Nothingness is not a 'thing' that is nothingness. Or again, to speak of nothingness as standing 'behind' person does not imply a duality between nothingness and person. In describing this nothingness as 'something' wholly other, we do not mean that there is actually some 'thing' that is wholly other. Rather, true nothingness means that there is no thing that is nothingness, and this is absolute nothingness. (p. 70)

In a phrase reminiscent of Augustine, he calls *sūnyatā* absolutely transcendent, but not situated 'on the far side of where we find ourselves', but 'on our near side, more so than we are with respect to ourselves' (Nishitani 1982:91). The difference is that to Augustine, God is an ontologically other Being, apart from us and the world. Even in the meontology of Heidegger, Nishitani finds a remnant of substantialist ontology (Nishitani 1982:96). We shall return to Heidegger. There remains indeed a difference between Christian-Western meontology or negative theology on the one hand, and Buddhist emptiness on the other. As far as Nishitani is concerned, in Western thought the closest analogue to the radical emptiness of Buddhism may be found in the mysticism of Meister Eckhart.

■ Chuang-Tzu

In China, Chuang-Tzu (4th century BCE), a founding figure in what would eventually be called 'Taoism', was no less radical in his non-thinking of Absoluteness, no less subversive of objectifying conceptual thinking and theoretical positions about 'being' and the rest, than the Buddhist thinkers mentioned above. Whereas the style of the Buddha's non-thinking was one of quiet, serious serenity and that of Nāgārjuna one of rigorous, ruthless dialectic, Chuang-Tzu exposed the absurdity of every pretence to certainty with light-hearted playfulness, expressed in witty stories (Graham 1981; Watson 1968; Wu 1982). To him, Absoluteness (non-being, *wu*) or emptiness (*hsü*) is neither being nor nothingness (the mere opposition or denial of being). It can neither be known nor named, and it is beyond good and evil. It is neither in opposition to the world, nor something ontologically other than the world. In the final analysis, non-being cannot be talked about. It can only be alluded to evocatively. Of the non-being of nature (*t'ien hsü*), the non-speaking and the non-doing (*wu wei*) of the sage are metaphorical expressions.

■ Meister Eckhart

I turn to the third great philosophical tradition deriving from antiquity: the Greek-Mediterranean heritage, since 2000 years ago to some extent overlapping with the religions of Judaism and Christianity, as well as Islam (when it arrived on the scene).

In the Western tradition, nobody circled Absolutism with greater fascination than the Dominican scholar-mystic, Meister Eckhart (c. 1260–1327). Eckhart radicalised, ‘Absolutised’, the Neoplatonic negative theology with its lingering substantialist view of God. There is little doubt that Eckhart derived his knowledge of Neoplatonism mainly from Proclus’ *Elements of theology* via an abridged Arabic version of it (we shall return to Proclus). In the Christian adoption of that tradition, ‘God’, stripped of attributes and unknowable, nevertheless remained a substantial ‘X’, however much attenuated. The parasitism of non-speaking, non-knowing, on speaking, knowing of some sort, based in firm belief in God, was not eradicated. Eckhart seemed to have wanted to keep the dynamic unrest, the creative annihilation of Absoluteness, alive.

With him, the word ‘godhead’ (*Gotttheit*) denoted a step beyond the Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. To interpret ‘godhead’ in his case as an add-on to the Trinitarian dynamic of God would not seem to do justice to his intention. From our perspective, he may be interpreted as implying that even a foundational concept, such as the Trinity is for Christianity, is somehow cancelled by a deeper annihilating vortex spiralling into Absoluteness. The conceptual construct of the Trinity, speculatively fertile and necessary as it may be, is nevertheless not ‘absolute’ in the sense of being indubitable and self-evident. It is ‘Absolute’ in the sense of imploding into and yet manifesting Absoluteness. The Three, conceived of as Persons, collapse into meta-personal Absoluteness. Ultimately not only all forms of creaturely being-knowing-feeling are annihilated, but even the most sublime, most profound forms of divine being-knowing-feeling – even divine justice, even divine love. ‘God’ collapses into and arises from Absoluteness. The ‘godhead’ Eckhart sensed, is absolute negation, and yet, at the same time, affirmation of what ‘is’. In Buddhist terms: form is emptiness; emptiness is form.

The same, we sense, also applies to the Cosmos (Eckhart would speak of ‘creation’). So when he says that God is born in the human soul, I understand him tendentially to say that the human being, like everything else, manifests Absoluteness. Godhead/Absoluteness is not Something or Someone else than, different from, the ordinary world, from us (the ‘human soul’). In that sense, using Christian parlance, God (meaning ‘godhead’, i.e. Absoluteness) was not incarnated once only 2000 years ago, but is continuously being incarnated – in the vocabulary we used so far, concretised as being-knowing-feeling-willing in Cosmos and all its individual forms. In that sense, ‘I’ am, non-dualistically, eternal, divine, absolute.

Eckhart's thought spells the end of God as anthropomorphic Subject over against the human subject, of envisaged, conceptualised God. Praying to God to free him from God, Eckhart's *Abgeschiedenheit* (detachment) refers to the mystic's true insight into the non-substantiality of all things, including God; his *Gelassenheit* (abandonment) refers to the mystic's serene abandonment to Absoluteness.

Eckhart stretched the possibilities of historical, orthodox Western Christianity to the limits and beyond. Not surprisingly, the Church condemned him for that. Yet in doing so, he followed and spun out the golden thread, the absolutist tendency, latent in the Western religious tradition.

■ F.W.J. Schelling

Compared to the limpid calm of a Buddha, the sovereign incisiveness of a Nāgārjuna, the confident speculation of an Asanga, the light playfulness of a Chuang-Tzu and the condensed economy of expression of a Dogen, the attempts of another explorer, Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling (1775-1854), make painful reading. Yet, in that difficult style, the inclination of a visionary lover of wisdom and truth to 'see' and 'speak of' Absoluteness and to reconcile that with the teachings of Christianity and his Neoplatonic inheritance as well as with a real appreciation of nature, is palpable.

Throughout his long and active intellectual life, his philosophy of nature (*Naturphilosophie*) retained certain essential features, which never added up to a perfectly balanced system. Schelling started all over a number of times, tried out various approaches with varying success, and was not ever quite satisfied with any of them. Nevertheless, overall – and placing strong emphasis on his later thought – he could be read to suggest the following 10 perspectives:

1. The universe is an organism of parts making up an organic whole, so much so that every atom contains the whole, and is an infinite world in itself.
2. Life is eternal and omnipresent, and every particle of matter shares in that.
3. The universe is the self-revelation, self-manifestation, self-contemplation, of God.
4. As one organic unity, nature nevertheless encompasses a great range of manifestations running from objective to subjective.
5. Nature is essentially in a process of development, and there is no fixed 'being'.
6. Nature is the creation of the absolute Spirit as Will.
7. In the universe as a supreme work of art, truth and beauty are one.
8. Nature has not been brought into being once and for all, but is an eternal process of becoming.
9. The world of appearances has no reality in itself.
10. The point of the world-process is the return of the finite to the Absolute.

The above express the commonality of Schelling's thinking with the Romanticism of the time, and its sense of interconnectedness, wholeness and ego-transcendence. They also mark interesting parallels with Buddhist thinking. With his emphasis on life and feeling, the difference between his thinking and the rational inclination of Hegel (see Ch. 16) is obvious. Hegel's World Spirit is rationally transparent; Schelling's is not.

Schelling's thought must be rated highly. However, his historical influence was limited, no doubt hampered by the abstruseness of his writing and the fact that in an age of high positivism his philosophy seemed to be an unpalatable mixture of science and obscurantist mysticism. My immediate interest is how he fared as far as Absoluteness is concerned. Admittedly, Schelling uses the concept, '(the) Absolute', regularly – but what does he understand by it? In his earlier thinking, it appears to be a general equivalent for God, the ultimate Spirit. Round about 1806 (his 31st year) we see him enter into an almost desperate drive to push the idea of the 'Absolute' into deeper waters than he had reached thus far (Brown 1977; Esposito 1977; Schelling 2002:1-78). The total threat of evil and chaos, radical darkness and death, and conflict in the heart of God became a new concern, absent in his previous work. This new start by Schelling attempted to rediscover the spiritual dimension that was lost in European philosophy since the Enlightenment. Apart from Boehme, other aspects of this tradition, rediscovered by Schelling, included Neoplatonic negative theology, mysticism in general, the Trinity as metaphysical speculation, the Jewish and Christian Kabbalah, and Nicholas of Cusa.

His uncompleted and thrice rewritten book *Die Weltalter* ('ages of the world') offers a singular insight into the struggle of a passionate sophiophile trying the impossible. This book was planned as his magnum opus and it would occupy his mind for at least 20 years. In the end, he abandoned the attempt. His grand design remained a twisted torso, alluring in its suggestiveness and majestic in its failure. Eventually, the ideas of *Die Weltalter* would be taken forward in his thinking on mythology and revelation that would occupy the last four decades of his life.

The 'ages' of the world (*das Vergangene* ['Past'], *das Gegenwärtige* ['Present'] and *das Zukünftige* ['Future']) refer to the three 'periods' of the process of divine self-manifestation. The past is God's eternal (non-)being; the Present is the world as God's Creation; and the Future is the return of all things to God. Only the first part (the Past) reached some measure of closure, but even that part was rewritten several times. Of those, three attempts (1811, 1813, and 1815) were published after Schelling's death, and without his consent. I shall here briefly confine myself to the third and longest version (Schelling 1958 [1927]:577-720). At least until the second half of the 20th century, posterity did not look kindly on the Schelling of *Die Weltalter* and what followed upon it, branding Schelling agnostic, a theosophist and an irrational mystic. The time for his rehabilitation as a pioneer of a way of thinking transcending

both scientific positivism and religious traditionalism, may have arrived (Žižek 1997). This essay would support that.

What Schelling overall had in mind for *Die Weltalter*, was nothing less than telling the history of the unfolding of the Absolute in time. His view breaks out of the ancient mould of timelessness. What was static participation in Plotinus, becomes dynamic evolution in Schelling. Something happens; God develops.

The world emerges from and will return to God as the Absolute. In his book, Schelling reiterates the classic idea that the divine cosmic process is a spiral, moving through what he termed *Zusammenziehung* (contraction) and *Ausdehnung* (expansion). In the case of God, contraction means that God contracts himself to the point of utter non-being. As absolute will and freedom, God also expands, and in that movement God creates the world. Here traces of Kabbalah are evident. The 'Past' was for Schelling not temporal, but referred to a meta-temporal Archetype of temporal reality, unfolding historically in the world. Reminiscent of Eckhart, he too speaks of 'Godhead' above God - transcending the God of traditional theology.

In *Die Weltalter* the emphasis lies on the dramatic, basic bipolarities of contraction and expansion within God. His agonising God, struggling within himself, remains trapped in pain. Here Boehme is subtly hovering in Schelling's thinking. Could he have broken down those dualities further, allowing them to recede into utter Emptiness and Silence?

It is noteworthy that Schelling did not see the world as an emanation or extension of God, but as his Creation. He was particularly sensitive to the possible accusation of pantheism (a charge indeed levelled against him by F.H. Jacobi). In his (let us say 'panentheistic') view, creatures are distinct from God, yet also embraced in him. Looking at him in the larger historical context sketched in this §, it seems that Schelling agonised a great deal, constrained by the historical possibilities and limitations available to him in Western theology and Neoplatonism. He did not achieve an easy, happy peace, as others whom we have observed did, and he did not resolve the stresses and strains in his tradition.

End

■ §16 All things end

To most reflecting persons the real entry into the windings of mystical experience is the experience of the End of things. This may come as a single shocking discovery or as a chronic sense of impermanence and mortality, eliciting an existential terror of annihilation and nothingness. At the level of human existence, it is mostly the experience of dying and death and the sense of loss and bereavement triggered by it, which confronts one with the inescapability of End.

Nothing lasts forever. Looking forward, we know that – whenever, but with certainty – humanity and all present species of life on earth as well as earth and sun and the billions of stars and galaxies presently blazing, will end. All the dykes of human culture, civilisation and religion, erected and maintained to protect our neat lives, meet the same fate. Awestruck as we may be before the achievements of the human spirit in art and science, cities and architecture, technology and philosophy, we know that some time they all become curiosities, perhaps remembered and understood and missed, perhaps not. At times, such as the periods of the Egyptian, Roman, Chinese and other empires, it may seem as if an eternal order reigns. Yet, eventually all such achievements are reduced to rubble. History, telling of things great and vile but all gone, is the story of End. All glories of culture and civilisation fade away.

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The great ordering systems of religion fare no better. In their heyday, they seem to their adherents to be the enduring earthly reflections of an eternal order of heaven. But eventually, in tandem with changing economic, political and wider social and cultural circumstances, all worldviews change, lose their aura of inviolability, decline, and become relics of a distant past. Widen the frame of space and time sufficiently, and they become like ephemeral specks of dust in an immeasurable expanse. Mental pictures of God (including names, characteristics and deeds attributed to 'him') are subject to the same fate. They briefly play their role of transcending and integrating human experience to certain groups, all transient, but then, given sufficient time, they lose their appeal. Today we are witnessing the collapse of mythological and religious edifices that have endured for centuries and millennia.

Rigorous thinking has the same obliterating effect. Continuing the critiques of many since the beginnings of philosophy in China, the Middle East and Mediterranean Europe, the modern epoch has produced various approaches – Kant, Feuerbach, Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, Foucault and others – demonstrating the human quality, the constructedness, the relativity of all such grand edifices, coming to naught – and perhaps amounting to naught? Using the tools of logical, linguistic, historical, sociological and psychological analysis, a radically critical perspective on religious ideas reveals them to be human constructs. Attempting to provide substantive answers to the ultimate questions plaguing humankind, reason ties itself up in knots. In the end, there is nothing to think, nothing to say. Enter the process of uncompromising criticism, and you are on the way towards the edge of religion. No religious institution, no religion, can claim final truth.

The impermanence of things in the order of time is not only empirical fact; it suggests the non-substantiality of all things small and large, short-lived and spanning billions of years – of the universe, of Cosmos. What I refer to here as 'End' certainly has a temporal aspect: things end in time, then they are no more. But it also reminds us that everything in its singularity (no matter how small or large and impressive) and all things in their totality, even while they still exist as part of reality, hang over Absolute Abyss which strips them of every claim to final truth. Their disintegration lurks just under the surface. There is a small step from the categories of temporal changeability and brevity to metaphysical non-substantiality. Impermanence becomes Absoluteness. Sadness of soul about the incompleteness, the premature termination of things, becomes metaphysical anxiety about the hollowness of things.

Things are shot through with Absoluteness. The moment that is discovered, whether in one mind-blowing experience or in a process of decades, things end. End is the de-absolutising of even very important things such as cultures, civilisations, languages, nations, peoples, religions and concepts of God spanning millennia. End is the Absolutising of things: they collapse into radically empty Absoluteness.

The realisation of End implies a certain attitude and ethos.

A first implication is the law of letting go. We are stripped of our most precious possessions: those that embellish our existence and add to our value in the marketplace of human society, as well as those that are essential, constituting our very core identity. This discovery pushes the notion of non-idolatry to the limit. Paradoxically, to love 'God' with all your heart, soul and mind – that is, to be passionately involved with Arche, including Absoluteness – is to let go of 'God' – that is, of every concept of enduring substance of every conceivable colouring, whether personal or impersonal. Absoluteness consumes every humanly created absolute, projected into eternity.

End creates space for the law of forgiveness and grace. Evil is not absolute. Eventually even that is washed away in Absoluteness. No doctrine of a planning and organising God can be kept erect in the presence of innocent victims of violence or starving children. Let go of theodicy. Evil can never be justified. What else can we do but wait for it to pass away into the Abyss – as it will, eventually? Allowing that to happen may be what forgiving grace is about. Evil will End, as all things do, and a new beginning will come. What more realistic solace can we expect, and offer others, in extreme situations of suffering and injustice?

There is a further implication: the law of appreciation and respect, of kindness and doing justice. Wealth, health and all the other good things of life End; that realisation does not demand an ascetic avoidance of life, but a grateful appreciation of its contingent beauty and a commitment to its protection. Working, struggling and even fighting on a practical level from the dimension of Horizon adds quality and effectiveness to human struggles. In End all things, even the smallest, most evanescent, glow with beauty and dignity – not because they are eternal, but precisely because they fade so quickly and, in their puny slightness are permeated by so much depth. Each tells the story of Arche. This implies loyalty and loving care, extended to the people we share our lives with and those who we do not know; to the weak and powerless, the sick and the elderly, the poor and the destitute; to products of culture, won and protected against great odds with much struggle and heroism; to nature as a whole, and to all its creatures. It implies living affirmatively, loyally – knowing full well that the objects of such loyalty eventually all pass away. Plant a seed, whether in personal or social life, tend it – whilst fully realising the truth of End.

The law of End teaches us to slow down. Pause. Observe ends – not only of epochs, centuries, lifetimes and years, but also of a single breath. Each ends. And each ending reminds us that we are constantly on the threshold of Absoluteness. Do not enforce or hasten End. Have patience. Let things, as far as possible, take their natural course. Do not kill: take no life; burn no book; persecute no heretic.

End – whether it is experienced as the temporal termination of things, or as their metaphysical breakdown, or both – evokes a range of human responses.

End

A distinction into two broad types will do, with a stronger remainder of the real lingering on in the first group, and a stronger measure of stripping in the second.

■ §17 Poignant End, tragic End

A first group includes attitudes such as grief, sadness, resignation and rebellion, even defiant joy. Each may be heroic. Opposite as some of them may be, they share one feature: serious pathos, intense emotion.

■ **tragedy**

Such poignancy can become tragic. This, even to the extent that the perception of a situation by an actor or observers in terms of one or more of the aspects touched on below, might be termed a 'tragic' perception. We understand tragedy here as a way of experiencing and interpreting End.

Tragedy is the confrontation with End as total and final disruption and collapse, tension and rift, with the threat of chaos, nothingness and meaninglessness (Reid 2002). It is triggered when an individual or a group of human beings sense themselves to be confronted by a radical negation of some order, hitherto accepted as unshakeable, the way things are, perhaps divinely ordained. It may be a threat to the order of nature, hitherto assumed everlasting. It may be the disruption of a social order of millennia, centuries or even decades, such as the fall of an empire or a political regime. It could be the rupture of orders of social relationships such as friendship, marriage, family, religious or cultural communities by events such as conflict, separation and death; also the breakdown of a religious order, a system of doctrine, a mythology, an ideology – of a system providing ultimate meaning. It may be the collapse of a person's identity, threatening the own sense of sanity, the own niche in a stable world and social acceptance; or even a person's own death. Pre-tragic poignancy stops short of the threat of nothingness and meaninglessness: End is sad, but part of the order of things.

Dislocating the human person (whether actor, victim or onlooker) and the human world (social and ecological), is such a total and radical onslaught on people's sense of normal reality, that it has religious (worldview, metaphysical) implications. The order of nature, cosmos, gods, God, is shaken to the core, and it disintegrates. The heavens collapse.

It is not merely a desperately difficult situation, but more specifically, involves clash and conflict of some sort (such as physical, social, cosmic or divine). It may be a no-win moral dilemma, an irresolvable either-or of two duties, tearing the human person or human community apart, making meaningful thought, emotion and action impossible, unbearable as such

impotence may be. The first-level moral dilemma becomes the meta-dilemma of morality as such, threatened by an absolute abyss of nihilistic meaninglessness. In his wider metaphysical scheme, Hegel's model of tragedy emphasises the conflict of two goods, the one-sided adherence by an individual to a partial position, as the essence of tragedy (Hegel 1951:558–566, 1954:527–533; Roche 2005:51–67). Ambiguous as Nietzsche's thinking (Nietzsche 1964:27ff.) on the birth of tragedy is, he essentially understands tragedy as the creative outcome of the conflict of two antagonistic principles, personified in the two Greek gods Apollo and Dionysus: the clarity of ordered surface life (represented by Apollo) versus the hidden, threatening depth of chaos (Dionysus).

An individual or human society involved in such a situation is not a mere victim of the situation, an innocent bystander, but also an actor, who, to some extent at least, brings it about. A rock from outer space obliterating all life on Earth would be catastrophic, but not tragic in the sense intended here, as an ecological catastrophe, induced by human greed and folly, and even by well-intended but mindless technological applications of science, would be. In full-blown tragedy, human freedom, responsibility and accountability loom large. The choices that one had, have become blocked, due to one's own actions. Yet the ash of human freedom is still glowing, even if the situation has turned into doom. Tragedy is constituted by human action, freely done and perhaps even partly intended, yet carrying devastating, unforeseen yet partly foreseeable, consequences. The tragic figure is partly responsible for his own fate. He carries guilt, has to live with regret. The real-life tragic hero Giordano Bruno largely brought his death over himself. In his theory of tragedy, Aristotle (384–322 BCE) highlights the element of human fallibility (*hamartia*) (Eden 2005:41–50; Halliwell 1987:37ff.). Universalising Aristotle's ideas, he may be understood to have implied that failure is enmeshed in even the finest human efforts, exposing the extreme and inescapable vulnerability of human existence.

Human responses to the full realisation of the implications of a tragic event, an end, multiplied by realising one's own contribution in bringing it about, occur on a wide range, including extreme feelings of loss, grief and suffering. People are overcome by alienation, doubt and despair, madness and resignation.

Some denouement of the situation, some sublimation of one's suffering, some saving grace, may be possible – coming out in responses such as raging protest, heroic fortitude, metaphysical justification, supernaturally revealed religious belief, or awaiting a miraculous supernatural delivery. Aristotle's view that a good tragedy arouses pity and fear and, by deepened understanding of the workings of the human mind, effects purification (*katharsis*) in the onlooker (Halliwell 1987), could be taken to point in this direction. Hegel finds the hidden redeeming element, inherent in tragedy, in the reconciliation of tragic opposites in the greater process. Nietzsche seeks exit from tragedy by gaily, heroically affirming life in spite of tragedy and because of tragedy. Jaspers sees liberation from tragedy in the tragic contemplation itself – release is found in the very

failure (Jaspers 1947:930, 944ff.). The religions teach their various triumphs over death and tragedy.

The visual arts, music, literature, philosophy and religious mythology reveal innumerable instances of poignant, even tragic End and dealings with that. Spotlighting a few random examples will suggest some of the possibilities. Let me start with two brief references. In the novel, *The Stranger*, of Albert Camus (1913–1960), the (anti-)hero Meursault faces execution by guillotine. Declining the services of a chaplain, and beyond rage and emptied of hope, he simply opens himself happily to the tender indifference of the world. The 20th-century protest of Dylan Thomas (1914–1953): not to go gently into the night, but to rage against the dying of light was an individual, futile railing against End in the form of death, and the poet knew it. Religious thought came up with elaborate constructions somehow to come to terms with End.

■ **Qohelet (*Ecclesiastes*)**

Sometime during the 3rd century BCE an unknown Hebrew author, known only as *Qohelet* ('preacher', or 'speaker'), experienced the Hebrew faith in eternal Yahweh (who had made an everlasting covenant with his people Israel) as stretched to breaking point (Fox 1999; Loader 1979; Rudman 2002). The name Yahweh does not even occur in the musings of this disillusioned man, written up in his collection of sayings (*Ecclesiastes*). Moreover, this profound mind does not present himself as part of any meaningful social nexus, of divinely-chosen Israel, but speaks as a solitary individual. He may have continued pessimistic strands in the Egyptian and Babylonian cultures, and he may have been influenced by elements in Greek-Hellenistic culture. More significantly, his reflections arose spontaneously from within the post-exilic Hebrew situation in the wider context of the time. A dream, a divinely guaranteed reality had been shattered. He was obsessed by End, particularly in the form of death – not only with its physical and social aspects, but also with its meaning. The upshot of his reflections was that death cast a long shadow of meaninglessness over life. Life has its fleeting joys, which may be enjoyed, but taken as a whole, it is *hebel* (transitory, vain, empty, futile, absurd). He sensed an irresolvable conflict between what justice demands and what life actually offers: toil and wealth, the pleasures of life, being just and wise, are torn by irreconcilable, offensive incongruities. The link between worth and reward had been smashed. Contrary to what the believer might expect, life did not reveal any sense. It was the End of meaning. He approximated tragedy. In his view, the human person was not necessarily responsible for this fate, but merely the disillusioned onlooker. There was no way out, no resolution, philosophical or religious, of the meaninglessness of life.

Yet this unknown Hebrew sage did not move over the edge into Absoluteness. It was not the emptiness of Jewish Kabbalah yet. He cut his losses. His faith in life may have been shaken, but his belief in God was not. Nevertheless,

God had changed. He had now become a vague, general Being. Religious belief had been stretched to the very limit of its capacity, but it did not implode completely. A religious and political-ideological construction had burnt out, but the embers were still faintly glowing. In the end, he turned back, and did not view the world consistently as empty. His last, summative word was, '[f]ear God and obey his commands; there is no more to man than this. For God brings everything we do to judgement, and every secret, whether good or bad' (Ec 12:13-14).

After the breakdown of the utopia of justice on earth, only the fear of God, obedience to his law and the expectation of his judgement remain. In the end, the preacher advises us to accept the evanescent little that life has to offer and to silence our religious protest, in submission to a distant, inscrutable God. That was enough to allow its inclusion in the Hebrew-Christian Bible.

■ Ibn Arabi

Like its sister religions, traditional Islam assumes continued life after death (*akhirah*), based on an unquestioned belief in eternal Allah. Death is the uninterrupted transition from transitory, insecure life to a higher, boundless form of life, enjoyed in the afterlife. The world will End, but that too is subject to the will of eternal Allah. Yet, in esoteric Islam (Sufism) extraordinary depth and beauty of expressions of End and Absoluteness occur – and in none more so than in the acknowledged grand master (*al-shaykh al-akbar*) of Sufism: the Arabic-Andalusian scholar-mystic, Ibn Arabi (1165–1240 CE) (Chittick 1994, 2007 [2005]; Corbin 1997[1969]; Ibn Al'Arabi 1980; Izutsu 1983; Nasr 1964:83–121; Sells 1994:63–115).

The theosophic gnosis of this colossus was at odds with the literalistic, legalistic exoteric Islam of his time, and he had to resort to indirect allusions. Notwithstanding, his being part of exoteric Islam was not an embarrassment to him. He accepted outer Islam as representing a necessary layer and precondition of faith. Apart from Ibn Arabi himself and contrary to some views, it must be recognised that *tasawwuf* (mystical Islam, Sufism) was not an extraneous addition from elsewhere to Islam but that it arose as a development from within the original religion itself. In its own way, it was a tendential (see Ch. 1) interpretation of the inner possibilities of Islam as a formal religion. Sufism was influenced by Neoplatonism and perhaps even Hinduism, but its mystical inclination was an extension of what was present in the life of the prophet and in the Qur'an itself. Sufism is an unfolding of an implication of the *shahadah*, the Islamic profession of faith in Allah. Islam, including Sufism, is the encounter with and submission to creative, pure, ineffable Presence. The question is whether Sufism would tolerate a tendential interpretation towards the radical Absoluteness hinted at in Taoism and Buddhism.

Ibn Arabi's creative interpretations of Islam in the literal sense of the word hinted at a profound level of meaning, moving towards the edge of End.

His very use of language, constantly shifting without arriving, like a continually turning kaleidoscope, precludes and undermines fixed meaning. His aim was not to present rational explanation in the philosophic (*fal-safa*) sense of the word, but gnosis, contemplative, intuitive intellection.

Central to Ibn Arabi's thinking is his notion of the 'Real' (*al-haqq*) – in his usage not unrelated to *Allah* (the personal name of the deity), but moving at the most abstract level attainable. To Ibn Arabi, the word 'God' or 'Allah' refers not to Absoluteness in its state 'prior' to being determined, but to its being determined. He uses the word *al-haqq* to hint at the Absolute. The event of mystical union with the Real implies the ecstatic passing away (*fana*) of the ego-self in love. The lover 'Ends', perishes, loses consciousness of self. God is all; that is to say, the duality between divine and human has been transcended. In order to reflect the divine Real, the mirroring human has to be cleaned, erased, has to become invisible. The End of ego is achieved through fasting, vigils, poverty and other exercises.

With the End of the separate human subject, only *al-haqq* remains. It is not the Real in itself. It is the reflected picture: the Real as reflected in a mirror. Yet Ibn Arabi delights in ambiguities and paradoxes. Has the mirror disappeared, or is it merely invisible? The point of the analogy seems to be that the existence of the existing human being is essentially correlated with divinity, and vice versa: the Real remains eternal, albeit essentially in relation to, reflected by, the mirror. It seems that Ibn Arabi envisages a togetherness, a for-and-in-each-otherness, of divinity-and-humanity. Proclaiming the Oneness of Being, he nevertheless moves towards disintegration of entities, whether cosmic, human or divine. The fusion of human and divine (ecstatic in both cases) annihilates human self-centredness, and it undermines theological certainties. Unless the God of belief is transcended, the outcome is idolatry. Within the historical parameters of 'monotheistic' faith, it seems to approach, as close as can come, Absoluteness. No wonder that at times he was accused of being a crypto-Hindu or Buddhist. Indeed, such Indian influences were probable. Yet – in the end, close to absolute End – *dhat al-haqq*, the incommunicable Reality beyond all names and distinction, including that of creator and created, remains intact. The human disappears, but the necessary existence of hidden Reality, never attainable, stays. The human individual perishes, but the deity – abstracted from names and features – takes over. That, it seems, was not Ended. The similarity between the intuition of this great Muslim mystic and Advaita-Vedanta with its notion of *Nirguna Brahman* (Brahman without attributes) is obvious.

Does Ibn Arabi's reference to 'the Real' retain an element of Being, essentially unscathed, perhaps as an inalienable part of the monotheistic faiths, even at their most radical? It seems so. True, as the source of all things, the Real is no thing over against any other thing. Referring to 'necessary Being' at the highest level, the term *wājib al-wujūd* denotes the non-delimited Essence of God or the Real that cannot not exist.

■ Matthias Grünewald

Western mainstream Christianity turns on the death of Christ. The cry of the dying Christ for his forsaking God (Mk 15:35), brought about by the freely committed sin of humankind, spells tragic End. The authors of the New Testament and the founding fathers of the church conflated that tragic death with eternal life. Christ arose from death, removing the sting of death and guaranteeing to all who believe in him, a resurrection from death and life everlasting. Christ the victor, eternal Son of eternal God, does not succumb to absolute End, but conquers it gloriously. End is beaten down by the majestic *tour de force* of victorious Christ. It was against-End, End confronted, conquered and denied.

Continuing the fascination of medieval Christianity with death, no Christian artist pictured the agony of Jesus Christ on the Cross in such gruesome detail as the German Renaissance artist, Matthias Grünewald (c. 1480–1528) in his *Isenheim Altarpiece* (c. 1512). The colours of the decomposing body and the taut lines and crooked angles of the tortured Saviour hanging from nails, leave nothing to the imagination. This is death at its ugliest. It is End at the outermost limits of agony, made even worse by the fact that the one who suffers such unspeakable pain, is the Son of God. Yet even this terror, precisely this terror, was understood by the painter to offer solace to suffering humanity. It was indeed intended to comfort the sick and dying in the hospital where these panels were placed. Someone suffered even more, and that was the Son of God who bore not only their physical agonies, but also their sins, thus saving them from the tortures of hell. One can expect that even as this painting consoled those who lay in fear of death on the threshold of the afterlife, awaiting the judgement of God, it also strengthened their culturally and religiously induced fascination with death as torture and punishment. This was the most terrible End imaginable – and, since it was part of the eternal plan of a righteous, merciful God, it was inescapable. Tragically, they had brought it over themselves and over the Son of God. Under that Cross on which their Saviour was nailed, they lay waiting for their End – guilty but, miraculously, forgiven; fearful but hopeful that their eternal post-death existence would take the form of a blessed afterlife. This was tortured but saving, expectant End.

■ St John of the Cross

The Spanish poet-mystic St John of the Cross (1542–1591) provides a unique window on the ways in which prophetic religion and mystical religion may be conjoined. His memorable contribution to the mysticism of End was his concept of the ‘dark night’ (*noche obscura*) of the soul. As he explained, this dark night manifests itself in three ways: first, there is the night of sensual denial and deprivation; secondly, there is the night of cognitive deprivation, of not-understanding, that is of faith; thirdly, there is God as dark night. Having passed through these three stages of night, the soul reaches union with God

(Saint John of the Cross 1983 [1935]:17ff.). His dark night is a symbol of nothingness (*nada*) in a variety of forms: the realisation of creaturely insignificance; the dissolving of the ego-self; nakedness of spirit; stripping of the greed for power, pleasure and possession; social leaving and rejection; the discovery that all things social and natural are nothing compared to God (Kurian 2000). In his own suffering (first, being imprisoned and tortured by some Carmelite friars and then being rejected by his own brethren) he discovered the depths of abandonment. In the process of ascending to God, the soul experiences all sorts of internal suffering such as temptations and fear as it revolts against the very idea of 'nothingness'. Yet this darkness of nothingness applies to the human side of things only. God is not subject to End. God is absolute fullness. The point of human self-emptying is to receive the fullness of God. Here John echoes the thinking of his fellow Spanish mystic, Ibn Arabi. In his prison cell, John intimately experienced the comfort of God, and composed songs of loving ecstasy. The joy of the fullness of God far exceeded the necessary suffering. We must free ourselves from all attachments, he taught, except the attachment to God. In the dark of night, the fire of love in John's heart led him on (Nims 1959):

[7]o where there waited one

I knew – how well I knew! –

in a place where no one was in view. (p. 19)

In darkness, beyond feelings, images and concepts ... we meet God. John gives classic expression to adoration as the key motif in Christian mysticism (De Villiers 2008:124–139). This approximates 'negative theology', profound mysticism of love, presented in unsurpassed lyrical poetry – searching for God, *hidden yet real* and finding him joyfully. Enconced in ecclesiastical tradition, sacramental liturgy and scholastic theology, it is not absolute End. In the oscillation between positive belief and negative non-belief in Western religion, the pendulum in John's case did not swing out to the extreme limits of the latter. The question is: could John have drawn the conclusion that the obliteration of the cognitive faculties of the human person implies the obliteration, the End, of traditional God in a more fundamental sense than he thought?

Reflecting on this question, we must bear in mind that during the late medieval to early modern period of the flowering of mysticism in the West, the common tradition of Judaism-Christianity-Islam in the West (particularly in Spain) was in a tragic process of breaking down. Nevertheless, there were certain themes common to all three shapes of religious institutionalisation, notably the belief in one personal God, that were untouchable. The great mystics in each tradition (Kabbalah, Christian mysticism and Sufism) were largely bound to the institutional and theological constraints of each religion, sometimes enforced with a strong hand. Apart from that, almost without

exception, in their own hearts and minds, they remained deeply indebted and committed to the religion-specific particulars of their own religion. That was certainly the case with John, as had also been true of Ibn Arabi.

■ Johannes Brahms

No artist gave more profound expression to the sting of death and the joy of victory over death than Johannes Brahms (1833–1897) in his choral symphony *Ein Deutsches Requiem* (1865). It is the song of a man who was preoccupied with death during the period of its composition. It is also the song of a man who has moved dramatically away from the heavily positive Lutheran-Protestant religion of his youth, to a humanistic faith. His music also marked End of another kind: the End of orthodox faith.

His masterpiece, weaving together texts from Luther's Bible translation and setting them to music, is still fed by a deep piety towards the Christian Bible. However, his faith is no longer Christian in any orthodox sense. His *Requiem* is a sustained avowal of finitude. There is consolation. His music conveys a profound sense of agony, and, dramatically opposed to and connected with that, of exuberant joy and dignified serenity. He does not find the consolation in the promise of a life everlasting after death, not in the expectation of a resurrection from death, guaranteed by Christ. Death is overcome here and now, precisely in the finitude of things. The end of death is sublimated, purified, transcended, in the beauty of the music itself, and then this (un)believer still believed in God, the Eternal, but it was a post-Christian belief. Shorn of exclusively Christian content, his music was intended as a human requiem, addressed to all humankind, regardless of religious partisanship. To him, the ultimate Horizon of the radical transience of things, as experienced in death, was universal. In End, Brahms found consolation in a universal, eternal God. There he made a last stand, and did not enter into Absoluteness, into which even the faith in eternal God must eventually enter.

It would be wrong to force Brahms into the dilemma of either believing 'really' and 'truly' (i.e. literally) exactly what the original documents and the tradition believed and said, or of being dishonest by using those texts, but twisting them cynically to suit his own idiosyncratic tastes (Minear 1987:81ff.). In accordance with Brahms' undisputed integrity as a person and as a musician, he did, one must accept, assent to the validity of those texts. Otherwise, he would not have quoted them as he did. In good faith, he interpreted them in accordance with his own mystical needs, which he also attributed to his audiences. That is what they, to his understanding, really, essentially, meant. Up to a point, Brahms followed through on a 'tendentional' reading of sacred books, in this case, of the Bible. In his hands, the Bible clearly seems to say something else than what its original authors had in mind, also than what its later orthodox Christian interpreters had in mind. The wrath of God at the last

day (the *dies irae*), as feared in traditional Latin-Christian music of death and eternal judgement, is wholly absent from his *Requiem*. Nevertheless, his interpretation was somehow continuous with the original explicit intention of the Christian Bible, even as he brought out what he perceived to be the original implicit message of those documents, not coinciding perfectly with the explicit intention.

The technique used by Brahms was simple. He (re-)interpreted the biblical messages on death by his selection of texts and omissions from such texts. Portions that seemed to place an exclusively Christian emphasis on things were omitted from the libretto. In the sixth movement, for example, Brahms quotes from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians (15:54, 55) 'then the saying of Scripture will come true: "Death is swallowed up; victory is won!" "O Death, where is your victory? O Death, where is your sting?''.

The preceding and following thoughts of Paul in this section, connecting death with sin, the law of God and victory through Jesus Christ, are omitted. In Brahms' vision, death is not eliminated from the human condition as Christian orthodoxy decreed, and the resurrection of Christ plays no role. To him, death is transcended in the midst of life. I am not defending Brahms' particular interpretation of Paul or of Christian faith here. One may ask for instance, whether he could not have (re-)interpreted the motif of the resurrection of Christ in terms of a universal mystical inclination of all of humankind. That is the route suggested by the logic of Arche, as developed on these pages. His overall strategy is understandable. His musical transcendence of death is an affirmation of life, guaranteed by eternal God, and it is not the prerogative of one (the Christian) religious institution. To him, the particularistic emphases of traditional Christian orthodoxy spread out into a generic human faith in eternal God, but the faith in eternal God does not peter out into empty Absoluteness beyond all institutionalised religion. The pull of Absoluteness lures further than Brahms was able to go at the End of his orthodoxy.

■ Thomas Altizer

At the halfway mark of the 20th century, going further than Brahms could go a century earlier, and following through on impulses provided by William Blake, Hegel, Nietzsche, Heidegger and others, Christian theologian Thomas Altizer (b.1927) moved closer to absolute End. He again deals with the theme of the 'death of God', and presents God as 'the Nothing' (Altizer 1967, 2003). Yet this is not an easy 'Nothing' but a tortured agony. Drawing on typically Christian theological concerns and mythology, this picture of the self-extinction of God, finally expressed in the crucifixion of Christ, remains in the ambit of the sentiments painted by Matthias Grünewald. The spectator of the divine drama according to Altizer is witness to divine self-annihilation, agonisingly tragic and saving at the same time. This variant of a classic theme is Christian to the core.

■ §18 Transcended End

A second group of responses to End as temporal termination and metaphysical breakdown involves attitudes such as easy abandonment and ultimate peace. These responses move beyond tragedy, closer to the end of End, where End itself as a theme of experience and reflection finally disappears on Absolute Horizon, and where End is not a final, serious concern, but a return to Absoluteness.

Edging closer to, deeper into the absolute abyss, this human response is not pessimistic resignation. Neither is it rebellion, nor paradoxical affirmation of death. Eternal existence is not sought, not for body or soul – as little as nothingness is feared. It is without struggle and conflict; there are no grief and suffering; no metaphysical or religious compensation and no defiant laughter. When such persons die, every day a little and one day completely, they enter their destiny – which was also, and will turn out to be, the origin of all things – with happiness. They observe and live through the fall of political, economic, social and religious orders with equanimity. They calmly let go of religious and other absolutisms. End is radical and total, the touching of Horizon, and easy. This non-serious acceptance is not pre-tragic, but post-tragic; not pre-nihilistic, but post-nihilistic; neither pre-theistic nor pre-atheistic, but post-both.

■ Chuang-Tzu

A benchmark for the incredible lightness of leaving remains the Taoist philosophy of Chuang-Tzu, who simply dropped all struggles as far as being and non-being are concerned. Chuang-Tzu is not a primitive, who is pre-reflectively at home in the cycles of nature. Karl Jaspers categorises early Chinese religion as pre-tragic (1947:920). That does not apply to philosophical Taoism, as exemplified in our friend from the period between 3rd century and 4th century BCE. His appears to be a reflexive post-tragic position. In fact, when Jaspers sees the transcendence of tragedy in not providing the final answer to tragedy, but in leaving the question open (1947:959), he is approximating what Chuang-Tzu suggested. Chuang-Tzu's 'answer' is no-answer, letting go completely, and so entering Absoluteness. End is met in a fasting of the mind, in quietude (*ching*) and emptiness (*hsü*) (Wu 1982:61ff.). Freed of all fear, presumptuousness and ambition, the sage has left behind all concern with ugliness as well as the beauty of the senses, ignorance as well as the joys of knowledge and understanding, happiness as well as the mourner's sadness, low immorality as well as the rightfulness and decency of high morality. Such a person has been reduced to the state of receptiveness and utter simplicity (*pu*), to the actionlessness of water. The just leaving, the non-doing (*wu wei*), of the microcosm (the human person), is a symbolic expression of the non-being (*t'ien hsü*) of the macrocosm. End is utter quietness and peacefulness. Free, this sage has died to the self, and meets the loss of health,

reputation, riches and his own physical death together with the End of all things, with complete equanimity. There is no hankering to find or keep anything. It is letting go, letting be, putting down, forgetting, sinking into Absoluteness with peaceful lucidity. For Chuang-Tzu the acceptance of End is not tantamount to acceptance of annihilation. Nor does he trivialise his death by the acceptance of his individual survival after death. He accepts death because 'at bottom I [...] have neither beginning nor end' (Graham 1981:23).

■ the Buddha

The point of departure of the young Siddhattha Gotama's journey into End was his discovery of decay and death. When he was a dying old man of 80, his final message to his disciples, summarising his essential teaching, was: 'Decay is inherent in all component things!' (*Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*, 6.7)

To that, he coupled the exhortation to his followers to work out their salvation with diligence. That meant taking leave of things, which in turn was associated with purification from the intoxications of ignorance, delusion, and attachment to self and other things – all Ending. Seeing that the Master's death was near, Ānanda wept. The Master did not console him with promises of eternal life hereafter, or with the reassurance of Eternal Being. His only consolation (if it can be called that) consisted in reminding him once again serenely of End as essential part of the nature of things (Rhys Davids 1977:158f.). Accepting End, non-permanence, desiring neither being nor annihilation, is wisdom and salvation. Yet this was not resigned nihilism. Less playful than Chuang-Tzu, the Buddha was equally unperturbed by End, taught happy enlightenment, and at least hinted at an affirmation of life and compassionate involvement in the world. That element would be developed in Mahāyāna Buddhism.

In traditional early Buddhism, the final stages on the meditative journey of Ending into Absoluteness have been mapped out, ending in *nibbāna*. In the experience of the 'infinity of space' all consciousness of form, all consciousness depending on sensory stimulation, all consciousness of diversity and multiplicity, end. Details and differentiations disappear, end. Then the visitor to these heights transcends the dimension of the 'infinity of space' and enters the experience of the 'infinity of consciousness'. There is just consciousness: consciousness of consciousness. In that consciousness, there is no split between the subject who has the consciousness, and the o(O)bject of consciousness. Is it possible to conceive of reality itself as, at a very basic level, attenuated to the level of consciousness? Indeed, some metaphysical systems have defined reality as just that. This stage also connects with sublime systems of mysticism, which revolve around the idea of human consciousness merging with Eternal, Divine Consciousness. It is compatible with a kind of pantheism. Even that level is transcended, ended. For even here, 'consciousness' is still an idea. One is

conscious of consciousness. It may still remain a super-Substance. The seeker of Absoluteness then moves out of and beyond the 'infinity of consciousness', and enters and remains in the dimension of 'nothingness'. Consciousness is stripped away. Even nothingness, ethereal as it is, is still a superfine Object of our thought, imagination, ideation or experience. There is a step beyond that. So there is a more advanced position, that of 'neither-consciousness-nor-non-consciousness'. The world, things and consciousness are getting even thinner. Consciousness is on the verge of disappearing, but it is still there. Then the End of consciousness is near. The next contour on this map of the mountain of the ever-increasing attenuation of mind and world is the 'cessation (*nirodha*) of consciousness and feeling'. Now, utter cessation – the threshold of utter End – is reached.

After that, the pioneer of this route (the Buddha) declared, he attained *nibbāna*: the highest insight and liberation, beyond the dimension of Brahma, the mythological god of creation who does this, that and the other thing, who gets angry and is appeased, and so on. *Nibbāna* (is) beyond Space, Consciousness and Nothingness. The early texts speak of this as coinciding with the insight into insubstantiality (*anattā*), or emptiness (*suññatā*), which is ultimate wisdom. In our present context, let us call it the Horizon of radical Absoluteness. Near this apex of (non-)experience, the routes of meditative absorption and radical insight meet.

Why would anyone embark on this journey at all – this journey which seems to lead nowhere, to have no relevance at all, to take one away from the world, from life and all its enjoyments and responsibilities? Because one is drawn towards this depth deeper than death, sensing that it is the ultimate truth, from which one may return to life with singular clarity of mind, simple happiness of heart and purity of life.

With sublime simplicity and calm, Zen masters compressed transience in their reticent little poems. Their return to the Great End of things in their own deaths is rarely sorrowful and never morbid, but mostly lightly matter of fact, just hinting at some great depth – nowhere else to be found than in the midst of the world as it is. End is nothing extraordinary, just the transient, empty suchness of things. As Japanese Zen master Tokken (1244–1319) expressed this attitude when he took leave on his deathbed (Stryk & Ikemono 1981[1973]):

Seventy-six years,
 Unborn, undying:
 Clouds break up,
 Moon sails on. (p. 76)

That is all there is to it. End is a continual experience of the human species. It is good to pursue the road of radical End to its utmost. However, End is not absolute, total, final, closed. It evaporates on Horizon, and is balanced by an opposite: Origin.

Origin

■ §19 Potentiality, novelty

Everything that is, is an event (an 'emerging'). Why and how Absoluteness issues forth into the many things of the world, is the supreme miracle and mystery.

That event cannot be explained by recourse to something else. It happens because it happens, because that seems to be so in the ultimate nature of Unground. Such 'mystical' acceptance may be articulated in fumbling thought, word and argument. Then it would become 'metaphysical'. No 'explanation' reducing this miracle to any Outside factor would have value. All we can do, up to a point, is to contemplate the wonder and the dynamics of the movement from absolute emptiness.

The first roots, the rudimentary intuitions underlying worldviews, start to stir here. Such rudimentary intuitions have both a highly personal, individual timbre, and at the same time, they are embedded in the collective psyche of humankind. Differences in nuance develop, take shape and end up as heavily divergent systems, comprehensive mythological and metaphysical narratives, in which the faint hints of undifferentiated distinctions become hardened into stark dualities, even dualisms. Flitting, hardly expressible intuitions become

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programmatic manifestos, as if referring to substantial 'things', 'beings' or 'entities'. According to such variant systems, all things may, for example, ultimately be reducible to one principle (monism), two principles (dualism) or a larger number of principles (pluralism); to matter (materialism) or spirit or some equivalent of it (idealism). Cosmos as a whole may be evil, or there may be no such thing as evil at all. God (supposing that such a notion is entertained) may be a being separate from the cosmos (theism), or may coincide with the cosmos (pantheism), or may include and contain the cosmos (panentheism). Cosmos may be the creation of God and separate from God (creationism) or may flow from God (emanationism); and so on. To its champions the faint intuition becomes the moment of clear truth, which in turn almost inevitably fans out in detail to become the grand edifice. Along their paths, the developing systems can deviate from their original points of departure. It is important to trace their development and challenge their extended logic and broad applications. It is even more important to uncover their first principles. What I want to do here, is move back behind such substantialising talk, to the roots of such elaborate systems.

Where would such dim intimations of faith that some people have, come from? A historical tradition; a combination of historical traditions? Ancient, pre-cultural, archetypal memories, rooted in nature itself? Ancient dreams, with similar roots? Pure speculation; illumination from within; inspiration or revelation? In various cases such pictures would undoubtedly be various mixtures of these. In the last resort, we may postulate, they come from humankind's being part of Arche, however much they may also be interpretations of interpretations of existing traditions.

Absoluteness has a 'womb'-like character. As Origin it is open Potentiality; it also has the aspect of Novelty, Creativity (cf. Whitehead 1978 [1929]). It is not only promise, but becomes actuality in the appearance of Cosmos. An element of freedom (speaking anthropomorphically) is adumbrated on the Horizon as Origin. What becomes in Cosmos is foreshadowed on the Horizon of Absoluteness, in its aspect of Origin as Potentiality; it is the realisation of Absoluteness in its aspect of Creativity/Novelty. Origin contains, in embryonic essence and principle, the workings of Cosmos. From the perspective of the reality of Cosmos, the creative *potestas* ('power') of Absoluteness as Origin is an implication of its overriding *potentia* ('potentiality'), its absolute possibility.

■ evil and perfection?

The following is implied in the drift of our tentative reflection: perfection appears as a possible 'future' possibility, rather than as a 'presently' given. In the depth of Unground, in Origin, evil and perfection are possibilities, working themselves out in the arena of Cosmos. Struggle is somehow part of the texture of the theogonic, cosmogonic, anthropogonic processes. Cosmic emergence

(including biological evolution), with its flaws, is necessary in the process of the self-perfection of Arche. All Ends radically; Absoluteness is Origin; Origin is Potentiality and Novelty; evil is somehow part of Unground and Cosmos, yet intended to be transcended in the spiral of things towards perfection.

Such a movement spiralling forwards is neither a return to an original perfection, nor a straight line of steady improvement and progress, but proceeds through failures towards perfection in which all beings may be happy. This is not scientific fact, but mystical fiction, dream, utopia, nevertheless providing meaning and inspiring action. In their human perspective on 'evil', observers may emphasise the not-yet-realised possibility of perfection – that is, the presence of 'evil' in the world; or they may emphasise the being-realised, at least in principle, of perfection, anticipating the utopian overcoming of evil – that amounts to the diminishing, denial, of 'evil' in any ultimate sense. The first of these two perspectives focuses on ongoing struggle, on faith in a gradual attainment of perfection; the second, the great anticipation, believes that everything that leaps forth out of the darkness of Absoluteness, exemplifies, is already, in principle, perfection. By realising, in the sense of coming to know this hidden truth, it is realised in the sense of being made manifest. In Cosmic life, the Potentiality is actualised, made to happen, as far as possible.

The highly developed human person, a *bodhisattvic*, messianic person, humanity at its best, is at a creative edge of this movement. In the past, humanity had an immense role in promoting evil, and may do so in future, making it a prime locus of evil in Cosmos. Of that possibility, a story such as the fall in Paradise is a mythical reminder, and something like the Holocaust, a historical example. Today humanity is again poised on the brink of committing an evil without precedent to all life on earth. Yet, in the past humanity has produced, and it may in future produce, radiating beacons of light.

■ aurora

What has been said above introduces some first intimations, both in the order of insight (epistemology) and the order of the Archetypal movement of things (ontology). We have started to discern, and started to whisper about shadows beginning to move against the wall of our cave in the faint light: beginning, end and transformation; nature and humanity; knower, known and knowledge; whole, part and that which transcends both; matter, life and mind; goodness, beauty and evil; life, death and rebirth; identity, change and transformation; necessity, potentiality and freedom, and so on.

The drift of the inklings mentioned above concerning the faint shadows at the dawn of Origin, suggests an attitude of affirmation, gratitude and joy towards what is – not only mind, but equally so matter, body and all its functions. Every existing thing is a miraculous event, continuously emerging

from the Depth. There is no room for a pessimistic despising of life or any of its parts or functions, no running away from it with its imperfections. Human beings are neither cosmic outsiders nor subordinate or superior, but a significant part of and partner in Cosmos, with a great responsibility, realising that their actions, performed in freedom, bear fruit and go to seed – in their own lives, in the Whole of Cosmos and the All of Arche.

In Chapter 3 it was said that ‘real’, empirical life, cosmic life as we know it, is not separate from, but part of Arche, suffused with the dynamics of Unground, Eternity and Infinitude. Everything, including human beings, is constantly standing in the great aurora, before an open Horizon, at the cutting edge of the emergence-subsidence of the world, replete with possibilities. Sometimes, in certain situations, real life limits the possibilities of human actions; in some situations humans have more time and more space to transform more radically, and create anew more freely. In principle, in every moment of real time and every location in real space, human beings, with all things in an emerging-subsiding universe, are in the eternal moment of open, creative Origin, unceasing emergence. New beginnings in life, at least as far as a person’s spiritual growth is concerned, can take place many times during a lifetime.

As is the case with End (Ch. 4), ‘Origin’ does not only and primarily refer to historical beginning, beginning in time, but to the dynamics underlying and manifesting in things in every historical moment. Cosmos becomes a playing field of possibilities. It implies an ethos of freedom, and of respect for Cosmic reality (what was in the past, what is in the present, and what may become in future) – for Cosmos is provisionally realised possibility, concretised Novelty, in an open process of emerging-subsiding.

From earliest times, primal religions understood nature as a growing, decaying, dying organism, continually reborn as it moves through the yearly and monthly seasons, in an eternal cycle. This was told in innumerable stories and presented in mandalas of many forms, such as the sand paintings of native American Indian cultures (the Navaho), the colossal megalithic structures of the Druids of ancient England (Stonehenge) (Argüelles & Argüelles 1972), and the rock engravings of the hunter-gatherer San of Southern Africa (Krüger 1995).

Let me look at some examples of how Origin was perceived and responded to in two religio-cultural contexts (the ‘Near Eastern-Western’ and the ‘Eastern’ one). This geographical distinction is an oversimplification. For our present purposes, I include the Mediterranean world and Arabia, and the areas north of it (including present-day Iraq and Iran) in the ‘Near Eastern-Western’ bloc. One reason for this pragmatic arrangement is that the family of religions originating in the ‘Near East’ (such as Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam and Baha’i), which became the dominant type of thinking in Europe and the rest of the ‘Western’ bloc over the last 15 centuries, share many traits and were engaged in intense debate for millennia. ‘Near East’ and ‘West’ here mean west of India. With India and the regions (including India, Tibet, China and Japan)

and religions (including Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism and Shinto) east of India, another distinct context of thought, sharing key traits, comes to the fore. For present purposes, I refer to this bloc as 'the East'. I am not interested in the blocs as such and the commonalities and lines of influence and borrowing running between them, but rather in a few powerful individual voices from them.

■ §20 Intimations from the Greek and Near Eastern-Western contexts

Let us start with some views held in the Hebrew community of faith: the original 'people of the book', as Muslims came to call themselves, also Jews and Christians, acknowledging a special family relationship between these religions. Let us not see this family in an exclusive sense, but acknowledge the wider relationships with all those paths that do not place such heavy emphasis on books. What we find, are not merely interesting incidental parallels or unexpected historical connections, but structural similarities and confluences of tendency. Those similarities and confluences are not merely historical accidents; they arise from the Origin of all things.

■ Hebrew faith, Judaism

□ Genesis 1

There is no more monumental start to any book than the first words in the Hebrew Bible, introducing the mytho-theological account of creation in Genesis 1:1-2:3: 'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.'

Assuming that phrases such as 'in the beginning' (*be'reshit*), 'God', 'formless and empty' and 'darkness over the surface of the deep' (Gn 1:2) are notions tendentially stretching out to Absoluteness and primordial Origin; what absolute miracle does the word 'create' (*bara*) contain. How is it possible, conceivable: Cosmos ('the heavens and the earth') somehow out of ... what and how?

An unknown individual wrote down this particular perspective on the origin of the world, probably in the period between 7th century and 8th century BCE, a few centuries after the legendary figure Moses (presumed 13th century BCE) was recorded in those scriptures. In passing, whether Moses was a historical figure or not, is of no importance in the context of the overall argument of our venture, as is the case with Lao-tzu and others. We are not addressing the historical accuracy of ancient narratives of the Buddha, Jesus or anybody else.

This narrative of Origin took shape in the crucible of the meeting of Israel with the dominant Assyrian-Babylonian worldview. This first outline of Origin in the Hebrew Bible is carried by two master intuitions. Firstly, there is an

absolute distinction between the world and an Other: God (*Elohim*). That perfect Other is the one and only, holy, living, personal, loving Creator of all, and ontologically separate from Cosmos. This is the first split, which underlies anything else that may be said concerning the Original nature of things. The second basic intuition at the beginning of the Hebrew Bible is that the set of foundational truths have been uniquely revealed in the history of the people of Israel.

These two principles provide the setting for a number of other basic assumptions:

- there is a polarity between Cosmos and some primordial chaos
- nature is a hierarchical unity of being, coming from the hand of God
- nature is originally good, without any trace of evil – evil is not tragically inherent in the world
- there is an unbridgeable distinction between the human being and the rest of nature
- the human being has a special, privileged relationship as far as God and the rest of nature is concerned
- strictly distinct from God and subservient to God, the human being is also the image, the likeness, of God
- the human being is ruler over the rest of Creation
- evil is the result of human disobedience to God
- history is linear, with a definite beginning and a definite end.

Proclaiming exact parallels with modern cosmological and evolutionary theory would be far-fetched. Historically, this perspective is, up to a point at least, part of a worldview, now dated, common to the cultures of that particular region and time. Yet these notions express certain basic intuitions concerning the Origin of things, which have retained an enduring interest and relevance to this day. Reading this section from the Hebrew Bible, one is privy to a primal vision concerning the Origin of things, monumental in its simplicity and grandeur. It is not the route followed in this exploration.

□ Isaac Luria

The *Tanakh* (the canonical Hebrew Bible) was not the last word in the development of Hebrew-Jewish thought as far as the Origin of things is concerned. Biblical elements, such as the account of creation in Genesis, Ezekiel's vision of the divine chariot and Isaiah's vision in the Temple, became the source of an esoteric MM tradition – the *Sefer Yetzirah* (between the 2nd century BCE and the 2nd century CE) being the earliest extant document of this tradition in full flight. From the 11th century onwards, it took the shape of what has become known as *Kabbalah* ('tradition'), which developed strongly from the 13th century onwards. It had its own speculative version of Origin.

Gnosticism (see below) influenced Kabbalah. On the other hand, Gnosticism itself was an outgrowth from the monotheistic religious stem, and had perhaps been influenced by early forms of Jewish theogonic speculation.

One among many Kabbalists, an exceptionally gifted and influential one, was Isaac Luria (1534–1572): born in Jerusalem and died in Safed in Palestine – the figurehead of later Kabbalah, even though he was strictly non-writing (Fine 2003; Scholem 1974:119–286). Chronologically, he flourished 15 centuries after the emergence of Jewish Gnosticism. To him the mystery of Origin was of prime significance.

In broad terms, this mystical genius followed the typical trends of Kabbalah, which distinguished two aspects in God in eternity, before the world came into being: *Ein-Sof* and the ten *Sefirot*. *Ein-Sof* is unknown, unknowable God, concealed but real, and he contains potentially the world and all its manifestations. This concept, with *Ayin* ('Nothing', or 'Nought'), approximate what is here termed 'Absoluteness', 'Eternity' and 'Infinite'. The difference is that in the footsteps of the *Zohar* (the main text of the Kabbalah), *Ayin* does not precede God as *Ein-Sof*, but follows it as the primary start or wrench with which the externalisation of the divine light takes place. The inexpressible fullness of *Ein-Sof* is transformed into nothingness, and from this nothingness 'all the other stages of God's gradual unfolding in the Sephiroth emanate' (Scholem 1974:217). This is quite different from our model, in which Being emerges from empty Absoluteness, preceding whatever happens next.

The *Sefirot* are 10 spheres encompassing the unknowable divine centre. They are dimensions of God, emanations of *Ein-Sof*, revealing and manifesting divinity. Ontologically, they mediate between *Ein-Sof* and the world. They are, as it were, the primordial moulds or forms (vessels, instruments: *kelim*) into which Creation would be cast. These ten *Sefirot* have the same general function as the Principles that will be ascribed to the level of 'Eternity' in Part Two.

The Lurianic vision retains the idea of God's unity and transcendence. These two ideas were essential to Judaism, and non-negotiable. Nevertheless, their differences from the simplicity of the Genesis myth are clear. God is much more complex; the relationship between divinity and the world is much more intricate; and the position and role of humanity in the great process are much more involved – human responsibility is so much greater. Humanity is not only responsible before God, but, to a large degree, is responsible for God.

To the general scheme Luria, an original speculative mind, adds his own accents, deepening the strong intellectual flavour of the Kabbalah tradition. Above all, he elaborates on what takes place in God before the Creation of the world. The beginning of the world is not the real beginning. The real beginning, the true Origin, took place in the depths of divinity. 'Before' the Creation of the world, God was not simply eternally there in eternal repose; he was involved in an internal drama. The external world germinated from that intra-divine event.

Putting together the various traditions of Luria's cosmogonic myth (Fine 2003:127-149), we may assume that he taught that, initially and before creation, there was only the limitless light of divine presence. However, divinity included an element of darkness and evil and judgement, comparatively small in the vastness of light and compassion, like a drop of water in the ocean. Evil is somehow present in *Ein-Sof*. Then, in line with other Kabbalists, he saw God as withdrawing into Himself, in order to create a space, a vacuum, in which He could manifest Himself. This act of divine retreat is known as *Tsimtsum* ('contraction'). It is the beginning of cosmos and life. The universe becomes possible because of the self-shrinkage of God. This primeval shrinkage also created the space for God to purify Himself of the evil, intertwined with the good in Him. The space left by *Tsimtsum* contained mainly evil, but also a degree of divine light. To the same degree that light and compassion were predominant in primal *Ein-Sof*, darkness, evil as well as stern judgement, are predominant in that new space.

The undifferentiated content of what had gathered in empty space will then become the substance out of which creation eventually comes forth. *Ein-Sof* acts on this inchoate mass, illuminates and animates it. This He does through the medium of His own emanations, the ten *Sefirot*, in a process of continuous descent from *Ein-Sof* and re-ascent, back into *Ein-Sof*. The spread of God's illuminating light through the created universe is not uniform, but in the form of separate sparks here and there. The souls of individual humans are such sparks. The world, and human existence, is a mixture of good and evil, reflecting divinity itself. This mixture was compounded by the sin of Adam, the first man, tainting all human souls to a greater or lesser degree with evil. Divinity starts to heal itself again in a great restoration (*Tiqqun*). All of this started to take place in God itself before the Creation of human beings. These struggles, including an element of evil, are inner divine processes. Humans would have a huge responsibility in the great task of mending themselves, the cosmos and God. The mystic person accelerates the final Messianic redemption of world and divinity.

Luria's mythology was spelt out in a staggering wealth of esoteric symbolic detail. Reduced to its essentials, the structure of his thought is clearly related to Gnosticism in character, but without the stark, unbridgeable dualism that typified the Gnostic idea of divinity.

The imaginative freedom with which Luria interpreted the original, normative Hebrew Scriptures, as well as the Kabbalah tradition, is striking. The point of what he aimed to achieve is obvious. He wanted to provide an account of the primordial Origin of things, good and evil. It is important to bear in mind the essentially mythological, imaginal nature of his thinking. It produced not fact, but creative, transformative fiction in order to satisfy a need for comprehensive understanding and motivation for a meaningful, good life.

His views are highly challenging and stimulating to any attempt today to somehow make sense of the emergence of the world, and to understand the human position in Cosmos as a potentially positive factor in the great process.

I close this summary with three observations. The first is that Luria introduced the feminine principle into the concept of divinity. The second is that he saw the material world as somehow continuous with divinity, without sacrificing the transcendence of God; the material world is relegated to a lower level in the great scheme of things. Here we hear echoes of Neoplatonism. Luria transcends the ancient classical account of Genesis with its simple dichotomies, in the direction of a greater comprehensiveness, inclusiveness and non-dual mode of jointing its various elements – in short, in the direction that this investigation senses to be a relevant one for today. But, thirdly, although Lurianic Kabbalah was not quite dualist, there is an element of early Buddhist, Gnostic and Neoplatonic pessimism as far as Cosmos is concerned, an element that these reflections wish to overcome.

■ Platonism (the *Timaeus* of Plato)

Dating from roughly the same time as the Genesis account, ancient Greece had hunches concerning the beginning and basic pattern of reality, very different from those contained in the Western-Asian monotheistic intuition with its one, omnipotent God. One of the basic themes, found in Homeric poetry (period between 8th century and 9th century BCE) and Greek tragedy, was the unresolved relationship between the power of the gods and the power of fate: the gods are not omnipotent, but have to grapple with the capricious force of fate as well as they can. A 100 years after Aeschylus (525–456 BCE), that problem still occupied Plato (427–347 BCE) towards the end of his long life, in his dialogue *Timaeus*. In the whole of Western-European thought, perhaps no single MM book dealing with Origin was more influential than this one, produced towards the middle of the 4th century BCE (cf. inter alia Cornford 1956 [1937]; Reydams-Schils 2003; Runia 1986).

In terms of pioneering vision and measure of influence, Plato is on a par with a very small number of groundbreaking luminaries, such as Abraham, according to the Hebrew Bible and the Buddha according to the Buddhist scriptures. History is not done with Plato, and one can understand why. His thinking is too varied to be simply repeated or taken at face value. That is part of his greatness and his enduring charm and challenge. He did not present one perfectly coherent system. In addition, he did not altogether move beyond the cultural conditions of his time, which in some respects differ dramatically from our own time. Listening to him with understanding includes interpreting him creatively. Many variants of ‘Platonism’ followed him, picking up or developing different strands in his work.

How does Plato arrive at his account of Origin? What is the origin of his understanding of Origin?

In the theogonic, cosmogonic account of *Timaeus*, Plato neither claims special revelation for his ideas, nor appeals to such a divine source as a literary

device to impress the significance of his ideas on his reader. He does not insist on some super experience, and does not purport to have any access to any special level of consciousness. His sensing of the shadows against the wall differs from the paradigmatic models expressed by, for example, Hebrew faith and the Buddha, according to those respective scriptures. In addition, his argument is neither inductive nor deductive in any strict sense of the word; it is a classic example of what C.S. Peirce would call 'abductive' reasoning. Plato allows the argument to come from the mouth of a perhaps real but unknown, well educated but ordinary man, Timaeus, who communicates them to his friends in an open, free conversation among equals, in a manner that shows the tentative nature of these reflections, struggling to find a satisfactory degree of clarity and consistency. Timaeus and his friends are, after all, but human, trying their best to understand, so Plato lets Timaeus go about constructing a combination of popular traditional religion, philosophical tradition, myth and speculative reason. These four strands are woven together artfully. The result is so deft, rich and varied, yet containing so many hidden tensions that his interpreters down the centuries failed to pin down his ideas in any final form.

Plato picks no fight with the first of these levels (popular religion) and even goes some way to save its face by accepting the gods of national mythology, but not without a hint of irony. He was, after all, a wise man, and throughout his life his main concern was the quality of human life together – that is, politics. After the death of Socrates, he lost his faith in popular democracy, but he did not withdraw from life in the market place in principle, and it would not have occurred to him to despise it, or popular religion that is part of it. At the same time, he knew that this level of relationship to the Origin of things needed to be transcended and integrated into a larger scheme.

From the models of the world produced by his predecessors in the philosophical tradition such as Parmenides, Heraclitus, Empedocles and Pythagoras, Plato (mostly openly) derives essential building blocks for his system. He makes no bones about this dimension of his project. The *Timaeus* unfolds as a sustained attempt at synthetic thought, combining, integrating and transcending those older models by developing a new mould, carrying the mark of his own great mytho-poetic imagination. But it must be added that Plato's thinking reveals some similarities to Indian thinking that has led many to postulate – apart from the undoubted common background and origin of the two cultures – later Indian influence on the Greeks, not least on Plato.

In any event, the ideas developed in the *Timaeus* are not presented as infallible, but as speculative; not as demanding acquiescence, but at best as commanding respect; not as perfect truth, but as only a possible account of the blueprint of things. Seriously intended as these ideas are, they also reveal a remarkable lightness of touch. They are neither purely rational philosophy, nor pure myth, but at times something in between. They are not merely a mixture of the two approaches, but a third type of discourse, one with a dignity

of its own. Plato's picture of the world with which he allows Timaeus to come up, is the result of a kind of reasoning combining myth and reason, and the status of his story is, by his own happy admission, nothing more than 'likely'. Striving to transcend the possibilities and the limitations of traditional religion on the one hand and existing philosophy on the other hand, this style of thinking also consciously tries to connect the world of religion with the world of science and philosophy, and to harmonise myth with reason and fact. It is clearly an experimental text, not 'original' in the sense of starting from scratch (which text, which author, however creative, does start from scratch?) but 'original' in the sense of moving close to the Origin of things with great intuitive-speculative power. In the *Timaeus*, mythical-symbolic imagination and rational argument may not be identical, but they are not separable either.

How does Plato's mythological narrative run? He imagines a grand spectacle, the centre stage of which is occupied by the Demiurge, Fabricator of the universe: 'God', we may say. Plato then proceeds to present what is essentially the trans-temporal structure of the world, in the form of a story in time. In that story, the Creator did not create the universe out of nothing. No, he took a pre-existing chaotic world of matter, and proceeded to order that chaos so that it might, as far as possible, be good, like himself. Giving it life and intelligence, he made it a living animal. This he did by forming it after the model of the eternal universal animal, existing in the world of eternal, pre-existing Ideas. To make the universe visible and tangible, the Demiurge made it of fire and earth. Air and water became necessary. He constructed this cosmic animal in a spherical shape, and caused it to rotate on its own axis. Since there was nothing outside of this living being to which it had to relate, it needed no eyes or ears, nor any limbs, nor any organs for respiration and nutrition. Before God made this spherical body, he made soul of three elements: Same, Other and Essence. He placed soul into the universal body and spread it throughout the body. Soul ordered the body in accordance with the rules of harmony, as expressed in mathematics and music. At this stage of Creation, God was well pleased. In order to bring it more in line with its eternal archetype, God created time and its portions, such as days, months and years, as well as the heavenly bodies (sun, moon and so on) necessary to measure time, and positioned these bodies in accordance with the laws of mathematics. He then created four kinds of living creatures (gods, who are the stars in heaven; and the beings dwelling in the air, the waters, and on dry land). In his remarkable amalgam of rational thought and mythological expression, Plato introduced a third most basic constituent (in addition to, in fact between, the ideal model and the sensible copy). This third element was a substrate, mediating between the other two, and allowing the ideal model actually to take sensible shape. Plato refers to this medium as a recipient, a nurse; in cosmological terms, it is none other than space.

Plato made up this fanciful story, and, not in the least concealed this fact. At the same time, it seriously reflects the state of the art, mathematics and science of his day. In passing, in the metaphysical-mythical emphasis he places on

mathematics, he stands between Pythagoras before him and thinkers such as Einstein, Bohr and Heisenberg long after him – but the seemingly inherent link between mathematics and physics has never been explained. Plato's story also contains his most basic intuitions concerning the deeper nature of reality. Indeed, it is a grand narrative, grand in every sense of the word. Today, as throughout the entire period of Western culture, it is still admired – not only as far as content is concerned, but also in terms of style of thought: open, dialogical, and yet not shying away from religion in the radical sense – from MM.

In stark summary fashion, the most basic underlying principles guiding the *Timaeus* may be listed as follows.

For Plato, the most basic assumption is the fundamental distinction between – not separation of – two levels of being: the level of eternal Ideas, of Being; and the level of derived, relative being, of the transitory, material counterparts of eternal Ideas. In fact, the cosmos as a whole is a concrete counterpart of such a pre-existing, supreme ideal type, or archetype. Plato was not a dualist (as tradition tended to portray him), but a one-world idealist: real things are real by dint of their participation in the real Ideas, hierarchically ordered, with the Good at the apex (Dunham et al. 2011:8, 19ff.). Plato does not step back, outside Being, into the absolute non-being of Absoluteness either. To him, the highest knowledge (in the terminology that we use here, MM knowledge) comes about as the human mind, driven by desire (*eros*), embarks on a road of recollection (*anamnesis*), and ascends by gradual growth, aided by education, towards an ecstatic discovery of the eternal, immutable Ideas.

Plato imagines an anthropomorphic God, but it is part of his mythological scaffolding, rather than of the essential house of his thought (I am not ignoring the difficulty and the risk of distinguishing these two types of thought, inseparable in Plato). In this penultimate context of anthropomorphic god talk, he makes no big fuss about whether there is only one god or not. Yet the drift of his thought seems to be in the direction of monotheism. That is how theologians from the Abrahamic faiths interpreted him, not without basis. Yet, it would be anachronistic to force Plato into categories such as polytheism, henotheism (the particular preference of one god in a polytheistic scheme) and monotheism. That was not the centre of gravity of his thinking. A more radical reading, tendential but justifiable, could interpret him to point towards a monistic idealism of sorts.

Above, a distinction was made between 'trans-temporal structure' and temporal story, 'story in time'. Again, it is important not to overemphasise this distinction. Plato's tale as a whole introduces the notion of history seriously as a very significant category. Somehow, he senses, the cosmos has a historical dimension.

In Plato's intuitive sense of Origin a duality between God/the Good/Ideas on the one hand, and some force of chaos/evil on the other hand, remains. His mythological God did not create the world out of nothing; he worked on what

was pre-existently there, 'before' time. In this sense, Plato reflected a duality similar to the one discernible in the Genesis account of Creation. Ultimately, Plato did not allow himself to be drawn into a final, clear-cut demarcation between God and pre-existing chaos-matter. His Greek heritage of the unresolved tension between God and capricious necessity (*anangke*) remains. Is this an unresolved hangover, or a suggestive shade of a distinction within divinity itself? The latter is the more fruitful interpretation. If Plato was no full-blown monist, he was no dualist either. *Timaeus'* ambivalence was eventually given up. Later Platonism turned towards derivationist monism: matter is an outflow of the One; Christian theologians, on the other hand, severed the tie completely: God created the world out of nothing (*ex nihilo*), and matter was definitely not divine.

Chaos-matter is not God. It is not as good as God is (by far not), but it is not anti-God. It is not something entirely novel emerging out of nothing by divine fiat, and it is not evil. Plato does not offer an explicit solution to the problem of evil. At the root of things, absolute Being and absolute Goodness are the same. Evil is not denied, but somehow belongs to the conditions of limitation, which are worked upon by the Ideas/God.

Remarkably, halfway through his book, he seems to realise that something very important is still amiss. He has the pre-existing Ideas; he has primordial matter-chaos; and he has God. However, he still has to cover the aspect of, shall we say, 'enabling space' – the kind of thing that is really the central notion of this chapter of ours. Somehow, one must explain, or rather contemplate the miracle that something, the world, *actually happens*. In order to satisfy this requirement, Plato introduces a concept that has not failed to excite the imagination and tease the abilities of interpretation of scholars over the centuries. He calls it by a variety of names, including mother, receiver (*upodoche*), nurse (*tithene*), and space (*chora*). In the scheme of our argument, Absoluteness *becomes* the world, and this becoming, this Origin, is the supreme miracle, worthy of contemplation. In Plato's system, the Ideas (plus pre-existing chaos-matter) add up to form the Absolute. In order for Absolutely Real actually to become the relatively real (the cosmos), some 'X', some purely passive and receptive matrix, having no qualities of its own but allowing things to 'take place', is necessary. Plato's *upodoche* (not to be identified with the primal chaos), *chora*, *tithene*, fills that need.

For Plato there is only one universe, which is a living animal, divine, suffused with 'soul', of which 'reason' is the highest part. He could therefore conclude the *Timaeus* with a doxology to the cosmos (Cornford 1956 [1937]):

[H]aving received in full its complement of living creatures, mortal and immortal, this world (*kosmos*) has thus become a visible living creature embracing all that are visible and an image of the intelligible, a perceptible god (*theos aisthetos*), supreme in greatness and excellence, in beauty and perfection, this Heaven single in its kind (*monogenes*) and one. (p. 359)

This is, of course, quite different from the Genesis tale of Creation in which the world is also severely relativised, but in a different sense than is the case in the *Timaeus*. Plato's notion anticipates a notion that would surface in the 20th century again (Earth as a living being), and it must be counted as a major prophetic vision of his, worthy of being picked up in our time of ecological reorientation (that will be dealt with in Ch. 22).

Plato has no anti-cosmic sentiment or resentment, even if the world is not perfect. It ranks lower on the descending scale of Being, but it is not despised. It is marked by a relative lack of Being, but it is nevertheless also relatively good, to the extent that it shares in Being. The human being is part of the divine, living universe, and is a 'heavenly plant', by virtue of its most divine component, namely the rational part of the soul. The human being is inherently good, and does not commit evil, or prefers bad to evil, wittingly and wilfully. By their essential nature, all people desire the good. Yet, the good is distorted through ignorance, which is the source of evil and vice.

In another late dialogue of his, the *Sophist*, Plato makes a distinction that is of great importance to our central problem concerning the nature of reality. He formulates it as the distinction between *to me on* (non-being) and *ouk on* (something that does or could exist, but does not exist or exists differently than something else). The first negates Being as such, indeterminately. It seems to me that with this *meontology* Plato tends towards the kind of thinking pioneered in Taoism and Buddhism, and sought in this orientation: Absoluteness. The term *apophaticism* as used overwhelmingly in Western and Near-Eastern MM on the other hand, even though used with an appeal to Platonism, accepts the reality of Being, even of a Being, even though nothing can be said about it. There is a difference between the two.

Plato did not develop the idea of the world as emerging from a meontic Absoluteness. His world becomes through participation (*methexis*) in transcendent but real Ideas, dealt with in several dialogues (the *Phaedo*, the *Parmenides* and finally in the *Sophist*). By introducing Ideas and distinguishing that level of reality from empirical things, Plato manages to introduce the category of becoming in his cosmogony. This is a step away from Parmenides' monism. In general, his theory of a plurality of Ideas involves that the Ideas, in which all becoming participates, do not come into existence themselves. The Ideas as the ultimate causes of things do not push the things of the world into existence; his emphasis falls on the participation of things in the Ideas as a being effected through a process of teleological approximation: the things are drawn towards the Ideal perfection from a chaotic state. A problem with Plato's theory of participation by one level of being (phenomenal reality) in another semi-separate level (the Ideas) may be what Aristotle made famous as the 'third man argument'. Plato's position seems to necessitate an infinite series of participations: this empirical 'man' and the Idea 'Man' add up to a set, which would necessitate a third level of Idea (a higher 'Man'), in which the two

previous levels jointly participate, and so on and so forth *ad infinitum*, in a never-ending series of approximate participations. The notion of Becoming in the sense of auto manifestation from the horizon of Absoluteness, of natural unfolding, would avoid this problem.

Overall, Plato's cornucopia of ideas concerning the origin of things amount to an Objective Idealism: his world is real insofar as it shares in a realm of Ideas. As said, Plato's thought is open-ended and not dogmatic. There is a certain epistemological modesty in his design of the order of things. It is not authoritarian and is there for anyone to check. That is not the least of its attractions.

■ Christianity

□ the Fourth Gospel

For the last 15 centuries the religious history of the West was dominated by Christian orthodox assumptions concerning the Origin of things, based on Hebrew faith, dependent on Greek thinking and generally in opposition to Gnosticism (see below). Around the last decade of the 1st century CE, John introduced the Fourth Gospel with the following words (Jn 1:1-3), equal to the opening lines of the Old Testament in their lapidary quality:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.

This opening harks back to Genesis 1. Again, assuming that 'beginning' (*arche*) here refers to a dimension absolutely outside time and world (cf. Bultmann 1968:15f.) – that is, to something akin to radical Absoluteness, how is it possible, conceivable, that it could contain a – *the* – 'Word'? Divine 'Word' did not 'become'; somehow, it 'was' 'with God', 'was God'. 'Beginning' here refers to absolute transcendence. Yet, the mystical intuition of John senses that the absolute negative and a great positive hang together essentially – not only as far as the coming into being of the world is concerned, but also as to the nature of God.

Both assumptions underlying the Hebrew vision of creation (the absolute distinction between God and the world, and the unique position of Israel) are modified. As for the first assumption: transcendent God is now defined as essentially incarnate in Jesus. The Word, God, Revelation, Creator, eternally pre-existent, took on human flesh in Jesus. The second basic assumption of Hebrew faith is also adapted: the notion of Israel is expanded to that of the church, that is, to all (including those outside of Israel) who believe in Jesus as the incarnate Word. The miracle of the existence of the world is looked at through the miracle of the incarnation of the Word in Jesus.

The exact relationship between God and the Word is a mystery, accepted and celebrated in faith – not only in this introduction to the Gospel, but in the

Gospel as a whole – as a matter of fact, in the entire New Testament and throughout Christian history of orthodox Christian reflection on the primordial Origin of things. The Word and God are One; and yet God the Father is greater than the Word (the Son). The Son obeys the Father; and yet the Son is not subordinate to the Father, and he should receive the same honour as the Father. The root Christian intuition concerning the Absolute Origin of things (as exemplified in the Gospel of John) would, over a number of centuries, be elaborated into the Christian theological dogmas of Trinity and Christology: of eternal triune God (Father, incarnate Son, and Holy Spirit), Creator and Saviour of all things. Following the Fourth Gospel and the other New Testament authors, most of Christian tradition would inscribe Jesus of Nazareth into divine eternity.

For the rest, this early Christian sense of the genesis and essential nature of things echoes that of the unknown Hebrew author of Genesis 1:

- the world is not an emanation from God (no monism)
- the origin of the world and the human being is not a tragic but a good and positive event
- evil (the Gospel speaks of 'darkness', 1:5) is part of the present world, but it is not originally inherent in the world (no dualism)
- the created world is good
- in spite of the unique unity of the incarnate Word and God in Jesus, the difference between the human being in general and God, and between nature and God, remains
- the process of the world is a planned, linear history, from creation through sin and salvation to the end of time.

Much as Christianity emphasises End in the death of Jesus, it also emphasises Origin and Life, which elevates it above being an obsession with death. Various themes central to Christianity (its teachings of Trinity, of Christ, of the Holy Spirit and Creation, of eternal life) refer to joyful Origin. Before all and at the root of all, there are the inner-divine movements of loving, divine begetting – of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. From that Original depth, and out of/from nothing (*ex/de nihilo*), came the Creation of the world and of humankind. There is not only an original Creation from nothing, for Creation is continuous (*creatio continua*): the continuity of the world remains utterly contingent, and dependent on God eternal. In Origin God designed his plan of eternal Life, which was executed through the incarnation of his Son.

In Christianity, the resurrection of Jesus from death is a dramatic, extremely condensed, religion-specific symbol of the pan-human and indeed cosmic process of Origin arising from End. The Son's resurrection, celebrated at Easter, inaugurates eternal Life, in which all of Creation will share. There will be a new heaven and a new earth. The Holy Spirit empowers people to share in eternal Life, in this life and in eternity.

Much of Christianity (particularly in the Middle Ages, as Dante portrayed in his *Commedia*) saw earthly life as not the real thing, but merely a preparation for eternal life. Death is the beginning of one's eternal destiny, hopefully in eternal heavenly bliss, with God. At an early stage and for a short while even the idea of transmigration was acceptable in some quarters. Christianity is essentially, according to its inner logic, the celebration of Life eternal, in which God, humankind and Creation co-celebrate in love and joy – now, in anticipation of eternal Paradise. Sin and evil, bad and sad as they may be, are merely passing shadows under the sun of God's love, embracing all that is, lasting for ever – and starting in the Origin of God's triune mystery.

□ Cusanus

Leaping towards the end of the Middle Ages, I pay profound respect to the great Christian metaphysical mystic Nicholas of Cusa, standing in the long shadow of the philosophy of Plato as worked out by Neoplatonism, and Aristotelianism, and straddling the divide between the Middle Ages and the new world of the Renaissance. Cusanus worked in the channel hewn by the intuitions expressed in writings such as the Fourth Gospel, as indubitable truth. He also had at his disposal the highly developed speculative tool of the Trinitarian dogma, which he used with great dexterity. In addition, he deferred to Neoplatonism, particularly to Proclus, as authoritative. No Christian metaphysical mystic paid as much attention to *God* (in our vocabulary: Absoluteness) as *Origin, Possibility*, than Cusanus did towards the end of his busy life, being involved in Church affairs. It is as if his entire life's work culminated in the idea of God-as-Possibility. This idea found supreme expression in his very last book, *De apice theoriae* ('Concerning the loftiest level of contemplative reflection', composed a few months before his death) (Von Kues 1966:361–386).

His basic intuitions are clear. In the very centre of his attention, stands the question: how could the world emerge from the realm of divinity? He does not take the world for granted. He is not satisfied merely to marvel at the flowering world, flowering simply because it is flowering. Being not only a contemplative but also a speculative mind, he wants to understand and explain how and why the miracle of the world could take place. With a burning passion, he wants to penetrate as deeply as possible into the mystery of Origin. Cusanus' passion for the Origin, which not only precedes, but also underlies all empirical things, expresses itself as a passion for unity. Behind the multiplicity of the empirical, sinful world lies the oneness of eternal Origin. God is One; the doctrine of the Holy Trinity is the bedrock of his thought.

Let me now survey the landscape of his thought by a triangulation exercise focusing on three books: *De docta ignorantia* ('Concerning learned ignorance', 1440) (Hopkins 1981); *De pace fidei* ('Concerning the peace of faith', 1453)

(Biechler & Bond 1990); and *De apice theoriae*, ('Concerning the Loftiest Level of Contemplative Reflection', 1464). In passing, the difference in style between the three is fascinating. Cusanus received *De docta ignorantia* in a vision en route back to Italy from a visit to Constantinople in 1437. Appearing in book form 3 years later, it is a carefully crafted, well-balanced thesis in grand style; he was a serious, still youngish man approaching the pinnacle of a brilliant career as theologian and church diplomat. The second book (*De pace fidei*) was also conceived as a vision, 16 years later when he was in his early fifties, an accomplished figure standing with great confidence at the pinnacle of his life and work. It was occasioned by the fall of Constantinople to the Turks in 1453. Now Cusanus could afford to write a book, for the time incredibly daring in its boldness, within 2 months' time, in supreme confidence and an easily readable style. Eleven years further on, worn out by church politics, disillusioned and hiding in mortal danger in the castle of Andraz, he produced the third book (*De apice theoriae*), marvellous in its playfulness with speculative ideas and words. It was as if he felt that he had nothing to lose; imagination could roam freely.

Overall, his passion for Origin in the three-oneness of God seeks to overcome splintering in all respects. Thus, it seeks to address the schisms in the Western church and to promote the pristine unity of torn Christianity, including East and West. It seeks the hidden unity in all religions, including the dreaded Islam, behind the varieties of historical form and ritual (*religio una in rituum varietate*, as formulated in his *De pace fidei*, I.6). It seeks the unity of philosophy, theology, science and mathematics, and it wishes to maintain the unity of speculative reason and mystical experience. In this effort, we – also hovering between epochs – may recognise a kindred spirit, standing in the awkward transition from the Middle Ages with its grand old certainties, to the Renaissance with its exploration of dangerous new possibilities.

From his major work, *De docta ignorantia*, Cusanus' path into Origin is laid out in advance. In short, God implies the world, and the world implies God. Each pole is essential to render the possibility of the other actual: the possibility of absolute, Originating God is actualised through the world, and the possibility of the derived, originated world is actualised through God. Of course, those two reciprocal necessities are not of the same order: God is absolutely necessary for the world to pass from possibility to actuality; the world is relatively necessary for the possibility of God's being Creator to become actuality. The Creation of the world is an event, relatively necessary, in the eternal life of God. That is its true Origin. Originally, God enfolds all things (is the *complicatio* of all things); the world with its many things is the unfolding explication (*explicatio*) of God, and it is only as they multiply in time that they fall away from God. Evil is not actually real; it is merely the relative absence of Being. Even in their multiplication, each of the many things of the unfolding universe is a contraction of the universe as a whole. God and that universe (one in its manifoldness) are taken up in a circular movement: from the Infinite One

to the finite many – and back. This is Christian Neoplatonism-Aristotelianism. It is also the normative background against which this little bas-relief sculpture of our great predecessor emerges. Where Cusanus' Christianity comes in, is in his projection of the dialectical play of possibility and actuality right back into the primordial nature of triune God, with Jesus Christ as centrepiece.

The last year of Cusanus' life was devoted to an increasing radicalisation of the idea of 'Possibility' (translation of Hopkins; more literally, simply 'can-ing' or 'being able-ness', from *posse*: 'to can'/'be able') (Brüntrup 1973; Hopkins 1998:1431-1434). To this notion I shall return in Chapter 12. First, in line with his principle of the coincidence of opposites (*coincidentia oppositorum*), he allows the two contraries 'possibility' (*posse*) and 'being' (*esse*) to coincide. He expresses this novel idea in the neologism *possest*: the 'can-be-ness' of God. What 'is' God? Answer: 'can-be-ness', that is, Possibility (Hopkins 1998):

The loftiest level of contemplative reflection is Possibility itself, the Possibility of all possibility [...] 19.III. Nothing can possibly exist prior to Possibility [...] Likewise, nothing can possibly be better than Possibility – or be more powerful than Possibility, or more perfect, simple, clear, known, true, sufficient, strong, stable, easy, etc. And because Possibility itself precedes all possibility that has a qualification added, it cannot either exist or be named or be perceived or be imagined or be understood. [...] 28.XII. The triune and one God [...] is signified by 'Possibility itself' (17,19). (p. 1431ff.)

To Cusanus, God's Possibility equals actual reality. His 'can' equals 'is'. Not only 'is' God of necessity what he 'can be'; the world too 'is' divinely necessary – because God 'can' allow it to be, or create it (*posse facere*: 'can create'). That is why God ('Absoluteness') is also the *complicatio omnium* (the enfolding of all things, of actual reality – in our terminology, of Cosmos). They are, and are essentially, because God can produce them. God is the Possibility to bring Cosmos forth and in God, Possibility and Actuality coincide.

The same thing can be looked at from the point of view of the world/Cosmos. So Cusanus consciously emphasises the emergence of the world (Cosmos) as a 'Possibility to Become' (*posse fieri*: 'can-become'), on the basis of God's *posse facere* ('Possibility to make/bring forth'). Because God is Possibility to make, Cosmos is Possibility to become. Divine Possibility continues to cast its light even on what has been made ('Possibility to have been made': *posse factum*).

In his last book Cusanus' thoughts find their apex in the notion of *posse ipsum* ('can-ing -itself'). At the end of his life of reflexive labour, his ultimate name for God, approximating the Unknowable and Unnameable, is: 'can-ing-itself', 'possibility-itself'. Now he could rest in peace, exhausted but happy. In our model, Absoluteness becomes Possibility, and Cosmos becomes as a manifestation of Possibility. Cusanus substantialised Possibility and identified it with the Christian view of God, which is not the case in this essay (also see Ch. 12).

The religions that need to be somehow reconciled today are more, different and vastly more complex than the ones considered by Cusanus. The great alternative religio-philosophical approaches of India and China in all their wealth, better known to us than they could have been to him, invite us to explore new avenues – different from his. Today it is possible to appreciate his comprehension, in spite of its limitations, of the religions known to him. Recognition is due of the pioneering quality of his thought in the Christian context of the time. In *De pace fidei*, his model for the reconciliation of religions, boils down to a soft Christian imperialism, absorbing them in quite a friendly way, as deviant forms of Christianity. This is a strategy that has been followed quite often since. Today a wider possibility than that which was available to Cusanus, and one that is explored in this argument, beckons us: Absolute Horizon is their shared Origin; Christianity, like all other religions, is understood as a relative, contingent expression of a drift tending towards Absolute Horizon, carrying all of them.

Today, the sciences look very different from the paradigm that dominated the intellectual landscape of his day. Quantum physics and biological evolution have burst onto the scene in a manner that he could not have foreseen. And yet his overall model of MM appears to offer fertile perspectives for a contemporary meeting of biological and spiritual (d)evolution. Also, keep in mind that Cusanus rejected the geocentric theory and anticipated, on speculative assumptions, the idea of an infinite universe and a moving earth, which would only, well after him, emerge on scientific grounds with Nicolaus Copernicus (1473–1543) and Johannes Kepler (1571–1630). Cusanus reminds us that the dove of the future needs two wings to fly: facticity-science-rationality and radical religion (MM), and the second no less than the first.

Cusanus' view of each of the manifold individual things of the world, each unique in its singularity, yet each nevertheless also a contraction of the universe as a whole, remains highly relevant to an ecological vision today. Each is a unique mirror of totality. Nature as a whole and each of its species and individual creatures are reciprocally involved: one for all and the whole, and vice versa.

Likewise, his vision of the relationship between the world (universe, nature) on the one hand and divinity on the other hand, as intimate as possible, without slipping into a flat pantheism, deserves careful study.

Also his presentation of human knowledge of Origin, condensed in his memorable phrase 'learned ignorance' (*docta ignorantia*), is a catchy formula for the essence of MM understanding. Higher than sensory knowledge, imagination, memory and reason, lies the understanding of the intellect, where all contraries and contradictories coincide. This is the realm where only a suprarational understanding, an unknowing knowing or a knowing unknowing, applies.

In the terminology we chose to use, Cusanus' views can be read tendentially as not incompatible with the notion that Origin and the original knowledge of

Origin appear from, and disappear into, Absoluteness. Yet there is a world, Cosmos. We may speak of it, and joyfully live in it.

The ruminations on these pages wish to be understood as legitimate extensions of the Bible and the Christian message and tradition. Nevertheless, they do not add up (in contemporary terminology) to either a conservative orthodox or a liberal variant of Christianity. A third candidate for an appropriation of the Christian message today may be Gnostic Christianity (O'Regan 2001). The three MM forces, those of Gnosticism, Christianity and Neoplatonism dominated the early centuries of the Common Era in the West. Therefore, a careful look at Gnosticism will be useful.

■ Gnosticism

It is understandable that under certain conditions (such as adverse climatic conditions and diabolically threatening social circumstances) some may see the universe as darkly ominous, and divinity fraught with unresolvable tension. What has generally become known as 'Gnosticism' (a term invented in the 18th century) belongs to such groups. Gnosticism took a speculative step right into the divine abyss itself. That is where its account of the Origin of things starts. A terrible drama played itself out in Origin; this world is merely a trembling aftershock. Gnosticism presupposed a personal, profound, intuitive ('esoteric') knowledge (*gnosis*), giving access to divine mysteries, inaccessible to everyday reasoning.

The question of what 'Gnosticism' really amounted to seems to be far from settled. 'Gnosticism' (containing a bewildering variety of forms) presupposed a general basic pattern of ideas, which lent themselves to endless variation. It was not an individual religion as such, but a wide-ranging trend. Here I restrict myself to a rather stark constructed ideal type, accepting that this picture does not satisfactorily cover individual instances of Gnosticism, but trusting that it may nevertheless be sufficiently representative to serve as a basis for our discussion.

The pessimistic theogonic and cosmogonic speculations of Gnosticism pivoted on the hunch that in the depth of eternity there were two gods to begin with, or that within God a tragic primordial fall occurred, and that the world is the secondary outcome of that upheaval. The creator-god (Demiurge) of the world is blind, imperfect, evil. He was identified with the Creator of the Hebrew Bible. Gnosticism was anticosmic: the world is a demonic system, inherently evil, and that evil goes back to divinity itself. Evil in the world, the evil world, is the extension and application of the evil within the divine realm – an evil that was sometimes seen as derivative, sometimes as equally primordial, the eternal opposite of the good. In the second case, there is a stark dualism between two irreconcilable principles in divinity itself. In the created world the

good is trapped in evil. The human soul is enslaved in ignorance, alienated from its true self. All of this was decked out in the most complex and extravagantly fanciful anthropomorphic mythologies. The Gnostic adept is redeemed through *gnosis*, and death is an act of liberation as the soul returns home to its source, but the final completion of cosmic redemption is still outstanding. In this process salvation messengers and redeemers, play a significant role.

The historical beginnings of Gnosticism are largely shrouded in mystery. It is generally accepted to have arisen between roughly 200 BCE and 200 CE around the Mediterranean, in circles beset by general pessimism and anxiety, and alienated from official religion. As far as its Hebrew roots are concerned, it may well have continued and radicalised the pessimistic trend expressed earlier in *Qohelet* (see §17), exacerbated to a level of total despair by the destruction of the Second Temple by the Romans in 70 CE. How could a good God have allowed that to happen? Despair was now pushed beyond the brink of what was tolerable within Hebrew-Jewish faith. Gnosticism probably also drew on Greek and Iranian sources. In general, during the Hellenistic period thinking individuals were afflicted by levels of existential and social anxiety unsurpassed in history. Gnosticism was one powerful expression of that disillusionment in the natural and social world. As radical withdrawal, it was also a form of social protest. In centuries that followed, it would spread eastwards and westwards, and flourish. It would become an adversary of Christianity. Yet, because of its adaptive and protean character, it overlapped with Christianity to a considerable degree, and also entered into symbiosis with that religion, and took over some Christian elements. Even the opening words of the Fourth Gospel (see above) were probably written with Gnosticism in mind, perhaps partly in opposition to it, but nevertheless reflecting it.

As a religious complex, Gnosticism eventually petered out after the triumph of orthodox Christianity. Orthodox Christianity not only managed to become a popular, widely acceptable religion, but it also ruthlessly persecuted Gnosticism and various groups associated with it. Yet Gnosticism lingered on and left traces in Jewish, Christian and Muslim circles for many centuries to come. It remained visible in medieval Christian sects such as the Bogomils (11th century) and the Cathars 'sometimes also known as Albigensians' (period between 11th century and 13th century); in a speculative Jewish mystic such as Isaac Luria (see above); a maverick Gnostic-Christian thinker such as Jacob Boehme (1575-1624); a poet such as William Blake (1758-1827); the contemporary Romanian philosopher Emil Cioran (1911-1995) (Cioran 1993 [1973]), and in other quarters of the modern epoch (O'Regan 2001). Christianity and Gnosticism struggled to define themselves against each other, and in the process became, or remained, remarkably similar in many respects, like hostile sisters. For example, contrary to its classic Hebrew antecedents, Western Christianity by and large barely escaped a hostile contempt for the body and its natural functions and the world - partly due to its main founding theologian,

Augustine of Hippo (354–430) who could not rid himself of Manichaean influences in his youth. The early Christian theologian Marcion (c. 85–160) demonstrated considerable overlap with Gnosticism as it is stylised here. His contemporary, the theologian Valentinus (c. 100–160), may be regarded as its most representative early figure.

□ the Manichaeism of Mani

Mani's Teaching (216–276 CE) was the historical apex of Gnosticism. With its wide geographical spread to the extremities of Asia and Europe and its ability to adapt to a variety of cultures, the religion founded by him (Manichaeism) was a strong, institutionalised religion in its own right for at least three centuries, from the 3rd century CE onwards. Mani hailed from the banks of the Tigris River in Iran. A syncretist, he presented himself as the successor to the Buddha in India, Zoroaster in Persia and Jesus further to the west, and brought the Gnostic MM impulse to its highest flowering.

Mani's teaching elaborated, in fantastic mythological form, classic Gnostic intuitions of the beginnings of things. A primordial dualism of good and evil, spirit and body, light and darkness, is the first epoch. Light and darkness become mixed, and a struggle for supremacy ensues; that is the second epoch. The coming into being of the cosmos in time is merely an outcome of that struggle in eternity and history, stretching once and for all from the beginning of the world to its final end. It is the gradual process of liberation of the light from the darkness in which it is still captive. Mani himself is the consummation of all religions, the final redemptive figure, called and supported by his divine Twin-Spirit (identified by his followers with the Christian Holy Spirit and the Buddhist Maitreya). Redemption is the prerogative of the elect, through esoteric knowledge and a harshly ascetic lifestyle. Finally, in the end, the eternal dualism of light and darkness is restored, but now it will last forever; this is the third and final epoch.

There is no denial of the stark grandeur of Mani's vision and the depth of his belief in the Father of Light, who, in the present epoch, is hidden and only represented by his emanations that are operative in the world. In eschatological anticipation, the Father of Light is joyfully adored (Asmussen 1975):

The Light is come, and near the dawn! Arise, brethren, give praise! We shall forget the dark night [...] He gives health and joy to the world [...] he takes away fear [...] and he puts an end to pain. (p. 142)

Yet the dualism of light and darkness will remain in all eternity.

The MM argument unfolding on this journey of ours is sympathetic towards certain elements of Gnosticism, but it takes up a very different position in other respects. In the lists below, I take issue with Gnosticism as an ideally typical construction; the details do not necessarily apply to specific historical groups; and obviously, an ideally typical model does not contend that it is the historically 'right' reconstruction, let alone the only useful one.

Similarities:

- The type of MM model explored here would – like Gnosticism – award *primary place to understanding, insight, wisdom*, not to obedient faith. Here may lie an essential difference between Gnosticism and Christianity as ideal types: in the latter, salvation comes from an outside saviour; in the former, it comes from inner enlightenment. In this respect, our meditations move close to Gnosticism (as to Eastern systems such as Vedanta and Buddhism).
- In the direction followed by a model such as the one developing here, such insight is – in line with what appears to have been a typical Gnostic concern – *immediate*. The social implication is that, much as such insight respects and learns from great teachers, it is not necessarily dependent on such authoritative figures; least of all if they are presented (or present themselves) as divinely ordained and endowed with indubitable authority. In our intuition, religious institutions and officials are not deemed essential, but may have a relative, useful function. Such structures, when presented as ‘essential’ for salvation (particularly if they are of a hierarchical nature, such as men ranked above women), inevitably led to authoritarianism, blind obedience and the persecution of all deviant (‘heretical’) opinion. In Christianity the dictum *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* (‘outside the Church no salvation’) – going back to the church father Cyprian in the 3rd century CE, and meaning by ‘Church’ the official, dominant social institution – has been a particularly problematic notion. The Church’s persecution of Gnostic sects and the destruction of their writings blot the record of Christian orthodoxy. On the other hand, while ‘typical’ Gnosticism seems to have contained a strong anti-authoritarian streak, certain groups containing Gnostic elements (e.g. some Cathari) also seem to have had a hierarchical organisation, in which women, while more equal to men than in Orthodox Christianity, probably did not share in all rights and responsibilities.
- This model affirms the typical Gnostic *affirmation of the feminine principle* (sometimes personified – as, e.g. Sophia) in mysticism, and of the position of women in social life. Gnosticism – and early Christianity, with the enormous creative space it allowed women – express a genuine MM concern and ideal. The affirmation of women in an emerging MM for our epoch, resonating in these reflections of ours, is here intended as an equal juxtaposition of genders, indeed as the transcendence of gender dualism.
- This model is consciously and deliberately open to the wisdom traditions of humankind; exclusivism is foreign to its intentions.
- This emerging model views ancient Gnosticism’s speculative interest in the Origin of things, and concepts such as *Bythos* (‘Depth’, ‘Abyss’) and *Proarche* (‘Before-beginning’), with great interest.

The differences include:

- Unlike some forms of Gnosticism, the kind of model explored here would not present its understanding as final or indubitable revelation; it is merely

provisional, tentative and relative construction, operating under post-Enlightenment conditions.

- The kind of insight espoused in these reflections is not a matter of elitist, special privilege (as some Gnostic schools maintained of their views), but is accessible to everybody. It is not 'esoteric' in the sense of secret or inaccessible, as some of Gnosticism was.
- The frame of reference of original Gnosticism was Greek thinking and the family of religions emerging from the Near East. Hospitable as it was, the historical horizon of Gnosticism – apart from Manichaeism – centred in the Greek-Semitic Mediterranean world. An MM for today will be open to all that humanity has produced. The limitations found in a publication such as this are due to practical restrictions of time, space and knowledge, not to principle.
- No doubt born from its sense of marginality and fed by its persecution by the dominant forces of the day, Gnosticism sometimes had an oppositional, antithetical stance of resentment that is foreign to the MM trend followed here. Our stance is irenic-ironic, not adversarial.
- Although realising positively the great importance of myth in humankind's search for meaning, this emerging model, unlike ancient and medieval Gnosticism, seeks to formulate its tentative insights in the language of clear elucidation. In our tracing of Cosmos unfolding from Unground, we do not follow Gnosticism's complex mythological hierarchies of various emanations. Yes, the imaginal faculty of the yearning human person must be rehabilitated, but at times the contemporary reader – at least this one – has great difficulty in relating to the extremely elaborate mythological schemes of Gnosticism with their phantasmagorical personages. Science is the most telling difference between the situation then and the situation now, in which we have to find our way. In ancient Gnosticism fanciful mythological emanations (*Aeons*) carried an ontological weight that is not possible to maintain under the scientific and philosophical conditions of today.
- This model shuns fanciful, wild exegeses of existing canonical creation stories, as was sometimes the case in Gnosticism. Allegory, useful as it is, can take one only so far. The Christian Bible, for example, can tolerate only so much before the connecting link between itself and a transformational interpretation of it snaps. Not anything goes. Therefore, this model is not parasitic on any existing canon, twisting and turning it beyond all self-recognition. It would rather honestly step outside such canons as absolute points of reference. Such a step may still seek to define itself as a legitimate tendential extension of such canons.
- Unlike Gnosticism with its extravagant speculations, this model avoids complexity, but seeks simplicity, consistency, coherence and reasonable communicability.
- This model is, unlike typical Gnosticism, not pessimistically a-cosmic or anti-cosmic, but strongly pro-cosmic, world-friendly, history-friendly,

emphasising the *ab Origine* goodness of the world. It does not see Cosmos as Originally a catastrophic evil, and does not split mind/spirit and matter/body/flesh, despising the latter, but elevates matter, body and its natural functions, to being the good expression of Spirit. It does not turn away from life, but loves it, and eschews the Gnostic alienation from Cosmos. The route sought here, is this-worldly pro-existence, for the benefit and happiness of all beings in this Cosmic cycle.

- Whereas the Gnostic narrative presents the great drama as moving from divine perfection through inner-divine loss and fall, to a recovery of the divine perfection, this model sees the great Archeic drama as a spiral of divine manifestation, return and unfolding.
- Unlike most of Gnosticism, this model is not dualistically postulating a polar split in the Original dimension of things. It does not blame a bad Creator God – or anybody else, human or angelic – for Evil. It does not see Evil as an aggressively antagonistic antistubstance, but as derived presence, inevitable shadow in the Archegonic process. Evil is not the great primary adversary of Arche.
- This model hopes that now and in time to come, humanity will continue to produce its great prophets, its enlightened intellects, its pure hearts, its caring creators of justice as circumstances require, but it does not project all its hopes on some mythological Saviour figure (or figures) in the past, present, or future.
- Different from typical Gnosticism, this model would not see the earthly, human nature of great figures such as the Christ or the Buddha and others as mere semblance. Precisely not. Cosmos is significant. As great MM prophets, they are fully earthly and human, even if they – like all of us, but more clearly – also participate in, and express, the higher dimensions of Arche, petering out in Absoluteness.
- This model does not claim to know the End of things and does not imagine dramatic apocalyptic visions; it listens attentively to the projections of science and tries to harmonise that with a vision of the spiral of emergence and subsidence. It trusts that All will be well.
- This kind of model is not elitist in the sense of ascribing any superiority to itself, as some forms of Gnosticism were. On the contrary, it seeks open dialogue with all – while emphasising that in a participatory argument merit should be the decisive factor. By inner conviction and commitment, this kind of orientation is for all, even if it is not, and will not be, held by all.

In spite of such differences, no one who studies the tragic history of Gnosticism can fail to be impressed by the depth of their commitment and their search for ultimate meaning.

■ Islam

The basic structure of Islam is very similar to that of its two sister religions, Judaism and Christianity. Yet the prophet Muhammad's experience of

monotheistic Ultimacy had unique characteristics, and an unsurpassed single-mindedness and simplicity.

In the revelations the prophet (c. 571–632) received (afterwards written down in the Qur'an), the topic that I termed 'Origin' features strongly (Rahman 1994:passim). The Qur'an neither indulges in nor countenances speculation or an intuitive grasp of Original knowledge from the human side. There is no delving into the depths of God. God (Allah) has revealed original knowledge to his prophets, lastly and finally to Muhammad, the seal of the prophets. As far as the physical Origin of the world is concerned, there is no stepping behind infinite, all-powerful, all-merciful, purposeful God and his sheer creative command.

□ the Qur'an

Before creation is only God, who is the sole Origin of all. He is not the topic of speculation. All is radically contingent upon him who decided to create the world out of nothing, and governs it through natural causation. Pantheism as well as atheism, materialism as well as chance are cut off at the root. God created everything for his own glory and he leads the process of the world purposefully to its final destiny.

There is no cyclic or spiral motion in an eternal process of beginning and end. Yet there will be a relatively new beginning, to which the notion of Origin also seems to apply. For, after the final judgement, this earth will be transformed into a new garden. Earth will not be destroyed, but transformed on a new level of Creation. There will be an eternal hell. Whether on the new earth or in hell, humans remain whole persons, from whose selves their bodies are never severed.

The human being is not split into two substances, body and soul, and is distinguished on this earth from the rest of Creation by virtue of the fact that God breathed his own spirit into him. That elevated Adam above even the angels. One angel refused to acknowledge human superiority, and became Satan, who is anti-human rather than anti-God. God's sovereignty can in no way be challenged, so the struggle between good and evil is a reality for humankind alone – it has no cosmic dimension, let alone an inner-divine dimension. Evil is in no sense co-ordinate with God. Gnostic speculations are completely foreign to the teachings of the Qur'an concerning the ultimate Origin of things. Yet it is not impossible that the Qur'an may hold telltale signs of Manichaean influence, the main difference between the two systems being the world-affirming stance of Muhammad. To Muhammad the human being is free, in order to fulfil his mission as God's vice-regent in the order of nature. Yet the human being is also free to disobey the command of God. He carries good as well as evil tendencies within himself. Eventually God's cause will triumph and overcome the evil tendencies in the human being, reinforced

by the principle of Evil (Satan). All people are equal before God, and men and women have parity before him (this understanding was not maintained in historical Islam).

In the prophet Muhammad's understanding of God, 'his' transcendence received such a strong emphasis (even if 'he' is spoken of anthropomorphically), that it could be radicalised towards Absoluteness. In the prophet's understanding of Origin, creativity was the dominant aspect. God as Origin is sheer actuality. Speaking of God as potentiality (as Cusanus would do) would have sounded quite unacceptable to his ears. The aspect of continuity features in God's ongoing governance of the world, on its way to his eternal purpose. There will be no final End – only a relative End with the judgement of humanity, after which a relatively new creation in the unbroken continuity of God's eternal reign will take place.

The above essential structure was put forward with great poetic and mytho-symbolic force, so that a peeling off of 'philosophical' truth from merely 'allegorical' dressing would be an extremely hazardous undertaking. Religious truth and mythological expression are inextricably interwoven. And yet the Qur'an allowed for remarkably free – in our terms, 'MM' – interpretations in reaction to the heavy, wooden forms that the Qur'an reception took on in ultraconservative circles over the centuries.

Passing by early forms of Muslim mysticism, notably Shi'ite mystical thinking (continuing certain Gnostic influences), let me now turn to two great figures in the Sufi tradition.

□ Ibn Arabi

Much as Ibn Arabi emphasises the Absolute and the End of all phenomenal things and knowledge (see previous chapter), he also emphasises the self-revelation of the Absolute (Izutsu 1983:252ff.). To him the Absolute is an inexhaustible fullness of being, manifesting Itself in all things, material and immaterial, even as it, paradoxically, conceals Itself in and behind them. This self-manifestation (*tajalli*) of *al-haqq* is the self-determination, self-delimitation, of the Absolute. In his view, as in the *tawhid* (the belief in One God, deserving to be worshipped) informing all of Islam, 'Supreme Being' remains the dominant category, as it was in the Neoplatonic tradition in the manner in which it was appropriated in all three monotheistic traditions. It is not submission to one of the many existent beings, to 'a' Being, nor is it Absoluteness in the sense spelt out in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4.

Ibn Arabi analyses various 'stages' in this emergence of Being. Clearly, this is related to our central concern here: how can Absoluteness be Origin? How can Unground bring about, become, unfold as, Cosmos? He actually uses the term 'emanation' (*fayd*) for this multifaceted emergence. It must be added immediately that he does not take 'emanation' to mean (in the

Neoplatonic sense) different levels of being, but different forms of the self-determination of the Absolute. The fact that our Sufi reconciles such conclusions with traditional monotheistic presuppositions makes his contribution all the more remarkable. All of this highlights the astounding daring, originality and profundity of Sufism in general and a giant such as this in particular.

The very first stage is that the Absolute manifests Itself ... to Itself only. This is the arising of Self-Consciousness in the Absolute. This is not an event in a temporal sequence, but an eternal event. With that, all existing things in the world make their appearance – in the Absolute, and not in actuality yet, but *in potentia*. In other words, Origin as potentiality arises in the Absolute. Cosmos as such and all within it do not exist in actuality yet. They become dimly discernible, as would-be things.

Then – again, not in a temporal sequence – comes a next Self-manifestation of the Absolute. The Absolute manifests itself in the various forms of concrete existence. Origin emerges as Creativity. While he subscribes to the Muslim view of creation ‘out of nothingness’, that ‘nothingness’ to him in effect means ‘out of the Absolute as Origin, Possibility and Creativity’.

An implication of his view is that Cosmos and all within it ‘exist’ from all eternity. An additional unique feature of Ibn Arabi’s envisioning of Origin is his view of perpetual creation. The world goes on being created anew – and everlastingly so – at every single moment. The Absolute is everlastingly becoming Cosmos. Another implication is that Cosmos is not flatly identified with the Absolute (that would be pantheism); no, Cosmos exists in, emerges from, returns to, the Absolute (a form of pan-en-theism).

In addition, Ibn Arabi envisions the paradoxical coincidence of End and Origin. Cosmos (and the human being in it) is not only created anew every moment, but also ceases to exist every moment – the same moment. Everything is constantly changing, and yet there is something eternal, unchanging: Origin as Continuity, I would interpret him to say.

In the end, this genius held on to eternal Being. That is deeply ingrained in the monotheism of Near Eastern-Western metaphysical mysticism; not absolute Absoluteness where even the haziest fringe of Being eventually just peters out and nothing remains to fall back on, but ‘The’ Absolute.

□ Jalaluddin Rumi

Another creative receiver of Muhammad’s message, and similar to Ibn Arabi in the essential structure of his thought, was the Persian Sufi poet, *Jalaluddin Rumi* (1207–1273) (Schimmel 1980 [1978], 1992). ‘Rumi’ means ‘the Byzantine’ (from *Rum* which is Byzantium, later Constantinople, today Istanbul). Having been born in what is present-day Afghanistan and died in Konya in present-day Turkey, he excelled as mystic in a century dominated by mystics.

Rumi was fascinated by the startling immediacy of God's rule. This constant, loving marvel at the miracle of Creation was the secret of Rumi's life. In our terminology: Cosmos is immediately transparent to Absoluteness. In this respect, Rumi displayed an attitude very similar to that of the great Zen poets. To him as Muslim, God himself is untouched by change. Yet God is permanently engaged in novel creation out of nothingness. The world and everything in it leaps out every moment gratefully and joyfully from the 'nothingness' ('*adam*') out of which it has been and is being created.

That 'nothingness' is not understood in a negative sense. It is, in our terms, sheer positive Potentiality. It is an ocean of possibilities, a treasure trove in which uncounted possibilities lie hidden to leap forth in an intoxicated dance at God's command: '*Be!*' As Muslim, Rumi does not conflate God and nothingness. Yet, at times, he seems to come teasingly close to it. 'Nothingness' is not only 'the first and initial station', but also 'the final position and end of everything', the 'abyss of Divine Life', beyond everything conceivable, even beyond the revealed God; it is the *deus absconditus* ('the hidden God') (Schimmel 1980 [1978]:242ff.). '*Adam* virtually coincides with *fana* (annihilation), and it is more: the unfathomable depth of God. The point of true human existence is to become non-existent again, returning to the depth of God in this life – ending in Absoluteness, as it Originates from Absoluteness (to translate him tendentiously into the idiom of this exploration).

This basic understanding was elaborated in thousands of moving poetic phrases. Consider the following gem, incidentally also suggesting Rumi's acceptance of a chain of being, stretching continuously – and in principle reconcilable with an evolutionary perspective, we might add – from mineral to the ultimate of non-being, '*adam*' (Schimmel 1992):

I died as mineral and became a plant,
 I died as plant and turned to animal.
 I died as animal and became man.
 What fear I, then, as I cannot diminish by dying?
 Once when I die as a human, I'll become an angel,
 And I shall give up angelhood,
 For Not-Being, '*adam*', calls with an organlike voice:
 'Verily we are His, and to Him we return!' (p. 156)

No doubt Rumi could also have changed the order around, from ascent to descent, and could have said: 'Not-Being, '*adam*', calls with an organlike voice: "Verily we are His, and from Him we originate"'.

Indeed, at this mystical level of Islam, Origin may tendentially be seen to appear as manifestation of Absoluteness, the Abyss from which all things emerge and to which they return and in which they are suspended in all eternity.

■ §21 Interim summary conclusion

Given their views of Origin and Original knowledge of it, the Abrahamic religions, for all their impressive grandeur, could take on authoritarian forms, becoming systems of revelatory positivism: divine revelation has been given and enscripted infallibly. It is the mystical traditions of these religious contexts that provide remarkable evidence of other possibilities, as we could witness in Luria, Cusanus, Ibn Arabi and Rumi, approximating Absoluteness as Origin and the source of all that is. That is here taken to be the latent, powerful tendency inherent in those religions. In their mystical forms, they tend towards convergence with views pronounced in the Eastern context. So let me turn to three such systems.

■ §22 Intimations from the Eastern context

Of the metaphysical mysticisms (that term taken in a very broad sense), Taoism, Buddhism and Advaita Vedanta entertain radical concepts of Absoluteness. How would this type of thinking envision the becoming and being of Cosmos?

■ Taoism (Chuang-Tzu)

In Chuang-Tzu, the effortless quietude of ending life (and all things) is paired with beginning, both arising from and at home in the 'jumble of wonder and mystery' that he referred to at the death of his wife. In our terminology, End and Origin coincide dialectically in Absoluteness. Chuang-Tzu's Ultimate is not Being, as has been the central supposition of Near Eastern-Western thinking, but, in line with much of Eastern thinking, Non-Being. The distinction between Being and Non-being is not scholastic hairsplitting; it is of the utmost importance. To Chuang-Tzu, Non-Being or Emptiness (*wu* or *hsü*) is not mere nothing, the mere absence of being. It is beyond both being and not-being. As such, it is not utter other-worldly transcendence. In the words of Kuang-Ming Wu, it is Non-Being and not Being that 'beings' beings (the latter would be the position of Plato, Spinoza and Heidegger – and, in the last resort, also Luria, Cusanus and Ibn Arabi). Non-being is indeed 'beginning', a 'not-yet'. It is a 'potent Non-Being'. It 'begins the beginnings of being'. It lets beings be. Salvific and supportive, it empowers beings. Being is the child, born of and fed by the mother, which is Non-Being (Wu 1982:76ff.). It would not be unwarranted to interpret Chuang-Tzu as indeed suggesting that Absoluteness is Origin – that is, Potentiality and Creativity.

■ Hinduism

From the perspective of the expedition undertaken here, the generations of Hindu and Buddhist philosopher-mystics that we are looking at in this section

appear like free-climbing mountaineers scaling sheer rock at dizzying heights. In historical perspective, it is as if the tendency at the heart of MM that we are following, has been fast-forwarded. The leaps from polytheism and henotheism to monotheism to monism to non-dual metatheistic Absoluteness have been made with breathtaking boldness.

The historical antecedents of the Indian experiment lie in the fruitful synthesis of ancient indigenous Indian religion and imported Vedic religion, roughly since the middle of the second millennium BCE. Chronologically that places those Indo-Aryan seers about 1000 years before the Buddha and legendary Lao-Tzu.

□ the *Upanishads*

From our vantage point in this part (Part One) the Upanishads/Vedanta (roughly the period between 4th century and 7th century BCE) are the apex of the Vedas, and *Advaita* ('non-dual') *Vedanta* (9th century CE) is one of the highpoints of *Vedanta*.

The Original knowledge of the oldest *Veda* (the *Rig-Veda*) was hailed as revealed (*shruti*: 'heard'). Its content revolved around a polytheistic or henotheistic pantheon, similar to that of the Greeks, Iranians and other peoples of the time. They seemed to have believed that the universe had its Origin in a cosmic sacrifice and dismemberment to produce the many things in the world. Theirs was a vigorous, exuberant worldview. Over the next millennium, the concept of divinity became more sophisticated and more attenuated. In the later hymns of the *Rig-Veda* there was a strong tendency towards monotheism, according to which the universe was created by one personal divinity, called *Brahma*. This view was contemporaneous with Hebrew monotheism. However, the avant-garde of Indian religious thought gradually moved into a different ambit (speculative, ascetic, acosmic, individualistic, inner-directed) from the one inhabited by their Hebrew counterparts, who never compromised the personal character of the One God and his chosen people. Social-ethically, both systems rested on the unquestioned but questionable assumption of male dominance.

With the highly speculative Upanishads (Vedanta) a new epoch started, which was dramatically different from the previous one. Now, for a period of about four centuries, Indian MM proceeded deeper into uncharted territory. Sacrifice was interiorised. Outer, social sacrificial ritualism was increasingly transformed into an inner, individual mystical journey, centring in One eternal, imperishable Ultimate Reality, referred to as '*Brahman*'. This monism was something different from monotheism.

The monistic strand was woven into a variety of patterns. In our present context an important distinction that was made at times by the late-Upanishadic men brooding solitarily in forests, was the distinction between *Nirguna Brahman*

(‘Brahman-without-attributes’) and *Saguna Brahman* (‘Brahman-with-attributes’). In the latter form, Brahman could be known, described and approached; in the former, ‘He’/‘It’ was completely unconditioned, and hence unknowable, unnameable and unapproachable. At that stage of Indian speculative thinking there was no doubt that Brahman at the very least ‘is’: eternal Being. All things, external as well as internal, nature as well as soul/spirit, objective as well as subjective, are somehow manifestations of the One and Only: Brahman. The complete identity of the individual, inner human substance (soul: *atman*) and *Brahman* was particularly emphasised.

The entire Vedantic system, including the elements of karma (determining one’s destiny after death) and reincarnation, circled around this central passion: ‘*That (i.e. Brahman) thou art*’. In the words of the very early *Chandogya Upanishad* (III.14, 1–4) (Macnicol 1963 [1938]):

All this is Brahman. Let a man meditate on that (visible world) as beginning, ending, and breathing in it (the Brahman) [...] He is my self within the heart, smaller than a corn of rice, smaller than a corn of barley, smaller than a mustard seed, smaller than a canary seed or the kernel of a canary seed. He also is my self within the heart, greater than the earth, greater than the sky, greater than heaven, greater than all these worlds. He from whom all works, all desires, all sweet odours and tastes proceed, who embraces all this, who never speaks and is never surprised, he, my self within the heart, is that Brahman. When I shall have departed from hence, I shall obtain him (that Self). (p. 142)

This gain came at a high price: the disdain for Cosmos. This was the shadow cast by these pioneers’ speculative daring, and this shadow followed their every move. And then, of course, the question of *why* and *how* Nirguna Brahman, the eternal Brahman-Atman (Ultimate Reality-Soul) manifests as Saguna Brahman, and eventually as the world, has not necessarily been dealt with. What exactly is the nature and status of the world? Is it completely real – completely unreal? Or something in between, relative, derived, semi-real? And how does all of this relate to these visionaries’ idea of a devolving-involving universe in an eternal and unspeakably depressing cycle of periods (*kalpas*), of which the dreaded, never-ending wheel of individual reincarnation is part?

□ the *Bhagavad Gītā*

A next stride towards the development of the great synthesis of Advaita Vedanta was taken with the compromise of various Indian positions, worked out by unknown poet-thinkers, the authors of the magnificent *Bhagavad Gītā* (‘Song of the illustrious Lord’). This gospel developed sometime between the 5th and 2nd centuries BCE. The hero-god Krishna, none other than an *avatar* (manifestation) of the great god or meta-god Brahman, appears to the warrior Arjuna, bound to do battle, and instructs him. One of the constant themes in this slender masterpiece is that All comes from and returns to the supreme Brahman: the Absolute that transcends all empirical categories, and is the End of All – and also its Origin.

Let us listen to one such proclamation of Brahman-beyond-Brahma (in Hindu mythology, Brahma is the Creator-god). The *Gītā* (IX.4, 7-10) reiterates the great Indian vision of the eternal return of things, their devolution from and return to Ultimate God. Brahman is potentiality, continuity and novelty (Mascaró 1962):

All this visible universe comes from my invisible Being. All beings have their rest in me, but I have not my rest in them [...]. At the end of the night of time all things return to my nature; and when the new day of time begins I bring them again into light. Thus through my nature I bring forth all creation, and this rolls round in the circles of time. But I am not bound by this vast work of creation. I am and I watch the drama of works. I watch and in its work of creation nature brings forth all that moves and moves not: and thus the revolutions of the world go round. (p. 80f.)

The *Gītā* hovers on the edges of three levels of thought. Firstly, it accommodates and utilises the level of anthropomorphic traditional theistic speech (*Saguna Brahman*), as, for example in the verbs taken from common life in the above quotation (such as ‘rest’ and ‘watch’). Secondly, it uses that conventional speech to suggest a more abstract, more transcendent level. In the above quotation, ‘invisible Being’ suggests the level of pure Being, stripped of qualification (*Nirguna Brahman*). Yet it still seems to move at the level of some Eternal Substance (‘Being’). And then, given our tendential reading of our great authors and traditions, one may think that the *Gītā* hovers on the edge where substantialising thought, even the purest and most rarefied and sublime (‘The Absolute’, ‘Being’ as such), peters out in an even deeper (non-)level, (non-)dimension, of non-substantialist Absoluteness.

□ Sankara

I now turn from mystical poetry, full of hidden meanings, to metaphysical systematisation, striving to be clear and coherent. That next stage, the culmination really of this growing system of thought, came in the period between 8th century and 9th century CE with Sankara – neither just rational-technical philosopher, nor merely pious devotee, nor religious propagandist, but one of the greatest representatives of the type ‘metaphysical mystic’ of all time.

Sankara (c. 788-820 CE) used very much the hermeneutic proposed here, namely a tendential reading (his own) of past and present. According to some, he even forced his inherited Vedantic texts into the mould of his own philosophy. Nevertheless, there is no denying his significance as one of the greatest thinkers of India, in spite of living, according to legend, for 32 years only.

Our leading question in this chapter is: How, if at all, can or does Absoluteness be, or become, Cosmos? How is this change – if it is a ‘change’ – possible, conceivable, explicable? In Sankara’s inherited Sanskrit apparatus: What is the relationship between *Nirguna Brahman* (‘Brahman-without-attributes’), *Saguna Brahman* (‘Brahman-with-attributes’) and the external world (*loka*)?

Of course, chronologically, between the *Gītā* and Sankara lies the massive edifice of Mahāyāna Buddhism. Sankara undoubtedly worked through Mahāyāna via his inspiration, Gaudapāda, in developing his thought. We do not have the space to enter into the historical negotiation process that may have taken place between Mahāyāna Buddhism and Advaita Vedanta. Let me rather just stay with a schematic summary of the essence of Sankara's thought regarding Absoluteness as Origin (cf. inter alia Dasgupta 1975 [1922]:406–494; Grant 2000:148–163; Ramaiah 1982).

To this great MM scholar, this explosion of genius in a brief life of 32 years, Brahman (the Absolute) is and remains eternally its own pure, unchanging and indiluted Self; universal and undifferentiated into particulars; and unrelated to anything outside itself. It eternally 'is' Itself. And all things of everyday experience 'are' also It, and nothing else. There is nothing else than Brahman to start with, and It does not become anything else. In our terminology, it seems that there is no Origin in the sense of absolute Novelty/Creativity. Nothing new (not to mention something new 'out of nothing') happens. There is only eternal self-perpetuating Being. So what then about the world that people experience in their everyday lives? Where does it come from? What is its reality value and status?

Brahman is the One Substance, and the One Self (*Atman*) of all. From the standpoint of the highest, ultimate truth, the plurality and reality of things, as experienced in everyday waking life, become apparent as the assumption and construction of ignorance. From that highest point of view, not only the universe as an existing reality and the multiplicity of things making up the universe, but the very ignorance, assuming the universe to be such, is a delusion itself, and non-existent. In truth, there is no ignorance, and there is no crossing from ignorance to true knowledge. True enlightenment does not destroy ignorance, but reveals that it never existed. Sankara did not see the empirical world as the mere figment of our imagination (like the son of a barren woman, to use an example of the time). What was at stake for him, was not the empirical reality of that world (he accepted that), but its ultimate status and value. It is real up to a point and for all practical purposes, but then it disappears, so to speak, into the Absolute. It is an appearance only, not of something *e/se*, but of its own deepest essence.

Nothing has any reality except as the Absolute (Brahman). That is known by revelation in the *shruti* and by critical reflection, that is, by intuition and speculation, but in the final analysis, by negation. Ultimacy has no attributes, but the ascription of such attributes, unreal as they are, may serve a provisional, useful purpose, namely somehow to approximate Ultimate Truth – but then they have to be dismantled. The highest provisional affirmation ascribes to ineffable Brahman the characteristics of Being, Truth and Bliss. Yet the wider context for Sankara remains the firm abolishment of all finite limitations and conceptions of the Absolute. In Sankara's view, Brahman does not become Cosmos as something else, it does not become at all. From the highest

standpoint, 'Cosmos' 'is' nothing but Brahman. In Brahman there is no Potentiality, nor Novelty/Creativity. Strictly speaking, there is no End and no Origination. In Sankara's Absolute, nothing happens.

Sankara's writing could be seen to hover on the threshold of Absoluteness, and implies, one may think, Absoluteness in the most radical sense of the word – to which, provisionally, for therapeutic purposes, the following features may be attributed in order to accommodate the searching soul: 'being', 'truth', 'bliss', 'one', 'substance', 'origin' and others (some used by Sankara himself and some not). So he might not have objected too strongly to 'Potentiality' and 'Novelty' either – as long we know that these are (hopefully) useful constructions. Even his *Atman* and *Brahman* point away from themselves into a deeper abyss. It seems that most receivers of Sankara's message hold him to the constructive monistic side of his mysticism. It is possible that Sankara himself gave them grounds to do so.

Is even speaking in the manner of Sankara, not a manner of speaking that, too, must in the end after recognising its own constructedness, its being a kind of *Saguna* construction, subside into absolute silence? Here things get quite difficult, because Sankara did believe that the overcoming of ignorance was achieved in a direct (in his words 'non-indirect') experience of Brahman in the state of *samadhi* (contemplative absorption). Did Sankara not underestimate the power and effect of his own speculative genius (constructing the Absolute 'according to Sankara')? If that is granted, could he not have inserted more dynamism and vitality in his notion (yes, *his* notion) of the Absolute? That brings us to a second and related problematic aspect.

An issue is Sankara's apparent lack of appreciation for Cosmos. Though he did not outrightly deny the reality of Cosmos, he underplayed its status and significance. In his philosophical treatise *Aparoksanubhuti* ('direct cognition/self-realisation') he explains his central idea with great clarity. 'I', the empirical self, am in truth the Self (*Atman*), which is *Brahman* (Vimuktananda 1982):

I (that is the Self) am verily Brahman, being equanimous, quiescent and by nature absolute Existence, Knowledge and Bliss [...] I am without any change, without any form, free from all blemish and decay [...] I am without any attribute or activity, I am eternal, ever free and imperishable [...] I am free from all impurity, I am immovable, unlimited, holy, undecaying and immortal [...]. (pp. 16-17)

This unity of *Brahman* and *Atman*, he illustrates with a number of enlightening analogies (Vimuktananda 1982):

Just as a thing made of gold ever has the nature of gold, so also a being born of Brahman has always the nature of Brahman [...] Just as earth is described as a jar, gold as an ear-ring and a nacre as silver, so is Brahman described as Jiva [...]. (pp. 30, 35)

It seems that Sankara brilliantly and rightly emphasises that the earring is 'nothing else' but gold. That is a most profound idea. Could he not have marvelled somewhat more at the beauty of the earring as a little object in its own relative right? Could he not have dwelt more on the many beautiful individual earrings,

on all the multitude of individual things made of gold? Could he not have said with more emphasis and joy that the precious goldness of the gold takes unique, concrete shape in *this particular* earring? In addition, would that not imply that the gold itself graciously allows its own goldness to be divided into a manyness, without losing any of its essential goldness – in fact, gaining a lot of significance in this Potentiality and Novelty – without sacrificing or compromising its goldness one bit? Does Cosmos not deserve more significance and love? Does Absoluteness not allow Cosmos to be? Also, does that not have immense implications for Absoluteness itself – such as that something happens on Absolute Horizon, and that from that Horizon many things emerge, in a sense distinct from Absoluteness, but not different? Could he not perhaps have said that *Nirguna Brahman* becomes *Saguna Brahman* and the world, that this event is not a loss but a gain, and that to think along such lines is not falsehood and ignorance, but truth and understanding? ‘Gold is earring’ is just as true and significant as ‘earring is gold’.

Wanting to forge Sankara’s ‘gold’ into an individual, concrete thing of beauty, I borrowed freely from Sankara’s near-contemporary Chinese Buddhist, Hua-yen scholar Fa-tsang, who also played with gold (cf. Krüger 2007:115,-136). So let me move into Buddhism straight away.

■ Buddhism

The argument of this chapter has been cumulative. This perspective on Buddhism will therefore carry further aspects of the argument dealt with in other contexts above.

Throughout its formative periods, Buddhist MM cosmology reflected the physical cosmology – the science and mathematics – dominant in each of those periods. Yet Buddhist cosmology also used and adapted such cosmologies for its own purposes. That means that Buddhist cosmology was not static, but changed over time. As little as, for example, the presupposed and implied cosmologies of the biblical book of Genesis, or Plato are normative for today, just as little are the various cosmologies of Buddhism normative now. What is required today is a tendential interpretation that would, in our critical-appreciative appropriation, disentangle ‘form’ and ‘intention’ and let go of aspects of both as may be demanded by our integrity for today and tomorrow. In contemporary Buddhism, this is as much an issue as in Judaism and Christianity today. For the observer, keen to learn where to find wisdom, this is no easy matter either. Must we take the six days of biblical Creation literally? How would Jews and Christians be able to separate form from content? Very much the same problem arises with regard to Buddhism. Can one have the living tortoise *and* remove its encasing shell? That is the hermeneutical question.

Two tendencies seem to carry the day in contemporary (i.e. modernised westernised) Buddhism. The first is simply to repeat the ancient cosmological ideas as normative for today. This amounts to Buddhist fundamentalism. The second

tendency, equally uncritical, is simply to skip the awkward part and to end up with a shallow version of sellable Buddhism, reduced to being personally successful peaceful and calm (McMindfulness). Both are ahistorical positions. The third, the difficult but necessary task, would be to enter into the separation the fluid yolk of enduring MM message and the white of dated cosmology contained in the same brittle shell, and to explore the promising possibility of a mutual enrichment of Buddhist MM intuition and contemporary science. That is the road favoured in this exploration. In the present context I am not primarily interested in Buddhist cosmologies and cosmogonies. Here I am interested in the deep functions and features of reality – in the most basic ontosophical patterns underlying the Buddhist cosmologies, specifically in the set of views related to Origin, as expression of Unground.

□ Early Buddhism

How is Original knowledge arrived at, according to the Buddha (or early Buddhism)? (As with Jesus, revered as the Christ, history cannot clearly establish the distinction between the historical figure of Siddhattha Gotama, revered as the Buddha, and the teaching of the early community.)

The Buddha and his early followers (cf. Bodhi 1978; Dharmasiri 1974; Jayatilleke 1980 [1963]) rejected speculation (as found in Plato) as well as divine revelation (as found in the Abrahamic religions) as sources of knowledge concerning the deep structure of the world. The only way to Original Knowledge, Knowledge of Origin, if possible, could be through personal insight, based in personal experience. This kind of ‘higher knowledge’, this final insight into the Nature of things is – together with moral purity and meditative or contemplative experience – an aspect of personal purification. It may be termed ‘empirical’ knowledge, but with the qualification that it was extended to lengths beyond the limits of our present associations with the term ‘empirical’. It included extrasensory intuitive perception, understood to penetrate into dimensions of reality beyond the abilities of common understanding, based on limited sensory abilities. This avenue to Original truth was in principle open to all, and the implication was that advanced people should gain their own share of such understanding. Notwithstanding, the fact was that for most lay Buddhists the end result, in psychological terms, probably did not differ that much from faith/belief in the Abrahamic religions: acceptance of superior authority – not necessarily in the sense of institutional power, but at least in the sense of mental, spiritual superiority. While the Buddha based his understanding and his truth on different grounds than Plato did, there was in principle the possibility, even necessity, of checking things out for oneself, overcoming mere faith/belief. The intention was always that initial faith/belief would mature into enlightened insight. Permanent submission (even in love) to superior, divine power was never expected.

Given his antispeculative stance, there were indeed certain questions concerning the deeper nature of the world that the Buddha passed by as

unanswerable. He refused to be drawn into speculative questions such as whether (with reference to temporal duration) the world was everlasting or not, and whether (with reference to spatial extension) the world was finite or infinite. The Buddha compared answers to such questions to the construction of an ascending staircase leading nowhere. Yet, not only are these questions in our present time of great interest to scientific cosmology, but they also touch on cosmosophical themes.

The Buddha also refused to accept answers to questions on the basis of some superhuman, supernatural, divine revelation. Ultimate insight was a wholly natural thing. Such questions needed to be answered based on personal experience, or not be answered at all. At a later stage in early Buddhism, the Buddha was deemed 'omniscient'; initially, he presented himself as an agnostic pragmatist: he was just not interested in certain matters, regarding them as not being, strictly speaking, of any value with a view to human happiness. As we saw earlier, the monotheistic religions were eager to provide revealed answers to such questions, and Plato tried his mythopoetic hand at answers as well.

Yet may there not be a problem here? The Buddha's message of human deliverance (as contained categorically in the Four Noble Truths) did seem to rest on certain cosmological, ontological assumptions, and to have had certain cosmological, ontological implications. How? Well, his absolute peak experience during the night of his enlightenment did seem to have such associations, regarded in addition, as essential to his core MM teaching. Firstly, he remembered his own many former existences; secondly, he saw exactly how karma works, as part of an endless round of rebirth; thirdly, he saw at first-hand the primary role of desire for existence as such and of sensuous desire in particular, in the tainting of human life. All three imply an ontology and cosmology of an endless cyclical existence – neither revealed supernaturally nor postulated speculatively, but seen and verified without a shadow of uncertainty. Is it just a coincidence that this view in broad terms was also part of the fabric of the Vedantic culture of the time, of which he was a child and in which he was brought up? His truly original contribution of non-substantiality (*anattā*), was his unique message of salvation. Yet, does the whole construction not make a certain culturally embedded and transmitted ontology and cosmology at least partly and indirectly, but in a real sense, normative? For a contemporary appropriation of ancient Buddhism, these are important hermeneutical questions to answer.

The nirvana experience, vastly elaborated in the Buddha's own teaching and in that of his early followers, particularly in the *Abhidhamma*, contains in essence the whole of early Buddhist ontosophy. It may be possible to argue that he merely accepted Vedantic views as part of the make-up of his listeners, and adjusted his message to suit the existing worldview of his Indian audience. Yet the Buddha seemed to have claimed that he personally 'saw' the round of eternal rebirths in the eternal process of karmic *samsāra* as indubitable Truth.

That which early Buddhism claimed that the Buddha experienced directly as a result of his final insight, and what early Buddhism developed in cosmological speculation, are hardly separable. It was an impressive integration of more enduring metaphysical mysticism and the more time-bound science of *then*. In later stages of Buddhism the integration found other, different expressions (Kloetzli 2007 [1983]). Also, any attempt at integration *today* would have to find its own expression, with reference to contemporary scientific cosmology. That will be attempted from Chapter 7 onwards.

There is an aspect of the Buddha's or early Buddhism's central mystical message concerning the Origin, the basic structure of things with which the approach attempted in these reflections does not fit well. Buddhism, at least early Buddhism and subsequent Theravāda Buddhism, always came down rather heavily on the side of End. It never rejoiced in Origin. Coming into being, the continuation in endless cycles of rebirth and suffering was surrounded by misgivings. In the admittedly rather extreme formulation of contemporary Theravāda master, Mahathera Nārada, speaking of the aspirant to sainthood (Nārada 1980):

All dissolving things are fearful [...] The whole world appears to him like a pit of burning embers, a source of danger. Subsequently he reflects on the wretchedness and vanity [...] of the fearful and deluded world, and develops a feeling of disgust [...], followed by a strong will for deliverance from it [...]. (p. 429)

Must we accept that the Buddha claimed to have verified views such as the ones mentioned above, with their world-rejecting implications and all? Alternatively, did he work with the materials that he had at hand, not necessarily giving it the measure of finality that it received at the hands of some of his scholasticising followers? It seems impossible to come to definite historical conclusions here. Difficult as it may be to unscramble the mix of the cosmology of the Buddha's time and an MM understanding somehow transcending that, this seeker – listening to him in a vastly different cultural setting – nevertheless prefers to follow that route.

□ Mahāyāna

Mahāyāna (which gradually became a markedly distinctive trend within Buddhism over a few centuries and started to flourish from the 1st century CE onwards) was also a synthesis of a unique philosophy of human salvation and certain cosmological and ontological presuppositions of the time, distinct from those supporting and merging with the teaching of early Buddhism (Kloetzli 2007 [1983]:51ff.). From the Indian Mahāyāna texts, one may glean an understanding of their basic understanding of the Original features of reality.

As in early Buddhism, the ideal remains to be liberated from the world. Yet, this liberation receives a far more positive twist, in that the world becomes the locus of benevolent, compassionate service to all beings, and the cycle of

rebirth becomes a means to ensure precisely that. Yet a certain reserve remains dominant. Not only were Indian Buddhists not really interested in history (including natural history: the way in which the empirically-given universe may have come into being and may have unfolded in time), they were essentially not interested in the world (Cosmos) as such. Myths took precedence over historical facts. Cosmology merely served a soteriological function: it was background to the saving foreground of salvation. A vast number of mythological, supra-mundane personages (divine Buddhas and Bodhisattvas) populated the higher reaches of reality, but they did not feature in attempts to account for the Origin of things. Buddhists always placed a strong emphasis on what is termed 'Absoluteness' here, distinguished from active gods, operative at a lower level. The world as it is remained a domain overcast by shadows. Its Origin and existence were not topics of wonder, joy and affirmation.

As in the teaching of the Buddha, Indian Mahāyāna (particularly as worked out in the Mādhyamika philosophy) retained a strong dialectical critique of human knowledge as, ultimately, constructions trapped in self-contradictions, and therefore completely unreliable as source of true knowledge concerning Origin, yet paradoxically potentially useful with a view to the attainment of Original truth. Salvation comes via wisdom and insight (*jñāna*) in the true nature of human existence, against the backdrop of certain cosmological views of the period, which were utilised as scaffolding for the soteriological message of those Indian Mahāyānists. Mahāyāna continued, and emphasised strongly, the idea that the human being in its true Origin essentially and ultimately shares in the good Buddha nature. Yet overall, the process of the emergence of Cosmos from Absoluteness was not a central topic of interest.

The acosmism and the emphasis on insight as means of liberation place Indian Mahāyāna quite close to Gnosticism, to a degree that mutual borrowing cannot be ruled out (Conze 1967:651-667). Apart from direct mutual borrowing, Conze allows for the consideration of the following three possibilities:

- (1) Joint historical development in a larger shared Asian-European context.
- (2) Parallel development as a basic type of response, triggered independently by similar sets of conditions, such as social alienation.
- (3) A common root in a *philosophia perennis*, going back to prehistoric times before the division and dispersion of humanity on various continents.

The main difference was that Indian Mahāyāna Buddhism, unlike Gnosticism, did not indulge in speculative mythologising about events prior to the world, such as a tragic fall into divine depths (Conze 1967:661f.).

Indian Yogācāra thought developed the idea of Buddhahood, Absoluteness, as womb (*Tathāgata-garbha*) (cf. Williams 1989:96-115). A related concept was *ālaya-vijñāna* ('storehouse consciousness'). It is comparable to a repository for seeds: everything people think, say and do enters into it and leaves its traces there - from where, in a remarkable continuity, corresponding states of

affairs sprout. This is how they explained the workings of karma: not substance, but emptiness – and yet continuity and new beginning. With notions such as these, Yogācāra theorists of mysticism did not make life easy for themselves. How can one maintain the ideas of absolute emptiness and potentiality at the same time? That is the problem addressed in this attempt too. Does ‘potentiality’ not imply a continuous ‘something’? This was the issue where the two sub-schools of Mādhyamika went separate ways: whereas the Prasāngika school uncompromisingly rejected all conceptual thinking, the Svātrāntika school allowed more space for speaking positively and adopting a position – relative as such a position might have been acknowledged to be. Perhaps we can only postulate both simultaneously: Horizon is the End of things and the Origin of things with, somehow, between the two, a measure of continuity.

Indian Yogācāra did not cover the cosmological dimension of the emergence of things from Absoluteness explicitly – that is, it did not really envision concrete Cosmos as coming forth from Absoluteness. Such a turn towards the real world – with dewdrops reflecting moonlight, frogs plopping into water and pebbles striking bamboo plants – all brimming with beauty in their very fragility, was taken in East Asian Buddhism. This positive turn towards the world opens a door, not only to the empirical sciences, but also to nature as an object of curiosity, and one which fills with wonder. Here the Buddhist sense of emptiness is dialectically unified with fullness. In our terms, every item in the concrete world, large and small, derives ultimate value from its being part of a vast nexus, stretching into Infinitude and Eternity, and reflecting – in a paradoxical way of impossible possibility – Absoluteness. The view of Origin put forward here resonates with this drift of the Buddhist message.

■ §23 Further provisional conclusions

This chapter was a particularly long trek on our expedition. The terrain was difficult and varied. It is with relief that we can rest in this clearing on this plateau, before negotiating the winding descent. Looking back, I still believe the direction set out on in our own, contemporary context, is the true north.

The central mysteries encountered on this trek concerned the relationship between Unground as Origin and Cosmos, and the relationship between Unground, Cosmos and evil. After pausing with a few of the great ones, those mysteries remain mysteries. I find that they may be ‘explained’ up to a point in the sense of being made clearer, plainer, *as mysteries*, but not in the sense of being accounted for – particularly not by being deduced from one or more other, higher principles which would make them appear to be evident or necessary, or by being made evident scientifically.

Looking back, it seems that while the Hellenic, Near Eastern-Western and Eastern blocs always retained certain typical culturally conditioned structures,

they may be channelled to flow in the same direction, and to enter the same ocean. Likewise, the mystics that we visited each remains uniquely individual, and yet they can be brought into harmony. The differences are in emphasis, not in tendential essence.

In brief: the dominant Near Eastern-Western voices (Judaism, Christianity and Islam; Platonism less so; Gnosticism not at all) rightly tend to affirm Cosmos, but do not penetrate to the level of radical Absoluteness to the degree that the Eastern voices do, even though they tend in the same direction. Indian religions (we looked at Taoism, Hinduism and Buddhism), show a profound interest in Absoluteness. On the negative side, they tend to look down on Cosmos. Closest to an optimal balance of both strengths are the systems of East Asia, such as Taoism and Chinese, Japanese and Korean Buddhism grafted on that stock.

As far as Original knowledge is concerned, it seems that four major avenues announcing themselves in this chapter – revelation, speculation, experience and imagination – deserve attention, but also qualification:

- ‘revelation’, not in a sense presupposing two separate ontological levels (natural and supernatural) and not claiming to present absolute and exclusive truth, but in the sense of Unground freely opening itself up as a loving gift to a grateful recipient;
- ‘speculation’, in the sense of the ability of human consciousness, deeply rooted in a *pars pro toto* identity with Unground, actively to investigate, postulate and try out experiments of thought, without claiming absolute and exclusive truth for its provisional outcomes;
- ‘experience’, in the sense of personal experience and vision, direct intuitive access to the Original depth of the world, likewise without claiming absolute and exclusive truth for its own discoveries;
- ‘imagination’, in the sense of creative composition, akin to works of art, opening new ways of thinking.

Part Two

Eternity

Principles

■ §24 The function of the dimension of Eternity

In the unfinishable human search for radical and integral meaning, some kinds of ideas are necessary, some unnecessary; some useful, some useless; some possible, some impossible. Given the nature of the world and of human beings, final knowledge concerning the ultimate nature of Cosmos is impossible, and yet ideas concerning that dimension are necessary and useful. Humans find themselves in a position of being damned if they do entertain such ideas and damned if they do not. Their tools are limited: observation, experience, generalisation, speculation, imagination, intuition, tradition. That is about it. All of this places huge constraints on the telling of Tall Tales about Cosmos. Engaging in the activity of finding Horizon has a certain inevitability and a relative validity about it.

■ Tall Tales

The presently dominant Tall Tale about Cosmos is a mechanistic one. Here we are exploring an alternative analogy with antecedents in history – that of Cosmos as a body: material, corporeal, alive and conscious; born, growing,

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decaying and dying in an ongoing process; emerging from and receding onto Absolute Horizon. From the innermost space of our imagined temple, we are now entering its inner courtyard: Unground unfolds as Eternity, and Eternity unfolds as Infinitude, and Infinitude unfolds as Cosmos. We are edging closer to the 10 000 things of the world of the senses.

Why do we not simply fall back on the old myth becoming dogma of a jealously loving God creating everything out of nothing in six days? The reason is that this does not solve the mystery, but clothes it in mythopoetic words. Taken as a myth in the sense of beautiful, old, mystically inclined poetry, it is monumentally impressive. However, it invites the exploration of other possibilities, perhaps better alignable with our experience of today. Another option is just to fall back on the materialistic theory: the universe is just matter fortuitously exploding onto the scene and rearranging itself through time. That too, requires an act of swallowing, enforced by the cultural conditions of today. In addition, it does not measure up to the requirements of the mystic taste. What then, about just postulating a massive identity of Being through all eternity? This also seems to miss a few nuances: the beauty and wonder of becoming, the poignant impermanence and ending of all things. We have reason to explore an alternative route, one exploring the direction of evasive Horizon.

Why not just abandon the whole thing? In a sense, I have already, of course. We are not embarking on a journey, guaranteed to reach a fixed, predestined, safe harbour. We are only entering some distance into a vast ocean. Is that not what makes up the noble fragility of being human in this vast, dangerous world? So let us row quietly in our bobbing little boat among the high waves close to the rocky beach.

Let us therefore attempt to uncover a number of Principles with the status of undetermined potentiality, operative in the structure and workings of Cosmos. If subjected to a naïvely realist or critical realist test of correspondence with some objectively real state of affairs, they fail. Such tests have their value in the field of fact and science. All the same, these Principles may be useful fictions, to be discarded like the raft that the Buddha refers to, once they have served their function to orientate us on how to exist well within our Horizon. The Principles of Eternity are not 'fact'; they are speculative suppositions, 'imagining' supposing 'fact', behind 'fact', contextualising 'fact' – and in that sense reconcilable with 'fact'.

In spite of the awe that these Principles inspire, they are not thought of or presented as purposive, intelligent divine or semi divine beings – even if it is understandable that people in the past have personified them and ascribed all kinds of anthropomorphic features to them, and may continue to do so today. I wish to stand clear of mythological anthropomorphisms in the sense of Gnostic *aeons* or other kinds of living beings such as angels or spirits. Anthropomorphic-mythological expression may be a magnificent vehicle to

carry its cargo, but only as long as the distinction between vehicle and cargo is maintained. We may have the wine in no other way than in a variety of vessels of clay, but the vessels are of clay, and are not the real treasure.

These nine Principles are the roots, the 'DNA', of religion as a homoversal need, and of the historical religions and metaphysical systems produced in history. The historical religions usually latch onto one or more of these Principles and attach an overriding quality to them, as will be indicated in chapters to follow.

They have an in-between status in the margin of our understanding, beyond our firm reach but somehow affecting us. They are useful boundary concepts, 'functions' rather than 'entities', 'possibilities' rather than 'realities'. These regulative categories are not part of Absoluteness, for Absoluteness 'is' not and has no parts. They just emerge in and from Absolute Horizon and are not experienceable parts of empirical Cosmos itself. They are enabling capacities – eventually taking on empirical forms, structures, organs, in Cosmos itself. Cosmos is an Arche-phany, and these regulative Principles are essential underpinnings of the world.

Thus, I shall refer to them not in the form of nouns ('Will', and so on) but in the form of gerunds ('Willing', and so on). Nouns suggest substantive entities. Gerunds, noun-verbs, hover ambivalently on the edges of verbs, are not quite nouns (denoting 'things') yet. Therefore, the sometimes awkward-sounding titles of the following chapters are not designed to be willfully deviant. These Principles are fleeting primordial original sparks, like flashes of lightning between impenetrably deep space and Earth in the dark clouds of a midnight storm, discharging tremendous energy and light and of great significance for Earth and life on it. Cosmos is not there yet, and yet these nine lightning bolts, unleashing energy, mark the beginning of 'otherness' in the depth of Unground itself.

In End Cosmos disappears; in Origin Cosmos appears, reappears. That 're-' is important: it moves between unbroken identity and utter annihilation; it signifies some continuity. We seek a route between the first two, narrow as it may be. In other words, we are exploring the Buddhist notion of continuity as an alternative to both identity and nihility, in the cosmological, cultural context of today.

We can only speak in anthropomorphic terms of that presupposed dimension. We have no other measure than ourselves, but we must know that we do it and allow it to perish under the guillotine of End. For that same reason, they are not presented as *the* Principles. The scheme makes no claim to finality or exclusivity.

■ the dynamics of the Principles

Eternity is seen as a system of structuring Principles, creating the possibility for Cosmos to be (see the diagram in Ch. 3). Even if Life and Consciousness

emerged quite recently into the bright daylight of the history of Cosmos they were in principle possibilities, even latent potentialities, even implicit eventings from the very beginning of Cosmos – and emerging from Horizon. Wishing to avoid the pitfalls of dualistic creationism and monistic identity, the set of Principles are intended to clarify the dynamics of that non-dualistic, non-monistic emergence.

The manner in which these constituting elements are presented here, is quite linear. Yet it is not a matter of temporal succession, but of essential conditionalistic relationships.

There is no historical or ontological subordination among the three sets of Principles. These nine stand each for all. They are neither separate nor identical. All are timelessly co-emergent and co-extensive. They are all mutually co-constitutive, with each element in each triad presupposing the other two elements, and each triad in turn presupposing the other two triads.

The three sets of three are not mutually exclusive pigeonholes into which reality is fitted. Each of the three clusters tells the same story three times over in complementary perspectives. Each and all nine of them simultaneously and together are taken to provide a significant perspective on Cosmos as a whole and on every one of the things making up Cosmos.

In wisdom, the human being is aware that it has no existence separate from Cosmos and from Unground, and that it is saturated with Absoluteness. In this final reconciliation, it realises that Absoluteness is in fact no Other. That is the tendention inherent in all religion and all MM, the drift of all the mythical accounts of revelation and enlightenment, the ultimate message of all burning bushes and *bodhi* trees.

The dynamic of the manifestation from Unground seems to be associated with some inadequacy, non-perfection, some necessity to achieve what is not there yet. Furthermore, it appears that in the process of Cosmo-genesis from Horizon, there is contrariness, opposition, even conflict and struggle. In addition, there may be a measure of imbalance among the Principles. Add to that the fact that the human being does not exactly appear to exist in a kind of pre-established harmony with Cosmos and Unground, and does not seem to realise its emptiness of substance. All of these together – the dynamics taking place on Horizon, in the Principles of Eternity, the agonising reality of Cosmos, the painful situation of human beings and their warped perspectives – seem to add up to, or constitute, what is called 'evil'. There is no point in denying evil, neither in presenting it as the outcome of a specific act of human sin (disobedience), nor in presenting it as merely a subjective human illusion that will disappear if we just open our eyes; also not in picturing it in terms of an eternal dualism, irreconcilably opposing good and evil. Evil is not completely non-existent, existing merely in the eye of the human beholder. If that were the case, the warped perspective would have to be explained anyway: Why do

humans see the world so incorrectly? There seems to be an element of non-alignment in the developing bigger scheme of things. The process of the manifestation from Horizon implies a movement towards a state that is not there yet. The process itself does not seem to proceed smoothly. It has its lack of adjustments. It has its possible alternatives.

■ §25 Paintings of Dawn

Let me set up camp here and pitch my tent in the company of the caravan of pilgrims – a caravan made up of wayfarers from all quarters of the world, all epochs of history, merging and mingling with a multitude of individual motivations – all searching after the same destiny, without necessarily realising that they are doing it.

This book is not a chronological history. If ventured upon, a comprehensive history would realise the complexity of the historical forces in the unfolding story of MM. I do not adhere to a ‘great man’ model in religious or MM history, reducing complexities to single events. Certainly, there were and are most remarkable personalities, but they should always be understood as interacting with wide-ranging historical forces preceding and surrounding them. The Buddha was perhaps the greatest personality in Indian history, but he was also the first one to say that every singular event – including himself – is merely an entangled, disentangling knot of multiconditionality; the history of Western civilisation is much more than a series of footnotes to Plato, or the Christ.

To what extent, and how, did those who have preceded us linger on the thin membrane between non-being and being? How did they paint the emergence of things in the glimmer of Dawn, with faint silhouettes becoming clear objects? Was it just a creationist ‘Fiat!’ or a physicalist ‘Bang!’ to them? In previous chapters, this has already received some attention. We stood before Plato’s *chora*, *tithene* (‘nurse’) and *upodoche* (‘receiver’), Sankara’s eternal *Brahman-Atman*, and Ibn Arabi’s *fiyd*. However, we are not ready to leave yet. In the orientations below, we shall explore the possibility of a linkage between Cosmos and a Horizon of becoming.

■ the Upanishadic philosophy and its offshoots

Between the 7th and 4th centuries BCE, thoughtful minds in India increasingly drifted towards the notions of eternal unity, identity and substance. Casting around for words, those Upanishadic philosophers called the eternal substance *Brahman*. Myth was mixed with philosophy, personal designations of Ultimate Reality with impersonal ones. Peering into this darkness, *how* does the world of the many changing, visible forms (*Maya*) emerge – if at all – from the eternal formless One? The term *Saguna Brahman* (‘Brahman with attributes’) was an

attempt to bridge this gap. Did something happen to Brahman itself: from being *Nirguna* ('without attributes') taking on attributes, establishing a link with the phenomenal world? Yet, even *Nirguna Brahman* is eternal Substance. Does this view, majestic as it is, explain the mystery of there being an empirical Cosmos? Sometimes these great unknown visionary poets fell back on myth – for example a golden egg emerging from the eternal ocean in the great dawn, becoming the Creator God (Brahma), who then created the world. Can anything 'happen' or 'change' in Eternal Being? Do such temporal categories hint at an eternal series of layers? All such efforts were more of an awestruck contemplation of an eternal mystery than a theoretical explanation.

In Upanishadic MM, the balance between Brahman and Maya (in our terms, Unground and Cosmos) still allowed for a relative, derivative becoming or reality of the latter. In later Vedantic teaching the pendulum, oscillating in its very nature, swung towards the unchanging nature of Brahman, and hence the illusion-like nature, the non-becoming, of the world.

Of interest from the perspective of this orientation is the Upanishadic teaching of *pralaya*. In a great cyclical movement, the world periodically dissolves and comes into being again, is destroyed and recreated. The question of weighting returns: how utter and final is the destruction, how novel the new origin? In addition, how does the novel emanate – by which process or mechanism?

In early and classical *Samkhya* (an orthodox school) (Larson 1969), there were two kinds of eternal Being: *prakriti* (matter) and *purusha* (beginningless, self-sufficient soul). In a sophisticated theory of the coming into being of the empirical world, these two become linked to each other and together they constitute the world of the senses. At the time of *pralaya*, the world returns to unmanifest *prakriti*; at the time of creation, the forms become manifest from *prakriti* again through the activating presence of *purusha*. In this process of becoming, the *purusha* remains alien, essentially detached from matter, in an eternal dualism. They do not take the step further back into radically empty Absoluteness, and therefore their Origin is not stupendously novel. The *Purva-Mimamsa* system (another early orthodox school) adhered to a view that this universe has existed as it is from eternity, and that the world cannot absolutely be dissolved, and therefore cannot originate. Becoming is no startling mystery.

Contemporary with Upanishadic MM (although not an orthodox variation of it), *Jainism* too, held a doctrine of *pralaya*. In its version, the universe is also eternal. It only goes through extended periods of decline and renovation. They did not share our problem: the dynamics of becoming in a strong sense. Their renovation was change of an eternal substance, not radical origin.

In extensions of Upanishadic MM in later centuries, various emphases continued to be placed. In the standard interpretation of *Sankara's* system of Advaita Vedanta, the phenomenal world is foam, a mirage, a dream, a matter

of mistaken Identity. He does not appear to have been particularly interested in how the foam appears, or in its exact texture. All his attention was focused on the eternity of Brahman. It was not the case that Sankara simply failed to elucidate the appearance of the world. He did not try to elucidate it. He was not fascinated by the bubbles of surface froth, but by the deep, eternal ocean of Being on which they foam. The mystery is shifted a step back: how is the eternal existence of Brahman conceivable?

In the non-dualism (*Visistadvaita*) of *Rāmānuja* (c. 1040–1137 CE), the reality of the differentiated many is strongly affirmed. God remains eternally unchanged. *Pralaya* is merely an interruption. God merely suspends the Cosmic process for a while. The universe as the cyclical process of *pralaya* and relatively new creation alternating with each other is the self-expression of the Absolute. In *pralaya* the world is in a state of latency; creation is the actualisation of possibility. The mystery of Origin looms large.

Therefore, Indian MM kept circling the twin stars of nothingness and being, change and eternalism, annihilation and origination, in forms too many, too subtle and too varied to be reviewed here. The overall dominant tendency in the original Upanishadic period was towards idealistic non-dualism, implying not creation of something from nothing by someone, but appearance of what is eternally there. The following contemporary quotation concentrates that sweep of thought (Ranganathananda 1980 [1968]):

The invisible (Brahman) is the Full; the visible (the world), too, is the Full. From the Full (Brahman), the Full (the visible universe) has come. The Full (Brahman) remains the same, even after the Full (the visible universe) has come out of the Full (Brahman). (p. 63)

That contains the central focus of Upanishadic MM awe and perplexity. In the modern period, nobody articulated the ancient intuition with more clarity than Vivekananda a century ago. The world is not ‘created’, and certainly not ‘out of nothing’. Brahman (Vivekananda 1964 [1907]:123), ‘is eternal, eternally pure, eternally awake, the almighty, the all-knowing, the all-merciful, the omnipresent, the formless, the partless.’

This characterisation does not appear as irreconcilable with what the monotheistic religions in their higher reaches, influenced by Neoplatonism, said about ‘God’.

In the schools mentioned above the problem of the space referred to here as ‘Eternity’ opens up. Regardless of whether there are two eternal principles (such as the interplay of consciousness and matter in Samkhya) or one (such as in Rāmānuja), the problem of the dynamics of the transitions (the successive stages or hierarchical levels) in the process of ‘becoming’ (or in the gradation in being) invite pondering. That also applies to what Vivekananda, in the case of Advaita Vedanta, referred to as the ‘projection’ of the world from Brahman. What happens between the eternal ‘is’ and the ‘projection’, and also, in the ‘projection’?

■ the Buddha

The Buddha was also a child of the Upanishadic age. His contribution was to push the notion of Absoluteness further back than was the case in the Upanishadic world. Not only the traditional god Brahma but eternal Brahman Itself, was emptied of substance.

The Buddha did not address the in-between dimension investigated here directly and in the exact context or terms interesting us, but his teaching is interpreted as implying the direction taken here. His teaching of meditation tracked a psychological or epistemological route: it is the journey from the domain of external Cosmos to the domain of Absoluteness. Could that journey of psychological inwardness imply a deeper cosmological dimension? Could the subjective journey towards and into Absoluteness not be a journey back, a return? May there, preceding it and presupposing it in the great scheme of things, be another journey: Absoluteness Becoming Cosmos?

There is the journey of human subjectivity, the little journey of human experience and knowledge; and there is the Great Journey of the Original emergence. The first journey is each individual's way back towards Absoluteness, our discovery and appreciation of our true status and destiny; the second is the way of Absoluteness exteriorising. The first is the way of the individual on the journey to the true human destiny, perfect liberation; the second is the way of the Cosmos en route to its destiny of perfection. In the Mahāyana, this second destiny was envisioned in the bodhisattvic dream as perfect happiness for all beings. The second is the one investigated here.

Advanced meditation is about traversing the way back, like salmon swimming back up river and waterfall to the place where they were spawned. I believe this is a valid interpretation and extension of the Buddha's teaching. Ultimately, advanced meditation is not only about becoming personally calm; it is about insight into the nature of Cosmos, emerging from Absoluteness and returning to Absoluteness. Therefore, *nirvana* is not only the end destiny of meditation; it points to the Origin of Cosmos. It is not for nothing that early Buddhism attached ontological significance to *nirvana*: at his death, the Buddha entered a domain to which neither being nor not-being can be ascribed. He reached Absolute Horizon. He knew that the flame goes out without going anywhere. In the Buddha's teaching of advanced meditation, the meditator progressively transcends 'form' – that is, in the language of this journey: Cosmic reality with its many forms and manifestations. This progression then advances through a number of successive meditative states (*jhānas*). I touched on these stages in Chapter 5, but in view of the unusual subtlety and significance of that scheme, I shall now revisit them briefly again, from a different perspective, namely: the *jhānas* as mirroring the process of Cosmic becoming.

First the meditator transcends all experience depending on empirical stimulation, and all mental representations of form and diversity – and experiences a state of *infinite space* (the fifth *jhāna*). (We are not touching on the preliminary stages of the first four *ghanas* here.) That is still a preliminary stage, not the final destination. Then the meditator moves deeper or higher and enters a state of the *infinity of consciousness*: empty, unformed, formless consciousness (the sixth *jhāna*). Even that is a consciousness, albeit an extremely attenuated consciousness of consciousness. Then that is transcended: the meditator enters a state beyond consciousness, a state of *no-thingness* (the seventh *jhāna*). That also hovers on the edge of consciousness. Then the next *jhāna* opens up: the level of the *cessation-of-ideation-and-feeling* (eighth *jhāna*). In this state the meditator ‘experiences’ an absolute quiet, where the differentiation between object and subject, between me and (in the vocabulary of this model) Unground has been left behind. Yet, even that is still an awareness of sorts. Then the level of *neither-ideation-nor-non-ideation* (ninth *jhāna*) opens up. Then the supreme ‘is’ there – but it ‘is’ not, and is not ‘experienced’: the meta-*jhāna* of Absoluteness (in ancient Buddhist language: *nibbāna*). The culmination is not finalised in a Substantial Eternity. No, it just peters out. The End and Origin of Cosmos – Absolute Horizon – is attained. Except that the word ‘attainment’ means nothing here. Words no longer apply.

In our MM reflection, we reconstruct the Great Flow of Unground: the cascading river of Cosmic Becoming against which we struggle back to discover our Origin. The river of Originating descending from the heaven of Absoluteness descends through cascades, as a result of which the ocean of material Cosmos, teeming with life and consciousness, is formed. In that we exist, with a strange longing for a lost Source and Destiny. Those stages must not be reified into clear-cut entities. They are just pointers to a mystery. We might as well ask the salmon to draw a map of the river. Nevertheless, it follows its instinct, and gets where it needs to go.

The Buddha knew the non-domain of Absoluteness. He refused to give definitive answers to questions Ending in Absoluteness – because of his knowing unknowing. It is possible to cast the meditative scheme of the higher (formless, *arūpa-*) *jhānas* in early Buddhism into the mould of Eternity and Infinitude, the two stages in the unfolding of Unground postulated in this exploration. Reversing the order of our human meditation, Absoluteness is the ontological equivalent of nirvana. The ninth, eighth and seventh *jhānas* would then allude to the dimension of Eternity: of ‘no-thingness’, of a ‘state’ prior to subject-object ideation of any sort. That is the topic of this Part Two. Further ‘down’ in the process of Absoluteness becoming Cosmos, the sixth and fifth *jhānas* (Infinite Consciousness and Infinite Space) roughly cover aspects of what I call ‘Infinitude’. They will be discussed in Part Three. Then comes the level of Cosmos – containing, among other things, thought processes and feelings.

■ *Mahāvairocana*

In another way, the argument unfolding here also seeks an alignment with the proposition put forward in esoteric Buddhism: the Cosmos as Buddha, Buddha as Cosmos (Verdu 1981:116–120). *Mahā-Vairocana* (Sanskrit: ‘Great Resplendent One’) became *Dari Rulai* in Chinese and *Dainichi Nyorai* (‘Great Sun’) in Japanese. In Sino-Japanese Buddhism Vairocana expressed the full ambivalence we are trying to understand here. Vairocana is the embodiment of *Sunyata* (‘Emptiness’). It is that embodiment in the form of all that is (the universe). The universe is Emptiness come to body, speech and mind. As ‘body’ (‘reality’), it is the *dharmakāya* (‘Truth Body’) of Buddhahood. As empirical reality, it therefore has the simultaneous and mutually implicit implications of Being and Truth (Wisdom). Emptiness ‘becomes’, ‘is’ Cosmos. As might be expected, the pull to somehow re-anthropomorphise, re-personalise this extremely sophisticated idea of ‘Buddha’ in statues and so on proved to be very strong. From our point of view, the implication of this idea of Buddhahood – of Emptiness/Absoluteness as Cosmos, and of Cosmos as Real, Living, Loving Truth, arising from, manifesting, returning to, Absoluteness – is what the path we are seeking here, is about.

■ Stoicism

Stoicism set out with Zeno of Citium (c. 335–260 BCE), a century or two after the rise of Buddhism. In the school that Zeno founded in Athens, classic Greek optimism had clearly come to an end. It was a time of great anxiety in the Mediterranean world, in which the individual human being’s struggle for meaning in the context of a capricious world order was thrust to the centre of attention. With Gnosticism three centuries later, that anxiety would reach even deeper. Zeno himself was probably of Semitic, perhaps Jewish, descent. Indeed, elements of the Semitic religious world are recognisable in his thought.

The historical distance between now and ancient Stoicism – Zeno, Cleanthes, Chrysippus and others – must be maintained even when MM connections across vast stretches of time are appreciated. Engaging with this ancient MM tradition, let me link up with some distinctions made by it (Algra 2003:153ff.; Brunschwig 2003:206–232; Frede 2003:179ff.; Pohlenz 1964; White 2003:124ff.). With the benefit of two millennia of continued reflection in the European tradition plus the contributions from other cultural contexts, we can appreciate how the Stoics groped for an understanding of the spark of becoming being.

Our ‘Cosmos’ approximates their *kosmos* or *holon* (the ordered universe as a Whole) – that is, the existing universe of experience. Does our ‘Absoluteness’ point in the same direction as their Void (*kenon*)? ‘Void’ to them was not the same as ‘space’. If space is filled, it is ‘place’ (*topos*); conversely, insofar as place has extension, it is space. If space is not yet filled, it is *chora*: potential place, and of a physical nature. Their concept *chora* is more ‘physical’, less

'metaphysical', than *chora* was for Plato (see §20). To the Stoics, neither filled space (place: *topos*) nor potentially filled space (*chora*), is the Void. The Stoic Void is not something spatial. It is non-material, and therefore not real (to the Stoics 'reality' and 'materiality' coincided). The extracosmic Void is without centre, quantitative extension and direction, or qualitative distinction. It does not have any influence on the material universe. The Whole (*holon*) merely rests in the Void (*kenon*), like an island in the sea.

To compare it to Buddhist thought: literally, the word 'Void' means roughly the same as the Buddhist 'Emptiness', but the meaning of the Stoic concept was less stripped of content and reference. To the Buddhists, Emptiness was primarily an epistemological category, with profound ontological and soteriological implications. Void is in the Stoic way of thinking 'not' real; while not referring to a radical dimension of 'non'-real, of Non-being, it may be thought to suggest such a dimension. In the end, to the Stoics, Void was part of their physics. Emptiness was the very centre of the Buddhist worldview; Void was rather peripheral to the Stoic worldview. The significance of the Stoic teaching from our point of view lies in the fact that they were the first in the European MM tradition to make a distinction between 'space' and 'void', even if they did not develop this strongly.

Of great interest is the Stoics' emphasis on materiality. They propounded neither a materialism denying mind nor an idealism relegating matter to an inferior order of being. The universe is material. Every entity existent is material. Reality was defined as bodily reality. Yet this did not imply materialism in the sense that there is nothing but brute matter. They did not deny the reality of *pneuma* (spirit) as the highest reality, but even that is material: it is a fine, fiery breath, air. That is God; God is material. They were materialists, not atheists. Yet they rejected the anthropomorphic ideas of divinity entertained by the Greeks in general.

They eschewed any suggestion of dualism, and sought a kind of monism in which matter and spirit, though not completely identical, are united all the way. From the point of view of the requirements of a contemporary MM, their great emphasis on materiality and corporeality must rank as one of their great achievements. Their universe is a large, living, acting, rational being, material and spiritual, cosmic and divine at the same time. That is a trailblazing train of thought. These reflections, though using a different terminology, are also seeking a fusion of matter and mind in a divine Cosmos - Originating from Absoluteness.

Did the Stoics keep mum about Absoluteness because of a certain shortcoming in their MM reflection? Was such an idea perhaps not really possible at the time in their world? Alternatively, would such an idea have run contrary to their basic intuition of the world, their strong emphasis on concrete, physical, corporeal reality? One may suspect that something of all three may have played a role. Their passion for corporeality, which would draw a lot of opposition from their contemporaries might in later times not have encouraged

them to explore any dimension ever so subtly distinct from the world of the senses 'behind' or 'beyond' that. Yet, in the long run, monism becomes problematic.

The strength of the Buddhist position was its emphasis on Emptiness; the latent weakness of their position was its acosmic, anti-matter, anti-body tendency. Compared to that, the strength of the Stoic position was its emphasis on matter and corporeality as non-negotiably central and good; its possible weakness was its lesser emphasis on Void in the radical sense as Absoluteness. An MM for today and tomorrow needs a combination of both strengths. Is such a double focus – that is, on Absoluteness *and* on the full concreteness of the world including its materiality, honouring both equally strongly – possible? How can the link be imagined? All of this is of particular interest, for our present urgent question is: What is the connection between Unground and Cosmos?

If the Stoic Void is not quite Unground; if they did not quite raise the issue of Absoluteness, Non-being, did they nevertheless somehow reflect on the *possibility* of the world being there? In other words, did they explore what I am calling Eternity and Infinitude, intermediate between Absolute Horizon and Cosmos? Yes. They were aware of that dimension, and addressed it with their notion of *archai* ('Principles'). They entertained another concept: *stoicheia*, also meaning 'rudiments', 'principles' or 'elements'. The *stoicheia* referred more to the 'Cosmic' side of things: the basic building blocks of earth, water, fire and air. Their *archai* on the other hand could be seen to operate more in the domain of our 'Eternity' or 'Infinitude'. The *archai* are ungenerated and indestructible Principles, without beginning and without end, and therefore somehow prior to the world, and not accessible to empirical investigation. They are not entities ('somethings'), but not 'nothing' either; they are 'not-somethings'. Put differently: *archai* are basic ontological concepts – they have to do with the *basic patterns underlying* the world; *stoicheia* on the other hand are cosmological concepts – they have to do with the *reality* of the world as it is.

The Stoics had their own equivalent of the Indian idea of *pralaya*. They referred to it as *ekpyrosis* (conflagration). The universe is periodically annihilated by fire, and is then recreated in an eternal cycle. Annihilation by fire is the equivalent of saying that God consumes the cosmos, but that was no mere metaphor; the Stoics did not think in terms of a split between the material and the 'spiritual'. One was the other. Be that as it may, God then brings the world forth from himself again, and consumes it back into himself again, and so on without end. It is moving to witness Chrysippus (c. 280–206 BCE) – perhaps the greatest Stoic thinker of them all – swaying high above firm ground in a strong wind on the flimsy tightrope between annihilation (End – Ch. 5) and coming into being (Origin – Ch. 6). Our question remains valid: what, if any, are the underlying Principles structuring the becoming and being of the world?

What are the Principles (*archai*) of all things, somehow contained in the divine seed, and sprouting to become all things? Some Stoic categories such as the

unity, plurality and cohesion of the cosmos, and an all-encompassing *rationality* inherent in the cosmos, may count as such regulative, structuring Principles in a sense similar to the one that I intend here. *Causality*, taken as a sense of relationship (association), is another such primary category. *Materiality, vitality and divinity* are also such *archai*. Above all, *activity (to poion)* and *passivity* (being acted upon: *to paschon*) are basic Principles mentioned by Stoic authors.

Stoicism remains fascinating and relevant. It confirms that this exploration is on a promising track. It encourages us, challenged as we are by the marvels and shocks of today's science, to develop ideas such as the inseparability of matter and mind. In that respect, it may be understood to link up with Buddhism. Just as Stoicism offered great opportunities for an interaction with the sciences of its own day, the general direction taken on our exploration is encouraging with a view to today's challenge to reconcile science with MM.

■ Ibn Arabi

More than 1000 years after Chryssipus, in the 12th century, the Sufi, Ibn Arabi, also wrestled with the problem of the evasive link between the Absolute and Cosmos. This is a structural problem to all MM systems marvelling at the fact that there is something and not nothing, a world, and pondering its becoming and reality against an unknown and unknowable backdrop. In the founding myth (Gn 1), arising in the early days of the tradition in which Ibn Arabi stood, the world came into being as ontologically utterly separate from the eternal Being who made it in a series of chronologically separate acts of immediate creation. How did that creative interpreter of his tradition, Ibn Arabi, attempt to give content to the gap-link, 'Eternity', that we are groping for?

To Ibn Arabi the God of revelation (*Allah*) is a self-manifesting form, assumed by an even more primordial level of Being, the Absolute, the Real (*al-haqq*). Structurally, this is almost the same as the devolution from *Nirguna Brahman* to *Saguna Brahman* in Vedanta, or as the non-dualism of Rāmānuja (who died 28 years before the birth of Ibn Arabi, in faraway India). How close the MM similarity seems to be, in spite of the geographical and cultural differences. The difference is that Ibn Arabi was a Muslim theist, and therefore supposed to uphold a stronger ontological difference between the Absolute and the world than the followers of the Upanishads were obliged to, but did he? Definitive statements here probably miss the mark. The first pole on Ibn Arabi's ontological continuum is the primordial Mystery of Mysteries, the absolute non-manifestation of Absolute Being (in our present context, the functional equivalent of our Unground), the plane of the Essence (*dhat*). The opposite extreme pole is the Self-manifestation of the Real on the plane of the sensory world (our dimension of Cosmos).

As Ibn Arabi sees it, the Absolute and empirical reality are contradictorily identical (cf. Izutsu 1983). That is to say: their relationship is not one of

simple identification. That would be pantheism. Yet, ultimately, they are the same, even in their strict separation. In essence, the world is nothing other than God, but in its determined forms the world is far from being the same as God. As Muslim, standing in the monotheistic tradition, Ibn Arabi could not overstep a line of non-identification. The world is the shadow of the Absolute – not less, not more. Anticipating a term that would emerge in 19th century Europe to attain this very aim (i.e. a narrowing of the gap between theism and pantheism without identifying them), Ibn Arabi essentially thinks in pan-en-theistic terms: God is not the All, but the All is ‘in’ God. In the end and after all, this great metaphysical mystic keeps the gap between the Absolute and Cosmos larger than was the case in, for example, the non-dualism of a Sankara in the Indian tradition.

Between these two (the absolute non-manifestation and the concrete manifestation of Absolute Reality) lies the mysterious in-between dimension fascinating me in this chapter.

Given the fact that the Absolute to him is Eternal Being, the gap-link between the Eternally Real and the empirical world must consist of a series of stages or degrees or modes in the unfolding of ultimate Being (Reality) in its process of Self-manifestation or Self-disclosure (*tajalli*). They are links in an unbroken ontological continuum of descent. He combines Qur’anic creation with Neoplatonic efflux and overflowing. In the model of Arche that is explored here, the notion of ‘Being’ is attenuated more radically than is the case with Ibn Arabi; indeed, it is annulled. At the ‘upper’ end, these reflections of ours (closer to the tendency of Taoism and Buddhism) see Being as bleeding out empty, dissipating into Non-Being; at the ‘lower’ end they see Being concretising as Energy-Matter (closer to the intention of Stoicism).

How does Ibn Arabi picture the field of our Eternity and Infinitude? In his version of the mysterious yet vital field between unmanifest Absolute Reality (*dhat*: ‘Essence’) and empirical reality, he distinguishes three intermediary levels of Being.

The first in-between level is the plane of the Divine Attributes and Names. This is the level of the Absolute manifesting as the One ‘God’ and ‘Lord’. This level of manifestation refers to Allah the Merciful, the Absolute as the ground of the world and all his Divine Names (eternal essences refracting the Absolute). Called *tashbih*, the experience of this level is an essential aspect of true understanding of the Absolute. It is just as important as the level and the awareness of the Absolute as such, as free of all determinations (*tanzih*). In the ninety-nine Names of God, the One starts a process of distinction and differentiation, but without abandoning being manifestations of the One, until the world concretely actualises the Divine Names. The Names are the relations in which the Absolute stands to the creatures. In their ‘centripetal’ aspect of facing the Absolute, the Names are One, and are the Absolute; in

their 'centrifugal' turning towards the world, the Names are 'other' than the Absolute.

According to Ibn Arabi, the ideal combination of the absolutely hidden aspect of the Absolute (*tanzih*) and this first level of manifestation (*tashbih*) was achieved only in Islam. The hint of exclusivity cannot be taken as his final word. It seems to me that anthropomorphic speech of Absoluteness takes place at the tier of Cosmos itself, where microcosmic human beings produce their ideas, easily turning them into idols. In Eternity and Infinitude, the possibility for such speech is provided, but all such conceptualisation takes place in historical conditions. That relativises all such speech. Ibn Arabi lived and thought in the era before the radical unmasking, from the 18th century onwards, of all theologies as so many human constructs. Today all MM must pass through that fiery brook. No item can slip undetected, hidden at the bottom of the religious luggage, past this checkpoint. Any form of special pleading for any historical religion - Islam, or any other one - must be transcended. The human sciences (history) had equally profound implications for the understanding of religion as the natural sciences. Hence, I see radical MM as standing outside, even as it includes every concrete historical religion, in an irenic-ironic attitude of relative affirmation, without affording a special status to any one.

There was also a remarkable degree of religious inclusivity, even indifference, in Ibn Arabi's thinking. He is reported to have said that at a young age he saw himself in a vision as under the guidance of Moses, Jesus and Muhammad (Ibn 'Arabi 2001:7). In addition, he described his heart as a temple for idols, a Ka'ba for pilgrims, and a tablet for the Pentateuch and the Qur'an (Guillaume 1977 [1954]:7). I believe, given the tendency towards Absoluteness of his thinking assumed here, that he would not have objected to add: his heart was a vacant space for Absolute Emptiness.

The second in-between level of Being is the plane of the Actions, the Presence of Lordship. Here the Names do not only enable the world (the first intermediary level does that), but *cause* the world to be (Izutsu 1983:102ff.). Everything and every event in the world is a self-manifestation of the Absolute through the causing presence of a definite relative aspect of the Absolute, called Divine Name.

The third in-between level of Being, and the one closest to the sensory world, is the plane of Images and Imagination, of eternal Archetypes. This is the half-spiritual, half-material world dimly reflected in waking human consciousness, and properly entered in true dreams. The Absolute starts to cast its shadow. The locus for the appearance of the world appears. It is the ontological aptitude of the world, the world in a state of potentiality. In the scheme developing here, that would be the equivalent of the dimension of Infinitude (see Part Three).

I find it impossible not to be impressed by the grandeur, beauty and subtlety of Ibn Arabi's panorama of the great cascading waterfall of Being, and not to sense that he is pointing toward the same mystery as the one scented on this similar journey of ours – which is also the one nosed and sought, without always consciously realising it, by all MM from the beginning.

■ Kabbalah

The Kabbalistic MM with its notion of ten *Sefirot* (Fine 2003:56; Scholem 1955 [1941]:213ff.) (comparable to the Gnostic emanations [*aeons*]) is of singular interest in our attempt to clarify the Principles mediating between Unground and Cosmos. Kabbalah tends towards empty Absoluteness as far as its monotheistic axiom permits. The Kabbalistic system of *Sefirot* seem to have the same function as our Principles, but whereas our Principles emerge from empty Absoluteness, Kabbalah does not entertain the notion of Emptiness/Absoluteness in the strong sense intended in this model. Even the concept *Ayin*, referring to the 'non-existence' of God in the sense of being beyond our human ken, does not seem to nihilate the theistic assumption of the ancient Hebrew faith. In the 16th century a speculative and imaginative visionary such as Isaac Luria continued the notion of the 10 emanations contained in the Zohar, written or (more probably) compiled in Spain a decade or two before the end of the 13th century, by Moses de Leon.

Connecting *Ein-Sof* and the world in the Zohar, the *Sefirot* ('numbers', then 'spheres', 'emanations') are ambivalent. On the one hand, facing the Absolute, they are dimensions, emanations, manifestations, revelations, of *Ein-Sof* (God-in-itself). As the 10 stages of descending divine self-manifestation and revelation, they also have a foot in the world of creation. As symbols of the divine, they constitute the very essence of that world. These 10 spiritual forces emanate from God like life-giving light from the sun, and unlike absolutely withdrawn God-in-itself, they can be contemplated by humans. The inner-divine movement and the cosmic movement are two sides of the same movement. The divine unfolding of the *Sefirot* has as its counterpart the coming into being of the world. Through the mediation of the *Sefirot*, the world of creation corresponds to the divine dimension, and everything in the created world has a counterpart in the divine world. The *Sefirot* mediate ambivalently, but are not ontologically separate from, 'outside' of, God, and, because of their mediating function, the world and everything in it share in a degree of divinity. Between *Ein-Sof* and the world, the *Sefirot* constitute a blueprint of the world, and are operative in the world.

The human person is the microcosm, reflecting and representing the macrocosm. As the universe in miniature, the human being contains all of these divine-cosmic qualities and forces. It therefore influences the macrocosm, and even divinity. It is the task of the human being to restore divinity-cosmos to the state of harmony.

The *Sefirot* are:

- *Kether Elyon* (the 'supreme crown' of God)
- *Hokhma* (the 'Wisdom' of God)
- *Binah* (the 'Intelligence' of God)
- *Hesed* (the 'Love' or 'Compassion' of God)
- *Gevurah* or *Din* (the 'Power', particularly the sternness, of God)
- *Rahamim* or *Tifereth* (the 'Mercy' or 'Beauty' of God)
- *Netsah* (the 'Endurance' of God)
- *Hod* (the 'Majesty' of God)
- *Yesod* (the 'Basis' or 'Foundation' of all active forces in God)
- *Malkuth* (the 'Kingdom' of God).

Among these divine-cosmic forces complex relationships exist as they cascade downwards in patterns of three's from *Ein-Sof* to the world. These 10 add up to an organic whole, like the limbs and organs of a human body, souled by *Ein-Sof*, and representing the entire cosmos; or like a tree, permeated and fed by the hidden yet present and active life-force of *Ein-Sof*. Our notion of Principles seeks an alignment with the Kabbalistic model.

■ Jacob Boehme

A motto of this inquiry is to bring together those from the past who belong together, with a view to the present and the future. By 'belong together' I do not mean identity in some unhistorical sense, but historical convergence of quite different roads, imagined to proceed from the same Origin and tending towards the same End. Therefore, I shall now listen to a vagabond voice calling from a seemingly quite different direction than the preceding ones.

Nobody in all of Christianity stood before the great mystery (the *Mysterium Magnum*, as the title of his last book rings) of Unground with more profound awe, than Jacob Boehme (1575–1624) did. Indeed, in his convoluted thinking and tortuous writing he was the one who coined the term Unground (*Ungrund*): the Godhead is 'more' (rather 'less') than firm Ground that we can stand on and get hold of; it is indeterminate Abyss; it is as nothing to us.

□ unlikely quintessential MM figure

If one is interested in the breaks and bridges between historical epochs in the West, particularly between medieval, Renaissance and modern thinking about God, nature and evil, Jacob Boehme's significance can hardly be overestimated. His thinking was the sum – and more than the sum – of major streams in Western religious thought: Gnosticism, the German-Flemish mysticism of the Rhineland, emphases within Lutheranism, hermeticism,

alchemy, Paracelsus, apocalyptic thought, Jewish and Christian Kabbalah, and more. He contributed to the last great flowering of the Renaissance, and he has been hailed and blamed as the prophet of the modern ideology of the inner-worldly fulfilment of the divine process that would culminate in the typically modern ideologies of world domination, such as Nazism, Communism and scientism. The human being was no longer a humble contemplator of God's work in nature as during the Middle Ages, but an essential actor in shaping its own destiny – as well as the destiny of nature (Walsh 1983).

That someone of the scientific stature of Isaac Newton was influenced by the 'theosophist' Jacob Boehme in the development of his theory of gravitation (Gibbons 2001:48f.; Wehr 1971:124), is more than a negligible historical curiosity. It is indicative of the connection (mostly hidden and unrecognised) between certain levels of theorising implied by science and MM thought (Nicolescu 1991 [1988]:69ff.). Boehme's thinking fell in fertile soil at the beginning of modern classic science. That kind of thought may also be relevant at the present time. Although his writing career was short (from 1612 to 1624), it was densely packed, with subtle developments of expression and content. On the other hand, his thinking remained internally consistent throughout, and each of his books addresses the same core questions from the same central perspective. In this summary, I remain close to smaller, lesser-known works belonging to the middle and latter part of his career (1620–1624).

A large part of Boehme's fascination, as well as of the difficulty of rendering him 'systematic', is the vivid nature of his mythopoetic thinking. To him ideas were not abstractions, but living realities. A major figure in the Western esoteric movement, his thinking is symbolic in a strong sense of the word: words and ideas are saturated with the meaning and power of their referents. They do not refer to objects external to them, but participate to a very high degree in the overwhelming world of the spirit. Reading Boehme is struggling through a jungle of trees, thick undergrowth and exotic flowers and animals, not strolling through a neatly laid-out garden with ordered beds of cultivated plants. Thinking (in the sense of envisioning, intuiting) at gut level, Boehme expresses his ideas (rather visions) in the most concrete, plastic forms. This cobbler-mystic with very little formal education but conversant with the major forms of MM speculation available to him, expressed his cosmosophical vision in a language which is extremely difficult to decrypt and render in more or less systematic form. Seeking perfect, clear consistency in his thinking and writing would be expecting too much, however desirable it may seem. Coldly decoded and conceptually packaged, his message of what transpires in the unfolding of God boils down to what is summarised here. I shall abstract from his unique manner of expression, and reduce his wealth of associations to bare outlines. His writing is too ambiguous and rambling, his thinking too obscure and dynamic, too tortured by dialectical tensions and too replete with a sense of ultimately unresolvable conflict (evil), to surrender itself to the format of an outline. Yet he did

undoubtedly succeed in developing his imagining as a coherent vision. This of course is if we look at the big picture and do not get bogged down in the detail. Rather than in its exactness, the strength of his thinking lies in its fecundity, challenging those who belong to a different epoch. Boehme is a visionary in the tradition of the great seer-prophets of humanity (cf. Berdyaev 1958:vff.).

The classical Christian symbolism projected a transcendent God, who created the world out of nothing. Boehme transmuted that myth into an eternal, Self-actualising Divinity, bringing forth the world out of his own Being. Therefore, divinity is present in all things, large and small and divine forces glow in all things, living and lifeless. The split between divinity and the world was the first one Boehme strove to overcome, without succumbing to a flat identification of the two (pantheism), and without simply reducing one to the other, which would have amounted to an abstract idealism or an atheistic materialism or a similar kind of monism. The second split he strove to overcome, and overlapping with the first one, was the simple split between good and evil of conventional Christianity. These two central concerns give rise to an enormously complex structure, which Boehme, in spite of his valiant efforts, could not explain lucidly. Yet he conducted his struggle, awkward as it turned out in respect of both the content and the presentation of his thought, with great integrity, passion and speculative ability.

The question stubbornly dogging us on this part of our journey remains: How does the process of 'divine' self-actualisation in the unfolding of the world proceed? How did Boehme envision it? Taking as his principal point of departure the belief in one God and steeped in awe of one divine mystery permeating all, Boehme defines that unity as fraught with eternal internal tension (cf. Bornkamm 1925:111), as consisting dialectically in the contradictory yet complementary opposition of 'Yes' and 'No' (Böhme 1955-1961:597).

□ the death, birth and growth of God

In Boehme's thinking, the concept 'divinity' is multivalent. On the one hand, it refers to the primordial 'Unground' (*Ungrund*) 'prior' to the manifest God; on the other hand, it refers to the revealed God in its self-manifestation and it approximates Eternal Nature. The theogony of Boehme shows us a God in the process of self-generation and development, of suffering and dying and being born, and of revealing Itself in that process. This occurs as a threefold movement within divinity. The main difference between Boehme and orthodox Trinitarian teaching is that, whereas in the latter case this doctrine is embedded in the saving and sanctifying activity of God in Christ, it is in Boehme - in spite of his very sincere allegiance to Lutheranism - embedded in a naturalistic speculative mysticism (Walsh 1983:14). This encompasses the intradivine theogonic process from *Ungrund* to full embodied manifestation in nature and humankind.

Divinity is, first of all, unfathomable, impenetrable darkness. This first principle constitutes Absoluteness as the indeterminate, completely open *Ungrund* (Koyré 1968 [1929]:281ff.; Weeks 1991:148ff.), that is, resting on no ground. It is primordial negative reality, pure nothingness, utterly withdrawn from our knowledge. It is not 'unknowable' in the sense that it simply exceeds the range of our knowledge, although on the same continuum as our other objects of knowledge, but in the sense that it is 'qualitatively' not on such a continuum at all. It is not a referring 'concept', but a 'symbol', suggesting absolute transcendence. As the Absolutely Transcendent, it is also Absolute Freedom and Will. In his emphasis on the Will, Boehme leaves behind the classic and medieval primacy of Being, and indeed lays a foundation of modern thought. Boehme's vision has neither the attitudinal nor the cognitive associations suggested by the concept atheism. As far as the first principle is concerned, (not yet) God is locked in a terrible struggle in Itself, with Itself. Divinity suffers. Ontologically, this suffering precedes the suffering of Christ, of God in Christ. The divinity of Absolute Transcendence dies, in order that the manifest God may be born (Deghaye 1985:37). In order to reveal Itself, divinity requires an Other than Itself, to act as mirror (Deghaye 1985:25). Thus the condition for God's emergence is created.

This process is beyond good and evil in the ordinary sense of the word. Yet the ultimate root of evil must be sought there, in the desire and quest of primordial divinity to manifest itself in an Other. Such a desire presupposes a lack, thus suffering (evil) in divinity. The duality between the desire to remain in Itself and the desire to become an object to Itself, to double Itself, implies opposition, discord, struggle, which is implied by the word 'evil'. Evil is thus an inevitable, necessary moment in the eternal theogony. Divinity would not have been able to manifest Itself without conflict, duality and struggle. God is the sovereign good – but also the God of anger and wrath (Koyré 1968 [1929]:184ff.), and without evil we would not have known that God is good. The theosophical gnosis of Boehme is the knowledge of good and evil, light and shadow, as opposite and contradictory yet mutually interdependent and even interpenetrating elements like day and night; constitutive, in their togetherness, of the ultimate nature of things and of divinity. Retaining a link with his Lutheran legacy, Boehme addresses the seeming dilemma between dualism and monism by implying that evil, wrathful divinity, is not the real God in his full manifestation. True God, love, only emerges in the good (Koyré 1968 [1929]:184ff.).

There is an element of eternal Necessity in that drama, played out in divinity Itself. There are also the elements of eternal Freedom, Contingency, Will and Choice. If 'tragedy' is the meeting and mixing of conflicting Necessity and Freedom, then that concept is eminently applicable to Jacob Boehme's God, and to nature and human history. That is indeed the terminology used by Schelling and Berdyaev to interpret his intention. There is no revelation, no growth and no redemption, neither for God, nor nature or human, without terror and suffering.

Then a new stage in the theogonic drama, a new movement in the divine symphony, a new phase in the devolution of God, up to a point discontinuous with the previous one, is reached. The terrible anguish is followed by harmony. God becomes manifest, is born. Now God is transformed into life, power and bright light. This moment is the 'Yes!' of a primordial, progressive revelation, preceding the creation of the world. The coming into being of nature and humankind is constitutive of the birth of God. In that sense, humankind is pre-existent, but the locus of this existence is still God Itself. The knowledge is still its self-knowledge. Without proto-evil in the sense touched on above, the dark struggle of divinity would not move forward to the full birth and manifestation of God.

In Boehme's theosophy, God is not the eternal Immovable of Greek and Vedantic metaphysics. God is born and dies. Yet this should not be seen in temporal terms, as if it all happened before the world came into being. The struggle in God takes place eternally, in a frame in which time is included.

□ divinity, nature, humanity

Boehme's search for an integrated vision of everything in which all things are interrelated and interpenetrating, led him to the discovery of one and the same underlying pattern present and operative in all things. His vision amounts to a pansophic syncretism of the scientific, alchemical, astrological, meteorological, theological and other insights that he had access to in his private studies. Theology, cosmology and anthropology converge, implying the rejection of both a *creatio ex nihilo* [creation from nothing], as well as emanation from God. *Creatio ex Deo* [creation from God] would come closest to Boehme's intention. For Boehme, the world would not have started with a blind Big Bang. Nor (as his *Mysterium Magnum* shows), was it put down finished and perfect by a fully actualised perfect Being. Nature is part of an eternal, divine trial and error process. History is not the linear, inexorable execution of a divine big plan. Boehme's was a struggling, devolving universe, embodying struggling, devolving divinity, which is intimately related to struggling, devolving Eternal Nature (Hvolbek 1998:110). 'Evil' is part of nature as a spiritual entity developing towards higher states of being and consciousness. This is very different from the dominant scientific vision of a universe in which life and consciousness are a hardly explicable speck.

God would not be revealed to itself without nature and human, but would only be an eternal stillness. External Nature is the symbol of the interior world. The entire blueprint of all reality, divine, human and natural, is contained in the smallest part of nature. Time with all its manifestations is shot through with eternity and its eternal patterns. Everything, literally everything – from the days of the week, to all sorts of animals, to the heavenly bodies, to kinds

of stones, etcetera – is allocated its place in the universe in accordance with this scheme. Although nature as a whole is the embodiment of God, and God the prototype of nature, Boehme does not identify God and nature pantheistically. He uses the symbol of a mirror to indicate the relationship between divinity and nature. In nature the coincidence of opposites occurring in God, is mirrored. What is implied in that measure of continuity is that all of nature is metaphysically homogeneous. Manifest, empirical nature, carrying and manifesting the all-pervasive eternal code, mirrors God.

The divine principles and the qualities of Eternal Nature are also engraved and actualised in the human, which is the eye of the universe. God is born and reveals itself in the human person, to the extent that Boehme does not consider God apart from its coming in the human spirit. Conversely, Boehme does not consider humankind without reference to God. Human nature is not fixed. Like the existence of God, the existence of the human manifests itself as Freedom and Will, ruling out any notion of being doomed to perdition. As God must die in order to be born, so human must die in order to be born. In the human, as in nature, as in God, Freedom is of paramount importance, never compromised by Boehme. This is upheld not only for the sake of the human alone. For, in Boehme's mind, the full manifestation of goodness in freedom in the human being is vital for the redemption of the whole of creation. The future of the cosmos is dependent on the further development of the human. In his thinking the possibility, the necessity, of a further evolution of the human being, not physically so much as mentally and spiritually, the evolution of consciousness, the overcoming of evil, are of central importance. The human being has an immense cosmic responsibility. Yet, in spite of the optimistic vision of Boehme of a final light-world, there is no doubt that this present human existence is marked by intense anguish.

□ inevitable, necessary evil

Boehme was particularly sensitive to social and natural evil in the world. The mystery of good and evil stands at the very centre of his theosophical search. *Unde malum?* [whence evil?] was the most central question of all, the root of his religio-metaphysical thinking. Thinking symbolically, he did not intend to solve the problem of evil theoretically, but rather led his readers deeper into the mystery of good and evil. His unique perspective in this respect, not without precedent in Western MM thinking, is his most original metaphysical contribution. In order to understand his doctrine of evil, it will be necessary to situate it in the wider context of his thought. In the thinking of Boehme, suffering and evil go back to the essential nature of divinity itself. There is a dark principle eternally present and active in the primal substance of things, painful and ill accommodated, like a disease existing inside the body of a living being. On all sides, even in God, he saw a raging battle between light and darkness. His was a tragic theogony.

So how does the notion of 'evil' fit into Boehme's theosophic vision? He offered an alternative to the two major solutions to this problem that dominated Western thought over the last two millennia, namely monistic Neoplatonism and dualistic Manicheism. Whereas Neoplatonism denied evil any ontological status, treating it as the relative absence of divine being and goodness, Manichaeism postulated evil as a second primal reality, over against and virtually equal to God in power. Boehme came up with a third solution between or beyond the first two, tracing the ontological root of evil, if not evil itself, back to God Itself. For Boehme, evil is not simply a shortage, a privation, but a real force. It is not absorbed into a unitary Absolute, nor considered illusory. Both this force and God's eternal overcoming of it are constitutive of God.

Evil, manifesting itself as resistance in complementary opposition, is for Boehme an inevitable, necessary condition in the evolution of the good, of God. At this level, his vision pictures intense suffering and anguish, even 'hell'. Yet this is theosophically tolerable, for there is meaning in it. At this level, evil is not absolutely negative. It is part of Eternal Nature, of life itself, a condition for the birth and manifestation of God, 'functional' evil, or perhaps even 'progressive' evil (let us call it 'evil 1'). It is fully present in the depths of divinity, locked in internal struggle towards self-manifestation. There is a further possibility, namely evil as pure destruction, chaos, irredeemable in terms of the struggle forwards. This may be called absolutely 'dysfunctional' or absolutely 'regressive' evil, locked up in principle in the vortex of the first triad (let us call it 'evil 2'). It is what hinders the birth of God, thwarting the progress towards full manifestation of the divine. This is utter darkness, regressive inversion, and this possibility is symbolised in the figure of Lucifer. The mythological figure of Lucifer was originally the carrier of light, representing, for Boehme, the perfection possible for created being, but came to invert the process of the birth of God. There is an essential difference between constructive struggle and suffering ('evil 1') and purely destructive evil ('evil 2'). Like the wife of Lot, Lucifer, the paragon of evil 2, looks backwards, not forwards. He wants to return to the abysmal desolation, reactivate the primordial dark fire. What Lucifer is at the level of the supratemporal process, Satan is at the level of time-space reality. On further investigation, the distinction of two types of evil turns out to be relative. In Gnostic fashion, Boehme postulates a fall (a presence of evil 2) prior to Adam, which is redeemed in the creation of Adam and the birth of the Saviour. Finally, Boehme is looking forward to a salvation in which even the purely regressive evil of Lucifer ultimately serves the good.

Coming to nature (the macrocosm), from Boehme's basic presuppositions it follows that the first origin of nature lies in struggle and suffering. Given the nature of God and the intimate relationship between God and nature, natural life consists in the conflict of opposing principles. The creative resistance, eternally overcome in God, is the source of suffering in nature. Nature, in eternal genesis, is struggle and suffering. Without the strife of being against being in

the words are extremely tightly positioned in this sentence nothing would exist. Here Boehme seems to come close to the Buddhist analysis of *taṇhā* and *dukkha* as constitutive principles of all life, and to Darwin's notion of the survival of the fittest in the struggle for life. The world of darkness, actualised in the reign of Satan, wills to revert to the initial stage of the cycle of becoming. However, the real fall did not occur with Adam in the Garden of Eden, but before that, before creation itself. For after that fall of Lucifer a new world, the present universe, was created, still marked by this awesome double aspect: labouring under evil, yet open to the future. Death remains the fermentation of life. The microcosmic (human) fall of Adam was not the origin of evil, but necessary for the full revelation of goodness. It was indeed a *felix culpa* [fortunate guilt]. Ultimately light triumphs over darkness. Ultimately, even Lucifer is a moment in the theocosmic drama. In comparable vein, in the Buddhist *Lotus Sutra* even Devadatta, opponent of the Buddha, will become a Buddha (Watson 1993:182–185).

□ concluding comments

In search of an MM of nature (including its dimension of suffering and evil), Boehme proves to be a beacon of bold mythopoetical and speculative thought. The structural and historical continuities between his thinking and the comparable constructions of Sufism and Kabbalah discussed earlier in this chapter are evident. Ambiguities abound in his thought. His complex intuitions do not 'solve' the problem of the existence of the world, of suffering and evil, theoretically. Yet he did not claim to produce a balanced theoretical system, and would not have wanted to be seen as producing such. He does not think away a burning sense of evil and the reader is constantly confronted with his struggle and hope, and with the paradoxes of freedom and necessity in the process of the world. The final criterion to be applied to his thinking, as to any attempt at MM, is not whether it is 'true' in the sense of 'corresponding' 'scientifically' to an objective state of affairs. The criterion is rather whether it is useful in helping people who have come face to face with the stark reality of life, of suffering and evil, somehow to accept that, ultimately, the dark side of life is comprehended in a larger scheme of things, awesome in its impenetrable depth, and yet offering a perspective of light and happiness. That was Boehme's intention.

We seem to have arrived at a crucial stage in the evolution of humanity. It is a time when, for the first time in history, the human being has the ability to destroy itself and all life on earth in attitudes and patterns of behaviour, bolstered by global technocracy, that may be termed 'evil'. Now, voices such as those heard above – the Upanishadic visionaries, Buddhism, Stoicism, Sufism, Kabbalah and Jacob Boehme – need to be heeded, not parroted, but understood historically and tendentially for our time.

Witting (Knowing)

■ §26 First light

In the first spark of becoming Cosmos there was Witting (Knowing), emerging with unfolding Unground, *ab Origine*. From the Horizon of that utter Non, a world is starting to emerge. Flanked by its partners Wanting (see Ch. 9) and Willing (see Ch. 10), it proceeds to unfold via the level of Infinite Consciousness to the concrete level of Cosmic Consciousness.

In the process of mystical experience (e.g. in the case of Buddhist *jhāna* meditation), consciousness is the last to go. In this chapter, we witness the Origin of its beginnings. This Witting (Knowing) in the open space of Eternity is one of the principles behind Consciousness as we know it in Cosmos. The roaring river of Consciousness down below in the ravine of this Cosmos, in which we are swept along, starts as a thin next to nothing wisp in remote mountains of Eternity, withdrawn from our gaze. That beginning – ‘before’ Infinite Consciousness, and ‘before’ Cosmic Consciousness – is Witting (Knowing).

‘Witting’ and ‘Knowing’, grown from archaic proto-Germanic roots, are here utilised for Archeic purposes. The old verb *wit* derives from a root (*weid*), meaning ‘to see’, ‘perceive’, ‘know’, and lies at the basis of ‘vision’. It has cognates in ancient languages such as Greek, Latin and Sanskrit

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(e.g. in 'Vedas'). 'Know' likewise has an ancient root (*can*), and is family of the Greek *gnosis* and the Sanskrit *jñāna* (both meaning intuitive knowledge in spiritual matters). Taken together, these ancient words are suggestive of a darkness prior to the bright light of everyday waking consciousness and the clear knowledge reigning in the world determined by science. The light of human consciousness, science and knowledge originally starts glowing in darkness of Eternity. First, Witting explodes as pre-intentional awareness, like a flash of light aiming at nothing in particular, prior to any subject-object distinction. It is a sheer event, Unground as pent-up Potentiality lighting up, with Witting as prime Principle. Why does Witting happen? To explore that, we would have to ponder the Principle of Wanting: somehow, Eternity *needs* to do it. This Event is absolute Freedom. So why does Eternity do this? Because it 'wants' to - without any coercion from 'outside'. There is no 'outside'. Absolute Horizon bursts open as Knowing, as primordial Awareness. Light is perhaps the most arresting symbol for this brightness, illumination, understanding, clarity, transparency, effulgent beauty. Can we 'see' it, 'feel' it, experience it? No. Yet, something in us responds to the notion of such a Principle, like the anadromous salmon remembering and anticipating shafts of light in a bright pond above. Mathematics and logic and their extension in science with its insatiable curiosity share in this thirst. The mechanistic-materialistic paradigm inhibits present-day humans from accepting this as their ultimate Horizon. In the most profound moments of their consciousness, human minds are lifted in remembrance of Origin and anticipation of Return. In the perspective of the reflections documented on these pages, any boastful claim of achievement is ruled out. What we may have, are merely remembrance, longing and groundless trust.

In this first layer of rationality, there is a first shimmer of Witting, right or wrong Knowing, and criteria for deciding between them. The appearance of Eternity as Witting contains a first shimmer of distinction, in the sense of light contrasted with darkness. With that first dawn of Knowing comes the *possibility* of ignorance (lack) and falsehood (opposition) - of imbalance, of the 'evil' counterpart of Knowing. Evil as ignorance and lie has its roots in emerging Unground, becoming Eternity.

Why am I projecting human features onto such a big screen? Rather cut the whole thing to pieces with Ockham's razor? And yet, can we live meaningfully without such a context, larger than the immediacies of the senses and minimalistic explanations - provided that such a wider context is cohesive in its own right and compatible with the best of human knowledge? Minimalism, formal correctness and simplicity are to be balanced by criteria such as integrative power, which are to be expected of sense-providing frameworks of understanding. Having said that, of course this model has no factual, scientific status.

The developing first Awareness of Eternity unfolds in at least the following mutually implied forms,

- One: it unfolds as *differentiating*. In this chapter it is not ontological differentiation (being different things) that we are interested in, but differentiation as an epistemological category (making distinctions). Witting as primordial distinguishing, emerges. In the human mind, this making of distinction will in due course take shape as the intellectual feats of analysis (taking apart) and discrimination (observing differences). The Latin prefix 'dis-' (as in *dis-cernere*; hence the English verb 'to discern') and the equivalent Sanskrit prefix 'vi-' (as in *vi-jñāna* 'consciousness'), have this exact meaning: knowing implies taking apart.
- Two: *relating* as co-ordinating, associating, comprehending, accommodating, organising, synthesising, wholemaking, linking together, harmonising is essential to all sensemaking. The English 'consciousness' comes from the Latin *con-scire* ('knowing together'), which is the exact equivalent of the Sanskrit *sam-jñā* (Pali *sañña* 'perception', 'sense', 'ideation', 'consciousness'): the con-stitution ('setting up together') of mere sensations of physical stimuli to become meaningful ideations.
- Three: with each of the above, two manifestations arise: the sense of *correctness and incorrectness*. There is an emerging sense that the differentiating and relating may give rise to truth and error.
- Four: as an aspect of this process, *imagining, anticipating*, appears. Cosmos is imagined on Horizon; it unfolds as the ability to imagine and anticipate, explore and create new possibilities – and yes, allow the word 'design'. Let me add a proviso. 'Design' is not understood here as the work of some substantial Intelligence. Eventually, deriving from some inaccessible but suspected Horizon, 'designing' emerges to become an organic part of Cosmos itself from its very beginning so many billions of years ago. Cosmos, a manifestation of Unground, is a 'self-organising', 'self-constructing system' (terms borrowed from Kauffman 2006:153) – understood in an MM framework. Here we have to abstract from our Cosmic category of time (a temporal future). In addition, the possibility of failure is given with Eternity itself. In Cosmos, the possibility becomes reality. From our human point of view, that is unfortunate. Yet, our dissatisfaction is understandable. After all, humans are part of the unfinished experiment, of the trial and the error (and leaning dangerously over towards the error side of the Cosmic and human experiment). We are satisfied neither with the world as it is, nor with ourselves. Understandably. The fact that we suffer, holds the hope and promise for something better. We may, after all, be part of a process of improvement. That is the *bodhisattvic* perspective. But here we are interested in ignorance and lie as possibilities originating from way back, from long 'before' the sinning humans of myth.

- Five: there is *preserving, continuity*, emerging in Eternity. Emerging and development imply retention and conservation. Again, we have to abstract from our Cosmic category of time (a temporal past). Retaining, conserving, is a root of Cosmos. In Cosmos the Eternal possibility of preserving will take concrete shape as the temporal history of the emergence-subsidence of the world, life and humanity, in which nothing is lost. Eventually, Cosmos itself will end and be preserved.

The human mind with its faculties is an extension of a Consciousness inherent in Cosmos, and that Consciousness is an extension of Principles emerging from an inaccessible depth. Cosmos-humanity participates in the dimensions of Witting sketched above. Cosmos-humanity differentiates, combines, tries and errs, imagines, remembers. Such phenomena in nature and humanity are Archephanies.

The human mind is the tip of a submerged iceberg. It, as well as the powers present in the simplest forms of life, are better understood by recourse to such a dimension than by reducing it to blind matter. That is not to say that the materialist perspective should not be followed through as far as possible. It must. Nevertheless, a perspective is by definition limiting. Such a limiting 'materialist' methodological perspective is something else than a totalitarian 'materialistic', mechanistic worldview, excluding every other aspect. The materialist perspective is of course valid – up to a point; but is that all? Does it need *more*: an expanded context, a wider set of connections? Yes, one would think. The perspective explored here postulates that the presence of Consciousness is not the result of blind luck occurring in matter only, but the outcome of a set of Principles emerging from Unground and triggering – 'in the beginning' – the emergence of a Cosmos. To develop that intuition is a difficult undertaking, and such a wider context cannot be scientifically proven, and nothing of the kind is claimed here.

From Witting comes – eventually, in the downward cascading from Unground – the sentient discriminating, synthesising, projecting, remembering (storing) capacities in nature. In human consciousness all of this has developed to most remarkable proportions – from elaborating causal connections in macro theories, to devising complex experiments, to reconstructing and treasuring the history of the universe, to anticipating what will happen millions of years from now. Also, all of that is part of larger processes of Cosmoses coming and going.

Ultimately, the following types of conscious activity, seemingly so discordant in human consciousness, can be imagined as expressions of the same phenomenon, deriving from the same source:

- mythico-poetic reason dominating traditional cultures
- dualising-objectifying reason dominating modern Western rationality

- mathematical-logical-scientific reason dominating contemporary thinking
- meditative, intuitive reason dominating traditional Indian thought
- speculative reason transcending all cultural boundaries
- mystical awareness, the knowing unknowing present in all cultures and religions.

That source is Witting, hidden in the recesses of Eternity. As the MM contemplator sits quietly, the connection with Witting beneath the cleverness and stupidity of human conscious minds and thoughts, may be discovered. Witting is the generative source, the original creative space from which human minds and thoughts ultimately derive. The human mind and the designing intelligence of Cosmos are restrictions, limitations, of that First Knowing, like drops of liquid condensed from the thinnest vapour. Here mind, consciousness, thoughts and the like are fully acknowledged as empirical phenomena, but not derived from a supernatural Substance – as little as they are from matter. To adapt the words of the 5th century CE Theravada commentator Buddhaghosa (originally written with reference to the non-reality of a human substantial ‘self’): in Eternity Witting (Knowing) ‘is’, but a Thinker (Knower) is not found (Buddhaghosa 1979:587). Human intelligence and the intelligence inherent in the process of nature ultimately arise from Witting arising from the nowhere of Absolute Horizon.

■ §27 Some cleared and travelled pathways

Let us now follow in the steps of a few of the wanderers seeking a vantage point to gaze up towards this altitude.

■ Greek insights

□ Pythagoras

In the 6th century BCE a Greek contemporary of the Buddha, Pythagoras (c. 570–480 BCE), born on the island of Samos but consolidating his mission in Croton, southern Italy, was an MM pioneer. He called his enterprise ‘philosophy’, and was perhaps the first person to use that word. This enigmatic hierophantic figure combined mysticism, metaphysics and science in a unique cosmological vision that would play a significant role throughout history, perhaps largely as a result of its reception by Plato. It is noteworthy that the main spokesperson in Plato’s *Timaeus* is a Pythagorean (Timaeus).

The underlying impulses of this school of thought included intellectual curiosity and dissatisfaction with outdated mythological accounts of physical nature, but – above all – an MM drive. Pythagoras’ achievement was to lay the foundations of a holistic ‘total science’, integrating scientific, metaphysical, religious and ethical principles, and expressing this synthesis in certain spiritual

techniques and an entire lifestyle. This kind of construction – cosmosophical, existential and soteriological at the same time – was continued in Plato, but lost its prestige in the wake of the thinking of Aristotle, which introduced a new empiricist perspective that would reach its apex from the 17th century CE onwards. Since then empiricism has largely become positivism. Since the Italian Renaissance, in figures such as Paracelsus and interests such as alchemy, the old passion started to awaken once again. Through the centuries, Pythagoras was both maligned as charlatan and revered as spiritual teacher, depending on the interpreters' perspectives. In this essay he is respected as a pioneer in the development of a strategy of integration of science and speculative mysticism – a strategy to be redeployed in each new generation as science and culture generally change. The principle of integration stays; the execution must be adapted from cultural situation to cultural situation. 'MM' is the name given here to that enduring programme.

It appears difficult to reconstruct with historical accuracy what the sage of Samos actually taught as far as his speculative metaphysics was concerned. The quintessence appears to have been the conviction that number is the key to the world. That makes him relevant to the interest in this chapter in primordial Witting. Stripped of the later tradition which assimilated him to Plato, he at least seems to have considered numbers – with its associations of identity, difference (opposition) and harmonious combination (*harmonia*) – to be principles 'behind', operative in, perhaps even coinciding with, existing things (Riedweg 2005 [2002]:23ff., 587). To Pythagoras, number stood for a kind of proto-rationality. It is not to be expected that Pythagoras, as pre-Socratic thinker, would or could have made the fine ontological distinctions that would only make their entry with Plato and Aristotle.

To him and his followers, numbers were somehow the original stuff out of which everything was made and of which it consists – probably in the sense that all things are somehow analogous to numbers, modelled on numbers, and that numbers are the first things in nature, the elements of all things. To them numbers were not mere contingent quantities, but prime metaphysical-mystical qualities. Numbers are the substance, the essence of all things. They are symbols of primordial 'roots' lying at the basis of reality and yet part of the tree as a whole. The numbers four (2×2) and nine (3×3) for example, stand for 'justice', that is, perfect harmony; and two (2) stands for ambivalence, differentiation, conflict. These and other configurations underlie all of cosmic reality. Music expresses the essence of the world. Musicology and cosmology, aesthetics and physics coincide, with arithmology as the link between them. From the point of view of this investigation, assuming an isomorphism of macro- and microcosm (nature and the human mind including its moral and aesthetic sense), Pythagoras' intuition is understandable.

It is not necessary to reconstruct Pythagoras' cosmology here. Yet it remains relevant to consider the probable function that numbers had for this sage.

Running the risk of anachronistic (mis)representation, I would say that they had the function of operative archetypes. I am not arguing that Pythagoras was 'right' or 'wrong' in any specific respect; only, that he pointed, in his time, in a direction that we may still consider fruitfully today. His pioneering concern with the common foundations of mathematics, music, cosmology and mysticism remains fascinating in a time of disintegration. I trust our Witting in Eternity – drawn to the notion of some primordial dawning of rationality as unity, differentiation and relationship – can be aligned to this ancient pioneering project of a proto-rationality inherent in material nature.

In the modern epoch, Johannes Kepler (1571–1630) was probably the scientist most influenced by Pythagoras. His declared aim was to integrate cosmology and astronomy with MM. His MM was an integration of Christianity and Pythagoreanism. A final solution to the relationship of science and MM is unattainable, and, like any 'final solution', unwarranted and violent. Rather, we should keep in mind the fruitful collaboration between the two spheres oftentimes in the past, and patiently keep working towards a constructive, dialectical harmony between these two discourses in future.

□ Heraclitus

Before the substantialising theories of Consciousness that would arrive with Plato and Aristotle, Heraclitus the Obscure of Ephesus (fl. c. 500 BCE, therefore a younger contemporary of Pythagoras, and probably influenced by him) found the key to unlock the mystery of all in the *Logos* ('word'). Yet his key seems to obscure even as it uncovers. Like Pythagoras, this pre-Socratic thinker lies on the further side of distinctions that have become part of our present-day intellectual scene. In spite of that, or perhaps for that very reason, Heraclitus still contains challenging and suggestive perspectives and he has not lost the fascination that he has always held.

To him, *Logos* lies at the root of the world process. We are part of it, part of an eternal cycle. If his *Logos* were to be looked at as an infinite substance, we might have had to consider it in Part Three. That would be a mistaken understanding. Heraclitus' thinking seems to signal an ontosophical stage or level before that.

In his aphorisms, we are confronted not by a system fine-tuned in all directions, but by intuitions and speculations about a primal appearance, half emerging from a darkness. We are witnesses to the first self-revelation of what lies at the basis of all, and which is concealed as much as it is revealed. We encounter a raw originality, both in Heraclitus himself and in what he is alluding to so obscurely in the fragments he wrote down in the last decade of his life. As with all the authors interviewed in this essay, the intention can neither be to interpret him exhaustively, nor to do it historically or systematically (cf. Kahn 1979:93ff.), but merely to pick up signals of correction and support from the

point of view of our own specific adventure. Here, I listen to him to catch echoes of Witting. In any event, given the nature of his thinking and the fragmentary nature of his extant cryptic utterances, any overly coherent rendering of his thinking must be suspect.

In his vision, the aspects of knowing and being are intertwined. *Logos* is 'reason' as well as 'reality'. *Logos* is the universal, eternal, even divine structure of the world. It is ultimate reality. Why is it called *Logos*? At a first level, presumably because it is spoken about. It is heard (taught by Heraclitus) and may be comprehended at that level. Yet, according to Heraclitus, people do not comprehend.

What he teaches, engages the science of his day. By postulating fire as the single source of natural phenomena, he participated in science. However, his basic intuition surpasses science as such. So what is the depth content of his teaching? *Logos* refers to that too. Now it points to a level deeper than human discourse – to a dimension to which the word 'word' somehow applies, to some revelation.

The first principle of all is simply *Logos*. There is no speaker behind it. Heraclitus gives no hint at all of any such thing or person. Nor is *Logos* itself to be substantialised as some kind of 'self-subsistent' power or principle behind the world. That would only come with his Stoic followers. Yet there is the hint of a kind of proto-'reason', proto-'rationality', proto-'intelligence' – even of universal, eternal 'law'. His *Logos* seems to hint at 'meaning', but it would not be the same as the clear, consistent rationality of bright Consciousness. He wrote obscurely, because his theme, his *Logos*, was obscure. Participating in the bright clarity of knowledgeable speaking, *Logos* ambivalently drops away into an Unknowing.

He is at pains to say that men are oblivious to that depth dimension. They wander like sleepwalkers. It takes a Heraclitus to explain it to them, and even then, they do not understand. Did this obscure prophet at the dawn of European MM see and anticipate what we, uncomprehending sleepwalkers of today, have to learn: that we cannot live by science and reason alone?

As far as both 'being' and 'knowing' are concerned, his unfolding of *Logos* is striking. In terms of reality, his world is one of multiplicity and conflict. War begets and rules all. Yet the world is also one and coherent. Heraclitus is the Greek father of the Western model of the dialectical process of unfolding and ambivalent reality. His 'reality' is not a dominating presence; it is dialectically cancelled, absent. Reality is deeply unstable. In terms of the knowing side of *Logos*, he is equally significant. For, how does *Logos* as understanding unfold? Again, it occurs through a dialectical process. It is differentiation, contradiction. Yet contradictions are associated, synthesised. *Logos* is coherence, order, law. That also mattered a great deal to him. Yet his *Logos* as 'knowing' is not the massive certainty of clear contradiction-free speech, based on irrefutable,

proven facticity. We know – and our knowing is cancelled. Knowledge is deeply unstable. He seems to beckon us towards a dimension prior to clear, firm consciousness. Perhaps our sense of Witting (with the two movements of contradiction and conciliation as its primary expressions at that most primordial level), points in the direction of the ambivalent dawn of consciousness that Heraclitus seems to have seen at the dawn of Greek thought.

An emphasis on *Logos* would recur in Greek MM right through to the Hellenistic period. By then, highly developed epistemologies, including theories of consciousness, dialectics and logic, had developed. Heraclitus' combination of epistemological revelation and ontological appearance would resurface later in Christianity, among others in the first verses of the Gospel of John. Even so, there would be an important difference: in Christianity, there would be an eternal Being behind and in the Word. The great attraction of Heraclitus is that he, intuiting the level of Eternity, evoked a mystery devoid of that assumption.

In Stoicism – the true heirs of Heraclitus in antiquity – we find the type of problem interesting us here, at least implied. Going back to Heraclitus, Stoicism (first Zeno) taught that a seminal *Logos* pervaded and activated the universe as generative principle. However, Stoicism gave a substantialising twist to the idea of *Logos*, which did not occur in Heraclitus.

■ medieval Sufi insights

□ Knowledge (*Alim*) as a Name of God for Ibn Arabi

In the period between 12th century and 13th century thinking of Ibn Arabi, the notion of the Names of the self-manifesting Absolute has great significance (Izutsu 1983:99ff., 141ff., 152–196, 486–493). The Names are, as it were, the channels for the self-articulation, self-externalisation of the Absolute right through to the level of the emergence of the world. Each Name represents to him an attribute, an aspect of the Absolute in its relationship to the emerging world. Causing the world to be, they have an in-between, ambivalent status and function between the Absolute and the world, sharing in both. They are the Absolute, and they are present in every existent thing, causing it to be. As the undifferentiated Absolute, all Names are identical; in the self-differentiation of the Absolute and its becoming world, each Name is distinct from every other Name, and they have different ranks. One of these Names is Knowledge (*Alim*).

Our Eternity in general and Witting in particular, seems to approximate the pattern of Ibn Arabi's thinking here. For to him the primordial polarisation taking place within the Absolute is that of Self-consciousness – that is, the Self-polarisation within the Absolute of knowing subject and known object as a differentiation within the Absolute (Ibn Al'Arabi 1980:27). Because of his adherence to Being as primary category, he seems overall to attach a stronger

character of 'beingness' to the Names than the orientation of this book permits. In his comparative analysis, Izutsu seems to underestimate this fundamental point of difference between Sufism and Taoism. Being remains the watershed between theistic religions and Vedanta on the one hand, and Buddhism and Taoism on the other hand. No, rather than a vertical watershed with either-or implications, it is more of a horizontal distinction between deep and deeper, Ground and Unground, substance and emptiness, with a porous membrane between them. The Names are part of the second to sixth strata of Ibn Arabi's extraordinarily complex and refined vision of the phenomenisation of the Absolute:

- In the first stratum the Absolute, *al-Haqq* (in our terms, that would approximate Absoluteness prior to Eternity), is still completely free of any limitation.
- The second stratum represents a self-determination of the Absolute within Itself. There is only still 'a faint foreboding of self-articulation. The Absolute, in other words, is *potentially* articulated' (Izutsu 1983:153). Self-consciousness arises in the Absolute in all eternity. The Names, at the stage of them all being identical, find themselves here.
- In the third stratum, the potential Self-determinations of the Absolute become actualised.
- In the fourth stratum, the full split into independent Self-determinations takes place. This move is reflected in the relative independence of the Names. Ibn Arabi's notion of what may be called *archetypes* operates at this level. The archetypes, though they are the essences of the possible things, are non-existent (*adam*), that is, they do not have a temporally and spatially determined existence yet (Izutsu 1983:160ff.). They are intermediate between the Absolute and the phenomenal world. In our terminology: they might be said to partake in Eternity.
- In his fifth stratum, the world comes into being potentially in the consciousness of the Absolute. Our Infinitude might overlap with this stratum.
- In the sixth stratum, the world comes into actual being. In our terminology, Cosmos emerges. He sees the Names as operative even there. Indeed, in our model, Cosmic Consciousness is an extension of the Thought of Infinitude.

Throughout, one can sense Ibn Arabi struggling to tread a fine line between an identification of the Ultimate and the world, and a strong division between them. Not only that. His model attempts to reconcile Islamic revelation with Greek philosophy.

His 'Knowledge' (*Alim*) as one of the Divine Names and archetypes is therefore double-edged. On the one hand, it is the eternal self-Knowledge of the Absolute; on the other hand, it partakes in human experiential knowledge, through human organs of cognition. Those (in our terms 'Cosmic') organs are also nothing else than phenomenal forms of the Absolute. His Knowledge spans and connects the entire range from the arising of Divine self-Knowledge to the cognition of human beings.

■ Kabbalistic Wisdom (*Hokhmah*) and Intelligence (*Binah*)

In the speculative Kabbalah, two of the ten *Sefirot* (*Hokhmah* and *Binah*) deal directly with the difficult task of bridging the gap between Nothingness and Cosmos, as far as the aspect of Witting (Knowing) is concerned. Stepping aside from great individual theosophical thinkers such as Azriel ben Menachem (c. 1160–1238 CE), Moses de Leon (c. 1250–1305 CE), Moses Cordovero (1522–1570 CE) and Isaac Luria (1534–1572 CE), even a general overview of speculative Kabbalah should reveal the intellectual beauty and profundity of this school of MM. In addition, the potential fruitfulness of the Kabbalistic approach to reconcile contemporary science with an MM for today must be appreciated.

In Kabbalah the theistic assumption of the ancient Hebrew faith is adapted, not completely overthrown. *Ein-Sof* is God – the God of Abraham, Moses and the prophets – in his most hidden dimension. Insofar as he transcends the capacities of the human mind, he is non-existent (*Ayin*). Kabbalah attempts to reconcile the traditional Hebrew idea of creation and its strong implication of transcendence, with the Neoplatonic idea of emanation with its immanentist implication. The *Sefirot* bridge the gap between the hidden God and the finite world via four stages or grades: the emanation of the *Sefirot* as primordial patterns in God himself; the investment of the *Sefirot* with creative powers; the union of the *Sefirot* with matter; and then the emerging of the actual world (Epstein 1975 [1959]:232f.). In essence, this is a panentheistic view: the world is potentially contained in God; the potential world becomes actual through the level of the *Sefirot*. The hidden God as such has no attributes. Yet *Ein-Sof*, insofar as he is active throughout the universe, does manifest himself as having certain aspects: the ten *Sefirot*.

The second and third *Sefirot* (*Hokhmah* and *Binah*) may be understood as patterns of divine thought at the root of reality. Yet they are essentially ambivalent. From the side of reality, they represent ‘God as the immanent *thinking* power of the universe’ (Epstein 1975 [1959]:236).

The first *Sefirah*, *Kether*, is the highest one of all, the ‘crown’ of divinity: the Abyss of ‘Nothingness’ – that is, of radical Unknowability ‘above’ Wisdom and Understanding. It initiates and enables the arising of *Hokhmah* (the ‘Wisdom’ of God) and *Binah* (his ‘Intelligence’, ‘Understanding’). With these two, the movement towards manifestation becomes more pronounced. Yet it is important to bear in mind that this level as such lies beyond the horizon of human experience. It precedes the division between the subject and the object of consciousness (Scholem 1955 [1941]:220).

Hokhmah represents the point between the ‘Nothingness’ of *Kether* and the created world. It hovers between Nothingness and reality as the primordial, first revelation. It is the first flash of cognition, before cognition becomes

limited in any way. Mythologically, it is seen as male. This Wisdom of God is also referred to as mystical seed, sown into creation: still undeveloped and undifferentiated, but nevertheless containing the essence of all that exists. At this stage, the world exists in God's thoughts, so to speak. *Binah* stands for the unfolding of *Hokhmah* as differentiation in the divine intellect, but still preceding created reality. In *Binah* God appears as the eternal subject. Seen as female, it is compared to a vessel, receiving, and yet also giving birth (to the next triad, the emotions), providing depth and breadth to Wisdom.

In this remarkable speculative construction the seed for differentiation and the other movements of Cosmic Consciousness has been sown, and has started to sprout – still concealed underground in the soil of 'hidden God'. Our model of the Witting of Eternity is compatible in spirit and tendency with the Kabbalistic vision.

■ insights from within modern physics

□ Albert Einstein

Einstein did not work out a systematic MM. As far as 'God' is concerned, his overall position was a vague veneration for a mysterious, inexplicable force behind nature. Overall, his attitude was a combination of deism and agnosticism. Yet, if any one thing stood out for him in his study of nature, it was a sense of awe before some transcendent order and orderliness manifest in the universe. An incomprehensible universe somehow reveals and presupposes some superior lawful rationality. On occasion he would use words such as 'God', 'Spirit' and so on, but the deepest layer of his view always remained a fascination with a transcendent harmony as such, operative in the cosmos. Hearing the music of the spheres and loving his violin were to him related passions. In his heart of hearts, he was a modern-day Pythagoras, who likewise saw music, mathematics and science as related to some transcendent order as the essence of things. Reach back as far as possible into Einstein's mind, and one finds a sense of harmony as the first and deepest root of all, cosmos as well as God. That was his final ultimate, his first principle, behind which there is no going.

□ David Bohm

In the second half of the 20th century, David Bohm (1917–1992) wrote extensively on what he termed the 'implicate' and 'explicate' orders (Bohm 2003). He was not only a physicist (working in the interface between relativity theory and quantum theory), but also a philosopher with an interest in the kind of question fascinating us here. No modern scientist with equally impeccable scientific credentials ventured more deeply into MM. What is more, he himself did not present such ideas as irreconcilable with responsible mainline science (although the physicist establishment did), but as rationally justifiable

extensions and implications of that science. However, he rejected the mechanistic model of the physical world.

In his system, the ground of all things of experience is a 'holomovement', an ongoing cyclical process, which expresses itself in concrete reality. All of reality - matter, life and consciousness - flows from two basic, reciprocal mechanisms driving the holomovement, namely 'unfoldment' and 'enfoldment'. A covert, implicit order unfolds to become an overt, explicit order, which then enfolds back into the implicit state. Of these two the implicate order is the primary actuality; the explicate order, the secondary one.

At the root of all, in his vision, is a preconscious movement that continually recedes ever further, constantly escaping our human thought. Every implicate order recedes into a greater one. Implicate order becomes super-implicate order becomes super-super-implicate order, behind traditional, limiting, personalising concepts of 'God' (Bohm 2003:119f., 146f.). Bohm approximates the notion of Absoluteness. Somehow, he is prepared to attribute a notion such as 'super-intelligence' to that depth dimension. So far, Bohm seems to endorse the approach explored on these pages. One problem must be noted (as pointed out by Howard Bloom) (Bloom 2012:441ff.). To explain his notions of the implicate and explicate orders, Bohm made use of his glycerine experiment, which needs not be set out here. The important point is that his reverse of the explicate to the implicate in this experiment was a return to what had been there all the time; it was not the creation of something new at all. Here's the rub: Should Bohm's experiment be interpreted as a failed, but all the same brave and useful, analogy for Cosmos actually emerging *de novo* from Eternity, from Absolute Horizon? Alternatively, did he mean to say that all was always there, albeit implicitly, from all eternity? Undoubtedly, here we are also up against the limits of language, of all conceptual thought. One wants to say only the minimum. Push it 1 mm too far and you end up in substantialist talk about Absoluteness. I would want to give Bohm the benefit of the doubt. Tentionally, he was on his way to the silence of Absolute Horizon, but he probably stopped too soon, or went too far, which boils down to the same thing. Speculate about Eternity to your heart's delight, but do not give content to Absolute Horizon; anyway, you cannot do it. Absolute Horizon problematises Bohm's analogy more than he seems to have been aware of.

How does the factor 'super-super-intelligence', according to Bohm, manifest itself in the process of 'unfoldment' to become consciousness? How is the thinking of consciousness foreshadowed in the depth of the implicate order? That is the question here. Indeed, four of the five features mentioned above in §26 somehow appear in so many words in his writing about the level of implicate order becoming explicate. Even if they are not developed strongly in the particular work of his that I am reading here, they are touched on as implied root categories in his endeavour to explain the most fundamental essence of all. At the level of the implicate order they anticipate the structure, function

and activity of explicit human consciousness. They are hidden in the vast preconscious background of ordinary, explicit consciousness.

- Firstly, in Bohm's thinking, the category of *wholeness, order* (not the mechanistic order of scientific dogma, but a transcendent implicate order) is the root of all. Like music, the depths of the implicate dimension of the holomovement has *meaning*, which derives from a subtle *coherence* right up there: the contrasting coherence of the implicate and explicate orders. In ways that are at present only vaguely discernible there are *laws*, a 'holonomy' ('the law of the whole'), beyond the reach of quantum theory. In Bohm's view new wholes may continually be discovered – the assumption of lawful togetherness remaining a basic category. The idea of *implicate* implies a certain togetherness of at least two factors, as does Bohm's postulate of the togetherness (wholeness) of explication and implication.
- Secondly, in likewise manner, 'certain similar basic principles of *distinction* will prevail in the holomovement' (Bohm 2003:89). The very notion of 'explication' in itself, at the most rarified level conceivable, contains the principle of distinction. What is more, the differentiation between the implicate and explicate orders implies distinction, even *separation (separability)* at the most primordial level of becoming.
- Thirdly, at the level of the implicate order Bohm assumes 'an approximate kind of *recurrence, stability*' (Bohm 2003:94). It connects the notions of order and difference. Music serves him as an analogy: an element of 'reverberation' is necessary for music with its sense of *continuity* to occur. This element of co-presence prevents mere fragmentation of the distinct. This element is assumed to be at the bottom of the nature of reality, namely that it is movement. This set of ideas can be assimilated into the category of 'preserving' (§26).
- Fourthly, Bohm distinguishes an element of *projection, creativity*, active in the unfolding in the implicate order (Bohm 2003:119). Incidentally, he finds the current model of evolution in biology to be too mechanistic.

In Bohm's thinking, Eternity was not distinguished as a distinct level or grade in the unfolding of his implicate order 'forwards' towards becoming explicate order. Nor did he see his implicate order as receding 'backwards', disappearing on Absolute Horizon.

Wanting

■ §28 The possibility of passibility

Need, want: an overtone of human existence as a whole and of all living and non-living nature. In Cosmic existence, it shows various shades:

- objective lack, that is, a deficiency without full awareness of it on the side of that which lacks – the plant requires, wants, needs, water in order to survive but does not fully realise that it does not have it
- objective drive or compulsion towards something – the plant wants water, in the sense that it will do everything in its power to bore down to water, again without being fully aware of it subjectively
- lack, subjectively felt, with overtones of distress and suffering – the victims of the earthquake desperately want food and water to survive; they do not have it but their bodies require it, and they know it
- compulsion, subjectively felt, towards attaining something – the victims are deprived of food and water, and they will do whatever they can to obtain it, even if helplessly crying for help is their only recourse
- desire or wish, subjectively felt, without the implication of objective deficiency – the billionaire wants another limousine
- desire or wish, subjectively felt, and not for one's own benefit but for the benefit of an other – the mother wants her child to live, and gladly sacrifices her own life for it.

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We are here up against a strange peculiarity: it seems impossible to distinguish nature as it 'really' is, from our human take on it, that is, from our projections onto it. The categories of our thinking and our words describing nature mould the things of nature to fit the shapes of our minds, thinking patterns and words. We see and talk about nature anthropomorphically. Even hard-nosed scientists, firm and definitive materialists do that: Thus, one of the 'primary desires' of any living thing is the desire for food; another 'primary desire' is to avoid becoming food. Molecules have 'needs'; a plant is 'striving upward' (Dennett 1996:37, 58, 61). In nature there is 'pitiless indifference'; nature is not only witless, but also 'callous' and 'heartless' and does not care (Dawkins 1995:131ff.). In such scientific writings, are such descriptions, such projections, just unintended, unconscious slips of the finger on the keyboard; shorthand, a manner of speaking; innocuous metaphors; rhetorical tricks to make us sit up; serious category mistakes; or intended to capture the 'real' nature of nature? They are probably a mixture of these.

We seem to have a few strategic choices: seriously to root out all anthropomorphic thought and speech about nature; or pooh-pooh it, and use it tongue in cheek as means to enlighten the less educated. Conversely, we could accept it as an inescapable and useful formative element in our dealings with nature. If we adopt the third strategy, we have another choice: either restrict our attention to observable nature, or explore – and speak anthropomorphically about – 'Nature' that is not observable, but somehow seems to be implied by 'nature'. These reflections have adopted the latter course. We may speak thus, but self-critically so, about nature and Nature. We cannot avoid it, but we can see through what we are doing when we are doing it. In addition, the manner and content of our anthropomorphisms can be probed and plumbed to a remarkable degree. The fingerprints of their human makers can be lifted from all gods.

This brings us back to Wanting as a postulated dimension of Eternity. In the orientation that we are wanting, seeking here, may we think that Wanting is a Principle governing Cosmos, deriving from eternity beyond? Yes. Longing, passion, love and suffering have Eternal roots, becoming deep functions in Cosmos as a whole. Is it not something similar to what Paul had in mind when he referred to 'the universe [waiting] with eager expectation' (Rm 8:19)? Of course, this is said from within our human, all too human, feelings, hopes and fears, love and suffering. It is either that, or silence. Silence before Ultimacy is good. In the beginning was the Word, says John; and before the Word? one may ask. Silence. The Buddha, to mention one, adopted it; and Jesus expired in silence. Speech also has its place as a signpost to silence. Some of the greatest followers of the Buddha and Jesus spoke eloquently, systematically and at length for the sake of serving silence. Do not confuse such speech with, or collapse it into, scientific argument. In this chapter we do not seek verification or falsification within the methodological confines of empirical science: Wanting may be thought of as

ending on Absolute Horizon and arising on Absolute Horizon. This stance is not taken on the basis of asymptotic parallelism, but based on respecting the distinctiveness inherent in the competencies of the spheres of science and MM (see §1, §3 and §13).

For the reasons explained earlier, the key words of this chapter are used in their gerund forms ('Wanting', 'Needing'), to forestall a tendency to substantialise them. The words do not refer to a reality, a structure or a being. They hint at a primordial function arising from Horizon, in a Wanting, Needing to become manifest. This Wanting arises at the level of Eternity. It is a possibility right through from Eternity to Cosmos, a living being, of which humankind is a small cell.

Absoluteness is beyond good and evil. Yet, in the emergence of Wanting in Eternity, the possibility of good and evil arises. Wanting is the Principle not only of an emotional force, but also of a moral force inherent in Cosmos. This aspect becomes abundantly apparent in humankind. Yet somehow, something like the love of sub-human creatures for their kind and even occasionally across species derives not only from blind biological drives such as hunger and procreation, but also from some Principle inherent in the Nature of things. As a kind of being, humanity is a member of the *community* of Cosmos, in which the 'rest' of Cosmos is not merely an object on which humanity bestows its sentiments. Likewise, the very idea of 'Wanting' implies shortcoming, in that sense 'evil' (*malum*). Concretised in Cosmos, Wanting can also take wrong turns, be perverted, and in that sense be 'evil'. It can become 'evil' in the sense of being intent on the aggrandisement of self at all costs, involving suffering for oneself or others, as human history as well as evolution demonstrates.

Avoid pitting *agape* (understood as 'giving love') against *eros* (understood as 'wanting love') as two irreconcilable emotive attitudes. Both giving and seeking arise from the same Principle, from Wanting. Wanting occurs in the company of Witting, Willing, Acting and Interacting (see Ch. 10 and further). Morality as a human phenomenon has an emotional, attitudinal aspect, and that aspect is inextricably connected to cognitive and practical dimensions. Morality is not about feelings and attitudes only; at its higher levels, it is also about the cognitive understanding of historical norms and situations, and of acting 'response-ably' and effectively in those situations. Nevertheless, centrally, morality does have an emotional, attitudinal aspect. That this aspect derives, ultimately, from Eternal Wanting is our present concern. At the level of emerging Eternity, Wanting does not occur in isolation, but as interconnected with all the other Principles that will be discussed.

A weakness in the criticisms of 'design' in the coming into being of the world, put forward by materialists such as Dawkins and Dennett, is that they tend to reduce any conceivable more-than-material preconditions for the existence of the world (which they do not accept, to begin with) to an

intellectual aspect (cf. Barham 2004:210–226). In passing, I am not siding here with the ‘design’ philosophers and theologians, as little as I am siding with the materialists. The point here is merely that there is more at stake than the possible workings or lack of intelligence in nature. The non-material preconditions (but always occurring together with material conditions) of Cosmos also include the Principle of Wanting with all its implications of pathos, emotion, affect, feeling, valuing and suffering, such as:

- positive (constructive) desire and negative (destructive) desire
- pain and pleasure
- anxiety and confidence
- wrath and forgiveness
- love, hatred and fear
- compassion and sympathy
- coldness and callousness
- detachment and involvement
- blissfulness and happiness
- anguish and suffering
- indifference and vulnerability
- cruelty, severity and mercy
- self-directedness and other-directedness
- requiring and giving
- yearning and satisfaction
- hopefulness and despair
- bias and impartiality.

It is inevitable that religious, philosophical and MM systems should colour the world of humans in emotive tints. For example, the key emotive tone of Taoism is non-preferential impartiality; of Christianity, self-sacrificing love; of Islam, sovereign mercy. In the highly personal secular worldview of Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) atheism blends with rationalism and neo-Stoicism to produce a life-orientation of detachment, but not cold indifference; in the atheistic materialism of Ernst Bloch (1885–1977) optimistic messianism mixes with an acceptance of the inevitability of disillusionment; in Emil Cioran (1911–1995) tortured Gnostic pessimism takes on a passionate, even joyful timbre. It is an interesting field, but not our present concern. Our present concern is: where does emotivity in the broadest sense – in whatever hue or flavour and wherever it occurs – ultimately come from?

The perspective of this chapter is that all forms of pathos, love, and so on, may be postulated ultimately to derive from a common root or Principle, stirring in some inaccessible Depth. That is, regardless of how divergent and opposing they may occur at the human level, in cosmos generally and at the divine level (in the many religious projections of humanity). The unrest, the feeling, the Wanting, as yet inarticulate, is primordial.

At the level of concrete cosmos, Wanting and all its ramifications occur in conjunction with Witting, Willing and Being with all their ramifications. This will be picked up in more detail later. I shall also argue that at the level of all the anthropomorphic gods of humanity (loving, jealousy and so on), the connectedness of divine mercy and love with divine intellect and divine being (including divine embodiment) is a criterion for the relative, functional meaningfulness of such god talk. Note: 'relative, functional meaningfulness', not 'absolute truth'. For at the level of the god talk of Cosmic beings (humans), there is no such thing as absolute truth, conforming to reality. If the criterion of truth as provable correspondence to some reality is applied, all anthropomorphic god concepts, inescapably operating within the confines of Cosmos, are untrue. Nevertheless, that does not render them useless. There were better and worse god constructions on the way of human development. Some carry the seeds of further ennoblement and self-transcendence to Absoluteness, and deserve our respect. Others are capped with a hard ceiling, enclosing the spectators of the paintings against the ceiling in a closed space, and shutting them off from the clear sky above, and are better discarded along the road of the development of MM.

At the level of Infinitude, the question (Christian, but not only Christian) of the passibility of God (his ability to suffer: from the Latin *pati*, 'to suffer') – also divine love, mercy, and so on as divine attributes – are meaningful, although not corresponding to fact, and there are better and worse projections. Here, at the level of Eternity, we are transfixed by a dimension prior to religion-specific God and theology and cosmos – that is, by the question of the very *possibility of passibility* in the most generic sense imaginable. That possibility of passibility is the Principle underlying the entire register of 'feeling' and 'emotions' in cosmos and human, starting to stir in the Eternity of Wanting Unground.

This kind of explanation does not compete with or replace scientific explanations of the origin and development of feeling etcetera, for example as presented by evolutionary biological science (along Darwinian lines), or psychological developmental science (say, along the lines of Piaget). It 'wants' to complement science. A contemporary example of such integration of scientific understanding of feeling and understanding the world of feeling as emerging from a deeper order, was suggested by David Bohm (2003:39ff., 103ff., 203ff., 218ff., 253ff.).

■ §29 Buoys in unchartable waters

I shall now further explore the possibility that, as far as the factor 'emotions' is concerned, the alternatives of scientism and traditional theism (including its ad hoc adaptations) do not exhaust the range of possibilities open to those interested in ultimacy. The format of this already large compendium does not allow lengthy in-depth discussions with a great number of encouraging and challenging perspectives, so I restrict myself to a few particularly interesting ones.

■ *Taṇhā*, *dukkha* and *karuṇā* in Early and Mahāyāna Buddhism

In the vocabulary of the Buddha of early Buddhism the affect *taṇhā* ('desire') looms large as a pivotal emotion in the human psyche and human existence in its state of being unenlightened. It is the emotional overtone of human life, devoid of understanding of the ultimate insubstantiality of all things; humans 'desire' an optical illusion. This craving is the chief cause of the ills of life. By ignorantly assuming that one has an eternal, substantial essence, one desires to maximise that quality. It occurs mostly in isolation from and at the cost of other forms of life, and of one's true spiritual destiny. Even the unenlightened desire for non-existence is covered by this negative cloud. This self-centered pursuit of a wrongly understood happiness is driven by ignorance (*moha*) of the true nature of things, and associated with negative emotions such as hatred (*dosa*) and unhappiness (*dukkha*). With his antispeculative stance the Buddha does not conceptualise ultimate insubstantiality (*suññatā*: Emptiness, our Absoluteness) as becoming cosmos, and in the process somehow – analogous to human emotional life – showing signs of desire (Wanting) in any sense. The Buddha's rigorous intellectual asceticism and his psychological focus on human existence indeed leaves little space for such a move.

Buddhism provides the seekers of liberation with ways and means to rid themselves of this kind of desire. This is achieved neither by repressing it nor by giving it full rein or by controlling it, but by becoming liberated from it. This liberation entails discovering its dynamics and, in the final analysis, by understanding its nature and origin. In the Buddhist account of the enlightenment of Siddhattha Gotama, under the *bodhi* tree, to become the Buddha, he demonstrated freedom of desire and hatred, and fullness of compassionate love. This liberation grew organically from the insight into the ultimate non-substantiality of things.

In Mahāyāna, an additional emphasis emerges, not replacing but rather complementing the above one. Metaphysical Emptiness, Buddha Nature as metaphysical Selflessness (our 'Absoluteness'), assumes the quality of compassion (*karuṇā*). *Karuṇā* transcends the psychological, human dimension (addressed by the Buddha of early Buddhism); it now emerges from the ultimate depth of the universe itself. In Mahāyāna Buddhism, particularly at the level of popular religion, this intuition is decked out in the richest metaphorical, mythological garb. This places the concept 'Bodhisattva' (like 'Buddha') in the dimensions of our 'Infinitude' (Part Three) and our 'Cosmos' (Part Four). Yet, it seems inviting to interpret its tendency in terms of our 'Eternity': Emptiness is Wanting Cosmic happiness.

This primordial drive becomes concrete, manifest, unfolded, in the mythopoetic figures of Bodhisattvas and Buddhas. The great compassion derives from the essential Nature of all things, from Buddha Nature, and takes

on a cosmic quality. Now Emptiness Itself becomes the subject of Wanting: a need, a passion, for universal Cosmic well-being and happiness. In the Bodhisattva this is indeed longing, but it is not ignorant, selfish *taṇhā*. For example, in a mythological context, the celestial Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara, perfect illustration of the great truth of Emptiness-becoming-Compassion, is filled with profound compassion and the desire for the liberation of beings. That great truth is, in our term, Wanting. The Bodhisattvic vow to seek the happiness of All, arises from a force generated from the innermost essence of Nature Itself: Emptiness.

This chapter as a whole is a reformulation of the ancient Buddhist metaphysical-mystical insight. Unground, with Absoluteness at its heart, becomes a universal Principle of Wanting. Cosmos – physical nature, the evolution of life, consciousness – can, in the final analysis, be understood in such a context.

■ **eros and *apatheia* in Plato and Plotinus**

An excellent candidate from the first centuries of Hellenic reflection on an MM background of human emotions, integrated with the science of the time, would have been Stoicism with its theory of impulse (*horme*) and emotion or passion (*pathos*) (Brennan 2003:257–294). However, I now turn to Plato, the most influential figure in Western MM. Does he help us to understand human emotivity as somehow tied in with a structural feature of cosmos itself, ultimately arising from a dimension beyond cosmos?

□ **Plato**

An obvious place to start would be Plato's ideas concerning *eros* (erotic desire, love). In his dialogues *Symposium*, *Lysis*, and *Phaedrus*, the characters of Plato famously discuss *eros* from various perspectives, without achieving finality, and without Plato unequivocally expressing his own view on the matter. The reader is invited into an open process of dialectical thinking, and interpreters can only construe a probability of what Plato's position might have been. Therefore, it is no wonder that his followers in later generations picked up various threads to spin out. Nowhere does Plato pronounce all-knowing proclamations. The speeches of his characters are tentative, criss-crossing probes of light into a night sky. At the very least the contributions of the various interlocutors, deftly used by Plato in his dialogues, seem to peak in the notion that *eros* is essentially the desire for the vision of the Beautiful (the Good) in the most general and sublime sense.

In Western thought, his complex treatment of *eros*, most significant in its own right, was destined to play an influential role in Christianity. Nevertheless, contrary to the anti-erotic accent that crept into that religion, Plato does not

reject or despise *eros* at the physical level, but honours it as a stage on a graded continuum (as was also the case in early Buddhism, as illustrated by the *Dhammapada*). Between Plato's Ideas on the one hand and humankind with their *eros* on the other, there is no dualistic split, but a continuous scale of perfection, in which *eros* is the driving force upwards. His is an end-directed ('teleological', 'final') structure. It is top-down (drawing, participated in) and bottom-upwards (striving, participating in) at the same time. Beautiful things are steps only, the final destination of which is the contemplation of the Idea (Form) of absolute Beauty. Is there, ultimately, a real ontological link between the Ideal world of the Forms and the empirical world? Plato probably does not allow for more than participation as contemplation.

Plato's *eros* is not to be reduced to selfish, acquisitive love, as has happened in some modern renderings of Plato (cf. Nygren 1957; Osborne 1994:86ff.; Rist 1964). In addition, in Plato, unlike early Buddhism, there is a certain rightness and nobility albeit flawed and incomplete in *eros*. It is halfway between utter lack and incomprehension at the bottom extreme, and fulfilment and final understanding at the top. As is the case with *tanhā* in early Buddhism in its developmental model from immature (foolish) to mature (wise), Plato's *eros* can be gradually ennobled, but in a model more positive towards desire than was the case in early Buddhism.

Plato ties physical *eros* essentially to *philosophia* ('love of wisdom'). At its pinnacle, sexual desire for the desirable, the physically beautiful, becomes meta-sexual – philosophical – desire: love of wisdom, culminating in the gazing upon true beauty, that is, upon the ideal form of the Beautiful as such, which is the same as the 'good' as such. *Eros* is the guide leading from a deficiency of beauty and truth in the creature to the fulfilment of the philosophic vision of beauty, on one continuum of experience. Implicitly all human desire, however imperfect and crooked, is love for perfect Wisdom and the Forms of Beauty and Goodness. So far, our connection of Witting and Wanting seems to find some warmth in the presence of this great figure. His connection of physical *eros* and philosophy (in the sense of *sophia-phily*, see Ch. 1) also extends a measure of encouragement.

Yet, now we hit a snag. In what has been attempted so far, Wanting at the level of cosmos in all its forms participates in and expresses the Wanting of Arche. Cosmic and human 'wanting' – not only physical, but also metaphysical – is connected to Wanting becoming manifest from Unground. I understand 'wanting' of life (food, sex, procreation and so on) as well as 'wanting' of ultimate insight (original '*sophia-phily*': MM) to ultimately derive from Eternal Wanting. Might Plato suggest something akin to that? It does not seem so. To Plato *eros* is one-way traffic: up, from the physical to the Ideal. The word is not used for the way down. To think of the divine as in any sense Wanting anything, would have been un-Greek. *Eros*, mythologically personified, is not a god, but

a *daemon* (a kind of semi-divine being, which includes the rational part of the human soul), intermediate between gods and men. The gods are perfectly happy and beautiful and in possession of good and beautiful things. It must be added that by 'gods' Plato did not mean the Olympian gods with their flaws – of them he was highly critical – but a certain level of derived being, lower than the Forms but higher than humans.

At what is human and daemonic *eros* ultimately directed? At the level of demythologised speech there is the transcendent realm of the ideas, including Beauty, which is the good. The Ideas are not just concepts in human heads, but constitute Ultimate Reality itself. They are the philosophical sublimations of the gods, and the eternal archetypes of empirical reality, not limited by time, place and observer.

In his *Parmenides* he refers to 'the One' (*to En*) as infinite, formless, beyond space and time, non-being, nameless, unknowable and indescribable. That is our Infinity at its most sublime. Is there any level somehow comparable to our Eternity or to empty, non-substantial Unground? No, it appears.

Plato's *eros* is good, relatively so – but it refers exclusively to the ascent from the world of humans and *daemons* to the Idea of Beauty or Goodness, not to the descent. Plato does not linger on the dimensions termed 'Absoluteness' and 'Eternity' in the ruminations of our essay, let alone on Wanting at such a level. The upper level of his building of being is occupied by the Ideas (Forms) such as Beauty and Goodness, with Being mixed in somewhat unclearly (there seems to be a remarkable degree of inconsistency in his construction) (Rist 1964:16ff.). Nevertheless, there can hardly be any doubt that the Ideas constitute the ultimate, most abstract level with which Plato cares to concern himself. Perfect Being, Truth and Beauty are the apex of all in Platonic thinking.

At which level(s) does Plato's *eros* lie? At the level of our 'Cosmos'. Yet there seems to be at least a hint in Plato that the gods (not the Ideas) are Wanting: they (e.g. the *demiurg* in the *Timaeus*) are wanting for creation to take place. The divine level is a sphere of happiness. They do not need anything for themselves. But it may be legitimately thought that in Plato his gods do appear to have the quality of love (even if the word *eros* is not used for them) (Rist 1964:30ff.). They want a world to be. They give creatively.

The Ideas of the Ideal World are perfect as they are. They are not wanting. If there is no movement from Ideas to Cosmos (gods, daemons and humans), presupposing some motivating movement within the realm of the ideas themselves – then surely something essential would be left unexplained in Plato's model? There seems to be a lacuna between the Ideas and the world; and no matter how desperately the world may 'love' the Ideas, the gap remains.

□ Plotinus

Five centuries after Plato and standing in the Platonic tradition, Plotinus (c. 204–270 CE), who was truly a mystic thinker of the highest order with a rich inner spiritual life, postulated two, three or perhaps four levels of being. He was a formidable synthetic thinker, forging the major systems in the tradition before him into a single system, not by simply adding them up in an eclectic type of unity, but by interpreting them tendentially, creatively.

A problem with interpretation is whether the One at the top and Matter at the bottom of Plotinus' system are to be interpreted as levels of 'being'. In any event, Plotinus' view of top and bottom is one of strictly non-reciprocal dependence of the lower on the higher. In this respect, the model sought in this essay is different in that it senses a reciprocal relationship between Absoluteness and Cosmos: Cosmos feeds back into Absoluteness.

First for Plotinus there is *to En* ('the One'). This coincides with his notion of divinity ('God'). The One/God refers to a dimension way beyond the anthropomorphic gods of mythological thought. Plotinus pushes the notion of 'God' further into transcendence than had been the case with Plato. The One/God constitutes the uppermost stratosphere of his thinking (Plotinus 1984):

Generative of all, The Unity is none of all; neither thing nor quantity nor quality nor intellect nor soul; not in motion, not at rest, not in place, not in time: it is the self-defined, unique in form or, better, formless, existing before Form was, or Movement or Rest, all of which are attachments of being and make Being the manifold it is (VI.9.3). (p. 701)

He assimilates Plato's Ideas (Forms) into that concept – they exist in the One. On the other hand, he makes his 'God' – the One – in a sense, more accessible to humans: it is not a matter of distant contemplation only (as had been the case with Plato's ideas); humans can become one with It. The world originates in the One, and shares in the One.

From the One, two (or three) further levels of being cascade downwards successively. Yet note that ultimately his is not a developmental model but a static hierarchical one of participation, amounting to a form of realism inherited from Plato and setting the parameters for most of what would follow in idealistic thinking. The mystic becoming one with the One is probably more of an epistemological than an ontological 'realisation'.

First, there is the duality in unity of *On* ('Being') and *Nous* ('intelligence', 'mind'). The One as such transcends Being and intelligence. From *On-Nous* proceeds *Psyche* ('Soul'), covering both individual human souls and nature. At the bottom – teetering on the brink of the whole system (Plotinus is hard to pin down) – there 'is' *Hyle* (Matter), but strictly speaking, it 'is' not. Matter is the point of exhaustion of the being and goodness of the One. It is important to note that although Plato is Plotinus' chief inspiration, Plato probably took the various aspects and levels of being as continuous emanations of the Supreme, without seeing them as discrete levels to the extent that Plotinus would do.

The system of Plotinus, which has played such an important role in Western MM and which may have had historical connections with Upanishadic thinking, is of great significance for meditations such as ours. Might Plotinus' *to En* point in the same direction as our Absoluteness (Unground), and might it be Wanting in any sense? In addition, what about his matter (*Hyle*)? Might our 'Wanting' drift into the orbits of Plotinus' *to En* and *Hyle*?

Let me start at the bottom of his pyramid, with Matter (O'Brien 1996:171ff., 117ff.; Oosthuizen 1974:124ff.; Pistorius 1952). Plotinus indeed entertains the notion of absolute Lack. Although ultimately deriving from the One, Matter is attenuated to a virtual state of non-being, absolute deficiency, essential poverty, at most a bare aspiration towards existence. In the words of Plotinus (1992):

There must, then, be some Undetermination-Absolute (*apeiron kath' auto*), some Absolute Formlessness [...] whose place is below all the patterns, forms, shapes, measurements, and limits [...] (I.8.3). [...] *and it is...* the Authentic Essence of Evil [...] Primal Evil, Evil Absolute (*kakon proton kai kath' auto kakon*) (I.8.3). (p. 78)

It is mere indetermination, 'absolutely indefinite and undefined [...] actually nothing, [yet] potentially everything' (Pistorius 1952:120). 'Negation-Absolute', 'Eternal Nothing', 'it can never become anything'; yet is 'the basis and mother of all becoming' (Pistorius 1952:119). It is the absence, the opposite, of God, of the Good; yet it is also 'the primal condition [...] a cosmic necessity' (Pistorius 1952:129). Then it is also Evil. These seeming inconsistencies indicate difficulties inherent in Plotinus' thinking. It appears that he entertains a number of ideas, not quite harmonised in his theory of matter. It is an indefinite kind of substratum of all; a level of being; and as utter Lack, it is the principle of evil. In our present context, the third of these is the most interesting.

Let us look at the opposite, uppermost end of his scale of being: The One. The One/God/the Good (Plotinus 1992):

[/]s that on which all else depends, towards which all Existences aspire as to their source and their need, while Itself is without need, sufficient to Itself, aspiring to no other, the measure and Term of all, giving out from itself the Intellectual-Principle and Existence and Soul and Life and all Intellective-Act (I.8.2). (p. 76)

The drift is clear: his utterly Beyond is the Source of All. It is also the teleological End of All, and the Attractor to that End. This teleology is Platonic. All things are wanting, and desire the great return. He sees a stronger ontological continuity than Plato had done between the Good and the world, via the intermediaries of Mind and Soul. Yet, like Plato, he sees the Good Itself as lacking nothing. It is 'without any need' (*anendes*). In our term: It is not Wanting in any sense.

Again, the thinking of Plotinus reveals unharmonised trends. He did not quite succeed in harmonising the divergent influences of Plato, Aristotle,

Pythagoreanism and Stoicism to which he was indebted (Armstrong 1967 [1940]). Perhaps, after all, its closest ally was Aristotle's view of the remote, completely transcendent unmoved mover. The One, in a sense beyond being (Dunham et al. 2011:26ff.), also seems to be a first, super Being, an Infinite Subject, including all existences. So far, it could correspond with what I will attempt to understand in Part Three (Infinitude). His notion of the One also suggests an Origin of Being absolutely transcending (*epekeina*) Being: radically unspecific, nameless, unknowable, indescribable, inexpressible (*arreton*), formless, beyond time and space, beyond limit. This seems to point towards Absoluteness and Eternity – paradoxically, in the same direction as the very opposite of his scale (matter). The question is whether Plotinus's 'One' should be interpreted as a substance (hypostasis) or not. Emphasise its positivity, and it becomes a hypostasis, staying in line with Aristotle's notion of 'substance', to which Aristotle added nine 'accidents' (including quantity, quality, time and location). Emphasise its negativity, and it tends towards being denuded of substantiality. His One and his None have the same implication: absolute transcendence; but how far did he push it? Understood as beyond Being, utterly devoid of any content or reference, his 'One' could approximate Buddhist Emptiness. That, I understand tendentially, is the final inclination of his thinking. The question is how consistent he was in following through in that direction.

Plotinus' MM would become the basis of the 'negative theology' of an important strand in later Jewish, Christian and Muslim mysticism. It does not seem to be as utterly empty as the Buddhist notion of Emptiness (our Absoluteness): after all, an experienceable union with it is possible for the upward-striving human being. Although Plotinus does not crudely anthropomorphise divinity, he does at times (quasi-)personalise this supreme hypostasis (e.g. he refers to it as 'Father', with certain personal, emotional and religious overtones) (Rist 1964:71ff.). The human *eros* culminates in mystical union with the One. This goes considerably further than Plato was prepared to go. In this respect Plotinus' notion of 'union' seems to position it closer to the dimension of 'Infinitude' (Part Three) than to 'Eternity': one cannot experience 'Eternity'; there can be no felt *unio mystica* with it. Nevertheless, 'Infinitude' can be accessed in mystical experience.

In our present context the question is: is the One Wanting? For Plotinus, pathos, suffering and so on characterise lower forms of existence. To divine nature he ascribes impassivity, impassibility (*apatheia*). Desire is innate in the material, mortal world. That world is pathetic: full of emotion and desire – and, taken by itself, miserably inadequate. Ultimately deriving from the divine state with its divine *apatheia*, it desires to return to that state of non-desiring. Thus far (III.5), Plotinus' view of *eros* follows Plato closely. Yet, Plotinus can speak of The One as *eros*: love – even Self-loving (VI.8.15), and in effect loving creatures, insofar as they are Itself. The One eternally returns to Itself in desire and love. Even so, the One is perfect, and without needs (III.6).

On the whole, Plotinus seems to hover ambiguously between apophatic ontology and a more radical meontology: God (the One or the Good) is beyond the 'being' of the things it produces, but does not seem to be stripped of 'Being' altogether. Plotinus also stands between the ultimate metaphysical dimension of Plato and Aristotle on the one hand, and the personal Divinity of, say, the Christian fathers, on the other. In addition, his *to En* seems to be both less empty and featureless than the Unground we are suspecting, and less the Source of Wanting with all its emotional and volitional implications.

Platonic and Neoplatonic thought and the kind of theology and mysticism – kataphatic (speaking affirmatively) as well as apophatic (non-speaking) – based on them, have guided us up to a point. There is all reason to treasure this MM inheritance. This trend of thought, represented but never dominant in the Semitic monotheistic religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, nevertheless represents the apexes – or rather, the one converging MM apex – of those religions, and pointing beyond all three of them.

What interests me in this chapter is the question as to what extent representatives of that broad theistic stream may have seen the Principle of Wanting – desire, emotion, feeling, suffering, love and so on – as emerging from Absoluteness? Of two of them (Ibn Arabi and Luria) I have already taken note in previous chapters. The bad religio-political relations between sectors of Judaism, Islam and Christianity today do not reflect their profound MM affinities. At the heights of the MM thinking from within these religions they are kindred spirits. Their respective systems are, for all their differences, structurally similar, hairs from the same head. In their various ways they remain beckoning, reassuring buoys, far out at sea, and relevant for any raft attempting to escape the confined dock of positivism with its nihilistic implications.

□ **Rahman, Mahabbah and Ghadab in Ibn Arabi**

In his mysticism of Love, Ibn Arabi continues and develops the Platonic-Neoplatonic mysticism of *eros*, with a touch of Gnosticism added. In his imagination emerges a divine pathos, mark of a sym-pathetic (i.e. loving, suffering) God, linking God and Cosmos (Corbin 1997 [1969]:105ff.).

As indicated in the previous chapter, for this Sufi the divine Names are archetypes, essences, operative at a level between the Absolute (*al-haqq*) and the phenomenal world. They mark the beginning, actualisation and fulfilment of the process of self-determination, self-articulation, of the Absolute. They are not phenomenal reality yet. In short, Ibn Arabi's Names may be interpreted as moving at the level of our Eternity. Why did God create the world? In classic Sufi parlance: because God was a hidden treasure, yearning to be known. Witting (knowing) and Wanting (yearning) are compressed in the heart of Ibn Arabi's Absolute.

Rahman ('Mercy'), the highest Name, for Ibn Arabi primarily refers to the act of making things exist; it mediates the mystery of divine manifestation. The word has a strong emotive undertone of compassion, benevolence and mercy. Closely related to Mercy is *Mahabbah* ('Love'). Following, and subordinate to God's Mercy and Love, is His *Ghadab* ('Wrath'). Dispensing with the details of Ibn Arabi's complex theory, the important idea for us now is that these Names occur at the archetypal level, emerging from God as the Absolute.

At the most primordial level, at the beginning of the emanation of the Absolute, at the very first stage of the appearance of Mercy, it is Divine Mercy exercised upon Itself. Ibn Arabi pictures the emerging of mercy as a moment in the self-'objectification' of the Absolute in the process that eventually culminates in the creation of the world, where the Absolute manifests itself in creaturely forms. The emergence of Mercy, taking firmer shape, proceeds via a number of steps, which we need not analyse in detail now. In a telling analogy, Ibn Arabi compares the gushing forth of mercy from within the depths of the Absolute to pent-up air exhaled from the chest of a man (Izutsu 1983:131). Building up within the Absolute, it explodes out into the real world of cosmic existence.

Divine Love has the unique association that it is the driving divine motivation, the principle, operative particularly in the creation of the world. The inner-divine process, as Ibn Arabi sees it, obviously precedes human action, feeling and morality, but has human action as a consequence. Love illustrates this very well. To this powerful speculative mystical intellect, Love is the most basic driving force, the root cause behind emotive and moral attitudes such as anger, fear and so on.

□ ***Hesed, Gevurah (Din) and Rahamim in Luria***

As has become apparent in previous chapters, Luria and his fellow Kabbalists opened a window on an enthralling landscape. With the other *Sefirot* the triad of *Hesed* ('Favour', 'Grace', 'Compassion', 'Kindness', 'Goodness'), *Gevurah* (or *Din*) ('Power') and *Rahamim* ('Mercy') make up the 'aspects', 'stages', 'names', 'faces', 'garments', 'beams of light' or 'branches' emanating from the depth of God (*Ein-Sof*) (Fine 2003:126ff.; Scholem 1955 [1941]:213ff.).

Historically speaking, the concept of the ten *Sefirot* may have drawn on the Platonic idea of Forms analysed above via Neoplatonism, but they are not reducible to Platonism. In Luria's vision, the 10 branches organically grow from the tree of God (of which *Ein-Sof* is the hidden root and sap); this tree is also the tree of the universe, down to its smallest ramifications. This system is worked out in a plethora of symbolic and mythical detail fascinating the esoteric mindset, but not central to the MM approach. So all we are interested in here, is the basic structure of his thought as far as our Wanting may be concerned. Given the complexity and esoteric nature of his thinking and a linguistic barrier, I am greatly reliant on secondary literature.

In Luria's Kabbalistic theosophy, *Hesed*, *Gevurah* and *Rahamim* express the Origin and the process of emergence of the entire range of emotions and moral attitudes as they appear from the hidden abode of *Ein-Sof*, eventually to surface in the world. They are, as it were, the conduits for the manifestation of the emotive and moral dimension in the world, from the original Source to the actual outlet (creation), and to the pond (the world). This analogy of ours has only limited value, for the 'substance' of the conduit is exactly the same as that of the water itself; there is no difference, only differentiation. It is like water channelled through conduits of ice. To switch metaphors, the three are stages in the exhalation of *Ein-Sof* – that is, in the process of progressive differentiation of inner divine feeling. They are still at the level of devolving *Ein-Sof*, still prior to the creation of the world, but eventually become concrete in the world, like breath condensing in the air.

Hesed stands for the primal, unconditional Love in and emanating from *Ein-Sof*. *Gevurah* stands for divine Severity, for the Sternness of God's judgement. It is the dialectical opposite of *Hesed*; *Gevurah* indicates the allowance within emanating *Ein-Sof* for suffering and fear. In his triad of divine emotions and attitudes, the third, *Rahamim*, is the reconciliation, the harmonising balance, of the first two. That is why it is also referred to as *Tifereth* ('Beauty').

□ Love in Franz von Baader

In the section on Plato and Plotinus, it was argued that the contradistinction between *eros* (understood as self-seeking love) and self-giving love, which would become so strong in instances of later Christianity, forces an issue, which is not pronounced in the Platonic tradition itself. Nevertheless, there can be no doubt that *agape* and a set of associated ideas – centring in the unconditional, forgiving Love of God for humanity and Cosmos – have always been central to Christianity. 'God is love' is the briefest and most comprehensive compendium of Christian teaching and sentiment. One stands in awe before the love of Jesus on Calvary, and before 'him' ('Father') whom Calvary points to ... and beyond 'him': before Eternity and Unground.

Traditional Christian orthodoxy views God in substantial terms. However, the 'negative', apophatic MM tradition, largely based on Neoplatonism and the appropriation of Neoplatonism through the lenses of Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335–395) and the anonymous theologian-philosopher, Pseudo-Dionysius (the period between late 5th century and early 6th century) in that religion, could tendentially be interpreted to point in the direction of Eternity and Absoluteness. In the MM urge towards increasingly radical negation, several Christian thinkers shot their arrows to hardly tolerable extremes. None adopted a more rigorous position than Meister Eckhart (c. 1260–1328). Nevertheless, it seems to me that to discover thinkers from the Christian context speaking on the wavelength of Absoluteness-Eternity, one would have to seek quite far to

the left of mainstream theology, also of Neoplatonic, apophatic mysticism. This directs my curiosity to someone like Franz von Baader (1765–1840) (Baader 1855ff.; Betanzos 1998; Görtz 1977; Lambert 1978), who was a follower of Jacob Boehme, who had in turn been influenced significantly by Jewish and Christian Kabbalah. There is sufficient reason to work on the assumption that Sufism, Jewish Kabbalah and esoteric Christian theosophy are soul mates – not only by dint of historical connectedness, but also because of the inner logic of a shared basic orientation.

What does Baader – to whose thought love is the essential key – contribute to our understanding? Baader was a unique – but after his death largely neglected – intersection in the cross-currents of mysticism (mainly Eckhart, Boehme and Louis Claude de Saint-Martin [1743–1803]); Romanticism (mainly Hamann [1730–1788], Herder [1744–1803], Goethe [1749–1832], Hölderlin [1770–1843] and Novalis [1772–1801]) and Idealism (mainly Schelling and Hegel). What makes this rather inelegant writer relevant in our present context is his passionate endeavour to overcome rationalistic philosophy, uncritically associated with science, and the threat of modern materialistic scientism as a worldview. In 1823, he warned against what he termed ‘modern nihilism’. Yet, he was no scientific ignoramus, but well trained in the medicine, mineralogy, chemistry and physics of his time, and an accomplished mining engineer.

Philosophically, his main targets were Descartes and Kant, with their insistence on autonomous reason. Yet he was neither a theologian in the traditional sense nor a pietist with its emphasis on irrational feeling. Rationalistic Enlightenment and sentimental Pietism were the two flanks of the spirit of his time that he attacked vigorously. In our terms, he was a Christian MM theosophist: a speculative intellect, an intuition suffused with emotion, and a conservative (but by no means uncritical) treasurer of the Christian faith.

Baader’s vision was inspired, above all, by the idea of *organism*, which he championed in Romanticism. Cosmos is a living, feeling organism. At this stage, he deserves to be questioned further with respect to three questions.

First question: what is the relationship between God and Cosmos? Baader took care to distinguish his theistic position (he termed it *Allineinslehre*: ‘all-in-one-doctrine’, a version of panentheism) from pantheism (termed *Alleinslehre*: ‘all-one-doctrine’): participation, but not ‘being part’; connection, but not confusion, mixture or identity of God and humankind, God and Cosmos. God is a living, individual Personality (IV. 24), eternally originating in himself, but without any intrinsic relation to Creation, and not devolving to become cosmos. In effect, he restored the old Christian-theistic faith, presenting it as the most adequate modern philosophy. As for matter and creation, he vehemently rejected attempts either to present it as a force eternally independent of God (Manichaeism), or to absorb it into God monistically (the idealism of Hegel). God is not acosmic, but does not have a material body; nor is matter the direct creation of God (II. 477, IV. 345, XII. 213).

What is, according to him, the deepest cause of Cosmos? It is the Love of God (Görtz 1977:57ff.). For this 'love' Baader is happy to use the term *Eros*. Incidentally, more than any other modern Christian thinker, and to his credit, he accommodates human eroticism in his system (IV.165ff., 179ff.) (Lambert 1978:190ff.). This divine love – and neither blind law nor chance – inspires the eternal cycle of cosmic descent and re-ascent. In his emphasis on God's love for cosmos, he goes further than (Neo-)Platonism. Baader admits that the Love of God has Need for an Other: the eternal nature of God in its primordial condition (*Urstand*) shows a certain *Indigentia Dei* (a divine Need) (III. 400). Nevertheless, he does not pursue this rigorously.

Second question: does Baader allow for a notion of Absoluteness as Eternity, from which manifest God and cosmos emerge? It seems not. The revealed divine Person is the ceiling of Baader's contemplation. God's existence is the non-negotiable, innate axiom of all axioms, but Baader is not interested in Love insofar as it may stir primordially in some hidden depth, only insofar as it appears firstly, finally and manifestly in revealed God. In this respect, he appears to be speculatively less daring than his inspiration, Boehme. He lacks the passionate drive exhibited in Boehme's clumsy writing about the Qualities, such as Desiring/Sourness, Sweetness and Bitterness. Often Baader declares the manner of God's movement towards creation to be inaccessible, and beyond the limits of our knowledge. It is pointless to speculate about the how and why of creation. It is a mystery. Furthermore, it is pointless to wonder about the origin of manifest God (V. 260, VII. 267, X. 318) (Görtz 1977:102ff.).

Third question: how does Baader account for the dark side of being, for suffering and evil? The deepest motive for Baader's insistence on the divide between God and matter seems to be the old theodicy problem: if matter is awarded a high status and brought close to divinity, God would become responsible for evil, he feared – for evil is associated with matter. If not its source, matter is at least its locus. Besides, that God should be responsible for evil is impossible. Baader saw evil as the result of the sin of humanity. Before the possibility of chaos and evil arose, God created a first creation, which was utterly free of matter. In that creation (Baader continues an old tradition), Lucifer rebelled against God. In any event, evil is not part of the divine realm (that would be a pantheistic view), but the result of a contingent fall of the human creature.

Appreciating Baader's explosive enthusiasm, inspired rhetoric and profundity, I nevertheless cannot escape the impression that he was a reactionary rather than an original figure, an eclectic rather than a creative one. Perhaps that was an inevitable shadow of his Romantic interest. His depreciation of matter holds no promise for the cosmological and ecological concerns of today. In that same context, his theism lacks creative imagination. He does not root love – in fact, the whole gamut of 'feelings' – as deeply as I had initially expected, knowing that he hailed from Boehme. He weakens Boehme's vision of a struggling,

developing Divinity in which pathos – including suffering and love, trial and failure – is a central feature, and of which evil is an inevitable shadow.

The drift of our own argument does not lead us to posit a competing Principle of Evil in Eternity or in God. Evil only becomes actual with the actuality of Cosmos. We assume a *possibility* of evil emerging with the Principles of Eternity, including Wanting – and in that sense it is inevitable and necessary.

Willing

■ §30 Will-o'-the-wisp

Advanced meditation, as practised in Buddhism, travels the road of the disappearance of consciousness. Here, in Chapters 8-10, we are attempting to conceptualise the opposite process, postulated as presupposed by the movement in meditation. This prior movement is the emergence of Consciousness from Absoluteness, not merely in a restricted human individual sense, but in a Cosmic sense. Here we are not speaking of Cosmic or human consciousness yet, nor of Infinite Consciousness. We are reflecting on the *conditions* for the *elemental possibility* of Consciousness, as they surface from utterly indeterminate Origin.

'Willing' as used here, lies behind and is somehow operative in intentional, free volition as well as other conscious inclinations as found in human beings; in subconscious proclivities and instinctive tendencies that are shared by humans and other animals that are lower down in the chain of being; in vegetative functions; and even in the world of physical nature as a whole. It is here understood to be a transcendental Principle, co-constituting, and co-operative in all of reality. The level to which Willing is here extrapolated, is the level mediating between Absoluteness and Infinite Consciousness. Willing as a postulated Eternal Principle hovers on the further edge of Infinite Consciousness.

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The anthropomorphic nature of the category 'Willing' is not denied, but acknowledged candidly. We have no other toolbox to work with, no other plan or design to work from, and no other material to work on, than our own human mind-bodies, with Cosmos and its implications assumed to be their intimate extension, their organically surrounding shell. When reflecting, we cannot get out of our human mind-bodies. Apart from that, an assumption of our argument is that reality is of one piece, and that microcosm and macrocosm share the same basic structure. To regard this as a naïve or underhand fallacy of ambiguity, would be a symptom of the tragic split between cosmos (nature) on the one hand, and the human being on the other hand. To use Christian language: the Incarnation of the Word should emphatically not be restricted to the Word being born as a human, but extended to its being deeply, inextricably inserted in nature as a whole, from its most primitive to its most highly developed forms of life.

Three Principles belong to the level of a *possibility* of Consciousness. Willing is the third. Together, mutually implied, Witting-Wanting-Willing create the conditions from which Consciousness arises. Meaning is the hallmark of Consciousness; and meaning is not only *sensing* (Witting) and *valuing* (Wanting); it is also *intending* (Willing). Primacy is not awarded to any of the first three Principles. Willing is not a mere epiphenomenon of any of the previous two, or of their combination. Nor is Willing the dominant force, from which the other two derive.

The same musketeer like interconnectedness present among these first three Principles (one for all and all for one, and one in all and all in one), also applies to the relationship between the Principles making up the second and third triads. It also applies to the first, second and third triads as wholes. Eventually, in Cosmos, Consciousness (Mind) and Matter, Energy form one inextricable nexus, in which neither is to be awarded primacy. These mutually constitutive elements are organically connected: in humans, in Cosmos, in Infinitude; and they make their first appearance in their togetherness on the edge of things, in Eternity. Willing is not the sole or primary driving force in Eternity, Infinitude or Cosmos. It is one of several Principles. Nevertheless, that does not detract from its significance. Underestimating its significance would result in a skewed understanding of things (a distorted MM) and skewed life praxis (a distorted ethics).

As it is meant here, Willing carries the consideration of Witting and the wish of Wanting further, and connects the wish of Wanting and the ability of Becoming (which is the first element of the next triad). Locked in itself and without the empowering capacity of Becoming, Willing would remain tragically impotent. It is incomplete in itself and is the necessary link between the first and second triads.

The great Principles of Witting, Wanting, Willing, Becoming, Acting and Interacting co-arise together conditionalistically simultaneously (an inapplicable

temporal category). I have chosen to start with the pole of Eternal Pre-/Meta-Consciousness, but could also have started with Eternal Pre-/ Meta-Matter. For the first triad the classic notion of 'Freedom' presents itself; with the second triad, 'Necessity' enters; both are mutually implicit as the two halves of the seed of Nature unfolding as nature (cosmos). Therefore, Willing is not to be isolated from the other Principles, or reduced to being an epiphenomenon of any one or more of the others, alternatively elevated to being the supreme Principle, from which the others are reduced. It ties in with the others as a fundamental Principle emerging from Unground and operative in Cosmos, in a system of dependent co-origination of them all. Willing is not the be-all and end-all of all.

Is Willing good and kind, or evil and cruel? It is beyond both sets, and carries in itself the possibility of both. Is it blind and arbitrary, or seeing and purposeful? The same answer as to the previous question applies. It must be understood in its larger context. Is the hand blind? Yes, if observed in isolation from eye and mind, but no, if observed organically in the company of eye and mind it is, as it were, endowed with sight. The functions are inextricably entwined.

The mutual implication of Consciousness and Matter, Freedom and Necessity makes its first division in Eternity, like the first split in an impregnated ovum, and remains implicit throughout the entire process of beginning, continuing, changing, developing and ending Cosmos. In their mutuality, they are formatively present in Cosmos as a whole, in all the various forms of Cosmic existence, and in human existence. I am not declaring an easy harmony between them, and I have to admit the possibility, in this complementarity, of all sorts of dialectical tensions and struggles which may – somehow, beyond our ken – be meaningful.

The spark of connection between Consciousness and Matter, Freedom and Necessity may be the locus of that with which we as humans have a problem: evil. It is neither a reality, nor a Principle in its own right, but a possibility. Evil 'is' partly there, in the inaccessible, dark heart of Eternity itself, and partly in our – the beholders' – eyes. Our limited perspective does not allow us to see all sides of it in every situation. The chameleon on the branch, all eyes, can only roll its eyes in all directions at once and try to get them around the branch, and guess and gauge and triangulate – and hope for the best as it strikes. Nevertheless, there are many misses.

The possibility of evil arises as inevitable shadow of Willing. Willing carries the possibility of perversion. Such perversion arises as the result of the possibility of misalignment between Willing and its partners. Between Willing and Witting, Willing and Wanting, Witting and Power, things can go wrong. That is a necessary risk. Willing can wilt; or it can become misdirected. Such perversions boomerang back on all its partners, with cognitive, emotional, and practical consequences.

The small decisions we take here, near the centre where things huddle close together, take on wide-ranging proportions as we move further away. One such wide divide at the outer band of concrete Cosmos concerns the relationship between free will and the necessity of natural law. Is there such a thing as free will at all? How much manoeuvring space do humans have to explore alternatives and exercise choices freely, or is it all determined, predetermined, in advance by the iron necessity of natural law, which allows no exception? How much freedom may we discover in Willing? Must our anthropomorphic limitation not lead us into a tangle from which there is no hope of escape?

We seem to be confronted, right at the start, with a dilemma. It seems to be either the inexorable working out of law (also approximated by terms such as 'destiny' or 'fate'): keeping nature, humans and God bound in an iron fist. Conversely, it is freedom: perhaps zero freedom in the lower forms of life, some freedom in humans and absolute freedom in God. All sorts of permutations have been explored in the course of religion and philosophy.

Should we see an initial impulse of absolute freedom in God harden into the inexorable determination of nature in his creation? Does the absolutely free God remain standing idly outside the fixed order, leaving it to run its predetermined course? Or does he intervene from time to time, perhaps to accommodate the needs and desires of praying humans, otherwise to make sure that the overall execution of His plan is ensured – perhaps by causing axes to float, or by raising dead bodies to life? Alternatively, should we conflate the notions of 'God' and 'Law' completely, so that one is the other, and all that reigns, is divine Necessity, without any exception? Else, should we grant hard Necessity its merciless rule, and then simply turn away from it and focus all our attention on the little space we (seem to) have to exist in good faith, as existentialism did? Such are the options tried out in history.

In the various theologies of religions, this basic problem and seemingly insurmountable paradox of Freedom and Necessity also recurred throughout history as the question of the relationship between the will of God (or gods) and the will and freedom of the human being. Aeschylus, Shakespeare and others sublimated this dilemma in magnificent tragedies. Perhaps taking a step back behind that *aporia* (two inconsistent, irreconcilable positions, locked in conflict) will add greater depth and perspective, without ironing out the dialectic flatly and completely. Neither collapsing them into a superficial harmony; nor glorifying an irreconcilable conflict; but envisioning, from a higher perspective in Eternity, a coherence, while maintaining the stark contrasts. That is what we are trying to do here. Human freedom – in relation to human systems of control, nature and its physical and biological laws, and God – is an issue of enormous significance. Let us not make any broadly sweeping, apodictic pronouncements now. Rather let the issue unfold itself step by step as we move along. At this stage, let it be said that freedom, though not an absolute, emerges with Willing as Principle from the source of all things.

This seemingly inescapable clash of two orders is a crucial problem in all MM. It is where Augustine and Pelagius, Calvin and Servetus, Einstein and Bohr parted ways, and where Democritus, Spinoza and Sartre took their various last stands. All of these figures, seemingly conflicting as they were, must somehow be absorbable in a larger schema, as so many diverse, and one-sided emphases. We need to find a way where Consciousness and Matter, Freedom and Necessity, are mutually constitutive. Nature is neither good nor evil as an inexorable feature or fate. It is an open process, in which Willing is a most significant Principle, though not in isolation.

In this endeavour we are drifting in a stream of thought that would move 'behind' the constructions of 'God' into a meta-theistic dimension of Eternity, the first primordial expression of Unground, where we may imagine Willing as emerging in pristine beauty. Unground, erupting in Eternity, bursts open with Willing. It flashes forth – not as the First Principle nor as the Only Principle constituting everything, but as one supreme Principle among others. *Primus inter pares* – as they all are.

■ §31 The art of tracking

The art of tracking animals for hunting purposes by our hunter-gatherer forebears was a crucial step in the development of science. I would want to see what is attempted in these reflections as an application of the same principles that guided them. I wish to track – that is, understand and interpret – the footprints of MM colossi who walked the earth in the past: sometimes massive and powerfully present, sometimes rare and secretive, sometimes daunting and regarded as dangerous, but always fascinating.

The hunters did what they did for sustenance and survival; our search is also a matter of life and death. To them it was an exhilarating quest; our adventure, too, is sheer enjoyment. In their case, the prey was not stationary, but on the move, always out of sight until the last moment; in our case, we are not like visitors to a zoo or game park, admiring some creature standing or lying down, but exerting ourselves to the utmost, in the urgent business of tracking elusive creatures. In order to catch up with their quarry, hunters cautiously and systematically gathered information from signs to conclude where the animal was probably going; we are also bound to keep our noses close to the ground, and painstakingly to gather correct historical and other kinds of information concerning those beings. The hunters' animals were there before they arrived on the scene, but then disappeared from the hunters' sight ahead of them; our mystics ruminated before us, in their own historical circumstances, but are, in another sense, well ahead of us: we have to track them, catch up with them as they keep moving just outside our sight. Complementing their close scrutiny of facts such as trampled grass, the hunters of old had to anticipate the route that the gazelle would have taken, reading the signs as pointing in a certain

general direction. We too have to go boldly, speculatively, beyond the immediately given or the historically available, and conjecture possibilities – we have to work in the knocked-together framework of imaginative preconceptions in a process of positive and negative feedback, constantly modifying our working hypotheses. The hunters identified with the animals and projected themselves into their skins, felt, thought, like them; in our search for MM meaningfulness, we identify with the great wounded, enter into their skins. The hunters respectfully, quietly, tracked their wounded, quietly moving animal brothers; we do the same as we track the movements of the silent ones on the edge of our reach.

■ Early Buddhism's teaching of *sankhāra*

The Buddha taught that the human being is constituted by the mutual interdependence of five factors (*khandhas*): matter (form, corporeality: *rūpa*), feeling (sensation: *vedana*), perception (ideation: *saññā*), emotional and volitional factors (*sankhāra*), and consciousness (*viññāṇa*). In short, they were differentiated in two groups: matter and mind (the latter consists of feeling-perception-emotional and volitional factors-consciousness). These five constituents (*upādānakkhandā*) are intimately intertwined and interdependent, making up the human person as a whole. None of them is reducible to any of the others. The human person is a unit of mind and matter: 'mind-matter' (*nāmarūpa*). Yet ancient Buddhism saw the higher levels of meditation as attaining dimensions of formlessness (*arūpaloka*) (Nārada 1980:11, 45f.).

The step I am taking is to extrapolate the essence of this suggestive scheme in three directions: back, to Unground Originating as Eternity; wider, to Cosmos (Nature) as a whole, thereby moving out of early Buddhism's psychological, phenomenological restriction of interest; and lastly, denial of the separation of body and mind (or matter and mind) at any level. For now, how does Eternity appear in this perspective?

Importantly, at least in orthodox Theravāda *Abhidhamma*, these categories were not 'real', discrete 'things', bearers of qualities (entities). They were classificatory groupings of qualities, functions, 'evanescent occurrences', 'flashes of actuality arising and perishing with incredible rapidity' (Nyanaponika 1998 [1949]:xvif.) operative in the human personality. Carrying those ancient notions over long stretches of time to today, I find that it is compatible with our venture to speak of the function of the categories of Eternity here. The categories of Eternity are not put forward as substantial, transcendent entities. Playing a similar organising role as the *khandhas*, they have the ontological status of enabling possibilities. Our attempt to co-ordinate the first and second triads, that both arise simultaneously and interdependently, leads beyond both abstract idealism and abstract materialism.

In the human mind (the locus of this ancient Buddhist pattern), the *khandha*-scheme suggests a distinction between, (1) sensation (the link between matter and mind), (2) the cognitive, and (3) the emotional-volitional aspects. The cognitive side (perception and consciousness) has been dealt with in Chapter 8 as Witting. The term 'Consciousness' is here used for the triad of Witting-Wanting-Willing as a whole.

Here we are particularly concerned with *sankhāra*: the emotional-and-volitional aspect (variously translated, including 'mental formations'). I take the liberty to treat them separately, as Wanting (Ch. 9), and Willing (Ch. 10). Early Buddhism's view of *sankhāra* encapsulates what has been covered in these two chapters. On the side of Wanting, it includes emotive dispositions such as love, hate, prejudice and resentment. On the side of Willing, *sankhāra*, particularly in the form of *cetanā* ('volition'), largely overlaps with the notion of *kamma* (karma): choosing, willing, deciding, intending in a broad sense, which is extremely important and formative in the course of one's life, and one's fate. In the present adapted schema, it is the great activating Principle as the conditions for Consciousness arise.

The upshot of what has been said thus far is this: the Buddha and scholastic early Buddhism may be interpreted – admittedly tendentially, but openly and fairly and not coercively – to provide some support for postulating transcendental Eternal Willing. The Buddha would probably not have endorsed the speculative quality of our schema, but support would seem to be forthcoming from other sectors in Buddhism as a whole. Let us see what the Indian Mahāyāna school of Yogācāra offers in this respect.

■ **Yogācāra's teaching of *parinirvāṇa*, *Dharma-kāya*, *ālaya-vijñāna* and *Tathāgata-garbha***

Over some centuries, in the Hīnayāna treatises, the systematic inputs of earliest Buddhism ballooned in size and complexity, and the *dharmas/dharmas* (components of reality) in some quarters tended to be seen in realistic, substantial terms. That was the case particularly in the Sārvastivāda sect, not in Theravāda. The Mādhyamika school (Nāgārjuna and his followers) punctured the substantialising balloon. What remained was Emptiness – the Buddha's original intention – both in epistemological and ontological terms: ultimately, all our mental constructs are empty, non-referential; the things of our experienced world without substance (but not 'unreal').

In a next great Indian move, Yogācāra (founded by Asanga and Vasubandhu, 5th century CE), came up with a brilliant outburst of creative, synthetic speculation. Without compromising the gains made by Mādhyamika concerning the meaning of Emptiness, Yogācāra dared to develop a schema explaining how the world of experience (in our terminology, Cosmos) arose from

Emptiness (our Absoluteness), how it worked, and how and why it could be purified to produce happiness of life, calmness of mind and clarity of thought (Anacker 1986; Chatterjee 1987 [1962]; Kochumuttom 1982). Their schema was not meant to be final, fixed truth. It was merely a mental map, to be torn up as soon as it had achieved its function: a clear, clean mind and the attainment of a free, compassionate life in the world. It was an ad hoc toolkit, intended to be dismantled after serving its liberating purpose, not to become an aim in itself. The map taking shape in the chapters of our exploration concerning the emergence of Consciousness, track the movements of Yogācāra in its emphasis on Emptiness-Absoluteness as the Origin of all.

Yogācāra expressed the ultimate truth of Absoluteness with four roughly equivalent terms (see below). These denote sheer Emptiness (*Sūnyatā*); yet they also contain the notion of that very same Emptiness as the Source from which all things spring. All four imply that Emptiness carries the potential not only for all of concrete reality, but also specifically for an enlightened consciousness.

Our Principles, giving words to the domain of Potentiality implicitly present in the Horizon of Absoluteness, follow that lead. Consciousness is the condensation, corporisation, of Absoluteness in various ways. Everything 'is' Absoluteness, but the simple word 'is' contains extremely subtle nuances, as Yogācāra saw and said. The Yogācāra conceptual apparatus covers what I have called 'Absoluteness'; it also posits 'Consciousness' at the level of our 'Infinite'; and it deals with consciousness (mind) at the level of our 'Cosmos' (empirical reality). It does not in so many words articulate the level of Potentiality, Possibility, at the level of what I have called Eternity, but the substance of this level certainly seems to be there by implication: *Sūnyatā* somehow becomes the concrete Cosmos experienced by the senses.

As said, Yogācāra has four terms referring to Emptiness as the Source of the world:

- Firstly, the term *parinispāna* (the 'perfect'/'perfected') refers to the deepest insight: into 'emptiness'. From it, arise the *paratantra* ('dependent') and the *parikalpita* ('imaginary') levels. The latter is the domain of everyday, concrete life, and both are expressions, levels, of Emptiness.
- Secondly, the term *dharma-kāya* ('Dharma-body') refers to that same ultimate Emptiness as the ultimate dimension, the ultimate nature of things (i.e. it is ultimate 'Buddha-ness'). This term already suggests the ultimate Absolute as the Source giving rise to all things - including the historical Buddha and the innate potential in all beings to achieve enlightenment.
- Thirdly, the term *ālaya-vijñāna* ('storehouse-consciousness') may be interpreted to express the idea that that very same Emptiness is the great container, the great granary, into which all things done in the world, fall back as so many seeds. From that storehouse, seeds - some pure and some

bad and contaminated – sprout. It is a great circular system, a spiral movement, in which the dropping as well as the sprouting seeds are a mixed lot of good and bad ... but the pure seeds can be cultivated to lead to liberation. It is not a closed circle, but an open-ended one, containing a promise. In our terms: things End into Absoluteness, and things Originate from Absoluteness, and there is an element of continuity between the two, in a spiral movement. The *ālaya-vijñāna* is the great ocean on the surface of which the waves of empirical reality appear and move.

- Fourthly, the term *Tathāgata-garbha* ('womb of the *Tathāgata*' – that is, of the 'Thus-come' [the Buddha]) – expresses roughly the same idea with different imagery. The great Emptiness is womb – and not only womb, but also embryo. Siddhattha-become-Buddha, also the other Buddhas, are born from this Emptiness; all humans, as potential Buddhas, implicit Buddhas, are born from it. Realising this is the great liberation, and it bears fruit in a different kind of life.

Where Yogācāra approximates idealism, is in its presentation of the entire process as a process of Consciousness. Admittedly, typical of mainline Indian MM, it is not really interested in the external, material world out there. It does not deny its existence, but assimilates it so closely to Consciousness that the distinction becomes fuzzy. This is where the interpretation becomes tricky. I follow the line that Yogācāra is 'phenomenalism', bordering on, even overlapping with, 'idealism' in a strong sense of the word. Yogācāra is essentially a meta-psychology, a theory of Consciousness, an MM serving the purification of the mind.

In Consciousness these theorists distinguished, apart from the level of the 'storehouse consciousness', seven other levels. *Manas* is the active, organising mind. Then there are the six levels corresponding to the six senses, which connect the knowing 'subject' with the external world as 'object'. Altogether, there are eight levels. It is not the external world as such that is 'imaginary', but the subject-object scheme that we impose on it. Ultimately, the subject-object dichotomy is false, imagined, fabricated. The 'truth' is the interconnectedness of all things, like waves on the deep, impenetrable ocean of unsubstantial Emptiness understood by the enlightened mind.

Faithful recipients of early Buddhism, the Yogācāra thinkers awarded *karma*, and with it volitional intention (our Willing), a key position in its scheme. That which drops seeds into the great granary, are our actions, driven by our cravings and our will. These seeds continue reproducing themselves in the great granary until they reach maturity. Then they sprout, and a new round begins. The ancient teaching of *karma* is understood as primarily the working of Consciousness, in which Willing is a significant category. We may pick up a trail, inviting us to interpret Willing as somehow implied in Absoluteness, and operative in the becoming of Consciousness. The relationship pertaining between Yogācāra's Emptiness and Consciousness is not that of an immobile

identity, but a dynamic spiral movement, driven by *karma* with the component of Willing featuring hugely.

Let us not forget that the Yogācāra philosophers were Mahāyānists for whom life revolved around the concepts of Buddha nature, the liberation of the mind, and the *bodhisattvic* existence. All contain Buddha nature, and emerge from Buddha nature. Contemplative insight aims at liberation from egocentric desire and will. Supreme human existence is *bodhisattvic* existence: becoming doctor, nurse and medicine for all the sickness of the world. Willing – firm resolve, commitment and dedication – is embedded in that existence. It is pure, embodied Willing.

It would have gone too far for them to have denied the factor of matter altogether. Yet, what mattered to them was to realise that even the world of matter is mind made *in the sense of* being mind constituted: what we ‘see’ is all grasping and being grasped, and that is what our unenlightened minds condition us to see.

Where do Asanga, Vasubandu and their followers lead us on our present quest? It does not seem necessary to change our course as far as the high value we attach to Matter is concerned. True, their emphasis was not quite there. An appreciative emphasis on Matter is necessary in our time. Our tentative scheme can go along happily with the Yogācāra emphasis on the slant of our natural perspective on the world of matter as a graspable ‘object’, apart from the knowing subject. We need to explore the interconnectedness of Mind and Matter, giving both poles their due. Hence, Consciousness, like Matter/Energy, arises from Absolute Unground. Willing is an important constitutive Principle in their interpenetration.

Next, let me follow a few representative windings of MM thinking in the ‘Western’ cultural sphere as it developed under the influence of Neoplatonism in the development of the Semitic monotheistic faiths of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, where the idea of God as Willing Agent was the supreme and central category.

■ Sufism’s teaching of *Mashi’ah*

I am again drawn to the Sufi system of Ibn Arabi, not only because of the obvious quality of this thinking, but also because of his moving critically and creatively on the edge of his institutionalised tradition: a tradition pointing in the same direction as others that are seemingly so different. So let me attempt once again to crack the code of his complex thinking, and to see whether it can be unpacked in the terms of the non-religious investigation of this book. Is the schema that is presented in this investigation reconcilable with his MM system? His thinking is not – and was not intended to be – easy, and yet his was not an exclusive, secretive, deliberately concealing kind of esotericism; what he wrote, is ‘esoteric’

in the sense of dealing with the deeper meaning of things, but it is also an attempt to say it, as far as that may be possible, in communicable language.

One difference is clear: Ibn Arabi is committed to theistic (specifically Muslim) faith assumptions. Yet Ibn Arabi is aware of a Beyond, which is beyond 'Allah'. Between that Beyond and the created world this side of the river, he postulates a number of stepping stones. Knowledge (*Alim*) is one such stepping stone across the river, one such link in the connecting chain; Mercy (*Rahman*) and its cognates are another; Will (*Mashi'ah*) is a third (Izutsu 1983:105, 126ff.). To Ibn Arabi, the One becomes Self-conscious (the aspect of Knowledge). Based on this Knowledge, Will arises. Based on this Will, the world is created.

Willing is a necessary assumption to make sense of Cosmos. Ibn Arabi confirms that in Muslim theological vocabulary. In his system – his version of 'Eternity', shall we say – Will occupies a position between Knowledge and Power in a scheme of superior-inferior relationships. What they point to in Ibn Arabi's vision, is a divine Essence, the Absolute as the One ('One' not intended as a number, but as a level beyond all number, all relations and limitations). His vision could – following a dotted line leading to an Absolute Horizon, explicated by Buddhism – be radicalised, to empty out into sheer Absoluteness.

In his system all events that occur in the world are, ultimately, due to the Divine Will. This covers not only good, but also bad. This is the creative Command of God, the Will of God, constituting and bestowing existence on the world. This supreme Will is not the same as the Sacred Law (God's obligating or moral Command), which commands and approves and disapproves of various acts. For even transgressions of the Sacred Law are effects of the supreme *Mashi'ah*, and fall under the decisive domain of Mercy, the ultimate end of all. Evil is evil, but it falls under the higher power of Divine Will and Mercy. Therefore, we see this great figure wrestling with the problem of evil, not denying it, and somehow wanting to accommodate it in a scheme of things in which Will and Mercy are superior, eternal Divine Names. They are ontological assumptions, transcendental Principles, operative in the world.

In the end, his distinction between God's two types of Will probably remains an unresolved paradox: how can God command something, which is then not done? If it is not done, how can the non-compliance then still be covered by God's Will? To resolve the paradox unambiguously, it, seems, Ibn Arabi would have had to move into a consistent determinism, or fatally undercut the notion of God's Will. He refused both escape routes. In our experiment, it seems better to locate talk of God's moral commands at the lower level of anthropomorphic, mythological speech – that is, if such God-talk is deemed useful at all. At that level, we humans fabricate our models of commands and commandments, deeming them to be supernaturally revealed, and obeyed and disobeyed, followed by rewards or punishments. It does not belong at the level of sounding the depth of Eternity proper. Here, there is only the first emergence of Willing without subject or object.

■ John Duns Scotus' teaching of *voluntas divina*

Two generations after Ibn Arabi, European Christianity reached what would in future, in some quarters be hailed as its theological apex: the synthesis of Thomas of Aquino (1224–1274). It is not the Angelic Doctor I am turning to now, but someone some 40 years later who – because of his complex thought, obscure writing and premature death – was destined to exert an inconspicuous but far-reaching influence in later centuries: John Duns Scotus (1266–1308) (cf. Bettoni 1978 [1946]; Duns Scotus 1994; Wolter 1990). It was he who would by some in the present time be noted, hailed or blamed as the initiator of the epochal movement that would become known as secular modernism.

Will was a topic of considerable interest to Scotus, to the extent that in some quarters his overall position was wrongly reduced to a form of voluntarism ('will-ism': all is will). If it is true that the notion of 'will' has become a crucial presupposition of modern European thinking, then it probably acquired its first groundbreaking theoretical exploration in the thought of Duns Scotus. William Ockham (c. 1285–1347) would then push it further, by ranking God's will above his love and reason (Willing above Witting and Wanting).

Duns Scotus, a Franciscan priest, was known for his personal piety, but the very structure of his thinking leaned heavily on rational argument, based on Christian revelation and faith. His mode of thinking might be called meditative: he dwelt contemplatively on the mysteries of God and creation. To him, thinking of God was only a means to the end of loving contemplation of God. Refusing to shut himself up within the limited horizon of the two major schools available to him (Augustine and Bonaventura versus Aristotle and Thomas), he sought a new synthesis via a critical investigation of the options available to him. Syntheses, that is disentangling and reweaving seemingly irreconcilable systems and thinkers, are forged in the heat of struggle. From the vantage point of today, where the historical horizon is so much wider and the need for synopsis urgent, his approach is to be appreciated.

Duns Scotus wrote in an age and in an intellectual style quite different from that of our contemporary time and fashion. Tracking the intentions of his thinking, we must allow for that. Yet he does not seem to have allowed for the dimension groped for here by means of the notions of 'Unground' or 'Eternity', 'prior' to the God of religion (as Ibn Arabi had indeed done). The revealed God of Christianity was as far as Duns Scotus was prepared to go. In tandem with being a rational philosopher, he was also – even primarily – a Christian theologian and the two were not perfectly harmonised.

To Duns Scotus, the primary metaphysical concept was 'being' (to which we shall turn from Ch. 11 onwards). That was his primary transcendental category. Co-extensive with 'being' are 'one', 'true' and 'good'. He emphasised the univocity of 'being' – that is, it applied in the same sense to all beings: God as

well as creation – thereby probably eroding the distinction between the ‘being’ of God and the ‘being’ of creation, perhaps even by implication annihilating the serious ontological difference between God and his creation. Reconciling the univocity of ‘being’ with the radical otherness of God creates a structural problem, given the prior assumptions of theistic creationism (indeed held by Duns Scotus). God’s otherness could now be a matter of degree, but not of kind. In any event, he did not transcend the notion of ‘being’ in the direction of ‘non-being’, it seems.

This exploration seeks a different route. Nevertheless, a similar basic problem remains: how can the relationship between the ‘non-being’ of ‘Absoluteness’, the ‘Infinite’ being of ‘Infinite’ ‘God’ and the concrete ‘being’ of the many things of the world be understood? Can the same word (‘being’) apply to all three? The argument pursued here postulates not a dramatic qualitative break, for beyond ‘Infinite’, ‘being’ peters out outside the range of sense or mind, disappears ‘Absolutely’. But yes, with ‘Infinite’ and ‘Cosmos’ emerging from Absoluteness a denser continuity can be found, and sense and mind can start picking up ‘something’.

This problem also pertains to Willing. How does Willing emerge from Absoluteness? What is the relationship between Willing at the levels of Eternity, Infinity, and those many finite, individual things? Let us not overreach and ensnare ourselves in complexities, but rather attempt a piecemeal approach. So, our question at this stage is only this: what did Duns Scotus have to say about Willing, or his theistic equivalent of it?

In Duns Scotus’ theory of the will, the intellect and the will are the two most fundamental properties or faculties of the human soul. The soul is a substance. So what is the status of these two faculties? Are they strongly distinct from the soul – for example, are they mere accidents of the soul, or do they possess the quality of ‘being’ themselves? Are they ‘parts’ of the soul? Duns Scotus argues that they are potencies, or potentialities (*potentiae*). He makes the following distinction: First, *potentia* relates to potency or power in the order of act or operation; and second, it relates to potency or power in the order of being. As he sees it, the human will occupies a middle position between two extremes: the will is neither fully identical with the soul, nor fully different from it. The will is neither fully ‘being’ (fully part of the soul), nor fully ‘not-being’ (fully apart from the soul). Between the soul and its willing obtains a ‘formal’ distinction: they are neither one and the same thing, nor two different things altogether. The will is a power (*potentia*) of the soul, yet ‘formally’ distinct from it. In one sense, the soul can be looked at in isolation from the will; in another sense, the will (like the intellect) is a necessary operation of the soul.

Scotus attempts to reconcile and transcend the alternatives available to him in medieval scholasticism. To him the will is not an implication or

expression of the intellect, nor subordinate to the intellect (as was held by Thomas). In the complex relationship between the intellect and the will, the will has a unique nature and irreducible function of its own. The will is dependent on the intellect in the sense that the intellect is a necessary precondition for the working of the will; on the other hand, in the final analysis, the will determines itself. Neither is superior to the other; in one sense the intellect precedes the will; in another sense the will directs the intellect. They are mutually causative, mutually dependent, and mutually subservient. This is a promising line of thought. It is noteworthy that an exact contemporary of Duns Scotus, Dante Alighieri (1265–1321), likewise assumed a delicate balance of the will and the intellect. In his *Inferno*, the key to the sins of Lower Hell (heresy, violence and fraud) is the evil will: an active willing of evil, paired with the faculty of the intellect, and laced with emotions and attitudes such as pride and envy.

The question remains: How did Duns Scotus see divine will (*voluntas divina*)? Let me repeat that by ‘God’, Duns Scotus means (in our terminology) Infinite Being. He does not, by extension, extrapolate the term ‘God’ somehow to cover what may transcend divine Being. I find no support in him for ideas such as Nonbeing, Emptiness, Unground, Absoluteness and Eternity (in our sense of the word). Does he present any sufficient reason for abandoning the route we are on here? I do not see any.

Let me follow this enigmatic figure a bit further, to see where this track might lead. According to him, God as the First Supreme Cause (the Maker), is, understands and wills. In him intellect and will belong essentially to his being, and perfect understanding and perfect will are indissoluble. The divine will is immutable and eternal. In addition, just as he knows and loves himself, he knows and loves his creation. A novel emphasis is that divine will, eternal and immutable as it is, is nevertheless free; so the world, though being what it is, could have been – and can be now – different from what it in fact is. In short, the world is radically contingent: it is not of necessity the way it is. God’s will is the cause of that contingency.

Duns Scotus’ insistence on the significance of the will is valuable, and may be extrapolated tendentially to the realm of Eternity: Willing as a first Principle, prior to ‘God’ talk. His insistence on the will as mutually implied with the intellect is equally impressive, and supports the line of thinking adopted in these reflections. Probably the same structural problem marking Ibn Arabi’s thinking is also present in that of Duns Scotus: the tension between God’s supreme, ultimate, creative will, and his moral will (which can be transgressed). In this form, that tension comes with the territory of theism. Even apart from theism, the problem of evil is not soluble by purely theoretical means; it is also a practical issue. Lastly, Duns Scotus’ notion of the radical contingency of things was a most important line of thought.

■ Schopenhauer's teaching of *Wille*

If 'voluntarism' is not an appropriate epithet for the thinking of Duns Scotus, it does apply to that of Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860). With him we step into a very different world than the one inhabited by Duns Scotus. The *corpus christianum* had dissolved; Romanticism had left its mark; the world of India had announced its presence in the Western cultural sphere. Schopenhauer made use of the new input from India – particularly the Upanishads and Buddhism – in a limited and selective manner, to confirm his own philosophical taste. He was also a bridging figure between the Idealistic systems of Fichte and Hegel of the early 19th century on the one hand, and the depth-psychological and vitalistic impulses in European culture in the late 19th century, on the other hand.

In his thinking, reason and intellect become surface phenomena; they are relegated to instruments of the will (*Wille*). There are no hidden depths of the kind that intrigued us in the previous schools of thinking. There is one and only one supreme principle, and that is the Will: the first and last, ultimate reality and substance, the Thing-in-Itself of Kant: dependent on nothing else, cause of everything.

Schopenhauer presented himself as the pupil of Kant by envisioning the world as representation (*Vorstellung*): all things are present to us as phenomena (mind appearances). Then Schopenhauer takes leave of Kant: the solution of the mystery of the world (the *great apriori*, the *Ding an sich*) can indeed be found – in the world itself, in the external and internal experience of the individual human being; and it can be named: blind, unconscious, irrational Will. As a metaphysical reality, the Will is sovereign and free; the individual will is subject to the overall Will, and hence has only limited freedom. The Will, primarily the urge to propagate and maintain life, determines not only the human person; analogously, all of reality – organic as well as inorganic – is the objectification of will. The essence is Will; the rest – individuation, corporeality – are mere objectification and form. History is the variable expression in different mores, epochs and people, of the one unchanging Will, moving in non-progressing, purposeless, directionless cycles. History has no intrinsic significance.

Schopenhauer takes the step into a pessimistic worldview: suffering, loneliness and conflict are the outcome of voracious, insatiable Will. Via the road of aestheticism, art – particularly music – offers some temporary relief; as an immediate projection of the eternal Will itself, art can quieten the restless human will. A more durable relief is found via the road of ethics: the ascetic denial of the Will, culminating in its complete extinction, and in compassion. Here Schopenhauer finds the essence of all great religious roads of salvation, such as Buddhism and Hinduism: the individual *atman* realises its unity with

eternal *Brahman*. Small soul disappears into large Soul, small will into large Will – that is, he said, into *nirvana*.

From the perspective on Eternity on these pages, the strengths and limitations of Schopenhauer's vision are conspicuous. His appropriation of Indian MM marked a great historical stride forward in Western MM. His thinking does coincide with certain pessimistic emphases, as held in certain schools at certain times of Indian thinking. Overall, his appropriation is patchy: he views the Buddhist idea of liberation, for instance, as a merely negative concept. India has much more to offer in terms of an analysis of ultimacy, and of active, positive involvement in the world, as the *Bhagavad-Gītā* attests for Hinduism and the extolling of the *bodhisattva* ideal for Mahāyāna Buddhism. One should not deal with Schopenhauer harshly; he made use of what was available at the time.

He assumed that the sages of all times – from ancient India, via mystics such as Eckhart, to himself – taught essentially the same message (Halbfass 1988:105ff.). His assumption deserves attention, but the ahistorical nature of his view is problematic. It misses the point that MM, like everything else, is taken up in a vast historical process of change and adaptation to ever-changing circumstances. The very real historical particularities and differences between MM systems are not to be underestimated (as he in fact did) but to be taken into account seriously. A *philosophia perennis* cannot be a static thing, merely to be stated; any convergence of the kind can only be found in a particular historical situation, as work always in progress. While its roots lie deep in the human constitution, it is not simply a given. All sorts of historical borrowing played a major role in bringing about similarities, and today it is not a simple fact either, but a challenge. Schopenhauer did not sufficiently allow for critical correction from the side of India; he did not have a sufficient sense of history.

Schopenhauer captured an emerging mood of his time. His vision is sombre, anticomic, anti-erotic and misogynist. Required today, is a pro-cosmic MM, with all the positive implications flowing from such a basic stance, including the seeking of happiness for all beings, an affirmation of life and *eros*, and, at a practical level, respect and full equality for women.

Like few Western MM before him (such as John of the Cross), Schopenhauer discerned the depths beneath the surface manifestations of consciousness, but he stopped at the level of Will, as substantial drive, as nameable, describable Ground. He does not seem to have been drawn towards the mystery of Will itself emerging from an even deeper profundity, from insubstantial, unnameable, indescribable Infinitude as, for example, Meister Eckhart had intimated before him. He seems to have avoided associations of extreme transcendence, and presented his Will as an immanent, directly discernible force. In the language of this exploration: his Will operated at the level of Cosmos. But here he also took a problematic turn: Cosmos is not, as he saw it, only the objectification of blind, indifferent Will, and human life is, in essence, not merely the drive to procreate.

By substantialising Will as the one, supreme entity, Schopenhauer replaced a particular one-sidedness with another. Whereas previously Reason had been awarded superiority, Schopenhauer managed a palace revolution, replacing one absolute ruler with another, but did not attempt to reconcile a number of Principles. What his vision gained in force and clarity, it lost in balance and nuance.

We could have proceeded by studying the thinking of another exponent of a metaphysic of the Will, Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), who marked a certain progress beyond Schopenhauer, his teacher, by replacing the former's pessimism and negative denial of the human will with optimism and activism. Yet, in his case, too, gains of force are made at the cost of balance. With him, the Will is again played off against the domain of compassion, which is denigrated as weakness; against reason; against the emancipation of women; against Christianity, and so forth. In the end, for all his rhetorical brilliance and his acuity of thought, one may suspect him to be driven by resentment, but not offering the kind of large-souled, inclusive, synoptic MM that we are seeking here. Let us grant this wounded loner the understanding he deserves, but follow his track no further.

■ §32 Summary

In the previous three chapters, we have imagined Witting, Wanting and Willing together, as co-emerging pre-conditions for Consciousness. We do not see an anthropomorphic God behind the surrounding hills, ready to intervene at any time in accordance with his own will and our requests. Nor do we sense the depressing aura of an all-determining necessity, gripping things with an iron fist. Neither arbitrariness nor necessitarianism would seem to do justice to the reality of the situation. We need to move beyond that dilemma if we can. Cosmos seems to be an open, evolving process, driven and led from deep within itself.

Human consciousness is made up of conjoined reason, emotion and will (and more). Above it, allowing for it and including it, we postulate a Cosmic Will, conjoined with a Cosmic Reason and Love. Cosmoses are singular events, born and ending. Our present one is one of them. Above Cosmic Consciousness, we discern - postulate - Infinite Consciousness, again made up of Reason, Emotion and Will, not concrete and manifest. Above that emerges the Witting, Wanting and Willing of Eternity, arising from utterly inaccessible Absolute Horizon. This is where every word is one too many.

Consciousness is not all there is; there is also the complex set of phenomena grouped around Being, Energy and Matter. Fully to appreciate the problems of the relationships of Consciousness and Matter, Freedom and Necessity, we will have to enter into that set. At this stage, it seems necessary to understand the

world process, Cosmos, as run not only by Consciousness and Freedom, but also by Matter and Necessity. That connection is where sparks fly. Cosmos, balancing between Freedom and Necessity, is a precarious thing, open to chance as well as inevitability, error and evil and unimaginable suffering as well as beauty and love. The best we can do, is to make sure that the rafts we construct to carry us down the stream of life are as sturdy and useful as possible for the purpose of bringing us to the ocean of insight, goodness and beauty, and then abandon them.

As far as the word 'g(G)od' is concerned, our argument would be tolerant:

- Firstly, of a space for myths of divinity, including human-like gods with personal names, from Ahura Mazda to Zeus and many in-between. Such projections fulfil a deep human psychological, social and religious need. Myths are troves of insight into human nature and the nature of the world. Understood well, they need not conflict with science, and deserve better than being discarded as nonsense. Perhaps there are other life forms in Cosmos, more intelligent and more noble – or evil – than us. Yet the MM impulse leads to the transcendence of any mythological fixations.
- Secondly, of something like 'Cosmic pantheism'. Humanity with its consciousness and its human nature, is part of nature, part of Cosmos: a living, conscious Being, for which 'divine' may be an understandable term, although not necessary.
- Thirdly, of Infinite 'Divinity' ('God', 'Spirit') without too much reservation, making sure that it is distinguished clearly from the first two senses. Here the term 'divine' emphatically does not refer to a personal being, a bigger version of ourselves, but to a transpersonal level where the limiting articles 'a' and 'the' no longer apply: Infinite Consciousness and Bliss, Infinite Beauty and Goodness, Infinite Being and Energy. At that level, a term such as 'panentheism' may be useful: Cosmoses are somehow expressions, manifestations, of a deeper background of ('divine') Infinitude. It is also a penultimate level.
- Fourthly, ultimately, the concept 'g(G)od' loses reference, peters out.

Becoming

■ §33 Auto-manifestation

I stare up in amazement and fear at the second of three mountain peaks – each with three flanks; all three steep, awesome in their beauty, and with their tops covered in dark, impenetrable cloud. Up there is not where gods reside; the realm of gods lies lower, at the contour of myth linking the clouds of Infinitude and the plains of Cosmos. Along the slopes of the first three-faced peak, we explored the primordial Principles of Consciousness; now we shall explore those of Being. Because of the commonalities of the terrain and the experience of the previous climb, the going – this sophia-philic wondering wandering – may be a bit easier now. I will presuppose and build on what has been said in the previous three chapters, without unnecessary repetition. On the other hand, the structure of the second mountain is different from that of the first, and it will undoubtedly raise challenges and obstacles of its own.

There are a number of dead-end intuitions. Cosmos does not arise from either Something or Nothing. It does not emerge *ex nihilo*, in the sense of out of a Nothingness, by whatever means, or by whatever pre-existent agent. Such a Nothingness is easily understood as a kind of negative opposite, a mirror image, of a substantialist view of a supernatural Being or Agent creating it all. We need to get outside such notions. ‘Absolute Horizon’, ‘Absoluteness’, ‘Unground’, it seems to me, is as close as we can come to conceptualise

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the sheer emergence of the ultimate mystery (how can there be, and why is there, something, a Cosmos?) without substantialising some pre-existent 'X'. The prefix 'ex' ('out of ') almost inevitably suggests such overtones. Therefore, rather allow Unground, and then Cosmos, to Become. There 'is' no other, pre-existing agent affecting the stillness of Absolute Horizon; no change of some pre-existing Substance, and no creation out of some pre-existing Nothingness. At most, let me indulge my sense of wonder by contemplating Becoming. I cannot see how our intuitive and speculative *gnosis* can be pushed any further. Becoming just happens. The concrete things of the world, the world itself, are instantiations of Becoming. They are not Things in a heavy sense of the word, just our takes, our fixations, of a continuum, a series of evanescent events, an appearing and disappearing flow, with Becoming one analytical cut from our side of that process. Clumsily said, Absoluteness realises itself, primordial non-manifestedness becomes manifest. At most, we may consider that it happens, and perhaps unfold aspects of the dynamics of such a procession, but that is as far as we can go.

Ideas of a personalised God may be understandable and useful from a psychological and educational point of view. It is a kind of shorthand, affording people a handle easy to grasp in their hour of need. Yet, its limitations are apparent to anyone scratching under the surface. It lures us into an infinite regress: Cosmos could not have brought itself into being – for that, God must have been responsible; but then, how was God brought into being? – Which poses another demonstrandum, and so on, ad infinitum. 'Personalised' is just that: a personification of the unknown, a creation of a Big Person like us little ones, and most likely designed to fit our personal needs and requirements, like a personalised vehicle. The notion of an 'analogy' between 'this' side (the world) and some postulated 'other' side (such as a personal God) does not really help. In order to postulate an analogy between two things, both have to be known, however faintly. The point is: we do not, cannot, 'know' of any other side, neither by reason, nor by revelation. Go far enough, and all we get is End and Origin.

Somehow, beyond the something-nothing dilemma, on Absolute Horizon, auto-genesis stirs. What emerges here is inadequately called 'Becoming': the possibility of happening, being, continuing, enduring, changing and ending. This line of sensing emphasises that Unground is not to be understood nihilistically. Absoluteness means absolute disappearance from sight; and something appears on that Horizon, and Cosmos emerges. The term 'becoming', like 'change', appears to be quite hopelessly trapped between substantialism (implying no becoming, no change) and nihilism (there is nothing to become, change). Such are the limitations of human thought. The way out seems to be to allow genesis, becoming, change and end to flicker unsteadily in the haze of inaccessible Horizon. The possibilities of our constructive conceptualising cannot get us any further. Cosmos is neither the 'same' as, nor something

'different' from Something or Nothing outside of it. We cannot get beyond these neither-nor negatives. Thought and talk go bankrupt. Nonetheless, on this side of the Horizon, we may talk of becoming and change.

The generation, conditioning, continuing, changing, (d)evolution, decaying of Cosmos and every one of its constituent parts, is part, an extension, of that primal genesis. Life with all its trials and tribulations is an expression of emerging Becoming, like surface waves on a deep ocean current. Cosmos is real, and manifestation of auto-manifesting Absoluteness. Cosmogony and 'theo'-gony (but here intended to refer to Unground beyond a personalised divinity) are two aspects of the same process. The spiral of Originating and Ending continues eternally. In that spiral Absoluteness absorbs, processes, even the bad (evil). Even evil is not separate from Absoluteness, but – incomprehensible as it seems to us – is included in its eternal movement. Its movement is a cycle of enrichment, forward, like surface water sinking into the deep and water at the depth rising to the surface, and all the while the ocean current keeps moving in its mysterious way. The individual droplets are part of all of that and reflect all of that.

■ §34 Fragments

In this §, I am again trying to see contributions made by our sophiaphilic predecessors and contemporaries as fragments of a puzzle which, when assembled well, may aid us in seeing a comprehensive picture. The picture emerging in these reflections on the puzzle with 10 000 pieces is not some 'final', 'real', picture. It is just another fragment in the ongoing – and essentially never-ending – human search for integral meaning. In the final analysis, MM is a-gnostic gnosis.

■ Parmenides

I now pick up a glorious fragment in the MM endeavour: 150 lines, all that remained of a poem of Parmenides (5th century BCE), one of the first European contemplators of the great mystery, and one of the greatest of those pioneering map makers of consciousness and world. He most likely worked in an established pre-Socratic tradition of MM reflection on what really 'is', distinct from the world reported by the senses.

His poem abounds in ambiguities and word play (cf. Curd 1998; Dunham et al. 2011:10–18; Kingsley 2003). Not surprisingly, what he intended, cannot be pinned down exactly. There is no single generally accepted reception of Parmenides. That he was a monist cannot be disputed and that his position boiled down to a variety of objective idealism is defensible, although not strictly proven from his extant fragments. In any event, he did not deny reality, matter and so on, but somehow saw all of that as included in a whole (Being),

which is somehow essentially tied to Thought (Truth). Parmenides understood the problem as no one before him: if the world became (came into being), there is a limited number of options available to explain that becoming. Parmenides eliminates a few: the world could not have been created by something else, could not have arisen from nothing, could not have arisen at any time in the past, and it does not have any parts and cannot change. All of these are negations, by which he became the forerunner of a number of MM thinkers, from Plato over Plotinus to Hegel. What remains and what he accepts, is that the world *is* eternally. The central axis of his mystic thought was the idea that change – not only in the divine order, but also in the cosmic order – is an illusion. He (or rather, the goddess leading him into ultimate truth) rejects the feasibility of notions such as creation and destruction. What remains, is utter changelessness, perfect fullness, simplicity and completion, without any lack, without future or past. That is ultimate truth, paradoxical truth, for it is true even of changing empirical being. Perfect fullness, stillness, is everything, and everything is (Kingsley 2003):

[P]erfectly complete –
 just like the bulk of a sphere neatly rounded off
 from each direction, equally matched from the middle
 on every side. (p. 179)

At the level of science, he may have been the first Western thinker to postulate that the earth was a perfect sphere (ibid.:233ff.), and that our common-sense idea, fed by our senses, of a flat earth, was an illusion, useful for practical purposes, but without substance. Perhaps that discovery is an important key to his thinking. Was his MM an extrapolation of the discovery of the spherical earth, or at least intimately connected to it? For, obviously, as a matter of axiomatic assumption to him as a Greek, a sphere must be perfect. On such assumptions and as an attempt to integrate MM and the cutting-edge science of his day, his MM becomes quite understandable and, given his pioneering position, with no prior support to lean on, highly impressive. He attempted to account for empirical experience, science and MM at the same time, in the same framework. He did that with his own seamless harmony of intuition, observation, speculation and mythopoesis, which is not easy to unscramble today. A similar integration is what we, with the profit of two millennia of scientific advance and a long tradition of MM thinking, need to achieve for our own time, to satisfy our hunger for integral meaning. It will be no easy achievement – if it ever transpires. Here we are exploring the idea that Absoluteness-Eternity-Infinity emerges as fluid Cosmos.

However much we may deceive ourselves about the world, in itself it is neither an objective illusion, nor an epiphenomenal reflection of something else, nor a subjective (self-)deception. Parmenides would have shot down the

possibility of a Principle of Becoming. There is only one reality, he says. With that, it seems to me, the drift of the intuition unfolding itself in these chapters can go along wholeheartedly. There are not two realities – at least not in the sense of the ‘natural’ one and then outside it another ‘supernatural’ one, perhaps the latter one being the ‘real’ one. This empirical world ‘is’ Absoluteness-Eternity-Infinity. With that, we can agree. The ‘is’ needs not be taken to exclude relativity, plurality and change. That there may be a succession of Cosmoses born and going extinct, arising from Eternity and returning to Eternity, is not allowed for in the perimeters of Parmenides’ grand vision. In addition, that there may be Wanting in the inmost recesses of things, is excluded by his theory. In his reality there is no distinction between inside and outside, and – perhaps by implication – not between consciousness and being either inside or outside. That may be taken to imply idealism. Nor would he have concerned himself with their arising from some hidden depth as two interdependent and complementary aspects of one reality. To him, all is a static circle without beginning and end; it is eternally present non-Becoming and non-Ending perfection. This seems to be a closed monism. It could not accommodate Becoming.

■ Gaudapāda

Brahmanic thought had been theistic and sacrificial. Then, around 700–600 BCE, the progressive Indian thought pattern became meta-theistic and meditative. The time of the Upanishads had arrived. That dramatic change was the key to the future history of Indian MM. The newly arrived Upanishads contained a rich diversity of intuitions and speculations in need of further development and clarification. Several systematic trends of thinking developed. One of these was (Advaita) Vedanta. It would become the dominant MM model in Hinduism.

Sankara (788–820 CE) would be the most prominent representative of Advaita Vedanta. I now turn to Gaudapāda (probably 8th century), who was probably two generations older than Sankara, and to whom Sankara felt himself deeply indebted. To Gaudapāda belongs the honour of revitalising and developing boldly and clearly, in his *Agamasāstra* (also called *Mandukya-Karika*, a commentary on the *Mandukya Upanishad*), the non-dualistic thinking of the Upanishads, launched a 1000 years earlier. Gaudapāda no doubt did that under the influence of Mahāyāna (Mādhyamika and Yogācāra) Buddhism; probably he had, at least at some stage, been a Buddhist himself. Sankara would steer the enterprise away from the Buddhist and into the mainstream Hindu channel.

To Gaudapāda the question of becoming was the most fundamental question of all. His MM answer was straight to the point: there is no becoming (cf. Bhattacharya 1989; Dasgupta 1975 [1922]:418ff.).

In his words (IV.19): '[T]he Buddhas elucidated (the theory of) absolute non-origination (*ajati*)' (Bhattacharya 1989:121). The Buddhas only spoke of origination/becoming (*jati*) kindly and skilfully to accommodate lower order minds, naïve realists (IV.18; I.42), who could not cope with the radical teaching of non-origination, in order gradually to lead them into the deeper insight.

The ultimate state of the self is 'all-pervading', 'changeless', 'non-dual' (I. 10; I. 17), not 'bound with cause and effect' (I. 11), 'unborn'/non-originating (I.16; III. 2; III. 48; IV. 4; IV. 22-23; IV. 71; IV. 100). The world is mere illusion or magic (*māya*), appearing as real, no different from a dream (II. 6; IV. 31):

That which is non-existent at the beginning, and at the end, is so also at the present; being like the unreal, things still appear as not unreal.

All that appears as manifest, as outside, are imaginary creations. There are no many things, either different or identical. Duality, birth and death, are false distinctions imposed by *māyā* on the unmoved, unmoving non-dual. When this mind activity, this thinking that there is production, ceases, sorrow ceases. Gaudapāda seems to say that, from the ultimate point of view, 'origination' is a category mistake: it does not apply. The ultimate transcends that very notion. To him the category 'Becoming' simply could not apply to the Absolute. Gaudapāda follows a different route than the one beckoning us.

Was Gaudapāda consistent? If he had said that everything, including ultimate reality, is just a dream, in a thorough-going idealism, his position would indeed have been fully consistent. He does not seem to have said that. In addition, 'is' *māyā* on his account not 'something', namely 'something else' than ultimate reality? Does it not 'arise', and constitute some (bad) 'change' of the ultimate? Does mind activity, imagination, sorrow, not 'arise' and 'cease'? If it is just a dream, why bother? How would Gaudapāda have responded to such questions?

It appears that, for some inexplicable reason, change (Origination, Becoming) does take place on Absolute Horizon. Cosmos does emerge. Cosmos remains shot through with Absoluteness ('is' Absolute) – and it is also (relatively and non-dually) real. On this spectrum, one can place the emphasis on the Absoluteness or on the relative reality of Cosmos. Nevertheless, it is not called for to push either to the point of denying the other. We need to hold on to both the absolute and the relative. Gaudapāda seems to undervalue the second. Unless we give the second its full due, any ground for attending to Cosmos with love and responsibility is cut from under our feet. Why not withdraw into a shell of indifference? It seems to me that the acceptance of the world with all its relative but real determinations and changes, beginnings and endings, and of the duty of responsible existence in the world, is not merely an accommodation of the weaker brethren, but the very essence of understanding Unground, and, from a pragmatic, moral point of view, a necessary assumption.

■ the *Awakening of faith in Mahāyāna Sutra*

For further direction I now turn to the speculative *Awakening of faith in Mahāyāna Sutra* (cf. Hakeda 1967; Suzuki 1900; Verdu 1981), flanked by the *Lankāvatāra Sutra* (Suzuki 1978 [1932]). Both were seminal texts for East Asian (Chinese, Japanese, Korean) Mahāyāna Buddhism. The extremely condensed text *Awakening of faith in Mahāyāna* was perhaps written by an unknown Chinese author in the period between 5th century and 6th century CE, and then translated into Sanskrit. The *Lankāvatāra Sutra* was originally composed in Sanskrit, probably before the end of the 3rd century CE at the latest.

As far as I can tell, Indian Buddhism did not address the question *whether*, and if so, *why* and *how* Absoluteness stirs, nor *why* and *how* Cosmos arises. It seems that the Buddha himself would have relegated such questions to the realm of the insoluble, irrelevant and speculative. One might suspect tendentially that the Buddha's message does contain certain interesting implications, worth exploring.

Hīnayāna scholasticism did not provide any theoretically coherent answer to the question of universal causality, that is, Cosmic becoming in a broad sense. The world of *paccaya* ('conditionality') was simply the assumed backdrop of its teaching on human karma and its soteriology: *samsāra* was just a given, the negative foil for *nibbāna*.

We take note of the Yogācāra scheme of the absolute *parinispanna*; the relative, transitory *paratantra* bobbing on the surface of that absolute; and the false *parikalpita* (empirical reality misunderstood to exist separate from the absolute *parinispanna*). The question is: *how does absolute parinispanna become empirical paratantra?* We only hear of winds of ignorance (*avidya*) driving universal causal becoming. Yet that is no more than a confession of ignorance – perhaps even of rejection? No seminal Principle of Becoming, no *reason* for it, seems to be forthcoming. Surely, what could then arise is the temptation of seeing Cosmic Becoming as 'a sort of delirious sickness contracted by ultimate reality' (Verdu 1981:24f.). Indeed, a closeness of Indian Buddhism and Gnosticism would seem to announce itself. If that is the final outcome of Buddhism, it would become impossible for us, on the course we have embarked upon in this essay, to follow it.

Our problem is: How can we envisage real genesis, and genesis of the multiply real, from Absolute Horizon – without diluting the full force of a radical concept of Absoluteness? In Fa-tsang's analogy of the golden lion: *why, how* does gold become lion, while still remaining gold?

According to the *Awakening of faith* and the *Lankāvatāra Sutra*, as uncovered by Verdu in a daring and original manner (ibid.:29–42), Origination is fundamental to *Tathatā* (true 'Thusness' ['Suchness']), which is *Sūñyatā* ('Emptiness'). In our

present context: *Sūñyatā* is the matrix where Cosmos is conceived, and from whence it is manifested.

Both our sutras encourage us to interpret Absoluteness (Emptiness) in this sense, without it being compromised; on the contrary, its true character is manifested in that very process. Far from being an endless vacuum, Absoluteness becomes. It is *essentially* self-embodying, self-defining, self-limiting – and in that very act self-actualising, self-manifesting. In classical Mahāyāna language (the *Heart Sutra*): the absolute is the relative, the relative is the absolute; emptiness is form, form is emptiness. We are here entering territory different from Parmenides’ changeless perfection or Gaudapāda’s featureless not-becoming. Here, undetermined potentiality by inner necessity and freedom *becomes* limitation. Extrapolated: Emptiness and the phenomenal world, that is, Absoluteness and Cosmos, co-exist in mutual dependency. The essence of Suchness is undifferentiated and devoid of all characteristics, and yet, simultaneously, this same Emptiness, Suchness, Absoluteness is from the beginning (Hakeda 1967):

[F]ully provided with all excellent qualities; namely, it is endowed with the light of great wisdom, the qualities of illuminating the entire universe, of true cognition and mind pure in its self-nature; of eternity, bliss, Self, and purity; of refreshing coolness, immutability, and freedom. It is endowed with these excellent qualities which outnumber the sands of the Ganges, which are not independent of, disjointed from, or different from the essence of Suchness. (p. 65)

In order to elucidate the nature of Emptiness, the *Lankāvatāra* uses the expressive concept *Tathāgata-garbha* (‘womb of the Tathāgata’). It explains (LXXXII) that (Suzuki 1978 [1932]):

[T]he *Tathāgata-garbha* holds within it the cause for both good and evil, and by it all the forms of existence are produced. Like an actor it takes on a variety of forms [...]. (p. 191)

In terms of Fa-tsang’s analogy, the gold allows itself to *become*: to become lion with its myriads of individual organs and hairs, while remaining gold. Yes, empty Absoluteness *becomes* – and eventually *becomes* Cosmos, without sacrificing – in fact, realising – its emptiness. It allows, contains, essentially and freely, *Becoming*. The gold is not some ‘other’ (‘transcendent’) ontological reality somehow also ‘immanent’ in the hair of the lion. Fa-tsang’s illustration overcomes any such split, however much the latter may be assuaged by terms such as ‘participation’ or ‘analogy’.

Can-ing

■ §35 Capacity to act and undergo

A sense of awesome power in and behind things has always been a central aspect of the experience of ultimacy in all religions. From the perspective of this contemplation, Eternity, unfolding as auto-genesis, emerges as the capacity to act and undergo. To emphasise an important theoretical point of Part Two of this essay, the gerund ‘can-ing’, awkward and clumsy as it may sound, is maintained as key word, in spite of more attractive substantive nouns such as ‘capacity’, ‘potentiality’ and ‘possibility’.

The theoretical point is the following: the Principle of Can-ing, emerging on Absolute Horizon is not a substance itself or a quality inherent in (a) Being, Person or Substance. Can-ing, but there is no one who cans, we say with a nod of acknowledgement towards Buddhaghosa in his *Visuddhimagga* (XVI.90): ‘not the doer but certainly the deed is found’ (*karako na, kiriya va vijjati*) (Buddhaghosa 1979:587). What Buddhaghosa said in a restricted anthropological context, is here extended to the process of becoming Cosmos. Here this exploration also takes a different route than Nicholas of Cusa, whose views on ‘possibility’ (literally, ‘can-ing’ [*posse*]) as developed in his last work (*De apice theoriae*) were referred to in Chapter 6. On the one hand, he says that ‘can-ing’ precedes existence. On the other hand, he is very explicit that ‘can-ing as such’ (*posse ipsum*) is the *hypostasis omnium* (‘standing-under’,

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the basis of all things) (Von Kues 1966:378). In this work he once again shows himself to be a 'negative' theologian in the classic mould as he had been all along since *De docta ignorantia* a quarter of a century earlier. All qualifications are stripped off, yet hypostasis is retained, and that is equated with God as conceived of in the Christian belief system: 'By "can-ing as such" the Trinitarian God is signified' (ibid.:384). This exploration takes a step further back towards sheer Absoluteness. As sheer possibility, Can-ing is here neither hypostasised nor identified with Being or with any particular historical concept of God, neither masculine nor feminine.

Before the thick, charged, active cloud of Cosmic being, power, causality and life thunders and flashes, a thin wisp, hardly discernible, is faintly discernable in the clear, empty sky of Absolute Horizon. Absoluteness begins to condensate in the ethereal form of Can-ing as the sheer capacity to act and to undergo – prior to transitivity (that is, subjectivity relating to objectivity), reciprocity (that is, two-way movement) and reflexivity (that is, rebound, throwback, on the first subjectivity).

Eventually Eternal Can-ing, a transcendental Principle without substance, becomes Infinite Power and Life, and then manifests as Cosmic Power, Causality, Action. Can-ing is an all-underlying, all-structuring Principle pervading Cosmos in its totality and every being in it, eventually finding expression in a plurality of actual acts. It is the non-substantial root, eventually bringing forth the external world as fruit, setting in motion the train of Cosmic, causally linked events. Being suffused by this principle, Cosmos, and everything in it, is self-creating. At the level of Eternity, of Absoluteness beginning to stir, this root is sheer Principle, potential, promise, incipient function. Deep in the heart of reality, arising from Horizon, is a capacity and tendency to act and undergo.

In the act of being produced, Cosmos and each of its myriad constituents are not merely passive, but they participate in Eternal Can-ing: in undergoing the process of being born from the mother, the daughter is also active. This is not weak passivity, inert submissiveness, uncreative compliance or surrender: as a strong capacity to allow, it is receptivity and creativity in one. The daughter announces herself, makes her appearance. At an archetypal level, the association with the principle of femininity is obvious. It is to be seen in conjunction with the masculine principle of begetting. The two are mutually implied. The myriad things share in the Can-ing of Absoluteness, participate in their own production (Becoming). The thing produced and coming into existence has its own share of Can-ing, non-dually distinct from Eternal Can-ing. Eternal Can-ing bestows freedom to act on Cosmos and its creatures.

Primordial Can-ing expresses the capacity of Unground to allow, encompass, accommodate, support, endure, and sustain the world. Can-ing pervades the world, makes it possible, like oxygen suffusing bloodstream and tissue and

making the body possible. Here we are mainly looking at the aspect of Freedom; later we shall have a closer look at the aspect of Necessity. Throughout, we need to be aware of their mutual implication. Freedom is not restricted to preconsciousness and eventually to Consciousness, and Necessity not to Pre-Being and eventually to Being (Matter). There is no split between Freedom and Necessity. Both permeate all of reality, in the macrocosm as a whole and its various processes and genera and in species of being in their various degrees and combinations. Equally, it must be acknowledged in the microcosm as its innermost, most essential truth.

■ §36 *Sandhi*

Originally, the term *sandhi* (Sanskrit, 'junction') was used in several contexts, such as two roads meeting or two houses joining. Such connections are dynamic sites. The word came to be applied particularly to the meeting of two sounds in spoken language. Somewhere between the need for precision and the need for economy shortcuts are taken in the speaking mouth, compromises are made, creative solutions are forged or winners and losers emerge. Similar things happen when systems of ultimate meaning meet. Various religions or systems of mysticism with their divergent conceptualisations may be understood as analogous to different sounds in one language, sounding together in the human mouth. In our day, the meetings among science and religions and other systems of ultimacy are sites of challenge and change. With others, we are seeking a euphonic articulation of various understandings of the ultimate mystery of things. This is different from reducing such systems to some poorest common denominator.

■ Taoism

As was the case with other systems of ultimate meaning, the roots of Taoism lie in insights originating in prehistoric shamanic religion. Yet it set out on its course in historical times, perhaps 1000 BCE, unencumbered by the compulsory baggage of mythological supernatural personae and an infallibly sacred scripture, to reach great heights of MM gnosis. Of course, it did give rise, understandably and acceptably, to religious myth and ritual, but these were never presented as depicting or enacting an exclusive saving truth about one or more quasi-human creator deities.

The point of departure of this Chinese model of All is a concept of natural, cosmic creativity and power, equally present in macrocosm and microcosm. Good nature, worth living and enjoying, is seen as a real structure, not as an illusion, as was the tendency in India; and not a structure of substances, but of dynamic forces and action. Added to that, in Taoist MM phenomenal nature is the exteriorisation, the dynamic expression, of an Eternal blueprint, preceding

and structuring the physical universe. In addition, Tao is not a way of strife and conflict, but essentially the Way of, and towards, macrocosmic and microcosmic harmony, peace and happiness.

Eternal energy (*chi*), eventually becoming cosmic energy, shows two interdependent and interacting modes: *yang* is active, positive energy; *yin*, its passive, negative counterpart. Together, they manifest the primordial fact of arising and decay – let us say, of Origin and End. To a thinker such as Chuang-Tzu, life and death, like cosmic time and space itself, are but two of the endlessly variegated forms of undifferentiated, transtemporal Eternity, successively assuming different forms of self-manifestation. This has the implication that no empirical thing has an essence in itself, but only a relative distinction from the other, and from the undifferentiated, ‘chaotic’ Tao (Izutsu 1983:315ff., 322ff.). This vision is essentially dynamic, presupposing a process of unobstructed transformation (change) from Tao to the things and back, and between and among things. There are no absolute barriers, only total unobstructedness.

In the thinking of Lao-Tzu, the Way, although it is in itself undifferentiated and nameless, a Darkness that transcends all things, is also the Origin of all. The *Tao Te Ching* (I; XL) reads (ibid.:391ff.):

The Nameless is the beginning of Heaven and Earth. The Named is the Mother of ten thousand things [...]. The ten thousand things under Heaven are born out of Being (yu), and Being is born out of Non-Being (wu). (p. 391)

Thus, the Way is essentially creative. At the stage of Non-Being in the self-devolvement of the Way, it ‘is’ not, and yet ‘is’ potentially, and gives birth to Heaven and Earth. It is pregnant with eternal energy. In imagery reminiscent of the Buddhist Yogācāra concept ‘womb’, Lao-Tzu refers to Absoluteness as a ‘granary’. Emptiness is supremely productive, and in this productivity, the principles of activity and receptivity (passivity) are mutually constitutive. In the Taoist MM masters one finds true Absoluteness [...] and also true Becoming, and Can-ing.

Any useful hermeneutic will be clear that there are no identities across cultural, societal and historical contexts, only, at best, felicitous contacts and convergences, perhaps inclined in the same direction, perhaps even moving forward in loose company. On that understanding, this meeting with Taoism has been, like the previous ones, profoundly rewarding and encouraging in our search for MM orientation in the world of today.

■ Mahāyāna Buddhism

The argument set out in the previous § is presented as in line with the Buddhist prime concept of *karma* (*kamma*): acting, doing. It is also presented as in line with the intention of the Mahāyāna Buddhist concept of *Tathāgata-garbha*, as developed in the Yogācāra school (around the 4th century CE), the anonymous

(probably Chinese) sutra *Awakening of faith in Mahāyāna* (before the 5th century CE), and East Asian Buddhism (the *Hua-yen* [*Kegon*] school, founded in the 6th century or 7th century).

The empty womb of Buddhahess (Emptiness, Absoluteness) is – paradoxically – the source where all things are conceived, from which they are born, and by which they are activated. The connection between this train of thought and the elevation of the feminine principle in MM is clear. In fact, one of the differences between early Buddhism and the later Mahāyāna was the higher philosophical and mystical standing awarded to femininity, to include a number of celestial Bodhisattvas, possessors of infinite compassion and wisdom. The mythical goddess *Prajñāpāramitā* ('Perfection of Wisdom') is, for example, the mother of the Buddhas. This archetypal connection offset the traditional androcentrism, inherent in ancient Buddhism as a social institution, as in all religions deriving from the ancient world.

Absoluteness 'becomes', 'is' Absoluteness as agent. *Tathatā* ('Thusness') is empty with reference to its logically prior state of bare indetermination; but precisely in that state it is full with the potentiality to manifest itself totally – it is therefore totally non-empty, full (Verdu 1981:45ff.). In our terminology, it contains Eternal Principles of Becoming and Can-ing. Discriminative words break down when attempting to describe this mystery. According to the *Awakening of faith in Mahāyāna* (Verdu 1981):

Thusness, (*Tathatā*; Chinese: *chen-yu*; Japanese: *shinnyo*), if relying upon discriminative words, has two different aspects. One is that it is truly empty, for only this aspect can in the final analysis reveal what is (ultimately) real. The other is that it is truly non-empty, for its essence comprises, in total completeness, all the undefiled qualities (of self-manifestation). (p. 46)

This formulation, moving at the same high level of MM sophistication as Chuang-Tzu, contains in an exemplary way, and as concisely as can come, the problem, the intuition and the sense of wonder leading this exploration.

■ Stoicism

As indicated earlier, ancient Stoicism spoke of two *archai*, basic patterns or regulative, structuring divine principles underlying the world: the Active (*to poioun*) and the Passive (*to paschon*).

In Stoic cosmology and metaphysics (Frede 2003:179ff.; Hahn 1977; Pohlenz 1964:64-110; White 2003:129ff.) the cosmos is periodically consumed by fire (the *ekpyrosis*, 'conflagration'). At such periods 'god' consumes the whole cosmos (which they took to be a living being) back into himself; he then brings it forth from himself again. Of fundamental structural significance in this process of world constitution is that there are two most basic all-pervasive principles in nature, essentially co-operative in an inner unity. On the one hand,

there is an active (life-giving, rational, creative, directive) element (principle, force). This generative principle in the universe was also referred to as *logos spermatikos* ('seminal reason'), maker (demiurge), or 'god'. On the other hand there is a passive element (principle, force) (that which is acted upon), counterpart to, and permeated and determined by the first, which is eternally inherent in it. This passive, impressionable, qualifiable principle, was held to be material (prime matter), and perhaps taken to underlie the four elements earth, water, fire and air. There seems to have been some difference of opinion among Stoics as to whether the active principle was immaterial or material, with the latter probably the dominant position. The two Principles were not dualistically dissociated. Overall, the Stoics were corporealists: the ultimate substance of things must be corporeal; and corporeality means that which either acts (activity) or that which is acted upon (passivity).

What is significant in our immediate context is not the corporeality of it all, but firstly the thread of thought that the world proceeds from god, and secondly that this happens in accordance with the principles (*archai*) of activity-passivity. These are metaphysical prior assumptions, which Stoicism derived from Plato and Aristotle, largely synthesising those two philosophers. Stoicism seems not to have settled for an unqualified monism of god and world. There is a measure of distinction: In the phase of collapse into god, god is utterly unadulterated, approaching absolute transcendence from the world.

Stoicism had a clear sense of the primary significance of the categories of acting and being acted upon in the coming into being of the world, yet it does not seem to have penetrated to the transcendental levels of Absoluteness and Eternity, as found in Taoism and Mahāyāna Buddhism. Their *archai* lie wholly within their cosmos. Yet this philosophy can be seen to join the route explored on our expedition: Cosmos emerges from, is non-dualistically and non-monistically permeated by, and returns to, Absoluteness. The Becoming of Cosmos from that primordial condition is governed by activity and passivity. That is a thread worth holding in our hands as we hope to move safely through the labyrinth of human responses to the mystery of the becoming and ending of the world.

■ Neoplatonism

Plotinus was acquainted with the scientific and philosophical thinking of his day, including that of India and of those preceding him. His approach to things was conciliatory, universalist, inclusive and synthetic, and not bound narrowly to any religious institution. Such features, apart from the substance of this thinking and his historical impact, make him a significant guide on the route of this exploration.

A basic principle underlying Neoplatonism in its various forms is the axiom that every productive cause is necessarily superior to its result. Higher cannot be caused, produced by lower, only lower by higher. Extrapolated to present debates concerning evolution, Plotinus would have rejected the notion that, say, consciousness, could arise from matter, as is held in materialistic scientism. He accepted an unhistorical scale of being; the notion of historical evolution lay 16 centuries into the future. Nevertheless, his top-down model of the hierarchy of things allowed for a bottom-up perspective. That perspective was secondary, and strictly subordinate to the larger movement of a devolution from higher to lower, from the One through Intelligence and Soul to Matter.

The One is immanent in all else, yet is also beyond and different from (transcendent to) all else. How did Neoplatonism account for the dynamics of this relationship, of the emergence of the world from the One? Is the relationship between the empirical world and the One such that anything at all happens? Is there any change, any Becoming? Terms such as ‘dynamics’, ‘emergence’, ‘change’ and ‘becoming’ are misleading, in that they push Plotinus further into a historical or quasi-historical view of things than that which he actually held. To him, reality is a structure of dependence of various levels of reality. Being ontologically ‘posterior’ means being contained in the ‘prior’. It seems to be a complex but essentially supratemporal relationship of partial overlap, partial mutual immanence and partial mutual transcendence of ‘prior’ and ‘posterior’ (O’Meara 1996:66–81).

Is reality, taken in the widest sense, from the One to Matter, in his system static? Yes, it appears, in the sense that his reality is – contrary to axiomatic (post-)modern assumptions – completely ahistorical. Nevertheless, it was not static, in the sense that his system did in fact allow for a considerable degree of dialectical tension. The One and Matter are two poles, positive and negative, eternally poised in a tautly ambivalent relationship.

The emanation of the One from Itself, thereby constituting the rest of reality, is in his *Enneads* a purely ontic relationship. ‘Emanation’ (Oosthuizen 1974:59ff.) means that the many are extensions of the One, just as – these are his own analogies – light is an extension of the sun, the circumference an extension of the centre, heat an extension of fire, smell the extension of objects, rivers extensions of a spring, fruit extensions of the root. Plotinus does not associate temporal sequence with such ‘emanations’; the emphasis is squarely and solely on the aspect of ontological primacy. Incidentally, Plotinus did not use the term ‘emanation’ himself, and it is not a Platonic idea either. Nevertheless, the term is expressive of Plotinus’ view. His thinking here reveals, if not Gnostic influence, at least the presence and spread of Gnostic ideas in the environment in which he thought. At least in this respect, the underlying structure of his system may be said to be similar to Gnosticism, although without the extreme pessimism and dualism prevalent in some Gnostic sects (such as that of Valentinus).

Clearly, Plotinus was up against the same fundamental perplexity that we are confronted with in this attempt of ours to make sense of things, including the existence of Cosmos since around 14 billion years ago, before which point it had not been in existence. Our perplexity concerns the paradox of the difference and sameness of empty ultimacy and the 10 000 things of empirical reality. Is there any Becoming, any Can-ing involved in this? To Mahāyāna precisely that Emptiness-Becoming-Fullness was a source of explicit, joyful wonder, the very centre of their MM; to Plotinus it seems to have been an intellectual embarrassment – at least, it did not become a focus of contemplative awe in itself. In the end, he envisions reality as a hierarchical structure like a pyramid, and unbecoming.

He could say (V.2.2) (Plotinus 1991):

[7]here is from the first principle to ultimate [*that is, last, 'lower'*] being an outgoing in which unfailingly each principle retains its own seat while its offshoot takes another rank, a lower, though on the other hand every being is in identity with its prior as long as it holds that contact. (p. 362)

That really begs the question intriguing us here. Plotinus is not quite Parmenides, but he does not seem to have developed a theory of change either. He does not hold a fully-fledged monism, and gives indications of tending towards a version of non-monism, but without accounting for Becoming. He does not appear to linger on the full extent of this problem, and takes for granted what is really a major issue, in need of prolonged contemplation and theoretical explication as far as that may be possible. On the one hand, he maintains the idea of sameness: whatever proceeds from the One, remains ontologically identical with the One. That is his main thesis. On the other hand, he cannot avoid introducing the idea of change, of ontological 'otherness': there are definite differentiations, breaks, in a process of degeneration, between his levels of emanation. That is a secondary thesis, or assumption, or at least implication. Have these two assumptions been reconciled theoretically, their relationship explicated? It seems not. In the end he falls back on a principle of evil unaccounted for, thereby fuelling a dualistic tendency. He hovers between monism and dualism, but does not quite strike a balance, moving forward. He did not develop a notion of 'process', of 'Becoming', of 'Can-ing'.

Plotinus' model poses a challenge to our contemporary groping for understanding. On the assumption that the above interpretation of his system is adequate, we need a view more dynamic than his, and one more appreciative of the exquisite beauty of the world and its many things in all their ephemeral concreteness – yet without compromising the absoluteness of atemporal, aspatial Absoluteness. We need to envision, imagine, Cosmos (time) as dynamically born from, and also non-dualistically and non-monistically part of Absoluteness-Eternity, and with its own relative existence and value. We need simultaneously to do justice to two essential things. Firstly, we need to appreciate the historicity of things – such as the real beginning of Cosmos with

time so many datable years ago, the real emergence and evolution of life through time, and – one day – the real end of Cosmos and time. This is a given of our (post-)modern mindset, part of the scaffolding of contemporary MM thought, which cannot just be dismantled. Secondly, we need to see space for significant change, Becoming, on Horizon.

Taking into consideration the caveats expressed above, a possibility opens up to read Plotinus cautiously, tendentionally in the direction that the train of our thinking is pulling and pushing. Following this route, we may postulate that his lowest level (d) – the world of Matter (*Hyle*) – corresponds (not in content or value, but in function or position in the ontological scale) to our Cosmos; and that his first i.e. highest level (a) – the One (*to En*), the undifferentiated source of all – corresponds functionally to our Absoluteness. Then we may interpret his third highest level (c) – the world-Soul (*Psyche*) – as operating at the level of, and roughly corresponding in function to, what we intend with Infinitude. Between the One (Absoluteness) and the world-Soul (Infinitude) lies his second highest level (b), Mind (*Nous*). It may be appropriated to refer to the level of ‘Eternity’, deriving from Absoluteness, and feeding successively into the two ‘levels’ below. Furthermore, his *Nous* could be interpreted to express the same function as our Principle of Witting: to him *Nous* is the supreme (divine) Intelligence. In effect, it may also be interpreted to function as the creative principle (Hatab 1982:38). This interpretation – his *Nous* as functional equivalent of what we term creative Eternity – would draw Plotinus into the vicinity, not only of the Upanishads and Vedanta, but also of Mahāyāna Buddhism. As in Yogācāra Buddhism, Plotinus’ *Nous* could be understood as a storehouse in which all potential beings pre-exist, and in which they are primarily activated, as eternal, divine thoughts.

■ Sufism

In the unmistakable and inimitable diction of the grand master of Sufism, Ibn Arabi, the attentive listener can pick up MM *sandhi* and trace the lingering sounds of Neoplatonic, Hindu (Vedanta), Buddhist, Jewish (Kabbalah), Christian and Gnostic thought. Yet the water of his understanding takes on the unique colour of his particular bowl, made from the clay of a particular set of historical, social and religious conditions (medieval mystical Islam). That is unavoidable.

In endless interreflections, impossible to pin down, Ibn Arabi’s ambiguous words and associations evoke the mystery of divine emanation. Ibn Arabi unmistakably imagines the divine Names as archetypes in the theogonic, theophanic process – that is, the process of the emanation (*fayd*), the Self-manifestation (*tajalli*), of *al-haqq* (the Absolute), culminating in the determination of concrete, empirical reality. First, the Absolute overflows to become the non-existent Names (archetypes); then the Names overflow to become creation. In this context, the Neoplatonic roots of this thinking are

obvious – indeed, Ibn Arabi referred to the ‘divine Plato’, and he himself became known as *Ibn Aflatun* (‘son of Plato’). In Neoplatonic vein, the Names in his vision cause the world to be, and are ever present in the world; they only become existent and knowable themselves insofar as they become the created world. The divine archetypes and their concretisations are reciprocally and simultaneously constituted (Ibn Al’Arabi 1980:31ff.; Sells 1994:75ff.). We can discern activity, passivity and reflexivity in the fundamental capacity inherent in the Absolute of the master. Procession and return – and what proceeds and what returns – are mutually constitutive. All the divine Names together exercise the function indicated in our scheme as Can-ing, allowing Cosmos to Become, and thereby actualising Absoluteness. The Names are jointly operative in the creation (*khalq*) of the world (Ibn Al’Arabi 1980):

The divine causality on which the Cosmos depends is the Divine Names, which are every Name on which the Cosmos depends. (p. 126)

Thus Ibn Arabi’s Absolute is/becomes ‘Commander’ (*amir*), issuing the powerful ‘Command’ (*amr*): ‘Be!’ (*kun*) (Izutsu 1983:197ff.). And the world is created. In the ontological structure of the process of creation according to Ibn Arabi the feminine principle, co-operating with the masculine principle, is obvious. He speaks of an intermediate level, an essential link, between the wholly inaccessible Absolute and plural reality – not discrete from either the Absolute or creation, but expressing a non-dual relationship involving thorough mutual implication. The timbre of the voice and the accent are different, but the sound is consonant with those of Taoism and Mahāyāna Buddhism. Yet, he does not venture towards emptying Absoluteness as far as they do.

■ Kabbalah

The symbolic veil (inviting and protecting, revealing and concealing) that Isaac Luria weaves before the ultimate mystery of Cosmos emerging from Absoluteness, contains an interesting paradox: the process of the *making* of the world is the process of ‘the *breaking* of the vessels’ (*Shebirath hakelim*). ‘Vessels’ (*kelim*) refers to the *Sefirot*: the 10 luminous divine emanations or inner-divine containers, as it were, of God’s light. Luria seems to envision the emergence of the world as analogous to the birth of a child from the mother’s womb. The birth of the child is also the rupturing of the mother. The birthing of the world is both a joyful and a traumatic event for both mother (divinity) and child (the world), and surrounded by confusion and chaos. The ‘breaking of the vessels’, signalling the scattering of the divine sparks and their becoming entrapped in space and time, occurred outside divine control. There is no other way. This is the ‘passive’ side of the emergence of the world, also carrying the aspect of necessity. Neither mother (*Ein-Sof*) nor child (the world) has a choice in the matter; they have to undergo the process. Nevertheless, it is the supreme act of divine creation; it is the ‘feminine’ aspect of (in our terminology) Can-ing.

It is not weak inactivity, but is supercharged with Can-ing. This association also emphasises the ambivalent position of the created world, hovering between the longing still to be part of the mother (or return to her, if that were possible) and the inevitability of a separate existence.

The similarity of this imagery as found in Luria and the general Buddhist pattern of thinking, arises from the nature of the reality that the observer of the miracle of Becoming and Can-ing is contemplating: Fullness/Being is implied, contained in, and proceeds from, yet is not identical with Emptiness/Absoluteness. That does not exclude the possibility of some historical connection of Buddhism and Kabbalah along a common journey over a considerable stretch of time. In Christian mysticism, sexual imagery was also a strongly developed theme. Without doubt this imagery has its primary roots in prehistoric shamanic layers of the human search for the ultimate meaning of things. Far from being a hangover from primitivism, it expresses a profound MM intuition of receptivity and activity in the core of things.

The 'active' ('masculine') aspect of the productive creation of the world in the tradition of Kabbalah is suggested by the ninth divine *Sefirah* called *Yesod* ('foundation'), associated with strength. This vessel is the equivalent of the Gnostic emanation referred to as Power (*Caen*). *Yesod* is the procreative force dynamically active in the universe, absorbing, concentrating and channelling all the *Sefirot* above it, particularly *Hod* ('majesty') and *Netzah* ('fortitude', 'endurance'), and then manifesting in *Malkuth* – that is, the established Kingdom of God at the level of the physical universe. Thus, Kabbalah thinks in terms of a union of the active and passive in God, from which the world is derived (Scholem 1955 [1941]:227). This remarkable MM imagining is relevant to our reflection on the miraculous Eternal moment of Can-ing, enabling the emergence of Cosmos from Absoluteness, while remaining and participating in Absoluteness.

■ Alfred North Whitehead

I now listen to a different sound from a different epoch: that of the modern mathematician and metaphysician Alfred North Whitehead (1861–1947), one of the most significant speculative MM minds of the last century and a half. Adding weight to Whitehead's thinking is the fact that he was an accomplished scientist, speaking with authority from within mathematics. That is a rare achievement among those interested in MM. Let me listen to his masterpiece *Process and reality* (1929).

Whitehead is typically modern (in contrast to a premodern thinker such as Plotinus e.g.) in that his metaphysics is thoroughly dynamic, historical and evolutionary. His thinking also signifies a move away from a deterministic, materialistic worldview and the Cartesian bifurcation of reality into the physical

(*res extensa*) and mental (*res cogitans*). His world is bipolar (or 'dipolar'), having both physical and mental aspects. At first hearing, his abstract language seems very different from that of the passionate MM individuals and schools above. It is especially in the last chapter of Whitehead's magnum opus (Whitehead 1978 [1929]:342–351) that we are allowed into the mystical part of his metaphysics. Unexpectedly we come across tenderness and emotion. He had lost a son in the First World War. Is there any meaning in it all? Yes, in the larger developing scheme of things God understands.

His substitution of *process* for *substance* marks a turn in Western metaphysics. It started a century or so before him, and is an inviting signpost on the road that we are following here. In his essentially Platonist 'philosophy of organism' *creativity* constitutes the primary category in his overall vision of process. Creativity is not a substrate existing apart from the individualised acts of actual entities in the world, but is present in them and their activities. 'Creativity', the principle of 'novelty', is the ultimate notion of the highest generality at the base of actuality. Whitehead understands creativity as an 'eternal object' in which things participate. In this respect, he is linking up with Plato's notion of eternal Ideas, markedly different from the kind of approach unfolding in this essay.

He distinguishes between the principle of 'creativity' and 'God'. God as well as the world is in the grip of the ultimate metaphysical ground, the creative advance into novelty. God is the principle of concretion, of order, mediating between original chaos and creativity and concrete reality with all its actual entities. Without God, there would be no actual outcome from creativity (Whitehead 1927:145, 1978 [1929]:349). Whitehead's position turns out to be a modern restatement of Plato's vision set out in the *Timaeus*: His God is the functional equivalent of Plato's Demiurge, the artist-artisan forming the word. Rather than share the usual theistic doctrine of a wholly transcendent God creating the universe *ex nihilo* (whatever that might be taken to mean), Whitehead's vision sought an alignment with the Platonic thinking of the *Timaeus*: cosmos is traced back to an aboriginal disorder from which the world emerges under the primary stimulus of creativity as primordial principle.

Whitehead's God is not static, but dynamically bipolar: He is prior to as well as consequent to creation; that is, he precedes creation, is affected by it and changes with it, responds to it. A significant difference is that, whereas the Platonic-Neoplatonic tradition would mostly fundamentally contrast 'being' and 'becoming' (Plato's creation myth does not really challenge that), Whitehead clearly wants to overcome that division. To him 'process' entails that 'being' is constituted by 'becoming'. That is a great step forward, necessitated by the texture of the dynamic contemporary worldview.

It is remarkable how easily he adopts anthropomorphic speech about God. One can understand why a substantial school of Christian theology (process theology) followed his example. The emotional tone and undercurrent of his

thinking ('God is the great companion – the fellow sufferer who understands') (Whitehead 1978 [1929]:351) is Christian, and this, to an extent, also resonates with Mahāyāna Buddhism. Theology carried certain features of his thinking, at times isolated from his larger theory, over into its own discourse. Whitehead himself made that possible in the last chapter of his *Process and reality*.

Our Eternal Principle of 'Can-ing', with 'God' talk accommodated at the level of Infinitude (see Part Three), moves in the vicinity of Whitehead's distinction of Creativity and God. Another instance of convergence concerns his vision of Cosmos as an active, self-creating agent, an organism (this will be picked up in Ch. 22). Whitehead's 'nature' is fundamentally 'organic' and physical existents are 'organisms' (not 'mechanisms'), marked by the interrelatedness of parts and parts, and parts and wholes. The universe is not lifeless in the sense of mechanistic materialism, even if it is not in every respect 'conscious': consciousness only arises at a derivative, later stage of organismic integration. Categories still to be discussed, such as Conditioning (Ch. 13), Totalising (Ch. 16) and Infinite Life (Ch. 19) also find support in Whitehead. The difference is that Whitehead does not begin and end with Absolute Horizon.

Conditioning

■ §37 Reflexive, transitive, reciprocal effecting

This chapter postulates Conditioning as a basic constitutive Principle in the nature of things. The correlativity of non-substantial, impermanent event flashes replaces substance as central perspective. The main historical antecedent of this view (Theravāda Buddhism) will become clear as we move along.

‘Conditioning’ as used here is not restricted to, but includes ‘causality’. ‘Causality’ usually refers to sequential relationships of determining factors in narrowly defined avenues, for example: sufficient heat causes water to boil. ‘Conditioning’ refers to the postulate that anything, in fact everything in the world, is contemporaneously, reciprocally correlated to everything else in networks that we cannot hope to trace exhaustively. ‘Conditioning’ is more than ‘concurring’. ‘Conditioning’ implies an element of effective changing in meshes of creative relations.

Every event-thing is context dependent. If a singular event-thing changes, the context changes, affecting every other one and a new gestalt emerges. If the context changes, every singular event-thing changes. The meaning (the contextual reference) changes; an individual event-thing can become something ‘new’ – something relatively new, that is. The Principle of Conditioning is understood as interconnected with Becoming and Can-ing

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in mutual presupposition. It is distinct from them and proceeds beyond them in the sense that it affects change – that is, the production of another state, involving reflexivity (subject/agent effecting change in itself), transitivity (subject/agent effecting change in object/patient), and reciprocity (a two-way movement between subject-subject [agent-agent]). Conditioning involves multirelational giving, receiving and reciprocating.

Initially, Conditioning is reflexive. The potentiality to act upon itself, to be acted upon by itself, arises on the Horizon of becoming Cosmos. In conjunction with the yetto emerge Cosmos, it becomes transitive, reciprocal and secondarily reflexive: Unground constitutes, produces and changes Cosmos; Cosmos constitutes, produces and changes Unground. Unground becomes the process of manifestation, involving Cosmos and the reflex of Cosmos on Unground, right up to End – and then the process is not just wiped out, but somehow remembered, carried forward. The movement of emergence from and return to Horizon is not a mere return in a closed circle, but an open-ended spiral. Cosmos has eternal implications.

Conditioning is not only the potential to act upon, but also the potential to be acted upon. It is effecting and undergoing. In the act of producing a daughter, the mother is produced as mother. The potter forms the clay; the clay determines the activity of the potter, constitutes the potter. 'ABC' (Absoluteness Becoming Cosmos) is a circuit with feedback from Cosmos on the original source of the energy flow. Conditioning includes the potential to activate: to trigger self-perpetuating chains of reciprocally linked relationships that empower the multitude of Cosmic events.

The relationship between manifesting Unground and manifested Cosmos is neither of a completely heterogeneous nor completely homogeneous nature. It is not heterogeneous in the sense that Cosmos (the result) is something completely different from Unground; that would emphasise duality too strongly. Neither is it homogeneous in the sense that Cosmos is simply identical with Unground; that would amount to monism. Via Conditioning, Unground unfolds gratuitously for no other reason than its own Witting, Wanting and Willing. Something happens. The danger of surreptitiously substantialising Unground lurks; it comes with talking. Use discourse, but also destruct it to become silence, realising that, at the approach of Horizon, analogy expires. Unlike a horizon in the generally known Sahara of which another side is accessible and comprehensible to us, here 'is' no Beyond: only End – as Origin. Absolute Horizon (Unground) appears to us as Eternity, involving Conditionality.

In the actual workings of Cosmos, the mutual implication of Freedom (the space to act) and Necessity (the linkage of acts, narrowing the space to act) is delicate. Karma as free action and karma as determined outcome (to use Indian terms, extrapolated to Arche) are not in an easy balance. The risk of tragic failure ('evil'), of the disturbance of the balance between creative space and necessary linkage, comes with the challenge of being Cosmos, and being a part

of Cosmos, as a human being is. It is not so that Freedom is increasingly funnelled into an increasingly narrowing and inescapable dead end of Fate. Every necessity remains part of a system opening up creatively towards new, unexpected possibilities under the Principles of Becoming, Can-ing and Conditioning. Necessity and Freedom are two mutually implying aspects of Conditioning that here is not understood as determinism. Nature finds and creates new ways. Seeded by these nine Principles, Cosmos appears as an unimaginably complex organism of which Matter, Life, Feeling and Thought are inextricable, mutually inhering and conditioning elements. At the level of Eternity postulated here, primordial Conditioning can, in conjunction with Witting, be imagined to involve the aspects of taking into account, responding to challenges, and anticipating the outcomes of such responses; also reacting creatively to such feedbacks in a continuous process.

In the argument put forward here Cosmos is assumed to be a multifactorial feedback system. It does not move in a straight line, and it has to negotiate challenges, respond to challenges and anticipate the outcomes of feedbacks. This would allow for understanding evolution as a complex interactive process involving multiple lines of reciprocal conditioning between species and their environment. Neither ironclad determinism, nor a substantialist first cause or a detailed master plan for the universe laid out in advance by a grand personal architect or super intelligence, is called for. Conditioning is assumed as a primordial constitutive Principle of the world.

■ §38 Complementary historical correlations

■ Lao-Tzu

A famous passage of the *Tao te ching* states (Lao-Tzu 1979 [1963]:67):

Thirty spokes share one hub. Adapt the nothing therein to the purpose in hand, and you will have the use of the cart. Knead clay in order to make a vessel. Adapt the nothing therein to the purpose in hand, and you will have the use of the vessel. Cut out doors and windows to make a room. Adapt the nothing therein to the purpose in hand, and you will have the use of the room. (p. 67)

The relevance of Lao-Tzu's homely similes (a cart, a jar, a room) can be paraphrased as follows: In each case 'the nothing' refers to the emptiness constituting the essence of all three items, which represent the empirical world, the world of utility. 'The nothing' conditions the tens of thousands of things in the world. The actively turning and passively turned wheel is constituted by the enabling empty hub from which the spokes protrude and around which the wheel of the cart circles. The jar, actively containing and passively filled with food, water or gems, is constituted by the enabling empty hollowness at its centre. The room, actively being a loving home and passively being filled with laughter and tears of children, is constituted by the spaces of its doors and windows.

Paraphrased: Absolute Absoluteness, the Mystery of Mysteries, is absolutely 'beyond' the phenomenal world. Yet, it turns towards the phenomenal world, and at a 'slightly lower stage', the absolute Mystery of Mysteries becomes 'the Granary of the ten thousand things' (Izutsu 1983:398ff.), thus beginning to manifest creativity. The phenomenal world is a stage in the self-explication of the Way, and all things are as it were contained in a state of potentiality in Absoluteness. Thus the Way, eternally inactive, is also eternally active; eternally empty, it is eternally full; its emptiness is supremely productive (ibid.:409). Empty Absoluteness becomes a Principle, enabling all things, pervading and affecting the phenomenal world. This Principle is also expressed in ancient Chinese thought as the dialectic of *yin yang*, conceptualising the balancing complementarity of seemingly unrelated and even opposing tendencies in the natural world, and functioning within the large, dynamic system of the whole of reality.

Lao-Tzu contents himself with the essence of the matter, and does not bother with working out the mechanics of the process of Conditioning. Buddhism does, in staggering detail.

■ *Paṭṭhāna*

We turn to two different classical Buddhist views on the relationship between empirical reality and emptiness, and the role of correlativity: Theravāda and Mahāyāna Yogācāra. In view of the importance attached to causality in Buddhism and the complexity of that input, I shall now present its contribution in some detail.

Several of the early Buddhist schools (according to tradition there were 18), produced their own systematic presentations of the Buddha's teaching, which had been presented by him, according to tradition, over more than four decades. These systems, termed *abhidhamma* (Pāli) and *abhidharma* (Sanskrit) were grounded in the original teaching of the Buddha himself, insofar as he chose to present his teaching in less popular, more stringent systematic form to advanced pupils. It gradually took further detailed shape as it was elaborated during the three or four centuries after the Buddha. In their later elaborations the Abhidhammas are very different from Taoism's limpidity; it certainly also took on a more scholastic form than would have been the case in the earliest stages of this philosophy. I now turn to one of the three extant systems: the Theravāda Abhidhamma. It consists of seven volumes, of which the seventh (*Paṭṭhāna*) deals thoroughly, specifically with the topic of conditionality (cf. Nārada 1992, 1993; Nyanaponika 1998 [1949]; Nyanatiloka 1980 [1952]:139–145).

'Condition', 'conditionality', 'conditional relations', 'relativity' and 'correlativity' are possible English translations of the Pāli term *paccaya*. This teaching has to be understood as cohering with the fundamental *dhamma* theory, which is essentially connected to the notions of impermanence, non-substantiality and

radical emptiness. *Dhammas*, the basic building blocks of Abhidhamma ontology, are quantum like ‘event-things’, without any relationship to a putative Substance in or behind the phenomenal world. The Buddha had cut off any notion of such a Substance at the root. In that sense, the *dhammas* and the wholes made up of them are radically contingent. This is nothing else but another way of stating the essential Buddhist teaching of *anattā*: ‘non-self’. It would be a serious mistake (perhaps made by some early Buddhist thinkers themselves, including the Sarvastivāda sect), to regard the *dhammas* themselves as mini-substances: that would obviously just shift substantial thinking from a macro to a mini scale. To the Buddha, the bottom category was not indestructible atoms, but change, process. The *dhammas* add up, through complex correlations, to form the manifold of the world as it is humanly experienced. Early Buddhism developed the notion of an all-pervading mutual conditioning of phenomena (‘dependent co-origination’ (*paṭṭiccasamuppāda*) and ‘relativity’ or ‘conditionality’ (*paccaya*) without any recourse to either personal divinity or transpersonal substance. Human action (*kamma*) is part of that.

One of the strengths of the Abhidhamma system is that it challenges the common understanding of causality as a one-on-one linear impact of one entity on another, by absorbing it into a wider multidimensional framework of reciprocally implied events.

The present exploration moves mainly in the current of thought that Buddhism cut through the mountains of human existence-in-the-world. However, whereas the Abhidhamma largely restricts itself to human psychology and human rebirth, this attempt has a wider cosmological interest. Early Buddhism showed less interest in a critical and constructive involvement with the science of its day than was the case in the Greek thinking of the time. The leading question of the Abhidhamma is a psychological, phenomenological one; our present one is a cosmological, and wider ontological, metaphysical one. What follows now is a kind of ‘double-check’ in the sense that the usefulness of the Abhidhamma scheme will be tested by applying it to our emerging model and its wider concerns. This model, in turn, will be tested in the light of the Abhidhamma view of conditionality. For this exercise, we turn to Chapters I and II of the *Paṭṭhāna*, leaving out the dense and detailed Chapters III and IV.

The *Paṭṭhāna* lists 24 modes of conditionality. Some of these appear to be duplications and subsidiary applications of others. In the following summary the numbers and names of the original scheme are provided. It must be borne in mind that the seeming long-windedness and repetitiousness of that text which does not fall easily on the ear of the contemporary casual reader, derives from it being a meditative text, studied in intense meditative, chanting sessions in which monks who were bent on achieving ultimate liberation considered each word in utmost concentration. These sections were not intended for quick consultation and superficial reference, but for serious introspection by students of the human mind in the human world.

Before the conditions are listed, mention must be made of a mysterious concept – mysterious because it is so very obviously at the same time connected to and disconnected from the system of 24 conditions as such. This is the notion of *asankhata*: the ‘Unconditioned’, ‘Unformed’, ‘Unoriginated’. It is *nibbāna*, beyond all becoming and conditionality’. Interestingly, the Abhidhamma does not posit a conditionalistic relationship between ‘the Unconditioned’ and the phenomenal manifold of conditionality. Yet it seems to be called for, also in the context of the early Buddhist teaching. In the *Dhammapada* for example (see Chs 5–7 of that collection of poems), worldly existence and *nibbāna* are related like the two banks of a river: opposites but mutually implicit. In Mahāyāna Buddhism (e.g. the *Heart Sutra*), this would become a theme of profound wonder. It is also the theme of the quote from the *Tao te ching* above. Understood as Absolute Horizon, it is an essential, structural element of this model. The Abhidhamma restricts itself to conditionalism at the phenomenal level of existence.

This set of 24, although analysing different types of conditions, is one coherent whole, that is in itself a conditionalistic nexus. Some relevant ones namely the following, have been selected from the list:

- (1) ‘Root condition’ (*hetu-paccaya*) is one that has the same function as the root of a tree: Something exists as long as its root exists and dies as its root is destroyed. In the context of our emerging model, tying Cosmos to Absolute Horizon/Eternity as root condition would be unacceptable. The Abhidhamma system is limited to existents and Emptiness is regarded as beyond conditionality, as precisely Unconditioned.
- (2) ‘Object condition’ (*ārammaṇa-paccaya*) refers to a physical object (e.g. an object of sight), as a sine qua non condition for consciousness. Extended to our model, one may draw the implication that ‘matter’ is a necessary condition for consciousness. This is not the same as reducing consciousness to matter (as materialism implies). Nor, of course, should materialism simply be turned on its head by reducing matter from consciousness (as forms of idealism imply). Both are mutually necessary. That is an essential structural element of this model.
- (3) ‘Predominance-condition’ (*adhipati-paccaya*), in the Abhidhamma model, refers (complementarily to no 2) to the fact that at a given time and in a given situation one of more phenomena, all in principle equally necessary, may in fact predominate. Again, Abhidhamma limits the application of this principle to the field of meditation and spiritual liberation. Extended to our model, it implies (e.g.) that at a given time matter may be the dominant condition. This allows for an acceptance and endorsement of current evolutionary theory, according to which consciousness arose later than life, and both later than matter, in the process of the development of our universe. This is the case in the ‘epoch’, the span of existence, the situation, of this our present Cosmos, but it must not be overextended to metaphysical proportions. At the Cosmic level, this essay argues, energy matter, life,

- love and thought are in principle, *sub specie aeternitatis* ('under the aspect of Eternity'), equally necessary.
- (6) 'Co-nascence-' or 'co-arising condition' (*sahajāta-paccaya*) is relevant from the point of view of our present interest. It refers to the simultaneous arising of two event-things, such as the four aspects of materiality (in the ancient Indian cosmology: earth, water, fire and wind), as well as to the five groups of *khandas* (matter, sensation, perception, emotional and -volitional factors, and consciousness). It confirms (like no's 2 and 3 above) the notion of a non-reductionistic, multifactorial, totalistic combination of, for example, the four basic dimensions of Cosmos (matter, life, love and thought).
 - (7) 'Mutuality condition' (*aññamañña-paccaya*) coincides with and reconfirms no's 2, 3 and 6 above. In our present context the nine Eternal Principles are confirmed as being mutually conditioned, every one necessary to support every other one in each constellation, and each constellation as a whole. The Principle of Conditioning is to be seen as essentially co-constitutive with the other eight (as has been argued in Ch. 7).
 - (8) 'Support-condition' or 'dependence-condition' (*nissaya-paccaya*) refers to a condition that serves as a necessary foundation or base for some event-thing. For example, the physical senses are the necessary supports for consciousness. Again, as is the case with no's 2 and 3, it by implication, allows for the mutuality of matter and consciousness without reducing any one in relation to another.

To the Abhidhamma, things are contingent, but not for that reason, arbitrary. They have no absolute substantial referent, but they are all interconnected. There is no simple linear line of causation, but complex diachronic as well as synchronic meshes of connections. In effect, the notions of incessant change (*anicca*), non-substance (*anattā*), radical emptiness (*suññatā*), conditionality (*paccaya*) and unconditioned-ness (*asankhata*), all in their correlational togetherness, replace the mytheme of gods as most basic explanatory context. The model developing in this book, arguing for Cosmos as a Whole emerging from and receding into Absolute Horizon in a process of which Conditioning is a central feature, presents itself as broadly compatible with this Abhidhamma view. What is added, is Horizon as constitutive factor. The term 'Conditionalistic Totalism in Horizon' (CTH) captures what is intended here.

■ Vasubandhu

Both types of Buddhist views analysed here (Abhidharma and Mahāyāna Yogācāra) are represented in one remarkable MM author: Vasubandhu (period between 4th century and 5th century CE).

In his youth, he wrote a classic monograph in the Sarvastivāda Abhidharma tradition, the *Abhidharmakosa*, and also a commentary on that work (cf. De la Vallée Poussin 1988–1990 [1923–1931]:vol I, 253–325; Verdu 1981:5–17, 174–176). Extending the early Buddhist hunch of a pan-correlative nexus enmeshing all

of life and reality, the *Abhidharmakosa* develops a complex theory of general correlativity involving six major types of ‘causes’ (*hetus*), and four types of ‘conditions’, or ‘sub-causes’ (*pratyayas*). It contains a wealth of reflection on active, passive and reactive causality.

In our grappling with the question ‘How is the world brought into existence on Absolute Horizon?’ particularly the first of the *hetus*, namely *karana-hetu* (‘efficient causality’) is interesting. As a kind of universal Conditioning – a supreme, all-ruling influence – it pervades all things. It is not thought of by Vasubandhu as ontologically transcendent in any sense, but as simply blowing through the universe, a collectively shared, supreme force. Yet Vasubandhu goes no further where we may have expected him to do so, and does not relate it to any source. It is almost as if a cloud of unknowing veiled this most basic of all types of conditioning, as if it were an afterthought, an extrapolation from individual karma, to a cosmic scale, without an investigation of its own nature. It remained that: a force all-ruling but unaccounted for. The world of experience is nothing but a flux of factors, constituted by the human consciousness to create the collective experience of ‘the world’. The ‘world’ is merely a sequence of consciousness events. In his model, Cosmos does not become an entity, a ‘subject’, just as little as the individual human being is one; and its relationship to an ultimate source is not explained. As we saw in Chapter 6, the Buddha also chose to remain at the psychological level; the ontological level of the origin of things was seen as the field of unwarranted speculation. In terms of the problem intriguing us here (a linkage of correlativity between Unground and Cosmos), the early Vasubandhu does not seem to offer much help. He himself seems to have felt that a different MM point of departure was required.

After his conversion from Sarvāstivāda to Mahāyāna and becoming co-founder of the Yogācāra school with his brother Asanga, Vasubandhu, in his subsequent writings, returned to the problem of world-producing (Verdu 1981:18–25, 177–179). He now subscribed to and helped develop a very different model. He dramatically simplifies the concept of ‘conditioning’. At the level of human existence, consciousness becomes a ‘storehouse’ (*ālaya-vijñāna*) bringing about the outer world. Human consciousness becomes a repository into which the actions in the outer world return as ‘seeds’, which sprout again. It is a feedback system of correlativity, flowing back and forth between consciousness and the outer world. Of course, the main new difficulty faced by these MM theoreticians was how to avoid becoming substantialists in the Upanishadic sense of the word. They had to retain the basic Buddhist notion of ‘no-self’ (no-substance, *an-atman*) at all costs. There is some difference of opinion as to whether they actually succeeded. Did they in essence return to the Upanishadic idea of *Nirguna Brahman*: a non-qualified state, on *this* side of the more radical Buddhist notion of Emptiness, as expounded by, for example, Nāgārjuna? This is a subtle problem, to which we do not have to provide an answer. To the extent that the Yogācāra thinkers saw an immutable ultimate, it becomes problematic.

In his attempt to avoid eternalism, Vasubandhu presented the *ālaya-vijñāna* as ever-developing, at the same time conditioning cause and conditioned effect, an ever-changing stream of seed impregnations and seed maturations.

The point intriguing us most in our present context is whether the Yogācārins allowed for extrapolating their new idea of correlativity to cover the emergence of Cosmos as a *whole* from absolute Emptiness, or whether they remained at the level of individual and collective human consciousness and *karma*. It seems that they did not take the step towards a universal cosmogony intentionally, but that it may have been implied in their approach tendentially. A handicap to them was the fact that the idea of Cosmos as a ‘whole’ would have been quite foreign. On the other hand, the notion of a transcendental source of reality – to boot, Emptiness itself – is manifestly operative in this system. At the deep bottom of all, beneath all the surface agitation, moves the great ocean depth.

We stand back from Vasubandhu and his colleagues to the extent that they may have implied that the world is merely illusory, at most a common human projection. Our reflections lead us to rejoice in Cosmos as a real manifestation of Absoluteness. On balance, what we are attempting here may harmonise tendentially with aspects of the later Vasubandhu’s thinking on the production of the world. We move in the direction of Absoluteness Becoming and Conditioning Cosmos, and being conditioned by Cosmos.

■ Aristotle

Turning to Aristotle (384–322 BCE) we do not find any support for the idea that Cosmos may be understood to emerge from Absolute Horizon. Yet his world does depend on a transcendental dimension in which the notion of causality features centrally. Aristotle was above all an empiricist with strong scientific interests, but he was not a materialistic reductionist. Nor was he a dualist, or did he regard matter as inferior, as was the threat in Platonic and Neoplatonic thinking.

In his early work *Categories (Kategoriai)* (Aristotle 1973:12–109) Aristotle distinguishes 10 predicates, foundational in the sense that no more abstract or more general concepts to understand anything are conceivable. Organising reality conceptually, they are the most basic perspectives in which things can be observed. His prime interest in abstracting these categories is the human being; they are primarily the most general predicates assignable to a human being. Still, his categories also operate as foundational to all of reality.

His list consists of the following: substance, quantity, quality, relation, place, time, position, having, doing and being affected. Aristotle is not interested in our Absoluteness at all. On the contrary, he makes a fundamental distinction between the first category (‘substance’) and the other nine (‘accidents’).

Of the 10 categories, substance (essential 'whatness', *ousia*) (Aristotle 1973: 18–35) is the one most important to him. He ascribes the concept 'substance' to an independent, concrete, individual something, or to a species of things, capable of existing independently, and with the ability of remaining the same, while taking different and indeed contrary properties. 'Substance' refers to what is 'essential' and not merely 'accidental'. Projected to a metaphysical plane: 'substance' – neither 'emptiness' nor 'event', to mention two other possibilities – is the hub of all.

This set the tone dominating Western metaphysics for two millennia and is a significant difference between Aristotle and thinking informed by mainly the Chinese and Indian models. To Aristotle, Substance was the most basic category of all. To the Taoist and Buddhist thinkers Absoluteness does not allow Substance as a final category: Dig deep enough and all substances dissolve, not only in conditionality, but also beyond that, in absolute emptiness. This is where the road between Taoism and Buddhism on the one hand and, on the other, Jewish, Christian and Islamic thinking splits. With Aristotle the philosophical destiny of 'Western' (including Jewish, Christian and Muslim) metaphysics, with Substance as capstone, has been sealed: Apophatic 'negative theology' may become thinned, attenuated, to the point that all conceptual attributes are erased, but bare Substance remains. Advaita Vedanta claims the same. Absoluteness takes a further step: Substance itself is erased.

Of Aristotle's 10 categories, the following three appear to be of special interest in our present context: 'relation' (*pros ti*), 'doing' (*poiein*) and 'being affected' (*paschein*) (Aristotle 1973:46–63, 78–81). Scrutiny reveals that it is not really the case. They are merely intended to have empirical relevance; none of them has a bearing on the ultimate level of things. The model that is emerging here, sides with Buddhism and Taoism on the slope of non-substantialism of the great watershed. Together with Indians like Sankara, Aristotle is a Greek champion of the opposite slope, namely substantialism. As said before, the analogy of a horizontal, porous distinction between substance thinkers and emptiness thinkers, deep and deeper, is more relevant than the picture of a vertical division (a watershed) with its either-or implication.

A key set of primary, underived principles (*archai*) in a complex argument in the *Physics* (*Physikes*) of Aristotle (Aristotle 1970:50ff.) relates to change (*kinesis*) in the nature of things. So does Wanting, for, as Aristotle points out, 'shortage' or 'privation' (*steresis*) (ibid.:86) is an essential factor in 'becoming'. It is fascinating to read how Aristotle is grappling with the very 'koan' of our meditations: From 'what' does Cosmos arise? Aristotle makes it clear that the 'ultimate material', the ultimate 'X', is sheer potentiality, which he calls *hyle* (of which our word 'matter' with its modern materialistic connotations, is an unsatisfactory translation). To Aristotle the ultimate material forever evades us, yet we cannot quite get rid of it. It is always there, eternally persistent: there

is something that underlies all opposites and all change, an ultimately underlying factor (*hypokeimene*) (ibid.:70–71, 80–81) – in usual vocabulary: ‘substance’. Much has been written to reconcile various notions of ‘substance’ in Aristotle’s various books. In addition to ‘matter’, Aristotle in his *Metaphysics*, also postulates ‘form’ (*eidos*, in function quite similar to Plato’s notion of ‘idea’) as a necessary and unchanging presupposition, prime substance, for the existence and change of natural things.

To Aristotle, nothing can come into existence or pass out of existence in an absolute sense (ibid.:82ff.). So, in this fundamentally crucial respect, Aristotle reprimands us. Nevertheless, we persist in arguing – rather, sensing – precisely that. Things arise out of a field of potentiality, which just arises – from what? Silence would be the only answer – which is why the Buddha gave that answer, and why legendary Lao-Tzu put in his disappearance act, heading West never to be seen again. The only words perhaps pointing non-referentially to this mystery of mysteries might be ‘Emptiness’ or ‘Absoluteness’, and so forth – cancelling, transcending Substance, however subtle Substance may be conceived of. Is it useful or necessary to dwell on this porous layer, dividing substantialism from underlying non-substantialism? Perhaps not. Can we ultimately avoid it? At least this great master of Greek-Western thinking suggests that the questions intriguing us are not vapid.

Explaining the why and how of natural phenomena and their changes, Aristotle in his *Physics* analyses the notion of ‘cause’ (*aitia*) (ibid.:126–139). By ‘causes’ he means the essential conditions for natural things to exist and to be what they are. Causes are the most basic types of factors to be taken into account in explaining that. Therefore, in essence, this formulation has the same function as and overlaps with the ‘categories’ above. In fact, Aristotle refers to his factors as *archai* (‘principles’) (ibid.:128). This model of causality of his was part of his theory of nature, with an immediate relevance to nature. It is also connected to his metaphysics.

Aristotle distinguishes four types of equally primordial causes: *hyle* (the ‘material’ *aitia*), *eidos* (the ‘formal’ *aitia*), *poioun* (the ‘efficient’ or ‘motive’ *aitia*), and *telos* (the ‘final’ *aitia*). The first cause intends unformed, undetermined ‘stuff’ or ‘matter’ with the potential of being formed into something (e.g. bronze). The second intends the ‘form’ or ‘plan’ in accordance with which something (e.g. a statue) is caused. The third intends the ‘power’ or ‘agent’ (e.g. the sculptor) effecting the act or process of causation. This third is really the only one corresponding with what moderns associate with the idea of causation. The fourth intends the ‘aim’, ‘end’ or ‘purpose’ of the event or process of bringing something into existence. A complete explanation of a natural event considers all four conditions. It is obvious that these four ‘causes’ have the same function as his earlier list of ‘categories’: they are the basic perspectives to be taken into account in explaining natural phenomena. Essentially, they are, to Aristotle, *archai*.

To 'Matter' we shall return later. The formal cause points to the distinguishing characteristics of a thing. It covers at least the categories of quantity, quality, relation, place, time, and position. It also touches on the kind of notion raised in our chapter as Witting: there is meaning, intention, order, coherence in things. The motive cause, in which his category of 'doing' resurfaces, has contact with our Principle of Willing and the aspect of 'activity' mentioned in §37. This cause will be looked at below, in connection with Aristotle's idea of the Unmoved Mover. In addition, Aristotle's thinking is committed to the notion that every existing thing is end directed (teleological). It is noteworthy that Aristotle does not understand the *telos* to be external to the caused object and the process of causation, but internal to it. Our notions of Witting, Wanting and Willing, including the anticipation of outcomes and creative adaptation to feedbacks in a never-ending process forward, is reconcilable with Aristotle's immanent teleology, against the present scientific commitment to expunge such an idea, assuming that it implies 'occult' forces or 'spiritualist' thinking.

Specialists in the field of Aristotle tell us that he changed his mind quite often. Nevertheless, there are some underlying continuities. His *Categories*, *Physics* and *Metaphysics* circle around the same questions, and the same and related concepts recur. To cut a long and intricate story short, towards the end of his *Metaphysics*, Aristotle directly addresses the central question intriguing us: Does Cosmos have any anchorage in a transcendent dimension? If so, how? Is there ultimate causing ... by ... from ... ? His categories of 'substance', 'relation', 'doing', 'being affected', his cosmic 'causality' and 'change' – where do they ultimately derive from? For, as a matter of fact, Aristotle defines metaphysics as the science of the first causes and conditions underlying all things, by which he probably (but opinions differ) meant the most general notions applying to things, which would make metaphysics the most general science of all. Yet he also included theology, the special science of divinity, as the last chapter of his metaphysics (as would be the case with Whitehead).

All movement (change) in the world, as he postulates speculatively in his *Metaphysics*, must have proceeded from some primal cause which, itself, is not caused but is the principle of change. If this were not so, we would be trapped in an infinite regress. Aristotle's own solution is to postulate – rather arbitrarily, one might think – an eternal first cause, a primary substance, which is immaterial, pure, perfect form, spirit, thought. There 'must' be a first cause, a prime 'Unmoved Mover' (*kinoun akineton*) (Aristotle 1961:346), and that is God: 'a living being, eternal, and most good' (*Theon ... zoon aidion ariston*) (ibid.:346); 'a substance (*ousia*) eternal (*aidios*), unchangeable (*akinetos*), and separate from sensible things' (ibid.:347); the supreme 'intellect' (*nous*) (ibid.:349). The prototype of Aristotle's Unmoved Mover (God) was probably Plato's idea of a world-soul. As the master himself said (ibid.):

There must be an extreme which moves without being moved, which is eternal, substance, and actuality [...] the unmoved mover [...] has no contingency [...]

On such a principle, then, the whole physical universe depends [...] God therefore is a living being, eternal, and most good [...]. It is clear, then, from what I have said, that there is a substance eternal, unchangeable, and separate from sensible things [...]. (p. 345)

At this stage of our journey, is there any reason to change course and to subscribe to Aristotle's Unmoved Mover or a similar notion? Not really. In the end, Aristotle does not establish a necessary connection between his Unmoved Mover and the things of experience. His view of causality does not accommodate reciprocity. His proof does not coerce, as little as would the proofs for the existence of God in Christian scholasticism, erected on an Aristotelian foundation by theologian philosophers such as Anselm (1033–1109) and Thomas of Aquinas (1225–1274). Aristotle's argument is that the Unmoved Mover 'must' exist, on rational grounds. From a Buddhist perspective, touched on above, that would be unacceptable. Nāgārjuna would have demolished it as rational proof. Rather stay with our lack of substance and our admission of poverty: There is merely beginning Moving, Conditioning, emerging from an absolutely inaccessible Horizon to become world, but no Mover, no Conditioner is found, or proven.

The koan of emergence is no closer to a theoretical solution; but how beautiful is the starkness of existence, how awesome the darkness from which it emerges.

■ Stoicism

Modifying Plato and Aristotle, the Stoics came up with their own original cosmogonic model (cf. Frede 2003:179ff.; Hahn 1977:57–90; White 2003:138ff.), shedding its own light on our problem. At this stage, I am not interested in the more concrete (closer to Cosmos) aspects of this process according to them, but in the primary conditioning dynamics operative in the process. Indeed, in their cosmogony causality played an essential role. All of reality is enmeshed in a network of necessary causality; and in the coming into existence of the cosmos, causality is operative.

Stoics distinguished (see Ch. 12) two fundamental principles (*archai*) determining all things: activity and passivity. These two, our argument went in §37, are aspects of primordial Conditioning. Contrary to Aristotle, they believed that the cosmos intermittently comes into being and passes away. In their vision of the (re-)genesis of the cosmos these *archai* play a constitutive role. The active principle or force, determining all things in the universe and permeating the passive principle, really amounts to a combination of Aristotle's four causes. To these MM thinkers, the active (rational) principle manifests as one cause, in which not only the formal, efficient and teleological aspects but also the material cause are fully integrated. Of great significance to the kind of thinking intriguing us here – one that would transcend the one-sidedness of

both materialisms and idealisms – is that Stoicism probably saw the active principle as both spirit and matter. Although they did not elaborate on the features of the passive principle, it was at least matter. As matter, their active principle was perhaps a combination of the active physical elements of air and fire; the passive principle, most likely a fusion of the passive physical elements of earth and water. In the Stoic active principle, we may recognise Plato's world-soul and Aristotle's prime mover. In Stoic terminology, the active principle, conceived of as god, acts on matter, introducing the semen, so to speak, of *spermatikoi logoi* ('seeds of logos'), impregnating receptive matter, and thus (re)producing the cosmos. They mythologised the active principle in the cosmogonic process as male Zeus, the passive principle as his consort Hera, bringing into being divine nature. Aristotle's notion of causality has been reworked creatively into a new theory. Their theory was neither dualistic nor monistic, but organic; they related 'activity' and 'passivity' as if a joined couple, together producing offspring.

From our vantage point, Stoicism's inseparable connection of spirit and matter is attractive. Stoicism may not have attenuated these elements as much as our model wishes to see them as they melt away in the direction of Absolute Horizon and appear from the nowhere of that Horizon. However, in its own manner, it did hold fast to the inherent mutuality and irreducibility of matter and mind – as Buddhism had done in its anthropology, and as this essay explores doing. I will return to this in more detail later on, in dealing with Infinitude and Cosmos. We also warm to Stoicism's continuation of the widespread ancient idea, recurring today, of nature as an alive, rational and intelligent being, coming into existence and perishing. Again, similar to early Buddhism, the Stoics subscribed to a notion of pan-causality, from which nothing is exempt. The Stoics kept grappling with the problem of freedom versus determinism, without coming down hard on either side. Like Buddhism, they did not elevate the idea of substance to the level of a prime, unassailable foundational category, as Aristotle had done, even if they did not go quite as far as Buddhism in actually demolishing that notion. The Stoics accommodated traditional, popular religion in a wider MM perspective that thoroughly relativised such religion, yet did not strip it of psychological and social value. Influence of Buddhism on Stoicism has not been established, although this can probably not be ruled out. As for Taoism, we may safely eliminate such a historical possibility. Rather, it seems to be a case of structural affinities, given certain similar intuitive points of departure. An appreciation of Hellenistic Stoicism grew with each step of the panorama unfolding before our eyes. A simple religio-political or philosophico-political choice is not called for; a larger synoptic synthesis (including all of human MM) is the way to go. Features of Stoicism such as the ones sketched above remain useful building blocks for a contemporary worldview.

■ Plotinus

Transcendent and stripped of attributes as it is, Plotinus' immutable 'the One' nevertheless stands closer to Aristotle's 'Unmoved Mover' than to Buddhism's 'Emptiness' and Taoism's 'Non-Being'. His One might be called 'the Absolute' (Inge 1948:104ff.), with the definite article and with an element of substantiality lingering in it.

The problem facing Plotinus in his *Enneads* is the following: How does the One give rise to the plurality of the empirical world? He did not see the empirical world as originating at some point in a diachronic sequence. Nothing dramatically new could have happened historically at any point. Nevertheless, the question of the link between the One and the empirical world remains; in that sense, it is the problem of Conditioning.

Excluded for Plotinus is the Gnostic option that some other force, apart from and diametrically opposed to the One, underlies the existence of the world. Like Aristotle, he wishes to escape from an infinite regress; in the end, there must be a stable source of being. Nonetheless, how would such a source (the One) and the many empirical things be related? How different or similar are the One and the world, with complete difference at one end of the spectrum and complete identity at the other end? Are they different or identical in essence? In the Plotinian model, the One is transcendent and distinct yet immanent at the same time, immutable yet, as such, indwelling in the things. In his scheme, transcendence and immanence are not alternatives but correlates. In his view of causality there is no producing activity involved, only sharing presence. To him it was not a matter of dynamic omnipotence, but of quiet omnipresence. Plotinus seems to view the world of the senses as different from the One, but also as participating in that transcendent realm and timelessly imitating it. For him there is 'Conditioning' of a static variety, as ontological dependence in a timeless hierarchical structure, but no 'becoming' and no 'causing' in the sense of effective 'changing'. His version of Conditioning expresses the power of similitude, amounting to ahistorical continuity, derivation and overflow, but not to creative novelty. Naturally, on such assumptions the effectiveness of Conditioning would seem to decrease with each step down the ladder: the effect at each level is inferior to that of the level above it (*Enneads* V.1.6).

As far as the relationship between the sensory world and the transcendent One is concerned, Plotinus' thinking appears to be neither strongly dualistic nor firmly monistic or pantheistic in the sense of identity of the source and the lower strata of being. In its own fashion, his is a variant of non-dualism. The world is neither utterly different from nor completely identical with the One. Overall, similarity prevails over difference; it is a relationship of continuity, somewhat stretched, but not at all close to breaking point.

Plotinus' vision communicates a remarkable beauty and peace: The world of the senses approximates, as it partakes in, the transcendent eternal One in its timeless repose. To Plotinus the world is something like a crystal sphere, dirty and opaque on the outside, but of a continuous substance with an illumined, illuminating glowing core deep inside, into which we may gaze. Being is radiant. The ultimate MM experience consists in that substance gradually becoming clearer as the mystic contemplates that inner light. He uses this image (*Enneads* VI.4.7) to explain the causing presence of the One in the universe as a whole; everything is affected by that central immobile principle, yet that principle is not divided (Plotinus 1991):

Or imagine a small luminous mass serving as centre to a transparent sphere, so that the light from within shows upon the entire outer surface, otherwise unlit: we surely agree that the inner core of light, intact and immobile, reaches over the entire outer extension; the single light of that small centre illuminates the whole field [...] we can no longer speak of the light in any particular spot; it is equally diffused within and throughout the entire sphere. We can no longer even name the spot it occupied so as to say whence it came or how it is present; we can but seek, and wonder as the search shows us the light simultaneously present at each and every point in the sphere. (p. 446)

Beautiful and moving as it is, the Plotinian vision does not address the challenge we face in our time: understanding a novel Cosmos, one that keeps on changing. Whence might it come from? What might its relationship to its inner secret be, if there is one? Whither might it be on its way? As said earlier, I cannot follow the great man in his fateful demotion of matter in the larger scheme of things. One may suspect that he is still moving in the ambit of the Aristotelian idea of an Unmoved Mover; what was a matter of pure intellectual speculation in Aristotle, becomes a mystical vision in Plotinus. May there be a further step to take, towards a Horizon of Emptiness transcending the notion of an ultimate substance, however subtly thought of?

■ John Scotus Eriugena

At the beginning of the epoch disparagingly known as the European 'Middle' Ages (as if dangling embarrassingly between the Classical-Hellenistic and modern epochs), the Irish Christian Neoplatonist John Scotus Eriugena (c. 800–877) developed a remarkable model of causality. This system was largely based on the Neoplatonic model of Proclus as championed (without recognition to Proclus) in the period between the 5th century and the 6th century by an unknown Christian monk, Pseudo-Dionysius. By the time of Eriugena, 'Dionysius' had acquired a status second only to that of Augustine.

In his major work, *Periphyseon* ('Concerning nature'; also called *De divisione naturae*: 'On the division of nature') (cf. Cappuyns 1964 [1933]; Moran 1989; O'Meara 1988; Sheldon-Williams 1968, 1972, 1981), Eriugena presents a model of what he terms *universitas* ('universe'). He could speak (II.528 B) of 'the universe,

comprising God and the creature'. In Chapter 3, such a notion was referred to as 'All'. To explain the structure and functioning of that All, Eriugena developed a model revolving around the notion of 'causality' (the term generally utilised in interpreting his views). This model was his own remarkable construction of the Neoplatonic emanationist theory of the Chain of Being, through his synthesis of mainly Augustine (354–430) and Pseudo-Dionysius. In his circumstances of relative cultural obscurantism in central and northern Europe, he had only a sketchy and indirect knowledge of Aristotle and Stoicism. For Eriugena the concept *natura* (reflected in the Latin title of his work) includes empirical reality as well as God, 'being' as well as 'non-being'. He distinguishes four divisions or classes in the all-encompassing *universitas* (I.441 A):

- (1) that which creates and is not created (*quae creat et non creatur*)
- (2) that which is created and creates (*quae et creatur et creat*)
- (3) that which is created and does not create (*quae creatur et non creat*)
- (4) that which is neither created nor creates (*quae nec creat nec creatur*).

In this system 'create' refers to the process of production in the broadest sense. Eriugena's perspective is an original restatement of the classic Neoplatonic scheme of God as the ultimate ground from which all things proceed and to which they return. On that assumption, classes 1 and 4 refer to God, and classes 2 and 3 to the created world. God is uncreated (1 and 4). He is said either to create (1) or not to create (4) – or rather: He both creates *and* does not create. Taken in a pseudo-historical sense, this could mean that God creates the world (1), but that after the eventual return of the world to God (in 4), he no longer creates; creation ceases. Such a pseudo-historical view is an understandable yet ultimately invalid extension of our human categories to a dimension that is essentially supra-temporal. Realising that, the 'creates' and 'nor creates' in classes 1 and 4 together emphasise that the creation of the world is God's free choice. Eriugena's (1) and our 'Origin' (Ch. 8), and his (4) and our 'End' (Ch. 7), appear to be functional equivalents.

Inserted (bracketed) between these two ultimate dimensions, his world emerges. On the one hand, the created universe in its two dimensions (2 and 3) is the result of God's free choice, as Eriugena as Christian would want to see it. On the other hand, being contained in this necessary scheme of things, the world and the creation of the world – and its causal (Conditional) structure – assumes a necessary, supra-temporal, supra-contingent dimension. Classes 1 and 4 locate God in a realm of non-being, suggested by the term *anarchos* ('without beginning'/'ground'). In terms of our problem of Conditioning, God to Eriugena is without Condition external to himself; he is self-conditioning. The Irishman's system is tendentially inclined towards replacing the typical Western emphasis on substance, being, as supreme metaphysical category with an emphasis on non-substance, non-being. Significantly, what Plotinus had called 'the One', Eriugena called 'nothing'

(*nihil*) (cf. Duclow 1988:23ff.; Sells 1994:34–62), perhaps radicalising Plotinus. Yet, even in his thinking, negation implies excessive plenitude (the superessential [*hyperousion*]) of Pseudo-Dionysius rather than negation in the absolutistic sense (cf. III.634B ff.).

Significantly, Eriugena saw a remarkable continuity between God and the world. Under ‘creation’, he understood the theophanic self-manifestation of God. That, from our point of view, is no problem. That is indeed the way to go: Cosmos appears from an Absolute mystery, somehow Origin. No, our question would be whether Eriugena is sufficiently consistent and far-reaching to warrant the grouping of his notion of ‘non-being’ in the same class as, for example, classical Taoism and Buddhism looked at above. Does his notion of ‘non-being’ truly transcend ‘being’, or does it still circle within the horizon of ‘being’, however subtly understood?

It seems that our MM journey does not, or rather should not, (1) reach a final dead-end, a definite ‘Is-not’, Nothing; (2) nor does or should it reach a line beyond which ‘Is’ merely becomes thinned by so many degrees but essentially remains, or is supercharged. No, (3) the firm line of conceptually graspable reality just becomes a dotted line, just disappears, as our conceptual and experiential capacity comes to an utter end; that is Absolute End, but open-ended. To use an example from Buddhism: when the Buddha compared the situation after his physical death with a flame, refusing to use either affirmative ‘is’ or denying ‘is not’ language, he was not seeking to escape via a meaningless, useless analogy; he was rejecting both options, while keeping the mystery open. This shows the way to an MM with cosmosophic implications: neither affirmative ‘theism’ nor denying ‘atheism’, but agnostic ‘a-theism’; neither ‘being’ nor ‘not-being’, but ‘non-being’; neither presence nor absence nor death of God (all three presuppose an existing reality), nor positivistic denial, but letting go, realising that there is an unreachable, uncrossable Horizon, where things and knowledge just peter out into a mystery of Absoluteness – from which they also emerge.

A sympathetic interpreter such as Moran uses the term ‘non-being’ to suggest Eriugena’s meaning (Moran 1989:100, 212ff.). In terms of the distinctions made above, that would have to be qualified, in the sense that Eriugena did not attain the level of radicalism found in the Taoist and Buddhist patterns of thought. The quotation above is indicative of the mixed mode of his thinking: ‘God is *anarchos*’ expresses his embarrassment. ‘God is [...]’ is not phased out completely. Eriugena’s thinking may not be representative of the dominant ontotheological (as Heidegger would call it) Western tradition, but it does not quite make the breakthrough to Absoluteness either. Typical of Christian Neoplatonism, he speaks of a divine level as *superessentia* (‘super substance’, perhaps ‘more than substance’, but not ‘non-substance’). It is a super thinned superlative, not a cancellation. To demand more, would be unfair, given Eriugena’s situation in place and time. I would think that the drift of Eriugena’s

thinking is towards 'non-being', 'anarchy' in the radical MM sense of those words. In principle, it is all there, and it would dawn fully later in Western thinking in a figure such as Meister Eckhart (c. 1260-1327). Moran draws Eriugena in the right direction, but the break with substance-centred thought is not complete. A phrase such as the following does not resolve but exacerbates the problem (Moran 1989):

The first principle of Eriugena's system is not being but, rather, the concept of a person or consciousness, who is above and before all beings of which it is the cause. (p. 230)

Is this a matter of a careless formulation, or a terminological problem, or is it indicative of a conceptual problem in Eriugena? In short, Eriugena's MM is not 'me-ontic' to the same degree as that of Taoism and Buddhism. Admittedly, language here reaches its limits. Still, there remains a difference, worth upholding, between Neoplatonic apophaticism and Absolutism. Admittedly, Eriugena introduced the idea of meontology (the study of *me-on*: 'non-being') to Western Europe, under the influence of Neoplatonism, as reconciled with Christianity by Pseudo-Dionysius. However, is he consistent in his development of the notion of 'non-being'? Alternatively, does his concept hint at a sufficiently radical level? Or, is his 'non-being' just another level of being? Could the same critical question be raised against our own presentation? Are we not, after all, utilising the noun 'Unground', and might it not have substantialist implications, as if it were some 'Being', Something? Once again, let me remind myself that throughout 'Unground', 'Absoluteness' and other similar terms do not 'refer', but merely postulate and project speculatively absolute boundary notions, End without content. 'Being' does not apply at all. Eriugena, with Neoplatonism generally, seems not to have annihilated as deeply as our Asian models. In his time and context, Eriugena produced an astounding MM system, but the apparatus and vocabulary for such thinking was not available yet. Groundbreaking, synoptic Eriugena did not have the benefit of the radical challenge of Indian and Chinese MM.

To the extent that he did not make a clear distinction between 'being' and 'non-being', the accusation of 'pantheism' regularly levelled at him in Church circles may be understandable. Yet that was clearly not the inclination of his thinking. He certainly did not flatly identify God and the world; on the contrary, he emphasised the transcendence of God. It would be more justifiable to apply the modern term 'pan-en-theism' to his thinking. Dimensions 2 and 3 of his system together refer to the created order. Dimension 3 refers to the world of the senses. Dimension 2 occupies a position comparable to what this essay is approximating with the terms 'Eternity' with its 'Principles' and 'Infinite' with its 'Elements'. In Eriugena's Platonically inspired Christian vision, this dimension of the principles of all things includes God's ideas and volitions. The ideas are aspects of God's self-manifestation and, like God, transcendent of 'being'. This appears to

support our notion of the ontological status of Principles. Like Neoplatonism generally, he saw causation to proceed through the mechanism of likeness: the empirical world is caused by being similar to (note: not necessarily identical with) the ideas (Moran 1989:251).

To summarise, in terms of our problem of Conditioning, Eriugena seems to say: God conditions himself; God conditions the level or realm of intermediate conditionality (ideas); and that level conditions the world. We can admire him for notions such as these. Yet, in addition to the critical question concerning the substantialisation of the notion of 'God' that has been raised above, there are two other aspects where the limitations of his model have become apparent. First, in his system the aspect of dynamic causality in the empirical pluralistic world itself is underplayed. Secondly, his God is not 'caused': is not reflexively affected by empirical nature.

Eriugena's position on matter is interesting. Given his Neoplatonic connection (in Neoplatonism ultimate reality was spiritual), his system is in effect a version of idealism. The basis of this is the Neoplatonic assumption that the effect must be similar to the cause: all must be similar to the spiritual One, without necessarily sharing all characteristics. On the one hand, this implies a devaluation of matter, as was the case generally in Neoplatonism. On the other hand, he saw even matter – the opposite, the imperfect, the inferior – as enfolded in self-manifesting God (ibid.:233). On the route unfolding in our reflections, matter is seen as an essential element in the emergence from Absoluteness, second to no other element and not inferior or evil.

As it stands, Eriugena's way of thinking stretches orthodox Christianity to its limits. I see him as extrapolating Christianity's inherent tendency towards Absolutism as far as he could or dared to go. It should cause no surprise that various arms of the Catholic Church (in 1210, 1225 and 1585) condemned his great work. In fact, one cannot escape the impression that he is interpreting the Bible and Christian dogma from the viewpoint of his MM. In his own manner he is reading the Christian tradition tendentially, attempting to reconcile West and East – which, to him, could have only meant the Greek 'Eastern' European tradition. Of the 'East' in the sense of the East Asian and Indian worlds, he could not have known. Muhammad had been born some two centuries before Eriugena, and during Eriugena's lifetime, Islam began its philosophical dominance, which would last for several centuries. Al-Kindi, an exact 9th century contemporary of Eriugena, developed the first reconciliation of Neoplatonism and Islam. Irish Eriugena and Iraqi Al-Kindi – independently of each other – attempted the same project: a synthesis of Neoplatonic MM and monotheistic religion. As often happens in history, similar challenges and conditions bring forth similar solutions. Neither of these pioneering spirits – one in Christian Europe, the other in Arab Islam – seemed to have been aware of each other or of their

similar roles in a greater unfolding MM drama. Far from diminishing Eriugena's significance, it highlights his creative achievement against great odds. In any event, the working out of a positive relationship with Islam would have to wait for Eriugena's disciple, Nicholas of Cusa (1401-1464).

Today a similar kind of project is called for, but on a larger scale than Eriugena could have known of in his time. MM today stands on the same kind of threshold as Eriugena did nearly 13 centuries ago, but the partners in today's MM multilogue are more numerous and more diverse. Taking all of this into account, it should be borne in mind that Neoplatonism as a whole might have been the result of philosophic and religious syncretism involving India and the Hellenistic Mediterranean, not necessarily consciously intended, but following in the wake of the conquests of Alexander the Great (356-323 BCE). In addition, Indian MM might have influenced earlier forms of Greek thinking as well.

■ Spinoza

In the early modern period a remarkable MM system with structural similarities to Aristotelianism, Stoicism, Neoplatonism and – unbeknown to its architect – Vedanta made its appearance in Holland.

The life experiences of its Jewish author, Baruch de Spinoza (1632-1677), predisposed him to a search similar to the one undertaken by some of our contemporaries. Of Portuguese *marannos* descent (Jews forced to convert to Christianity on the Iberian Peninsula), he was alienated from social constructions – ethnic, religious, political and academic – with their disciplinary power and the prices they exact. He overcame the sorrow that easily comes with such loss and isolation with immense dignity and personal integrity. As a young man, he became disillusioned with intolerant, institutionalised religion, yet he accommodated its mythological god talk as a means to inculcate morality among the majority of people not amenable to high reason. Consistent with this approach he championed the political ideal of the full acceptance of religious diversity in public life.

An accomplished scientist (a specialist in optics) he had to endure vehement opposition from both the Jewish synagogue and the Dutch Reformed theologians for his alleged pantheism and heretical interpretation of Scripture. Sensing the need to come to terms with the scientific worldview emerging in his time, he proceeded to develop a metaphysical system on the strictly rational basis of the impregnable mathematical method, without recourse to supernatural interventions, such as falling back on divine miracles. He assumed that his views of God were established rationally and with indubitable certainty. To him the Hebrew, Latin and Arabic literatures of his time, shorn of their religious idiosyncrasies, carried the same living philosophical tradition, born in

Greece. He sought an alternative to, a middle position between, dogmatic religion and atheistic science, and his metaphysics was borne by a mystical undercurrent (cf. Bennett 1996:61ff.; Curley 1969; Elwes 1955 [1951]; Spinoza 1925; Wolfson 1960 [1934]).

In Spinoza's thinking, the factor of causality plays an important role. It is not lost on us that the heading provided for the entire first part of his *Ethics* is 'Concerning God' (*De Deo*). It is not the God of Jewish, Christian and Muslim theological apologetics, but the God of rational philosophy. Attempting to overcome theism, deism and atheism and settling – but perhaps not quite – in pantheism, his system culminates in the idea of an 'intellectual love of God' (*amor Dei intellectualis*): the love towards God, which is the same love with which God loves himself. This is the highest perfection and bliss that humans can aspire to, and can attain through an immediate, intuitive knowledge, which is the highest kind of knowledge. The garb of mathematics and 17th century rationalism clothed a metaphysical mystic.

Spinoza refers to 'mystical knowledge' as 'intuition' (*scientia intuitiva*) (II.XL.II), meaning the immediate, clear perception of the essence of God and of things. This intuitive knowledge does not arise from any external source, but from God's infinite intellect, of which the human mind is part. I take this to be a mystical understanding in the sense of this exploration: a sense of participating, both ontologically and epistemologically, in Wholeness, sufficiently to provide meaning, happiness and an ethos with universal outreach. However, would Spinoza have endorsed Absoluteness?

Spinoza links the love towards God and the resultant pleasure to the *realisation of God as cause*. In his *Ethics* (Part I), he tackles the problem of causation head-on. In the opening line of his book, his Definition I (the first of eight) defines 'self-causation' ('that which is self-caused' [*causam sui*] as 'that of which the essence involves existence' (*id cuius essentia involvit existentiam*). This definition is coupled with what he understands by 'substance', namely 'that which is in itself (*quod in se est*), and 'is conceived through itself' (*quod per se concipitur*) (Definition III). The word 'God' makes its appearance in Definition VI: it refers to 'a being absolutely infinite (*ens absolute infinitum*) – that is, 'a substance consisting in infinite attributes, of which each expresses eternal and infinite essentiality.' It is clear that 'God' is a – no, the sole – substance: not the Creator at a certain point, but the eternal, self-caused ontological support of the world. His term 'Nature' is co-extensive with 'Substance' and 'God'; he speaks of 'God, or Nature' (*Deus, sive Natura*). In terminology reminiscent of Eriugena, he distinguishes two aspects of nature: creative (*natura naturans*) and created (*natura naturata*).

Following on his Definitions, he postulates seven axioms, of which the following four explicitly deal with causality:

- (1) 'Everything which exists, exists either in itself or in something else.'
- (2) 'That which cannot be conceived through anything else, must be conceived through itself.'
- (3) 'From a given definite cause an effect necessarily follows' and 'if no definite cause be granted, it is impossible that an effect can follow.'
- (4) 'The knowledge of an effect depends on and involves the knowledge of a cause.'

His position, seemingly so clear on the surface, nevertheless gave occasion to considerable puzzlement and various interpretations, into which we need not enter. For our present purpose, and not taking into account all that Spinoza had written, it is sufficient to note that indirectly (he does not indulge in open polemics) he refutes two forms of ontological dualism: the split between matter and mind, and the split between the world and God. As will be indicated in Chapter 15, these dualities occurred in the thinking of Spinoza's older contemporary, Descartes.

The first is the split between matter and mind / form, deriving from the Greeks (Stoicism being a notable exception) and revitalised in Spinoza's time by Descartes with his contradistinction of 'extension' and 'thought'. To Spinoza these are two aspects of the same and only infinite substance, God. Yet he takes care not to conflate them. To him 'thought is an attribute of God'; so is 'extension'. The upshot of Spinoza's substance monism is neither an idealist reduction of matter and the material world nor a materialist reduction of mind, but the attribution of both materiality and mind or consciousness to God. The most dramatic aspect of his system, going against the grain of the religious tradition of the medieval West, was that he asserted God to be (to use Aristotle's terms) the material cause (in addition to being the efficient cause) of the world. Interestingly, his insistence on the necessity and power of God excludes the possibility of God having passions, will or purpose, that is, a large part of what we would call 'consciousness'. On the other hand, his definition of 'substance' (III) specifies 'that which is conceived through itself', which seems to imply the aspect of consciousness. This investigation sides with Spinoza's general drift as far as the non-duality of mind and matter is concerned.

The second split rejected by Spinoza pertains to the relationship between a mutable, caused world and an immutable ultimate cause (substance or God). This dualism also had an ancient pedigree, harking back mainly to Aristotle and monotheistic theology. Spinoza implies that Greek (Aristotelian) philosophy and the traditional monotheistic idea of creation render the notion of causality impossible. For how could a changeable, complex (and material) world be

forthcoming from a totally other unchangeable, simple (and immaterial) substance (God)? In Spinoza's perspective, the postulate of creation out of nothing would not solve the problem of the substance 'causing' a totally different kind of being, but begs the question. The relationships among (1) 'nothing', (2) 'the substance' and (3) 'a totally different kind of being' would not be resolved. By implication, Spinoza also censures emanationist theories of the kind that something essentially different (and material) emanated from a substantial (absolutely changeless and immaterial) source via any number of intermediary steps. His implied criticism is correct: inserting even an infinite number of gradual minute steps does not solve the logical problem. Yet Spinoza did not simply settle for a straight pantheism in the sense of a simplistic identification of 'God' and 'everything'. To him the sum of all modes (i.e. all things) is in God, yet is also transcended by God as the infinite substance. It would seem that the modern term 'pantheism' covers his position. Somehow, creatures are passing modes of a Substantial, Infinite Matter-Mind Being.

Ironclad consistency on his chosen path, followed so single-mindedly, would seem to demand some form of monism. He seems to follow such a path, but it is not exactly obvious how strictly and narrowly he understands it. Does he intend it to be as unyielding as, for example, that of Parmenides (see Ch. 11), Gaudapāda (see Ch. 11) or Sankara (see Ch. 6 and 7) – for all three to whom the phenomenal world was an illusion? Does Spinoza rule out the existence of particular things and change altogether? Does the participation of things in God's eternal and infinite essentiality exclude their temporality? Probably such occlusion was not his intention. This is the sort of problem arising inevitably, given the direction of thought followed by Spinoza, just as it was the case with the Upanishads and Neoplatonism. His MM system is obviously of a kind with the latter two systems. All three seek to derive all things from One.

One should hesitate to come to definitive conclusions concerning Spinoza's intentions. Yet, in the end, the 'geometrical' method is not as clear as Spinoza undoubtedly intended it to be. His theory does not seem to provide sufficient basis for Becoming and Conditioning in the dynamic sense explored on our perambulation to come into play; he remains close to the classic idea of substance. Better than the concept of an ultimate, infinite, unchanging Being in itself in whatever sense, would be to ascribe change to whatever self-conditioning Origin appears on empty Horizon beyond substance of any sort.

Spinoza's naturalism deserves endorsement. His ambition was to satisfy the procedural requirements of the emerging modern science of his day, but it is doubtful whether contemporary scientism would be prepared to follow him into the dimension of MM. I have no serious quarrel with the fact that he uses the word 'God', although the content he gives it is problematic. In this perspective, his thinking appears remarkably static and we may sense a vast hinterland receding into Absoluteness behind his infinite, substantial God. Ultimately Spinoza probably settled pantheistically for an idea of 'God' as

somehow identical with the physical universe, thought of as infinitely large; and God-Universe thought of as both (inseparably but not identically) Infinite Mind-cum-Infinite Matter. Interpreters of Spinoza tend to emphasise one or the other, assimilating his thinking to either materialism or idealism. That is not the best way to read him. The drift goes beyond such a duality.

His version of the ontological proof for the existence of God (going back to Aristotle and the scholastics) is not convincing. Neither should one make too much of his geometrical, rationalist method. It 'proves' nothing. Inexorable deductive argument is not the best way to do MM. It must be borne in mind that Spinoza made use of that procedure to link up with the science of his day against the theological dogmatism of his time. It has to be redone in each new time in terms of that time. Remarkably, his method does not obliterate his mystical inclination. That yearning can be suppressed in certain circumstances, but not eradicated; in his case, it radiates clearly through the thick integument of the early modern epoch. Nevertheless, the aura of indubitability this method seeks to provide, needs to be deflated. All such theories are constructions, more or less receptive to the open mystery beyond, and more or less useful.

Other aspects of his view of causality requiring critical interpretation include his necessitarianism, according to which all things are strictly determined in a strong sense, and his limited compatibilism of necessity and freedom, according to which only God is a completely free cause – that is, not determined by outside factors; all other causes are necessarily determined by yet more causes. Finally, Spinoza perhaps does succumb to a deterministic reductionism. Rejecting any notion of a 'final' (teleological) causation directing events, he will find it almost impossible to escape from a mechanistic reduction of causality, mathematically expressed.

Spinoza was used here as one example from the early modern period. Now the waters in the MM thinking of a contemporary physicist will be tested.

■ David Bohm

Whereas classical physics permitted only a causal (even deterministic) description of the physical world, quantum physics brought about a momentous change by seemingly permitting an indeterministic description of at least microphysical processes. A style of thinking very different from the deterministic one exemplified by Spinoza, appeared. To account for the baffling complexities of quantum physics, various theories were put forward, the most widely accepted one being the Copenhagen interpretation pioneered by Niels Bohr in the 1920s. Given the vague and tentative nature of Bohr's writing, the wider philosophical implications of his thinking remain notoriously unclear (Faye & Folse 1994). He (and others) suggested for the most fundamental level of

physical phenomena an inherent indeterminism, according to which the notion of causality is to be renounced – at least as far as that level is concerned.

With David Bohm (also see Ch. 8), it is a different matter. He considered the possibility of a wider context, allowing for both causality and the puzzling behaviour of matter at subatomic level. Even with reference to the domain of quantum physics, he wanted to preserve causality. In his book of 1996 (Bohm 1996 [1957]), devoted to causality (and anticipating his later work on the enfolding and unfolding orders), Bohm is well aware of the limited range of applicability of the term ‘cause’: ‘more fundamental’ than causality is the reality that ‘everything comes from other things and gives rise to other things’ in ever wider ranges of effective relationships and regularities – in his words: of ‘conditions’ (‘background causes’), and ‘inside a wide variety of transformations and changes’ (ibid.:1, 33, 132ff.). Actually, he refers to this as a ‘principle’ (ibid.:1, 8). ‘Cause’ and ‘causal laws’ refer to artificially abstracted situations, that is, situations from which their full contexts have been removed conceptually. In such situations, causes are necessary relationships, directly effecting changes. The ‘laws of nature’ (including ‘laws of chance’) are wider and more general than causal laws. One might say that whereas Spinoza strives to maximise causality, Bohm limits and relativises the range of this notion. Yet, within its domain, he insists on its validity.

Admittedly, Bohm’s argument so far has no immediate MM point. He goes as far as to say that a complete understanding of the totality of interconnected effective relationships can never be achieved, even if progressing science can approximate that ideal more and more (ibid.:31ff.). What he wants to do in this book, is present a model of causality that would overcome the notions of absolute indeterminacy, as it appeared in microphysics, and of the simultaneity of opposing (‘complementary’) pairs of behaviour (e.g. wave-like and particle-like). He aims at overcoming mechanistic science. Whether he succeeds in doing that in a convincing manner at the level of scientific argument, must be left to the experts in theoretical physics. We stay with the MM question. Nevertheless, Bohm goes well beyond the dominant mechanistic model (including its quantum-physical manifestation) by claiming that nature may harbour in it an infinity of dimensions at various levels and modes of being, hitherto undreamt of in science (ibid.:133ff.). Therefore (ibid.):

[E]very entity, however fundamental it may seem, is dependent for its existence on the maintenance of appropriate conditions in its infinite background and substructure. (p. 144)

Vice versa, each thing in the universe contributes to what the universe as a whole is. He eschews both determinism and indeterminism in favour of what one might call a pan-conditionalistic model of becoming and change, comparable to the intuition of Buddhism concerning the dependent co-origination of all things. In his ‘qualitative infinity of nature’ the horizon of

reciprocal becoming is forever shifting back (Bohm 1996 [1957]:160). These are intriguing suggestions hinting at a larger-scale structural feature of reality in a manner relevant to the notion of Conditioning.

As noted in Chapter 8, lawfulness ('holonomy') is central to his notion of the living totality of a 'holomovement', consisting in unfolding implicit order and enfolding explicit order. As we come straight from Plotinus and Eriugena, the Neoplatonic slant of Bohm's thinking – whether by accident or by design – is remarkable, except that where the world picture of classical Neoplatonism is static, that of contemporary science is dynamic and historic. Bohm develops that possibility. Again it becomes apparent that few – if any – contemporary MM positions are brand new. All basic intuitions had their precursors long ago in the one long, continuous search of humankind as a whole for meaning transcending the daily struggle for existence.

Singularising

■ §39 Selfness

Let us now explore the third peak, *Pre- or Meta-Existence*, that comprises Singularising, Pluralising and Totalising, mutually implied. No individual thing, large or minutely small, is a fixed, closed unit. It is a temporary node in a process in which such individual identities constantly form and dissolve by encountering pluralities of 'others'. This occurs by being and becoming part of ever-increasing larger wholes, and eventually, arising from and ending on Absolute Horizon.

By using the term *existence* ('standing out') we are not joining in the existentialist cry of the anguished human individual, threatened by nihilism, standing out, alienated, from the human crowd and the natural cosmos. The term 'existence' refers to Cosmos and all its constituent beings as emerging from Absolute Horizon. The 'ex-' is not intended to mean 'out of ' in the separatist sense. Cosmos too, as a concrete singular, unique 'event' ('coming out') 'sub-sists' or 'in-sists' 'in' Absoluteness.

The first (Ch. 14) of the three flanks of this peak revealing itself now, is connected with unity and identity; the second (Ch. 15), with alterity and plurality; the third (Ch. 16), with totality and non-duality. These three

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perspectives are inseparably interrelated. Establishing a relationship among oneness, manyness and wholeness is an inescapable given of any synoptic perspective.

These three in their togetherness have cropped up in various historical contexts in the course of human reflection on these matters. In the 5th century Augustine of Hippo, in his *De quantitate animae* ('the measure of the soul' [XXXII.69]) could not decide whether all human souls are one, many separate individuals, or a combination of one and many. Towards the end of the 18th century, in his *Critique of pure reason*, Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) worked out the foundations of human knowledge. In that context, he devised a table of all possible reasonable judgements that might be made. His first category is 'quantity', consisting of the three subforms 'singular', 'particular' and 'universal'; a very different context than that of Augustine, and very different from our own present context, yet with a similar tendency to find a comparable type of pattern. In yet another context, and closer to our present concern, various religions have placed various emphases: Islam was drawn to a stark vision of unity, whereas forms of popular Hinduism enthusiastically embraced plurality. People have usually gazed at the mystery of things through one of the panes of this three-paned window.

We shall now move in a wider context than the nature of the human soul (Augustine), or the nature of human knowledge (Kant), or the nature of the mythologised gods of humans. We are fascinated by all three perspectives (Singularising, Pluralising and Totalising) on the overall theogonic, cosmogonic process from Absoluteness to Cosmos. As in the previous chapters of Part Two, the gerunds denote neither a state nor an entity, but an incipient possibility. What appears here as this Principle is not perceptible, but it is imaginable as a potentiality of something relatively new. The Principle of single Selfness appears, preceding twoness, manyness, togetherness, yet mutually implied in them.

Singularising is the Principle underlying the qualitative uniqueness, completeness, identity, integrity, continuity of individual empirical events. Empirical, Cosmic events, in every small, singular instance at every singular moment, are appreciated as dramatic event-ings from Absoluteness. The single raindrop falling, carries in its fragility, the message of unrepeatable uniqueness.

Singularity is both event and relative structure; this leaves space to accommodate the notion of continuity. The basic Buddhist intuition of the nature of the human being is applied to the nature of the world as such. Like the human person in the Buddhist view, all things and Cosmos are shot through with Emptiness (Absoluteness); there is no massive substantialist identity, but continuity and a light, relative identity of each as a temporary composite structure, consisting of various components, which, in turn, form part of larger composites. These emerge from and are permeated by, Absolute Horizon.

Singularising is the Principle connecting the single human person, other singular identities and Cosmos as a singular identity with the root of all things. The singular cosmic event or thing (whether atom, cell or individual living being) is a manifestation of the Principle of Singularising emerging on Horizon.

The literal meaning of 'in-dividual' ('not divisible') is not intended here. Every 'individual', from cosmos to sub-atom and everything in between, is indeed 'divisible' into infinity. The 'individual' is both the whole made up of constituting elements (each further divisible) and a constituent part of larger wholes embedded in even larger wholes. Such individual identity is only relative, but distinguishable from the moment of integrated wholeness. It is a matter of relative emphasis and perspective. We have to come to terms with all three moments, and find a balance among them. In the history of human reflection such relative distinctions have often hardened into absolute alternatives.

Therefore, in this chapter, we focus on the moment of relative individuality, which is not the singleness of isolation. Oneness, unity, identity, singularity, individuality have significant implications of plurality (difference, alterity) and integration (totality), both internally and externally, but here it is about the very being itself of a thing, its relation to itself. Singularising takes firmer shape further down in Infinitude and Cosmos, but here we encounter the first hint of Selfness. This Principle may be detected in poignant human life. 'I am!', or at the end of life, a defeatist or triumphant 'I was!' – what loaded statements by short-lived individual human persons, these are. Our question is: Is a tendency towards singularisation inscribed in the very nature of reality, latent in all of reality, and does it ultimately derive from an inaccessible dimension that cannot be verified empirically, but envisioned imaginatively? On this MM quest, we attempt to see the nature of human individuality, and the individuality of each individual thing and the individuality of Cosmos, as resonant with the deepest nature of reality itself, with Singularising as a Principle in all things.

Mysticism presupposes a marked sense of singular selfhood. Yet it is more likely than not a journey in the company of friends. It is not necessarily being alone or solitary, although there is no fear for that and it is sought at least from time to time. The mystic as defined in this exploration is essentially not self-centred. *Ego* becomes *ipse*, authentically 'oneself'; assuming the freedom to take responsibility for the self; discovering the essential individual integrity, deeper than the contingencies of race, gender, possessions, dogma or age. It is saying 'I' with confidence and dignity, but without vanity; assuming one's continuity through time for a brief while as a combination of factors, that is, one's relative identity – while accepting one's contingency. It is not postulating any part of the self as eternally unchanging or as existing independently of other things.

Around the 'I', a timespan of billions of years and a space of tens of billions of light years spread out, appearing from and disappearing into Infinitude.

Inside the 'I', the infinitesimally small and brief tumble away, eventually disappearing into Infinitude. Somewhere, sometime between the large and long and the small and brief, the empirical 'I' flashes forth as a radically impermanent yet continuous singularity, permeated by Unground. The 'I' is a point of balance of many forces, a result of many influences, a creative point exerting a certain influence. It flashes for a fleeting moment and yet, in its puniness it contains and represents Cosmos. This is the positive side of I-ness.

On the negative side is an overemphasis on unity, with the ugly twins, exclusivity and repressive inclusivity, two only apparently opposing concretisations of the dimension of Singularising. This takes place at both the psychological (individual) and the social (collective, political) levels. At the level of social collectivities ('collective individuals') 'One God', 'one people', 'one nation', 'one party', 'one boss', 'one religion', 'one church' with 'one dogma' and 'one agenda' appeal to people at a subconscious level, and are therefore useful for ideological and propagandistic purposes.

'Unity' as supreme article of faith and as centralising social reality, has a strong affinity and mutually strengthening effect. It is about power. A critical attitude towards both the ideology and the reality of centralised social power flows from the position taken in this investigation. They are one-sided aberrations of a primordial urge deriving from Unground. This view of unity lies at the root of theocracies and totalitarian governments as history demonstrates.

Human beings who intuited the nature of the world often felt a need to reduce to oneness. In the meditative practice of mysticism, one very important exercise has always been the observance of singleness, the concentration on one single thing to the exclusion of all other things. In Indian religions, this is known to lead to states of calm in various degrees. In Neoplatonism, the One had very much the same function as the absolute focal point of metaphysical and spiritual attention. Manyess and otherness are illusions, we hear the Advaita Vedantin say. Such attempts have run across cultures and religions. If taken to extremes, it becomes the monistic fallacy, manifesting in the effort to reduce everything to matter, or to mind. The first led to forms of materialistic monism, the latter to forms of idealistic or spiritualistic monism. Below we shall look at some samples of such attempts.

It is necessary to give the Principle of Singularising its full dues, yet the human being cannot live by unity alone.

■ §40 The mountain spring

Let us stay on our chosen course, attempting to discover a remarkable perennial mountain spring. It is visited by various single travellers, thirsty enough to want to get there, and able to do so by scaling the mountain from various sides.

Some only slake their own thirst. Others scoop water into containers of various shapes and sizes and colours to carry it to those lower down. Some tell the folk down in the various villages what the water is like. Then, various things can happen in the villages. The water loses its freshness, tastes as if it has been preserved in the containers for too long, and becomes infested with life-threatening organisms. Otherwise, the containers become the focus of attention; the water 'must' be drunk from containers only or exclusively from certain containers. Alternatively, the same water is poured from container to container, and soon, people forget about the origin of the water, and the once living water turns stagnant, stale and unhealthy. When the scouts talk about the original taste, they use differing words and analogies to describe it. Then, when they or various groups meet on occasion and converse in their different languages, it seems as if they are talking about different liquids. Yet it is the same water, preferably to be drunk and tasted straight from the spring itself. It is not something in containers, nor something to talk about. It is certainly not something to fight about, for it never fails. Let us appreciate a few singular scouts below.

■ anonymous forest-dweller(s): Chandogya Upanishad

In Chapter 6, I sat at the feet of mystical seers of ancient India and paid my respects to them as they announced the unity in and behind the plurality of things. I need to return to them and again pick up one of the earliest pre-Buddhist Upanishads, the *Chandogya Upanishad* (probably around 650–600 BCE), written in prose (Gotshalk 1998:159–187; Hume 1968 [1921]). In this simple, forceful, visionary document, Uddalaka Aruni educates his son Svetaketu in a mixture of mythology and sublime speculation concerning the true nature of things, including the place of human beings in it all.

In the beginning was one divine Being alone, the teaching goes, one only, without a second. Yet there is a sense of differentiation, for Being had the urge to become many, to develop and differentiate itself to become plurality. However, plurality does not constitute a different reality. The many are only modes, manifestations, names and forms of the ultimate and supreme reality, just as all things made of clay are clay, all things made of gold are gold, and ocean water in many vessels is the same ocean water. The human soul is presented as formed of the eternal Soul, and manifesting That. The subjective and the objective coincide, are one. In a lapidary formulation, chiselled indelibly on generations of listeners' minds, Uddalaka pronounces to his son that ultimately there is a – one – finest, spiritual essence, and that the human soul is That (Hume 1968 [1921]:246–250):

That which is the finest essence – this whole world has that as its soul. That is Reality (*satya*). That is *Atman* (Soul). That art thou (*tat tvam asi*), Svetaketu (VI.8.7). (n.p.)

This axial idea is repeated with a wealth of poetic images, all boiling down to the same idea: the world is *Brahma*, that from which one came forth, into which one will be dissolved, in which one breathes (III.14.1). Realising this *unio mystica*, is liberation. The individual phenomenal self, in its innermost, original true essence (*Atman*) has the great Self (*Brahman*) as its ground and source, and is 'identical' with It. Although not directly perceivable, Being is present in all things, like salt dissolved in and spread out throughout water, invisible but nevertheless discernible through taste; sensory experience may fail to detect the all-pervasive mysterious presence of *Brahman*, but another faculty – intuition – can. Like a spider's web is spun from within the spider and tiny seed becomes big tree, the *Atman* and the eternal Entity are 'one'.

Yet these very similes, striking as they are, seem to beg rather than solve the mystery of the ultimate relationship between the world and ultimate reality. Is the identity partial or complete? What would 'identical' (That art thou) mean here, and what would the difference between 'essential' and 'accidental' and between 'true' and 'imaginary' or 'illusionary' be? Is the appearance of the world necessary? Volumes have been written about these questions. Not all the Upanishads, it seems, came to the radical monistic conclusion of the later Vedanta that all phenomena are mere illusion. Cosmos may after all have a derivative, relative reality. The salt and the water are not quite identical.

Monism may be paired with either idealism or materialism. In the equation of *Brahman* and *Atman* the question whether the ultimate substance is matter or mind, has not necessarily been addressed (Mittal 1974:85ff.). Yet the dominant drift in the Upanishads was towards an early form of 'idealism': *Brahman-atman*, the inward and only world, is the world of self-consciousness, reason, feeling and will. The meaning of unity and identity has been interpreted variously in different schools and over time in this great Indian tradition. Perhaps we should allow this early intuition to stand in its majestic inaccessibility as a reminder of the mystery of the Principle of Singularising.

Yes, materialistic monism was also an option, and indeed one taken in India. At the extreme opposite of the *Chandogya* and other *Upanishads*, the broad Lokāyata movement saw the world as consisting of at least the four elements of earth, water, fire and air, with a fifth (ether) added in some quarters (Jayatilleke 1980 [1963]:90ff.). Yet, as far as this movement settled for matter as the one and only ultimate substance underlying all empirical things, it was an early form of materialistic monism. Any 'materialism', however much it may allow for a plurality of subfactors and -forces, is, in any strong sense of the word, per definition monistic: matter is sole reality, and all phenomena are fully explicable in terms of matter and its functioning. Lokāyata philosophy rejected religion as not instituted by gods at all, but invented by human beings. The existence of an Intelligent Being (God) as the cause of the world is denied. As a whole, this philosophy cannot be seen as an MM movement. Nevertheless,

while some were nihilists and extreme sceptics, at least some representatives adopted, if more by implication than intention, a fully-fledged metaphysical position of materialistic monism. According to this view, the universe has neither meaning nor purpose. The world is simply the way it is: the result of the combination of the four (or five) material elements. There is no recourse to anything outside the dynamics of matter itself to explain the world. It will be clear that such materialism is not reconcilable with the drift of this treatise. On the other hand, matter needs to be appreciated much more positively than has been the case in MM thinking generally over the millennia.

■ the Buddha: *Mūlapariyāyasutta*

The Buddha as individual teacher is not to be lifted from the historical context of India of the time. His teaching was also 'conditioned'. With his teaching of multifactorial dependent origination (including both mind and matter), he sought a middle position between the two opposites of the time, held by the Upanishads and the Lokāyata.

Sometime around the period between 5th century and 6th century BCE the Buddha taught a short *sutta*, the *Mūlapariyāyasutta* ('the *sutta* concerning the root sequence') (Horner 1976:3-8; Trenckner 1979:1-6), containing in a nutshell the essence of his teaching. In it, he lists a number of topics that might become themes for MM contemplation. Among them is the triad of 'unity', 'plurality' and 'universality'. The Buddha was well aware of the ways in which these topics were dealt with in his time. We here find a typical early Buddhist approach to our theme. Should 'unity' be promoted to supreme category, forms of monism would be the result, as was the case in the Upanishads of the time. Should 'plurality' be promoted to supreme category, forms of dualism or pluralism would be the result. Of this second possibility, early Buddhist scholasticism itself provided examples, particularly the Sarvastivāda sect, from the 3rd century BCE onwards.

The Buddha's approach was to seek a middle way between, or rather beyond, the extremes of, on the one hand, compacting to a point of monistic unity, and, on the other, fragmenting to a point of incoherent scatter with, at best, mere compiled aggregates. He trod the road of a non-dual process of dynamic conditional connection. As for the question of the ultimate 'universality' of things, he followed a unique empiristic road, declining speculative constructions unconnected to sensory experience. Yet he brought all experience under the common denominators of non-permanence, non-substantiality and suffering. Reality is a dynamic conditionalistic nexus (*paticcasamuppāda*: 'dependent co-origination'; *paccaya*: 'conditionality', 'relativity') and in that sense, a 'whole' (see Ch. 16). This teaching strove to facilitate salvation, taken to exist in the integration of the human personality, in the context of a profoundly understood reality.

So how is the topic of ‘unity’ dealt with in this *sutta*? The answer also applies to the aspects of ‘plurality’ and ‘universality’, which we discuss in the next two chapters. So the perspective of this *sutta* will not be repeated there.

The Buddha explains that understanding is layered.

An uninstructed average person would consciously reflect (*sañjānāti*) on unity; string together chains of argument (*maññati*) and fabricate speculative metaphysical systems, adhered to with great subjective conviction and attachment. Such a person would think along one of the following four lines: he would (1) identify himself with unity, (2) construe and project himself as part of unity, (3) construe and project himself as separate from unity, or (4) construe unity to be part of himself. Furthermore, he would rejoice (*adhinandati*) in unity thus construed. The Buddha suggests that such systems are developed from and for the sake of self-interest, as overarching systems in which their architects nestle. The whole thinking pattern revolves around the ‘self’ as an unhealthy centre of thinking. This style is precisely what the Buddha put forward as a profoundly wrong sense of personal individuality and identity. The ‘self’ becomes the centre of the universe; metaphysical systems centred in ‘unity’ reflect that basic orientation. The Buddha demolishes obsession with ‘self’, psychologically as well as metaphysically. He couples his ontological rejection of every form of substance metaphysics, with reference to both the human person and the world as such, with an epistemological critique of ‘thinking’ in terms of the polarity of ‘subject’ and ‘object’, ‘I’ over against ‘X’.

This MM of non-substantialism (*anattā*) is the one feature that distinguishes Buddhism (and Taoism) from virtually all other systems. Buddhism is the eradication of egocentrism in all its varieties. The Buddha did not deny the existence of empirical selves as relatively continuous series of functions (Collins 1982), but he did deny ‘selves’ in the sense of eternal, permanent substances enduring through all change. That included human souls as well as divine beings. To imagine that is illusory, the root of wrong thinking. This is a basic understanding running through the entirety of Buddhist history. Even in the idealism of Yogācāra MM the thinking of the unenlightened person is understood to be determined by the polarity of ‘grasper’ and ‘grasped’ as bias. All the constructions following on that are mere illusory imaginations.

The Buddha then explains the manner of thinking at the stages beyond that of the average worldling. At the supreme level of insight such a person knows intuitively (*abhijānāti*). This is not the result of a switch to some other source of information, such as supernatural revelation, but an extension of sensory experience. The Buddha does not disqualify conceptual thought as such. To him it remains useful as a critical, analytical, clarifying instrument, but decidedly not as speculative scaffolding. With that scaffolding, the Buddha has also left behind the orientation around ‘self’. Forgetfulness of impermanence and non-substance, with reference to both the individual person and the ultimate nature

of reality as such, is the root of evil. Hence, the Buddha sought a way of multifactored coherence against the backdrop of emptiness, leading beyond the dilemmas of eternalism and nihilism, substantialism and chaos, monism and pluralism.

Early Buddhism taught that existing things are not eternal, but at best continuous over time, and that such things are made up of constituent factors called *dharmas* (Pali plural: *dhammā*). Naturally, the question would arise: what is the ontological status of those *dharmas*? About 250 years after the Buddha the Sarvastivāda school held an interesting view: the compound things can fall apart, but the *dharmas* themselves (their list contained 75 *dharmas*) are self-sufficient and persistent realities. To anticipate Leibniz: the *dharmas* are ‘monads’, irreducible units. Like Proclus and Leibniz, the Sarvastivādins saw their basic units as combining to form the empirical things. In terms of the concern of our Chapters 14–16, the Sarvastivāda position added up to a unique combination of oneness (radically singular, irreducible, atomic *dharmas*), manyness (75 *dharmas*) and wholeness. It can be argued that every attempt at a systematic account of the world has to come to terms with those three Principles.

In terms of the impetus of early Buddhist thinking, the view of the Sarvastivādins, unintentionally but in effect, implied a substantialising position. In Theravāda Abhidamma throughout its history, a different view was held: *dhammas* are ontological actualities, ‘thing-events’, evanescent occurrences, ‘flashes of actuality arising and perishing with incredible rapidity’, but not stable, perdurable entities (Nyanaponika 1998 [1949]:xviff.; Nārada 1980:187ff.). The quality of each is variable in accordance with the relational system to which it belongs (Nyanaponika 1998 [1949]:41). *Dhammas* flash forth as singularities on the very verge between being and non-being. In passing, an investigation of the similarities of ancient Buddhist *dhammas* with the *quanta* (physical reality at its most reduced scale) of contemporary quantum physics would be an interesting undertaking.

Buddhist meditation reflects a balance of an accent on unity with an accent on plurality without being trapped in either, and issuing in insight into emptiness. The accent on unity is reflected in the concentration (*samādhi*) type of meditation; in the fifth *jhāna* ideation of manifoldness (*nānatta*) is no longer noticed. Then the advanced Buddhist meditator does not find oneness (as in Neoplatonism), but the dimensions of infinity and ‘nothingness’ (*akiñcañña*). The accent on plurality (the next chapter) is reflected in the bare attention (*sati*) type of attention, where the passing multitude of things is noticed mindfully. Because of that, comes the true insight (*vipassanā*, *paññā*) into the interdependence and ultimate non-substantial emptiness of phenomena.

The route unfolding on this journey of ours follows the direction pioneered by early Theravāda Buddhism, here turning to that teaching as a model to

approach issues of cosmology. The Theravāda *dhammas* emerge at the level of what this essay distinguishes as Cosmos (Part Four). Here, in Part Two, we are taking a step further back, postulating a Principle of Singularising presupposed in the emergence of Cosmic thing-events. Our attempt most likely contains more speculation than the Buddha would have endorsed. Extrapolating from early Buddhist psychology, this essay sees Cosmos as the ever-changing outcome of a never-ending process, conditioned by varieties of factors, and arising from Absoluteness.

Cosmos, the universe, does not possess some unchanging single core and is not part of some eternal, unchanging monistic substance. Yet Cosmos has a relative identity, integrity, individuality, and a certain continuity. The theorem of 'Singularising' also wants to clarify the precious value of the existence of continuous, relatively stable individual identities in Cosmic reality, which all derive from empty Absoluteness. Relative singularity, yes – proceeding from Eternal Singularising, as a moment in a larger movement.

■ Lucretius: *De rerum natura*

During the same centuries as the ones during which the *Upanishads*, early Buddhism, early Jainism and the Lokāyata flourished, Greece saw developments parallel to those in India. In Greece too, monism vied with pluralism, and idealism with materialism, and there were also various combinations of those positions. Additionally, there were attempts to steer a course between or beyond both types of extremes.

Of the early classical MM authors visited in previous chapters, none pushed further towards the notion of a totalitarian idealistic monism than Parmenides of Velia. Before Parmenides, other Greeks had found the one basic substance from which all things emerge and to which they all return in various natural phenomena such as water (Thales, 6th century BCE), a boundless something without qualities (Anaximander, 5th century), air (Anaximenes, 6th century) or fire (Heraclitus). Those positions may be called 'naturalism', but they were not 'materialistic' in the strong and exclusive sense the word would adopt in later times. They were also early forms of monism in the sense that all things were seen as modifications of one basic element, but again not in a strongly developed sense. Parmenides went a step further: there is indeed a single ultimate reality ('Being' or 'the Real'); and that single substance is absolute fullness, motionless, continuous and indivisible, not giving rise to anything and not allowing any change. Nothing happens. There is only oneness; the plurality of sensory experience is an illusion. That position amounted to monism pushed to the limit.

Challenged by the uncompromising absolute monism of Parmenides, subsequent Greek thinkers needed to adapt it in order to save empirical reality.

Finally, ancient Hellenic materialistic monism received its most sublime visionary expression in the Latin poem of Titus Lucretius Carus (c. 99–55 BCE): *De rerum natura* ('on the nature of things') (Lucretius 1965a; 1965b; 1976). In his poem, Lucretius sets out a complete materialistic explanation of the natural world. He had more than a scientific aim. He wanted to rid human life of two fears, which he regarded as the root of all ills: fear of death and fear of gods. The two ancient schools of Lokāyata in India and Epicureanism in Hellenism differed from modern materialism in detail and scientific sophistication, but their epistemological, ontological and worldview underpinnings were the same as those of their modern counterparts. These underpinnings are what concern us here, not the detail of Lucretius' physics.

The basic model is simple, clear and consistent: all things are complexes of atoms and nothing more. Yet he did not deny the existence of happy gods residing somewhere, but they do not interfere in human affairs and never made a single thing out of nothing (*de nihilo*). Nor does anything return to nothing, but to constituent elements which have physical existence, but are too small to be seen with the naked eye. In addition to these invisible miniscule 'bodies' there is the necessary postulate of a void, an empty space otherwise movement would be impossible. Lucretius makes the explicit point that apart from matter and emptiness there is nothing – no third element discernible by either the senses or by reason. The universe is infinite, and all things are taken up in ceaseless motion in infinite space. There is thus an infinite supply of matter.

In all of this, there is no deliberate design or conscious intent on the part of the atoms (or on any other part, for that matter). There is no teleological movement. It is all a result of chance, explicable as the outcome of random collisions and combinations through infinite time and space (Lucretius 1965b):

[/]t is because many atoms undergo many changing conditions throughout all space during limitless time, and are moved and stirred by blows, that, after having tried every kind of motion and combination, at length they chance to fall into such groupings as those from which this world of ours is formed and continues to exist (I.1024ff.). (p. 37)

Given sufficient space, time and matter in the form of minute particles, everything – including the emergence of sentient beings, soul, mind and spirit (III) – is eventually possible in a blind process, we hear him say, anticipating contemporary monistic materialists. Indeed, there is nothing new under the sun.

Lucretius did an excellent thing in stretching his materialistic model to its limits, enabling his readers to gauge the possibilities and limitations of this version of monism. In our present context a shortcoming of Lucretius' vision is that the transcendental question – the question concerning the possibility and status of oneness as a category – is not raised. That is what really interests us here. Apart from that, I am not convinced that this materialism is the

way to go. The facts that he adduces so poetically do not prove the truth of his picture. His model overstretches the possibilities of matter, defined in a restrictive manner as shorn of every vestige of rhyme or reason, and not entering into any combination with any form of life and consciousness that is not reducible to physical matter. His materialistic monism falls short of explaining what it claims to be explaining. Accepting it, would have required more credulity than the assumption of principles prefiguring consciousness and life, inherently co-present with matter.

In Greek-Hellenic thinking Plato, Aristotle and Stoicism in their different ways explored the space between the absolute (and idealistically inclined) monism of Parmenides on the one hand and the materialistic monism of Leucippus and Democritus on the other hand. Doing that, Plato, Aristotle and Stoicism took up positions quite different in content but comparable in function to that of the Buddha, who also sought a path avoiding the extremes of idealistic (some Upanishads) and materialistic (Lokāyata) monisms.

In his account of the origin of the cosmos in the *Timaeus*, Plato assumes matter as a pre-existing chaotic condition, subsequently endowed with life and intelligence. Plato may be called a pluralist in the sense that he accepts the existence of a large number of primordial Ideas, approximating monism in the sense that he awards pride of place to the 'ideal' component of things, with 'matter' somehow part of the mix. Yet, he was not a monist in the sense of a Parmenides.

The Aristotelian and Stoic schools also found that monism in both its one-sided idealistic and materialistic varieties had explanatory shortcomings. A century or so after Leucippus and Democritus launched their philosophy, Aristotle, while sharing their empirical, scientific passion, rejected their materialistic monism with such great effect that it was virtually dead for 2000 years. He devised his set of four types of causes (material, formal, efficient and final) in conscious opposition to their theory, in an attempt to escape from the cul-de-sac of One-ism in any form. Contrary to Plato, Aristotle took a great interest in individual things. We might say that the phenomenon of empirical 'singularity' fascinated him a great deal. That we can only admire. To Aristotle, 'matter' was the principle of individuation: that which distinguishes one individual (say Socrates) from another (say Callias). All of this would have a long and complex history in philosophy in centuries to come. The main point now is that Aristotle had an eye for empirical individual things, and he had an eye for matter (to him it was a basic principle of reality), but he did not postulate Matter (or any other single thing) as the ultimate one and only.

Not too distant from Aristotle, Stoicism (Hahn 1977:34ff.) also argued that prime matter never occurs by itself in nature, and is not infinite or unlimited. Nevertheless, to them it was a basic constituent of the cosmos, and it had a high MM value: it was the passive principle, unqualified substance, and they

could call it 'divine'. Yet, it was not the sole basic principle. There was also the active principle: reason, mind (*logos*), even soul. Both matter and reason (mind, soul) play equally important roles in the generation of the cosmos. Their position was not dualistic, but it was not monistic in a reductionistic sense of the word either, and materialistic monism was out of the question. At the root of cosmos lies a non-dual unity of mind and matter.

The upshot of this excursion confirms the suspicion that monism in any absolutist sense (as in a thoroughgoing materialism), is not a branch to sit on.

■ Proclus: *Stoicheiosis theologike*

In the *Stoicheiosis theologike* ('Elements of theology') (Proclus 1963 [1932]) of Proclus of Athens (c. 410–485 CE), 'Oneness' is discussed as the first and supreme transcendental category. By 'theology', Proclus did not intend the meaning that the word would later acquire in the monotheistic religions; his usage largely overlaps with what we indicate here by MM; in his own life ritualistic theurgy also played a large role. Though distinct phenomena, historically there has at times been some overlap among mysticism, esotericism, magic and occultism. Jacob Boehme in the 17th century is another striking example.

Again, to start with, a positioning of this great text in its historical context:

With this book, Neoplatonism reached its final systematic theoretical culmination. By then the *philalethia* pioneered by Ammonius Saccas in Alexandria two centuries earlier had become a school system. The three great markers preceding the ideas on oneness in this book of his were (looking backwards) Plotinus' *Enneads*, Plato's dialogues and the poetic fragments left behind by Parmenides. Proclus lived two centuries after Plotinus at a watershed time when one cultural epoch (Graeco-Roman supremacy) was finally crumbling, and another (the European Middle Ages) was emerging. He looked back on an MM tradition of eight centuries linking him with Plato, the initiator of the movement of thinking of which he, Proclus, was the last great ancient representative. Parmenides flourished roughly one century before Plato. Two generations before Parmenides there was Pythagoras, to whom the notions of 'one' (*hen*) and unity (*monas*) as serious MM ideas really go back.

In spite of the lack of explicit references by Proclus and other Neoplatonists, the possibility of Indian (Upanishadic) influence on Neoplatonism must also be borne in mind. Yet Proclus' Neoplatonism is not merely Western acculturated Upanishadic thinking, but the natural unfolding of ideas present in Greek thinking from the beginning.

Ahead of Proclus lay the development of the European MM tradition with its own impetus, which would find its own culmination, and would start to decline,

some nine centuries later at the time of consolidating figures such as Aquinas and Dante (13th–14th centuries). Add another seven centuries, and we arrive at our own century, which is also a time of decline and new birth: high modernity is crumbling, and an unknown epoch is emerging. Therefore, chronologically, Proclus stands two-thirds from now on the way back to Plato. As for the European(-Western) tradition as a whole: behind Proclus, starting roughly 600 BCE with Thales of Miletus, lay a 1000 years of reasoned reflection on the true nature of things. Ahead of Proclus, to the point where we reorient ourselves today, lay 1600 years of continued reflection.

After and largely through Proclus, Neoplatonism continued to exert considerable influence in Western MM. Yet as an individual, he is an example of the accidents of religious and academic politics and the fickleness of fame. Even during his lifetime, he was a sidelined figure, under pressure from Christianity that was in the ascendant. In later centuries, he continued to be either ignored or attacked as pagan. Yet the basic structure of his thinking found fame twice – both times under false names. First, in the 6th century, an unknown Christian monk under the pseudonym ‘Dionysius’ adopted and dressed Proclus’ system up in the garb of Christian language, and presented it as the work of a 1st century Christian (a convert of St Paul). Then, during the high Middle Ages, Proclus again found fame under the name of Aristotle whose star as the great authority was then at its zenith. This second mistaken identity goes back to an Arab book, written in the 9th century, and actually based on Proclus’ *The elements of theology*. Therefore, we have the remarkable phenomenon of the same metaphysical structure, attacked in one case as the product of an unregenerate, pagan mind, but twice lauded under mistaken flags: first as true Christianity and then as true Aristotelianism. He only started to gain recognition in his own right from around the 13th century onwards in the thinking of Nicholas of Cusa and during the Renaissance.

Proclus’ system consists of 211 axiomatic propositions, each explained and argued. This format could lead the reader to believe that he arrived at his views by strictly deductive means. That was hardly the case (Hathaway 1982:122ff.). He systematised existing ideas, mainly Plotinus’ floating and not always consistent speculations, committed to writing in the *Enneads*. Plotinus provided the creative intuitions; Proclus’ arguments create the impression of rationalisations and systematisations of those prior intuitions. Of Plotinus his student, Porphyry said that he experienced the ecstatic state of union with God four times; of Proclus we have no such information.

The first six propositions of the *Stoicheiosis theologike* deal with the One, the Units and the many (Proclus 1963 [1932]:1ff., 187ff.). In his cosmogony Proclus in fact inserted a novel category which he termed *Henads* (Units) between the One and *Nous-On* (‘Intelligence’-‘Being’), which in the system of Plotinus was the first hypostasis derived from the One. In passing, it may also be noted that Proclus (probably for various reasons) (ibid.:252f.) elaborated

the first two-in-one hypostasis (Being-Intelligence) of the master Plotinus into a triad by the insertion of Life (*Zoe*) between the first two. Below that (essentially continuing Plotinus) come Soul and, right at the bottom, Matter (Body). What concerns us right now, is his notion of Unity, which to him is higher in the hierarchical order of things than Being and Intellect.

Proclus does not deny plurality (*plethos*), but postulates that every manifold somehow necessarily participates in the One (*to hen*) (proposition 1); otherwise plurality would disintegrate into nothing (*ouden*) or divisibility *ad infinitum* – and both of these alternatives are unthinkable to him. All that participates in the One is both one and not-one (proposition 2), for participation implies distinction, some ‘otherness’ – otherwise it would simply be complete identity. He does not repeat Parmenides. Proclus sees unity and plurality as essentially correlated fundamental principles of reality. All that participate in the One are necessarily both one and not-one, that is, plural (proposition 2). From the point of unity, plurality is an add-on, qualifying unity. Conversely, from the point of view of plurality, the previously not-one ‘becomes one’ by participation in the One (proposition 3). Their unity must be due to ‘a “one” which has entered into them.’ Therefore, Proclus distinguishes the many ‘ones’ from the one metaphysical ‘One’ behind and in and beyond and other than everything: the ‘One itself’ (the *auto-hen*, as he calls it) (proposition 4). He implies that unless recourse is taken in a One that is not analysable any further, one is doomed to the process of infinite regress mentioned in proposition 1 (also see proposition 14). He is thus taking up the position adopted by Aristotle with his postulate of a first Unmoved Mover.

Anticipating the topic of the next chapter, we can clearly observe that Proclus neither denies plurality nor sees it as either prior to or coexistent with the One, but as radically secondary and posterior to It, and participating in It (proposition 5). Plurality proceeds, unfolds, from the One. Plurality is not denied, but seen as descent into imperfection.

Why and how that happens, is the central concern of Proclus and his fellow Neoplatonists. Proclus implies that the One is transcendent and immanent at the same time: while determining all plurality, it itself remains unaffected by plurality (Proclus 1963 [1932]:191, 199f.). In Proclus, plurality can derive from the One only because the One intimately combines unity and multiplicity in itself.

Proclus thus found it necessary to attempt to bridge what would have appeared to him to be a huge gap between the transcendent One and the empirical plurality of things in the system of Plotinus. He accomplished this bridging with the help of the notions of *Enas* (‘henad’, ‘unit’, ‘one’) and *Monas* (‘monad’), bolstering his notion of participation. Both terms go back to Plato. Whereas ‘monad’ in Proclus ultimately refers to the originative principle, the transcendent ‘One’ (proposition 21), it also denotes the head category from which each of the strata of reality proceeds. Thus henads (units) derive from

the One as ultimate Monad; intelligences, from the monad Intelligence; souls from the monad Soul, and bodies from the monad Nature. There is, therefore, a hierarchy of monads. The category 'henad' has the specific function of explaining singularity and plurality. He clearly felt a need to find an MM context for the fact of singular things in the world. There is not only the one transcendent 'One', but by dint of the participation of the many in that One, also many phenomenal, derived 'ones'. The transcendent One implies a plurality of ones. Later on in his book (propositions 113-128), he applies this concept to the ancient mythological Greek gods, in a last moving but futile attempt to save the old world against all the odds at the time of its final collapse (ibid.:257ff.).

The One causes the many, without being changed by the many in the process; it therefore remains intact. To him the One, identical with the Good (propositions 12, 13, 20), is the unadulterated primordial principle (proposition 20). Beyond the One there is no further principle; for unity is identical with the Good, and is therefore the principium of all things (*arche panton*).

It needs to be re-emphasised that 'the One' does not refer to a finite quantity or number in the world of appearance, but to infinite potency (propositions 62, 86). Transcending even Being, the One is nevertheless the source of the plurality of individualities (ibid.:259, 270f.). The One 'conserves and holds together the being of each several thing' (proposition 13) (ibid.:15), that is, It is the ground of individuality (and plurality).

A first general observation is that Proclus illustrates that any MM account of the world needs to relate oneness, manyness and wholeness. This brief analysis has focused on Proclus' notion of oneness. It stands to reason that in a frame of thinking such as Neoplatonism, the balance between the monistic or pantheistic tendency on the one hand and the due observation of individuality will be most delicate. Proclus illustrates this difficulty.

A second general observation: we note that he does not relegate the world of plurality to the realm of the unreal, as is for example the case with Parmenides. In spite of the effort he put into bridging the gap between the world of the many and the transcendent One source of all (his propositions 28 and 29 are clearly an attempt to ensure continuity); it is questionable whether he succeeded. Safeguarding the transcendence and immanence of 'producer' (the One) in relation to 'product' (the empirical individual) is a difficult balancing act. Is the separateness of the individual real or imaginary (illusionary)? Each, if pushed far enough, would break the tenuous connection. This is of course not his (nor Plotinus' or Plato's) problem only; it is the problem of every effort to find a way between monism and dualism or pluralism, including the route explored in this MM. Yet it must be attempted. Proclus' solution (whether it really is one, is of course the question) is that the product (proposition 30) (Proclus 1963 [1932]:217f.):

[/]s at once identical with it [*that is, the 'producer'*] in some respects and different from it: accordingly it both remains and proceeds, and the two relations are inseparable. (p. 217)

A third observation: there is no feedback from lower to higher among the levels of reality. Thus, each Monad participates upwards in the higher Monads, but not downwards. That means: each receives from above and passes on downwards, but not the other way round. There can therefore be no feedback from the phenomenal world into the dimension of transcendence. There is no reciprocity between the One and the phenomenal world of the one-many: the phenomenal one-many participate in the One, but the One participates in nothing (Sweeney 1982:140–155). This journey explores precisely such a feedback in the movement to and from Horizon.

A fourth observation concerns the structural similarities between Neoplatonism as voiced by Proclus, and the Upanishadic tradition, which strengthens the assumption of stronger historical connections than is usually recognised. The *Chandogya Upanishad* and the *Stoicheiosis theologike* are two individual members of one family, two Spirit brothers, so to speak. This is not a forced imposition, but the recognition of a natural, organic relationship, and probably some, yet untraced, historical familiarity.

A fifth observation relates to his proposition that unless the One is postulated, one is doomed to a non-stoppable process of disintegration ad infinitum, and that that is necessarily an intolerable idea, is disputable. This criticism is fundamental to this essay. Furthermore, his postulate – a version of Aristotle's Unmoved Mover – seems arbitrary. A need ('there should really be ') is not necessarily its own fulfilment ('therefore there is'). Relativity does not prove a firm Absolute. By extension, I would want to add, the possibility that – tendentially – his thinking could have radicalised Absoluteness further than actually happened, deserves careful consideration. Is the 'nothing' (*ouden*) that he speaks of disparagingly in his very first proposition, necessarily something to deny? We are here poised on the divide between Neoplatonism and Buddhism(-Taoism). Proclus cuts off the possibility of 'nothing' at the very outset; the Buddha pursues it as ultimate truth (but in a qualified sense). Proclus finds refuge in a notion of transcendent yet unchanging substance; the Buddha rejects that assumption. Proclus proclaims unity to be the supreme category, to the point that the One is not affected by plurality at all. A Buddhist-inspired view would collocate unity with plurality and totality in the context of processes of all-pervading change, relative coherence and continuity between beginning and end, arising from and subsiding into Absolute Emptiness. The model tried and tested on these pages greatly admires Neoplatonism, but finds more alignment with Buddhism-Taoism. A thin, significant line divides Buddhism and Neoplatonism (and Buddhism and Upanishadic monism) at this level. Let Buddhism inadvertently drift a few degrees towards the substantialising of Emptiness, and the essential distinction between the two types of systems will

have broken down; let Neoplatonism be drawn a few degrees further towards a more radical denuding, including even the One and the Good, and the line will have been crossed. It seems to me that tendentially Plotinus' teaching aimed at Absolute Transcendence, but that, in the way it was worked out, the One functioned as first Substance.

There is another fundamental difference between the type of model seeking form on these pages and the Neoplatonic one. That model proceeds from the axiomatic priority of the actual above the potential (Proclus 1963 [1932]:71ff., 240ff.). Its point of departure is the assumption of a superior, perfect One giving rise to inferior Many. The model explored in this treatise does not make the assumption of a substantial 'One' as ultimately necessary and non-negotiable *terminus a quo*. All we find are traces, tracks, disappearing altogether and appearing inexplicably. We do not find Cosmos emerging from an actuality full of potentiality, but from potentiality appearing from empty, inaccessible nowhere. The furthest back we can go, are 'Eternal' Principles, and these are a mixture of abductive intuition and extrapolating speculation, hopefully providing some context for an understanding and appreciation of Cosmos, not concepts strictly 'provable' as corresponding with reality.

Treatment of the One by Plotinus and Proclus, reminds of the early Buddhist meditation exercise of concentration (see above). In Neoplatonism, the object of contemplation becomes increasingly more evanescent from a semi-empirical (numerical) category to a wholly (or almost wholly) transcendent category. In early Buddhism, through a nine-level scale of abstractions, the cognitive content of the object of contemplation gradually disappears, concomitant with the emergence of a range of subtle emotions, until the supreme state of *samādhi* is attained. The structural similarity between Neoplatonism and Buddhism cannot be overlooked. Where Neoplatonism awards absolute priority to Unity, Buddhism is open to Plurality as well, and allows both to sink away in the wider depth of Emptiness. I read the attainment of the One (*to Hen*) in Neoplatonism as inclining towards the same as the Buddhist dimensions of 'nothingness' (*akiñcaññāyatanam*), 'neither ideation nor non ideation' (*nevasaññānāsaññāyatanam*) and 'cessation' (*nirodha*). An important difference is that what the Buddha and his followers present as essentially a way to physical and psychological calm, Plotinus and his followers present as a full-blown cosmogonic scheme of procession and return. In this respect, I seek an alliance with Neoplatonism. However, in its voiding of even the most abstract level of experience into emptiness, Buddhism sees further.

A sixth observation concerns Neoplatonism, here represented by Proclus, as link between Plato on the one hand and the theologies and philosophies of the monotheistic religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam insofar as they were connected to the (Neo-)Platonic tradition, on the other hand. That such historical and structural connections exist is beyond doubt. In his late dialogue

The Sophist (Cobb 1990) Plato implies the metalevel of Absoluteness. He raises the problem of 'non-being', which is different from 'not-being': not-being is the mere denial of a possible or conceivable empirical state of affairs; non-being has to do with a metalevel, transcending the empirical level of both being and not-being. That level is altogether 'unthinkable, inexpressible, unutterable and unsayable' (238C). In Plato's dialogue (238E) the stranger concedes that he cannot avoid speaking of *to me on* as if it is 'one' (*hen*). The question is whether Neoplatonism took this proviso of Plato as seriously as Plato probably intended it. One is not so sure, at least as far as Proclus is concerned. A tendential reading of (Neo-)Platonism as drifting towards transcending even the 'One' would minimise the distinction between Buddhism and (Neo-)Platonism. Proclus uses the concept 'One' in a more substantial sense than Buddhism would be able to condone. When we come to the use that Neoplatonism was put to in the monotheistic theologies and philosophies of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, it is even more the case. There the distinction between this 'One' and a living, personal Being, jealous that his exclusive singleness should not be threatened becomes thin indeed.

I reluctantly take leave of Proclus for now. The atmosphere one breathes in the company of this last great Neoplatonist is one of resignation, even sadness, realising that something great was coming to an end.

Perhaps this also comes through in the final haunting words of Plotinus himself in his *Enneads* (VI.9.11). The supreme life, he says, is a life taking no pleasure in the things of the earth, and 'a flight of the alone to the Alone' (*phyge monou pros monon*). As far as the 'no pleasure' is concerned, we had occasion to express doubts; Cosmos is to be loved. What could the great North African have meant by the 'flight of the alone'? Self-centred narcissism it certainly is not. Perhaps we can pick up a sense of personal solitariness; and it was a time when anxiety about a social world in collapse started to take over. The individual was alone, but the second 'Alone'? Perhaps it was intended as solace to the lonely human individual. Remember, Plotinus says, the ultimate truth is the One, and that One is also Alone. His system was not a piece of abstract, hair-splitting reasoning; it was MM in the purest form: intuitive thought, and feeling. A human being and a system of thought, capable of expressing such depth so subtly, deserve respect.

■ G.W. Leibniz: *Monadologie*

Let me now observe an early modern offshoot of Neoplatonism.

The first academic work (1663) of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646–1716) dealt with the principle of individuation (Leibniz 1959:1–5). Fifty years later, his mature metaphysics centred in his unique adaptation of the concept of 'monad'. I shall here restrict myself to the last stage of Leibniz's thinking, culminating in

his *Monadologie* (1714) (cf. Bobro 2004; Brown 1990; Coudert, Popkin & Weiner 1998; Jolley 1995; Leibniz 1959 [1840]:705ff., 1973; Mungello 1977; Rescher 1967; Russell 1992 [1900]), in which he provides a metaphysical basis for singularity, his prime metaphysical category.

The ancestry of his idea of 'monad' includes Plato's Ideas, Aristotle's forms and Proclus' monads and henads, discussed above. Leibniz did not take over his idea of 'monad' directly from Proclus, but most likely from Kabbalah (Coudert et al. 1998:72), which in any event had a strong Neoplatonic component. Among the many movements of mysticism-related thought influencing the synthesising Leibniz – either directly or indirectly, and being present either openly or residually – Plato and Neoplatonism were not the least, providing his thought with idealistic undertones (Dunham et al. 2011:59–72).

Leibniz was essentially a Christian Platonic-Neoplatonic thinker along the lines of an earlier figure such as Cusanus. Continuing the spirit of a Cusanus, he was an irenic figure in all directions. Not only in his embracing universalism but also in his diplomatic involvement in practical life, he was a successor to the 15th century MM scholar. He defended Christian orthodoxy and tolerated pietism and *Schwärmerei* as well. Other traditions he not only tolerated but admired, made an impact on him, including Aristotelian scholasticism, Chinese thinking (Confucianism), Jewish (particularly Lurianic) and Christian Kabbalah, and a measure of occultism and alchemy (including Rosicrucianism). His ecumenism included non-Christian religions, but he does not seem to have been aware of the possible Indian (Upanishadic) connections of Neoplatonism.

Thinking progressively at a time when modern science, then in its infancy, demanded a new orientation, he nevertheless made no secret of his openness to the mystical tradition in its widest sense. Yet, essentially, he was an intellectual in the modern sense of the word, neither a contemplative mystic given to a meditative discipline nor prone to visionary ecstatic experience. His 'mysticism' was considerably less developed than his rational 'metaphysics'. Nevertheless, Leibniz moved in circles that saw an intimate link between the new science and pansophism. All of these influences played a role in moulding his monadology. In his inclusive attitude, stretching across barriers of times and cultures, I find in him a precursor of the general approach unfolding in the reflections of this treatise.

So how does Leibniz's teaching of 'monads' fit into the larger picture of his thought? In Neoplatonic vein, Leibniz sees 'the ultimate reason of things' (*ultimaratio rerum*) in 'a certain dominant Unity' (*Unum*) which is 'extramundane': 'greater, higher, and prior to the world itself' (*mundo ipso majus, superius, anteriusque*) (in his *De rerum originatione radicali* 'On the radical origin of things' [1697]) (Leibniz 1959 [1840]:147f.). This *Unum* is the absolute metaphysical necessity, not in need of any reason itself. It translates into the multiple individualities of the world, and that is what his monadology is about.

The problem that dominated ancient Greek thought is still very much alive. Leibniz's argument for the existence of that *Unum* is the ontological argument, well established in scholastic philosophy and theology, that essence necessitates existence, so God (supreme Unity) must exist as the Necessary Being. There must be one single source, from which all existent things continually issue and are being produced. In Leibniz's frame, *Unum* is the God of Christianity, the author of creation. God, understood in a deistic sense (he created the world but does not intervene in it) would remain the ultimate foundation of his system. Nevertheless, the Neoplatonic structure of his argument is obvious. Aristotle is present too, amalgamated with Neoplatonism: *Unum* is the efficient and final cause in one (Leibniz 1959 [1840]:149). And he also sees the spectre of a hopeless infinite regress hanging over the non-acceptance of this *Unum*. To Leibniz, as to Proclus who was our Neoplatonic representative above, insistence on this 'One' is clearly not an arithmetical issue; more than a number, 'One' is a term for all-round potentiality and perfection, transcendent yet also immanent.

On that traditional basis, Leibniz promulgated his theory of monads. Created by/emanating from the Unity, they are also distinct from the Unity. A plurality of individuals, deriving from Unity, they nevertheless do not lose their respective identities. In his thinking this notion made its appearance earlier (around 1685), and the word itself came up a decade later (Rutherford 1995:166). Glossing over the considerable difficulties of interpretation raised by this notion, its essentials boil down to the following:

By 'monad' (*Monadé*) Leibniz means a simple substance: without any parts itself, but entering into compounds. There is an infinity of independent monads. They are the true atoms (*Atomes*) of nature, the basic, constituent elements of things (*les Eléments des choses*) (proposition 3). This may raise expectations that we are back with Lucretius, but that is not the case. Leibniz does with Lucretius what Marx would do with Hegel: turn him upside down. The difference is that the upside down goes in the opposite direction. Marx would invert Hegel's idealism to materialism; Leibniz inverted Lucretius' materialism to idealism – well, almost, for Leibniz did not espouse a full-blown monistic idealism. In any event, monads themselves are neither extended, nor compounds of elements that are more basic. They have no parts, but they do have a differentiated internal structure. Each monad is unique, and differs from all others. Monads 'have no windows' (proposition 7), but by that phrase Leibniz does not mean that monads are completely self-enclosed and isolated, incapable of entering into relations and that there is no interaction among monads. That would run counter to their job of forming compounds. Actually, monads are substances and the hallmark of substances, according to Leibniz, was that they are principles of force, capable of action. What Leibniz seems to have meant was that, being absolutely basic, their internal structure cannot be affected from outside. Nor did he mean that monads do not change. They do,

but their essential change comes from an internal principle, and they are perdurable substances, continuous through all change.

In short, monads are fundamental metaphysical entities. In terms of our present chapter, one could say that his monads, modelled on the notion of human persons, are individuals, singularities; a monad is the archetype of a person. At their most fundamental level, these ultimately real entities are soul-like substances (*ames*, proposition 19). Resisting the materialistic mechanism of his day, he sees monads as indestructible spiritual substances, endowed with perceptions and appetites. Perceptions and appetites are more than mechanistic matter, but less than full consciousness. Not all monads are the same. They exhibit functions ranging from mere appetite to full reason on a hierarchical scale, only those of the highest level are capable of self-consciousness. In any event, the monad is the dominant *entelechy* or *form* in everything: actualising, constituting and maintaining everything, from minute particle of matter to living thing.

As far as the relationship with matter is concerned, Leibniz is not easy to pin down, and interpretations vary considerably. Matter is not a substance to him, and he seems to suggest that monads are not essentially materially embodied. He does not seem to be an idealist monist in the sense that external material reality is rejected or devalued as mere appearance. On the one hand, he divides monad and matter, but on the other hand he also sees matter as an aspect of monads.

There is, firstly, God as the supreme monad, and pure spirit. Then there are monads as such, the original individual substances. Thirdly, there are compounds of monads. Unique as this view is, it nevertheless fits well with the Neoplatonic model of Proclus (see e.g. Proclus' proposition 6). Leibniz's monadology does not amount to a monism in the sense of an exclusive emphasis on oneness. His system of oneness is also a system of manyness. It wants to explain wholeness (compound). Not only monads, but also compounds are 'individuals' – the first essentially, the latter in a quasi-sense, and they are embodied. Monads become manifest in the world in conjunction with material bodies. For example, sensation without bodily senses would be unthinkable. God, the supreme monad, is the only individual substance that is not a spatio-temporal existent.

Leibniz does not quite overcome the notion of bodies as machines (e.g. propositions 64 and 77). He believed that with the concept of monad, he overcame the dualism of mind and matter in Descartes, but that is not necessarily the case. He is less dualistic than Descartes, but more so than Spinoza. As the soul follows its own laws of final causes, so does the body follow its own laws of efficient causes, and they accord by dint of a perfect, divinely pre-established harmony (*system de l'Harmonie préétablie*) (propositions 78, 79, 80). That might not necessarily imply real interaction or

interpenetration, let alone real union of mind and matter in an individual being such as a human person. In addition, it leaves the nature of ‘matter’ and ‘body’ unexplained. Yet it must be noted that for Leibniz there was real connection among individual things in a shared world. Monads perceive a real world; his view did not amount to solipsism. I also note with appreciation that, contrary to the reductionistic materialistic monism that began to appear in his day, there is nothing utterly lifeless in his universe (proposition 69). Even in the smallest part of matter, there is life and soul (proposition 66).

His thinking is idealistic as far as he awards primacy to the spiritual: everything emanates from a single supreme substance (God) (propositions 38–41), who is pure immaterial spirit and pure activity – ultimately perfect, necessary and sufficient. He continues the Neoplatonic tradition of an ontological continuum with spirit and matter at the opposite extremes. Derived matter is not entirely alien to the original spiritual substance (God), but a modification of that substance.

His Neoplatonic understanding of the essential structure of God and the world is not apophatic (‘negative’, unknowing), but kataphatic (‘positive’, knowing). Since human minds participate in the divine mind, they are in possession of innate ideas, emanating from and corresponding to divine ideas. The monads are known neither through the senses nor through intuitive understanding, but through reason, capable of constructing theories; in that sense he is a rationalist.

Leibniz has a sharp eye for the moment of real singularity in the world, and he awarded a metaphysical background to them: monads, derived from God, are singularities, constitutive in the composition of the world. They are the transcendent sources for empirical individuality. They remind of the eternal *dharmas* of the Buddhist Sarvastivāda school. In Leibniz’s universe, all things are connected, and therefore each monad represents the entire universe, is a mirror of the universe (propositions 62, 63, 67) (Leibniz 1959 [1840]:710):

Each portion of matter can be conceived of as a garden full of plants, and as a pond full of fish. But every branch of each plant, every member of each animal, every drop of their juices is in turn such a garden or such a pond. (p. 710)

Even the earth, air or water between plants or fish contain such wholes (proposition 68). A sentiment such as this is impossible to ‘demonstrate’ empirically or ‘prove’ rationally (contrary to what Leibniz would want us to believe). It is a pure MM postulate according to the definition of MM applied in these meditations. We note that with Leibniz, too, singularity, plurality and totality are co-present all the time.

Similar to all the other figures visited, Leibniz is a link in one single chain concatenated backwards, forwards and sideways. Behind him is Proclus and the Neoplatonic network surrounding Proclus, in front of him is the German

Idealistic network, and sideways of him is – among others – Chinese thinking. For yes, Leibniz’s analogy reveals a relationship with Fa-tsang’s analogy of the golden lion nearly 1000 years before: parts and wholes and parts and parts are interpenetrated. It was not possible for me to establish whether Leibniz came to that idea via his Chinese studies or all by himself. Either way would be remarkable: if he was influenced by Chinese thought, it would be a signal of the breadth of his historical connections; if the idea arose in his own mind, it would be a signal of the breadth of the human mind and the spirit of MM. The one network of human consciousness spans all the earth and all times. Leibniz himself, like all other individuals, is proof of the truth of his analogy. There is no such thing as an isolated individual thing. Leibniz did not set out to argue for the Principle of Singularity as a significant element of the secret of the universe. Nevertheless, indirectly his ‘monads’ register that.

Leibniz contains all of Western thought before him, and his own thinking is a germinating seed that would flourish in German Idealism a century later. This fanning out of his singular system in various directions is one reason why he presents a challenge to interpreters. There seem to be unresolved tensions in his thought – problems, if not of coherence and consistency, then at least of clarity. His thinking at times appears to be somewhat contrived, as if he was doing his best to avoid Spinozistic pantheism. Nevertheless, his is a remarkable attempt to root empirical individuality in a metaphysical context, and his notion of ‘monad’ is an expression of the Principle of Singularising.

Apart from the primary interest in this chapter, he deserves respect for other aspects of his singular existence, such as his affirmative immersion in practical life for the good of all. His fascination with China and his overall willingness to integrate a variety of systems is remarkable. Perhaps the quality of immediacy to God of every monad signals a sense of mystical immediacy to God. From the perspective of this peregrination, Leibniz appears as not moving close to apophatic mysticism, not to mention Absoluteness, as his ontological argument for the existence of God illustrates.

■ **J.G. Fichte: *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre***

A century after Leibniz, Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762–1814) raised the problem of the ‘I’ to the level of metaphysical primacy. I will now briefly take note of this forceful man of action, somewhat alone and half-forgotten, but in recent decades re-emerging into the light of interest as precursor of movements such as phenomenology, existentialism and depth psychology. In line with the format chosen for this §, I shall refer to Fichte’s treatment of our problem in a single seminal writing of his – the early *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre* (‘Foundation of the entire theory of cognition’) (1794) – dispensing with the wider framework of his thinking and its development over

time (cf. Claesges 1974; Copleston 1999 [1963]:vol 7, 32ff.; Dunham et al. 2011:116ff.; Fichte 1845:83–328; Schrader 1972; Seidel 1976).

Let us in passing glance at the historical context of his thinking. Since the Renaissance and the Reformation and in tandem with the rise of capitalism, a sense of the significance and the uncertainty of the human individual started to billow out over the Western world. The philosophy of the emerging modern age reflected that ambivalence. The individual, increasingly cut loose from nature and tradition, was in crisis, yet individuality was at the same time seen as the escape route leading out of that crisis. Descartes' dictum (see Ch. 15), 'I think, therefore I am' was not a foundational adage for rationalism only, but also for individualism, haunted by solipsism; the primacy of the 'I' as guarantor of indubitable rational knowledge was established. At the end of the 18th century, Kant also attempted to push through, as Descartes had done, to the bottom of the crisis of human knowledge, and like Descartes, he continued, but also radicalised, the emphasis on the role of the human person as constituting knowledge and morality. Contemporaneous with Kant's thinking, the French Revolution elevated the dignity of the individual as primary ordering principle in the social and political contract. The social, political and philosophical developments in tandem made a deep impression on receptive young European intellectuals such as Fichte.

Looking further back and across cultural divides, Protestant Kant did for modern Western MM what Buddhist Nāgārjuna had done for Indian MM 16 centuries before. Both delivered critiques of human knowledge, by implication rendering all rational, speculative metaphysical systems untenable. Yet Nāgārjuna himself accepted a faculty higher than reason: intuition (*prajñā*); and after Nāgārjuna came Yogācāra with their idealistic system, describing consciousness as the root of reality. Kant did not go the route of intuitive MM *gnosis*. As Nāgārjuna was followed by constructive metaphysics informed by his critique, so the constructive metaphysics of German Idealism followed Kant, informed by his critique and attempting to overcome the inconsistencies and gaps they found in his thinking. Kant accepted a mysterious thing-in-itself (*Ding an sich*) beyond human experience of things as ultimately foundational. That is the one thing Nāgārjuna rejected. Kant left no possibility of knowing such thing-in-itself, Fichte felt. Ultimately, Kant could not explain where human sense constituted knowledge and the knowledge-constituting apparatus of the human mind come from. What ultimately causes our knowledge, and how? Fichte wanted to bridge the gap that he detected. To Fichte, Kant's system also suffered from a related stress fracture: it failed to connect theoretical reason and 'faith' (i.e. belief in the existence of God, the immortality of the soul, and practical morality). Bold Fichte attempted to construct speculative bridges across the chasms that cautious Kant left gaping. In both Buddhism and Idealism, daring new constructions in very different styles followed on very different cautioning critiques.

Registering his European context, Fichte proceeded to lay his own metaphysical and political accents, critiquing, extending and developing Kant by securing and radicalising his mentor's premises. Unlike his erstwhile youth friend F.W.J. Schelling with his nature mysticism, and his Berlin colleague F.D.E. Schleiermacher (1768–1834) with his definition of religion as essentially the feeling of absolute dependence, Fichte was no metaphysical mystic. Nevertheless, let us follow in his footsteps a little further. He was a metaphysical moralist, and in this combination, morality had priority over metaphysics. Yet he is of interest to the topic of this chapter as a figure of extraordinary power who, in a bid to remain faithful to Kant while overcoming the ambiguities of Kant, raised the theme of the active 'I' (*Ich*), striving after freedom, to central metaphysical position. In this notion he discovered the supreme transcendental unitary principle that he sought – admittedly incapable of proof but nevertheless, the most basic, self-evident axiom, from which could be shown that all sense of consciousness and reality flows.

Fichte's thinking amounts to a double-edged idealism: both an epistemological idealism in the usual philosophical sense of objects of knowing being regarded as somehow created by or at least dependent on consciousness, and also a moral idealism in the sense of striving after an absolute ideal. The openly declared impetus in all his thinking is the ideal of the realisation of freedom; that, to him, is morality, and is the true epicentre of his idealism, making it essentially an ethical idealism. The colour of Fichte's teleological idealism is activist and optimistic. The human being is in the constant process of making and remaking itself in the process of making and remaking its world. The ultimate aim of all action seems not to be the realisation of personal individual freedom, but the freedom and independence of an absolute 'I'. Throughout, the distinction and relationship between the empirical human 'I' and the absolute 'I' remain unclear.

Reduced to basics, the ground plan of Fichte's system as found in his *Grundlage* is as follows:

- Firstly, Fichte distinguishes as the first metaphysical principle an absolute 'I' as *act of positing*. Reflexively considering what goes on when we 'know', that is the first, foundational notion that may be postulated. It is for him the minimalistic yet undeniable transcendental point of departure with reference to which everything else, including nature, needs to be deduced. Everything else issues from the auto-productive *Ich*, which by and in itself is pure activity (*Thathandlung*). We note with interest that Fichte dramatically moves away from the classic Greek-European notion of *person* as somehow related to *substance*; now person becomes *activity, freedom*. His postulate of the 'I', Fichte believes, disposes of and replaces Kant's notion of a thing-in-itself hidden mysteriously and unexplained behind everything, including thinking. The *Ich* as freedom is the one common root of both practical

reason and theoretical reason, joining them together. In 'activity' will and intellect coincide, become 'free intelligence'.

- A second, antithetical principle – the principle of *counterpositing* (*entgegensetzen*) – is by necessity implied by the first principle. This is the moment of difference. The 'I' implies an opposite, 'not-I' (*Nicht-Ich*, to use Fichte's vocabulary), and that Other is necessarily constitutive of the 'I'. There is thus essentially an 'intentional' object, to make use of terminology from the toolbox of the phenomenology of Husserl a century later, and actually going back to Fichte. The *Nicht-Ich* is produced by the activity (*Thathandlung*) of the *Ich* itself. In order to activate itself, the *Ich* requires some resistance, some boundary, and some limitation for itself. The 'I' finds itself through the 'not-I', in fact, a plurality of 'not-I's. The 'not' does not denote a flat contradiction or denial of the original thesis, but the opening up of alternative possibility: it creates the possibility for the existence of a body, a natural world and human civilisation, and of a dimension of rational, free and striving human beings. Here the fundamental moral, activist quality of Fichte's personality and metaphysic once again announces itself. The 'not-I' is posited by the 'I', in order to overcome it. The 'not-I' is limited, made by the 'I' and remakeable by the 'I'. It provides the raw material for the striving of the 'I'; it challenges the 'I' to become itself, and is the battleground upon which the moral striving is exercised. 'I' and the world, mutually implied, can and must be changed for the better. Thus, the human longing for freedom is pushed by the need to overcome the obstinacy of the world, and pulled by the infinite, unrealisable desire for freedom. It is important to note that this opposition (positing 'over against') of 'I' and 'not-I' takes place not outside, but within the 'I'. Fichte does not seem to have intended this idea as a denial of the reality of the world, or as a claim that the world is created by the 'I'. Yet his focus was so strongly on the world as constituted by the 'I' and as the battlefield for the realisation of the freedom of the 'I', that he lost sight of the need to explain the status and origin of the 'objective' world fully.
- Thirdly, a synthetical fundamental principle: the *Ich* and the *nicht-Ich* are not mutually completely exclusive, but *mutually determined and determining, limited and limiting*, as we have already started to see. Subjectivity and intersubjectivity, human subjectivity and nature, are mutually implied. The separation is separation in reciprocal relation, unity in distinction. The thesis, antithesis and synthesis are mutually implicit: one makes no sense without the other two. Thus, Fichte was the father of this famous triad in the context of German Idealism. In his thinking, this mutuality is the basis for the theoretical reason as well as the practical reason: the 'I' assimilates the 'not-I', and so comes to final self-consciousness; and the 'I' must subdue the 'not-I', in order to attain the ideal of freedom and independence. Morality is acting from a sense of obligation to that freedom. The 'I' and the 'not-I' are both posited within the 'I' – not as a completed fact, but as a task, a mission, an ideal, in infinite deferral.

From the vantage point of where we are at this stage of our perambulation, Fichte, part of the massif of German Idealist metaphysics, is impressive, but along the flanks of his thinking, a number of slippery crevices become visible.

The strengths of his system, as marked out in his manifesto, are obvious, and up to a point seem to support what is evolving in these chapters. For example, in the way he outlines his principle of 'I'-ness it seems to be interrelated with what was discussed in previous chapters as Witting (his thinking), Wanting (his will) and Can-ing (his freedom). He supports our notion that selfness is not for a moment to be separated from otherness (manyness) and togetherness. That is a step beyond Descartes. All synoptic systems need to harmonise those moments. His 'I' is by no means intended as existing in isolation from the latter two. A valuable implication at the level of human existence of Fichte's vision is that subjectivity is per definition and by its very nature intersubjectivity. The empirical individual presupposes many other individuals; the freedom of the empirical human individual presupposes that of other individuals. What will be argued in the next chapter is in line with this thinking.

Another strong point is that, more than anyone else in the Western tradition before him, he dismantled the notion of substance as primary category. In Buddhist terms, his *Ich* is no *attā*. In fact, Buddhaghosa *bon mot* 'not the doer but certainly the deed is found' up to a point resonates in Fichte's notion of the 'I' as essentially activity (*Thathandlung*). That is a great stride away from Neoplatonism.

Yet, a problem in Fichte's model is that he does not go back 'behind' the self-positing 'I'. His system articulates what *proceeds* from the 'I', but does not take the step backwards into what *precedes* the 'I'. Fichte's speculative *terminus a quo* of all experience is the constitutive, spontaneous 'I', positing everything, including the 'I'. By a further step back, I do not mean the acceptance of some mysterious thing-in-itself or some personal mythological divinity. As indicated in the previous paragraph, when he substitutes activity for substance, he seems to approximate the Buddhist idea of non-substantialism, which is a cornerstone of the attempt at understanding unfolding in our argument. However, not quite. In fact, he continues the Aristotelian attempt to obviate an infinite regress by assuming the existence of an Unmoved Mover; in Fichte's case, it is an absolute 'I'. But the meditations of this essay, guided by Taoism and Buddhism, see a need to peer through such a transcendental 'I', and find themselves drifting into Infinitude, Eternity and Absoluteness, into empty 'non-I' (not 'not-I'). Fichte does not explain how 'I' arises and his postulate of the 'I' as simply being there without any reason (*schlechthin*) is rather arbitrary and begs the question. Probably, given his cultural and historical context, he could not have considered radical emptiness (in our terminology: Absolute Horizon).

A problem related to this, is that, as many commentators over time have pointed out, the relationship between the 'absolute' 'I' and the finite 'I'

is obscure. What exactly does he mean? To what extent does the notion of *Ich* apply to the individual human, to what extent is it a transcendental category, perhaps even a supra-individual Self? It is not easy, perhaps not possible, to decide when he is busy with a phenomenological procedure and when with a fully-fledged metaphysical idealism. Perhaps the absolute 'I' is an ideal of the finite self – of all finite selves, insofar as they are moral beings, striving for freedom. I read him as, in his notion of 'I', at least skirting the notion of Selfness (Singularising) as a constituent Principle in things, the Principle of Otherness (Pluralising, see Ch. 15) in his 'not-I', and the Principle of Totalising (see Ch. 16) in his third principle.

His second principle is singularly negative. The 'not-I' has no Original dignity in itself. He does not deny cosmic reality, but seems to see it 'phenomenologically' as the 'object' of 'intentional' cognition. Yet a problem from the point of view of this wandering of ours is certainly that, in Fichte's model, nature, matter and the body appear to be the raw material on which, or the tools with which, the 'I' exercises its moral duty and expresses its freedom. Nature is opponent and instrument, nothing more. The problem, it seems, is perhaps not so much his proceeding from the transcendental standpoint of 'I', but the manner in which he works out the necessity of the 'other'. In the way he works it out, it is a negative boundary. In whichever way one looks at Fichte, he is not positively interested in nature for its own sake. Nor is he interested in the natural sciences. He does not deny the reality of nature, but it has a shadowy sort of presence as grist to the mill of the 'I', nothing more. It is no Other to which the human being can relate in mystic participation or caring responsibility. As Schelling correctly pointed out, Fichte did not overcome the mechanistic view of nature of the 17th century. That goes completely against the grain of our attempt. Contrary to his protestations, he did in effect devalue nature. In the reflections of this essay, every singular 'I' is seen as an intrinsic part and expression of Cosmos and Arche.

His third principle is not particularly impressive either, and does not move beyond the second one. It reaffirms the mutual limitation, but does not move into a mutual inclusion or a next step or level. As said, a further step *back* (towards Absoluteness) needs to be taken – and a step *forward* into a true reconciliation of 'I' and 'not-I' in something more than either. Fichte remains trapped in a disjointed division between subjectivism and objectivism. In opposition to the objectivism of modernity, he pitted an absolute subjectivity, not overcoming the opposition as such.

Another opacity in his model concerns his views about God, as it came under attack in the atheism controversy (*Atheismusstreit*), launched by F.H. Jacobi (1743–1819) in 1799. Fichte fell between two chairs. No doubt, his ideas concerning God did not conform to orthodox Christianity, but of course, that did not make him an 'atheist'. His absolute 'I' is an as yet unconscious 'God', revealing, discovering and realising itself in and through nature and humanity.

This is a becoming God, and certainly not an individual person. To Fichte, there is no personal God existing outside the human being and outside the transcendental moral order of things. That moral order *is* God. This view led to Fichte being accused of atheism. The problem was that his thinking, or writing, or both here, were not entirely clear, and that he seemed to fail to draw certain inevitable conclusions. His sharp distinction of religious and philosophical discourse and his failure to achieve integration was a hangover from Kant's own position. Nevertheless, he opened the whole dimension of layers of consciousness, thereby anticipating what Jung and others would bring to light a century or so later.

As far as knowledge of ultimacy is concerned, Fichte also demonstrates a certain shortcoming. His strictly formalistic method of argumentation is probably an inheritance from Spinoza, but unlike Spinoza, here no intuitive procedure of coming to an understanding of things, emerges. Notwithstanding the obvious novelty and force of his style of thinking that pioneered an enormously productive period in speculative metaphysics, the argument leaves an aftertaste of forced dialectics.

Fichte's great strength is his teleological morality, with its implied emphasis on moral action with a view to the improvement of things. This could be reconciled with the Buddhist *bodhisattvic* ideal, and this book is happy to be aligned with that aspect of his thinking. A weakness of his construction is that his ethics is premised on the assumption of an antagonistic relationship of the human 'I' with nature. It would be far more fruitful to allow ethics to flow from an MM locating of the human person in Cosmos in a positive relationship. One may suspect that his ethics would not be able to provide sufficient safeguard against the collective egoism of the human species, or sufficient motivation to serve and protect nature in the present threat of the impending ecological disaster.

Pluralising

■ §41 Otherness

Pluralising refers to the possibility of distinction in various shades and grades (twoness, manyness, difference, diversity, disjunction and so on) emerging on Horizon.

In some MM systems, a sense of otherness was expressed as a vertical duality, such as between God and his creation. In other systems, it could be a horizontal duality or plurality between two or more irreducible principles in reality itself, such as matter and spirit. In yet others, it could be expressed as both a vertical and a horizontal duality or plurality with one or more supernatural gods interacting with another hierarchically lower level of reality, with its many associated components. The game of oneness, twoness and manyness was played in many ways, in accordance with many sets of rules.

Contrary to the view in strands of Indian and Western MM, manyness is not an embarrassment in need of being explained (away), but an essential aspect of the world; one to be affirmed. Selfness and Otherness are equidistant from Absoluteness. From the point of view of monism, plurality might be stripped of value and reality and declared mere delusion. From the point of view of this emerging model, Pluralising is not derivative, but Original. Manyness is not

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inferior to Oneness in a hierarchical subordination, but equal to it in a co-ordinated balance, equally manifesting and demonstrating the inner dynamics of Unground. There is no Singularising without Pluralising, no Pluralising without Singularising. In the meditative practice of mysticism, one important exercise has been the observance of plurality. The Buddha, for example, was not obsessed with the attainment of Oneness, and taught a non-judgemental attention to, a choiceless awareness (*sati*) of the many things as they arise and subside, against the backdrop of the insight into ultimate non-substantial Emptiness.

It is as if the drive towards Becoming develops a certain pressure to 'become more'. In becoming Subject, it apparently needs to generate Subject-Subject and Subject-Object relationality. Distinctness, an essential moment in the becoming and being of Cosmos, does not necessarily imply superiority and inferiority. It is true that division is the root of competition and conflict is not an accident in the world, and it seems to be part of the structure of the emerging world, going back to the cosmogonic process itself. The way to go is not to curl up in the foetal position in oneness, but to embrace the scatter of the world with its many fragments and its struggles, and yet not to remain in conflict, but to move forwards towards reconciliation, without giving up oneness and manyness.

One of the ways in which people's relationship with the depth of the world is expressed, in addition to a sense of unity with an Ultimate, is a sense of otherness. As far as MM is concerned, its associated knowledge may take the form of a sense of receiving a revelation from an Other. Its emotional tone may be one of personal response, of awe and love, before an Other. Alternatively, it may be one of fear and servility, as the history of religions demonstrates repeatedly: a wholly Other divinity imposes his law, which the human being is obliged to obey without question. Its devotional expression is communication, such as in prayer. In individual life, the sense of otherness may lead to inner tension and division between inclination and what is felt to be obligation, either self-imposed as duty or Other imposed as divine law. I am split: what I want to do, I do not do, but what I hate, I do. Whether that Other will is merciful or wrathful is not essential in our present context; the essential thing is the otherness, the distance.

The term 'mysticism' is admittedly not usually used for this sense of encounter with Otherness, but I wish to retain the possible link between both ways of relating to ultimacy: a sense of oneness and sameness, and a sense of twoness and otherness. A sense of otherness has its own dangers, and it cannot be the final word. However, it has its own dignity. It is also rooted in a primal dimension of things. Often a sense of awesome Otherness, of a *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* ('terrible and fascinating mystery', to borrow from Rudolph Otto's *Das Heilige* [1917]), is aroused by a sensed experience of encounter with nature or with God (or gods). Such a meeting may also lead to

a range of emotions, which turn it into mysticism. This variety of mysticism is particularly at home in monotheistic religions: God, a transcendently Other, is loved with heart and soul. Love, whether directed at divinity, humanity or nature, implies duality – and does not exclude more. The history of mysticism is full of examples of this kind of experience. Look at that tendentially, as pointing beyond itself and asking for a further connection. That connection announces itself as Totalism and expires in Emptiness.

In previous chapters the ‘-theism’ part of monotheism received some attention. In the present context, the ‘mono-’ part of it is important. I note that monotheism is not by any stretch monistic, but essentially implies both unity on one hand (the one God), but also a clear duality and plurality on the other hand (the ‘one’ God is ontologically strictly distinct from the world and from the many things making up the world). This Other-directed mysticism is not necessarily inferior, as seems to be implied in the most widely used definition of ‘mysticism’, but it needs to be understood and granted a relative value against the backdrop of Absoluteness. The ‘One’ in ‘monotheism’ is not the same as the ‘One’ in Neoplatonism. In Neoplatonism, the pluralistic world does not stand over against it, but emanates from it and participates in it. The monotheistic ‘mono’ hails from an altogether different, Near-Eastern mythological background. In the developing history of the founding sources, ‘mono’ increasingly came to mean a numerical one; and the relationship between that one God and the world is one of difference, not of unity or continuity. Within the monotheisms of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, sophisticated attempts were made to accommodate it to Neoplatonism, but the distinction between ‘one’ as it functions in the two systems is worth upholding.

Between monotheism and polytheism there are significant differences. ‘Monotheism’ refers to the belief that there is only one God; ‘polytheism’ is here understood as an umbrella concept to mean the belief in a plurality of gods in a wide sense. This includes varieties such as ‘henotheism’ (the enduring focus on a single god in a pluralistic pantheon with a hierarchical structure of higher and lesser gods) and ‘kathenotheism’ (various gods are venerated in turn, one at a time). Following these definitions, there is no absolute break between monotheism and polytheism; early Hebrew religion for example was a variant of ‘henotheism’ that gradually evolved into monotheism proper.

Here ‘polytheism’ is not used in a pejorative sense. Monotheism and polytheism express quite distinct perspectives on the world and both are here taken to be equally original. The strictness of Jewish and Muslim monotheism with its Cosmic reservations expresses a worldview quite different from the inclusive cosmic affirmation of the Germanic, Greek-Roman, Indian and other pluralities of divinities. Yet, from another point of view, monotheism and polytheism are related, and both are transcended on Horizon. A plurality of divinities may be experienced as living presences in the world, and they may

be fully recognised by their adherents to be mythological manifestations, human projections of an inaccessible depth – which is not necessarily the case among the more sturdy conservative theoreticians of the monotheistic religions. As sources containing truth regarding the human situation, the Greek, Roman and Indian mythologies (to stay with the cultural areas mainly featuring in this book) offer profound insights. In fact, the ancient Greek, Roman and Indian stories of gods and goddesses have a democratic inclination missing from the Hebrew stories with their one patriarchal ruler.

Forms of present-day theology (e.g. those influenced by Karl Barth [1886–1968]) strongly differentiate ontologically between the natural world and a Wholly Other, and make a point of awarding absolute Power to that Other, expecting obedience. Such thinking may be forceful and effective (as was the case in the struggle against Nazism in the 1930s and 1940s), but it might also become instrumental in promoting an authoritarian mindset and be used as a tool in political power struggles. It can all be understood, and from the perspective of this exploration such thinking is not so much rejected as false but rather seen as, in the last resort, something to be transcended. On the Horizon such an ontological difference, with its associated power and obedience, evaporates. Returning from that Horizon has other individual and social ethical implications.

The sense of a divinely Other might lead to a sense of special privilege, or one of estrangement and isolation. Collectively, even if some inner-group identity (a ‘we’) is achieved, this is easily pitted against an other group or other groups. It happens all the time. The sense of otherness may infiltrate and take over the relationship to nature of an entire culture, to the extent that they are alienated from nature. The contemporary world is living through and struggling to escape from this split of knowing human subject versus known object. A sense of otherness without the reconciling and integrating ‘totalistic’ viewpoint of the essential togetherness of things is an aberration.

At the level of social and political ordering of life, a healthy emphasis on Pluralising provides a basis for democracy with its implied pluralism, tolerance and distribution of ideas, wealth and power. Historically speaking, Neoplatonism did not succeed in countering the latent totalitarianism in state and religion in Europe, following the merger of ancient Near Eastern theocratic monotheism and the Roman Empire with its centralised order. In that troublesome historical context, mystics tended simply to withdraw into Oneness, away from manyness, perhaps hiding but not necessarily undermining real and ideological patterns of social and political ‘oneness’ as unitary domination in Church and State. This essay adopts a very different social and political morality. What is needed is a loving acceptance of and immersion into the many. A top-down hierarchical perspective, anchored in the idea of oneness at its apex, needs the corrective of a perspective proceeding from the idea of the many as a positive value. To prevent this ‘democratic’ perspective from denigrating into its own version of

a tyranny, namely the mass tyranny of numbers, a 'totalistic' integration of both in a further step beyond 'one' and 'many' is required. That will receive attention in the next chapter.

Both monotheism and polytheism may be understood, critiqued, tolerated and accommodated as far as possible. The point is to appreciate both in their relationship to Absoluteness, appearing in the Principles of Singularising and Pluralising. All such systems circle around Absoluteness, some closer, some at greater distance. A sense of Otherness as an I-Thou relationship, is possible towards other human beings and living creatures; it can be felt towards Cosmos as a whole and towards a supernatural Person - but, by definition, not towards Absoluteness. Mythologised, personalised gods fulfil a deep-seated human need, but beyond the gods is Eternity - and beyond that, 'is' Absoluteness.

In his drama *Nathan der Weise* (1779), Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729-1781) addressed the question that blighted so much of Western Near Eastern history and, connected with religio-political animosities, resulted in the loss of many millions of lives: which one of the three monotheistic faiths (Judaism, Christianity or Islam) is the true one? Which of the wise Nathan's three sons received the real, precious heirloom: the ring? Nathan's answer, that the truth of the real ring will be established by the manner in which the three sons behave during their lifetimes, is profoundly meaningful. Yet, Nathan's answer must be widened and deepened. Widened: not only these three, but all religions need to be drawn into the ambit of our interest, and deepened. Not one of the three monotheisms (or any other religion, for that matter) is absolutely true, and none is absolutely false. All are true to the extent that their relative understandings of things approximate Absoluteness, and all are wrong (i.e. not living up to the best promise in them) to the extent that this depth dimension is denied or not realised. 'Oneness' and 'Twoness' are not absolute values in themselves, and enforcing that as if they were so by means of verbal, ideological, institutional and physical violence, would be a travesty of truth. 'One' is a privileged number', but so is 'two', with its own unique symbolic associations for human beings. So are the combinations 'three', 'four', 'five', 'six', 'seven', 'eight', 'nine', 'ten' and so on, as all of the esoteric and some of the mystical traditions of humankind attest. In cultures such as the Babylonian and in individuals such as Pythagoras and right up to this day with its science, numbers have always carried rich meanings, ultimately deriving from the Principles of Singularising and Pluralising.

To move to the empirical level again: the fact that I am one of many things, made up of many things and destined to disintegrate into many things, is just as essential to my being as that I am uniquely I; they are mutually implied facts and experiences. That one becomes many and many one, is essential to the Cosmic process. Cosmos has a tendency towards unifying, and it has a tendency towards multiplying.

■ §42 One boiling magma and many moving plates

In this study we are not naïvely inhabiting some make-believe Pangaea of ‘one’ religion. Nor are the religious continents on which humanity exists, taken to be separate blocs of institutionalised ritual and teaching. They are all manifestations of the same Archeic dynamics, have one common source in the subconscious layers of the collective human consciousness – and deeper, in the Nature of Cosmos itself and the secret it carries. None of these continents is eternal. They move apart, converge and collide, and their collisions have often been occasions for dramatic changes on the surface of human consciousness. In addition, there were always singular creative eruptions of the force below, such as those we shall witness now.

■ ‘Multiple unity’ (Eriugena)

Eriugena has more to say to us (cf. Ch. 13). The concept of ‘multiple unity’ (*unum multiplex*), used by him, highlighting the complexity of the relationship between oneness and manyness, ultimately derives, via Pseudo-Dionysius, Proclus and Plotinus, from Plato himself.

The problem of the relationship between oneness and manyness is intimately related to the problem of the emanation of the world. Neoplatonism with its emanationism (the many are continuous with the One) followed quite a different route than monotheism did, with its creationism (the many are discontinuous with the One). That ties in with the nature of the ‘One’ in the two cases: in classic monotheism, it is one real Person; in Neoplatonism, taken broadly, it tends towards transcending being and number altogether – but this attempt remains ambivalent.

There were attempts to reconcile the two approaches. One of the most intriguing of these is found in the *Periphyseon* of the Neoplatonic-Christian theologian MM, Eriugena. He does not stand isolated, but forms a historical knot in whom several strands meet and from whom certain strands lead into the future. In that historical context stands the historical figure of Jesus, on whom Christianity would be built, and who could not have foreseen what his future would be in the Christian church, theology and philosophy, and what would become of his message of love in centuries to come. In that complex tradition of transmission and interpretation over several centuries, of which Eriugena was an instance at the end of the ancient period and at the beginning of the Middle Ages, Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, Proclus and Pseudo-Dionysius were the most significant theoretical-theological markers. For now, a few comments on Plato and Plotinus must suffice to suggest that background.

As for *Plato*, in his own thinking on oneness and manyness, he oriented himself in relation to Parmenides, Heraclitus and Pythagoras. Plato was neither

monotheist nor monist, neither dualist nor pluralist, in any strong sense of the word. There is no point in getting drawn into squabbles about words; one person's duality is another person's dualism and a third person's non-duality. Where exactly Plato stood as far as the relationship between the empirical plurality and its possible source is concerned, is open to debate. In various dialogues, including specifically his notoriously enigmatic *Parmenides*, he deals with the doctrine of atemporal, aspatial but very real Ideas, in which sensible things participate. Both Unity and Plurality are such Ideas; sensible things participate in both those Ideas at the same time: as far as a single thing is one, it participates in the Idea of Unity; insofar as it consists of various parts, it simultaneously participates in the Idea of Plurality. To the question regarding exactly how this relationship of participation and imitation with the level of Ideas is to be understood, he has not given a single unequivocal answer.

Plato suggested that the many sensible things, each of which are both one and many (i.e. divisible), are intimately related to a plurality of Ideas. These, in turn, are subsumed in one differentiated hierarchy, with the Good as the supreme Idea, and includes the notion that the two worlds of Ideas and of sensible things are neither simply one, nor simply separate. The world of the Ideas is the substantial but non-material, fundamental and highest, true reality; and then there is the derived reality of the world of the senses – the material world of change. Are these worlds essentially the same or different, one or two? What does participation mean? These ideas, multivalent as they are, were carried forward in the Platonic tradition, continuing to exert their seminal influence. Plato did not leave a perfectly clear message, but raised questions haunting future generations. The relationship between the plurality of empirical things and the Principles of Singularising and Pluralising is a problem this essay is also pondering, with a strong intent to steer clear of both monism and a two-tier reality.

The structure of the universe according to *Plotinus* was not only a synthesis of what had gone before, but also a remarkable, creative step forward. As seen in Chapter 9 and Chapter 13, Plotinus' reworking of Plato and Aristotle places 'the One' unambiguously at the apex of the hierarchy of being. The interesting point is the relationship between that One and the multiplicity of particular things. Strongly as Plotinus wished to distinguish the sensible domain of the many and the domain of the One as different, he nevertheless did not see them as completely opposed, but followed Plato's lead of participation by means of imitation. Somehow, for Plotinus, the One is at the same time transcendent to and immanent in the many. Insofar as the One is 'negative' (utterly unpredicable), it is transcendent; insofar as it is 'positive' (the first and ultimate principle of reality), it is immanent in the sense of being the active First Cause, radiating into the various levels of being, making and preserving all things. The One is not the productive cause of the pluralist physical reality in a dynamic event or process in which something dramatically *happens*. It is the immutable pattern timelessly and omnipresently inherent in, and comprehensive of, the many and, in that sense, the cause of the many (Costa 1996:356–385).

Unity, the One (*to Hen*), is the basic condition for all things (*ta panta*) to be. Plotinus opts for a variety of non-dualism of the two domains of the One and the many: neither complete separation (as in Gnosticism) nor complete identity (as in Parmenides), but mutual inherence in which the domain of multiplicity is not original, but utterly derivative from the One. The 'two-ness' of the two domains hovers between the one-ness of identity and the two-ness of separation. He did not resolve this ambiguity theoretically. The One is responsible for both the oneness in the many (as far as the many participate in the oneness of the One) and the manyness of the many; the relationship appears to imply similarity as well as difference. Plotinus seems not only to have relished paradox, but to have become stuck in contradiction (Bales 1982:40–50). Sections such as the first, second and third tractates from his fifth *Ennead*, dealing precisely with our present problem, are profound and thought-provoking, but also quite perplexing. A turn of phrase such as the One being *hen polla*, 'a one-many' (Plotinus 1984:122) (also translated as 'a One-that-is-many') (V.3.15.12) (Plotinus 1991:454) contains in a nutshell the beauty and profundity, as well as the perplexing quality of his thinking.

Plotinus' followers in centuries to come, would not have an easy time reconciling the various accents in his seminal book. On the positive side, it may be said that he was the first to express, in his paradoxical notion of *hen polla*, the idea of a coincidence of opposites that would find its finest expression in the Christian Neoplatonist Nicholas of Cusa (1401–1464). Let me not forget that Plotinus was a mystic who was reported to have experienced a mystical union with the One, ineffably present in the many. The concept 'MM' as used in these reflections, disallows hiding behind 'mystical' feelings and experiences that cannot be backed up by thought. Plotinus himself stood firm on the connection between clear, rational speech and an awareness of dimensions transcending that (Gerson 1994:218ff.). Yet, has he entangled himself in a dilemma from which he did not quite extricate himself? Indeed, he could not quite succeed in harmonising the diverse and essentially divergent strands of the tradition he had inherited.

Let us try out another – clearer, simpler and more consistent – possibility than the one explored by Plotinus: namely that the Principles of Pluralising and Singularising are co-eternal, both emerging from empty Absoluteness and indeed having real effects in Cosmos, and that in Cosmos, plurality is not inferior to, but of equal dignity as unity.

Eriugena stepped into the stream of Christian Neoplatonism after the Tigris of monotheism and the Euphrates of Neoplatonism had already joined several centuries upstream. Included among those before him in the already established tradition of Neoplatonic Christianity, were Marius Victorinus (4th century), Augustine of Hippo (354–430) and Pseudo-Dionysius (period between late 5th century and early 6th century). Our aim here is not to compare Eriugena with his forerunners, but simply to get a taste of his thinking as far as the problem of oneness-manyness, sameness-otherness is concerned.

Following the formulation of Plotinus' *hen polla*, Eriugena wrote of God as *unum multiplex* ('multiple unity') in his *Periphyseon* as he attempted ultimately to reduce the many things to the unity of God, without explaining them away: 'God is a multiple unity in himself' (*deus est enim unum multiplex in se ipso*) (III.674C). He consciously strove to maintain both identity/singularity on the one hand, and difference/multiplicity on the other hand – his second emphasis being rare in medieval Christian theology and philosophy (Moran 1989:71).

In his Book III, which deals with the third aspect of universal nature, namely that which is created and does not create (in other words, the phenomenal world as creation), Eriugena has occasion to discuss the relationship between unity and multiplicity in considerable detail. He (III.651Bff.) deals specifically with numbers. All numbers, he speculates, are causally and eternally in the Monad (*monas*). In the Monad all numbers are indivisible. Yet the singularity of the One is 'both simple and multiple', for It 'pours itself out as multiplicity into all' (*se ipsam in omnes multipliciter diffundit*) (III.652C). The Monad is the beginning, middle and end of all numbers, for from It they proceed, through It they move, and towards It they tend (III.653C). Therefore, they all subsist eternally (*aeternaliter [...] subsistunt*) in the Monad. From the Monad come, first, Two (*Duas*), then Three (*Trias*), and so on (III.654B), each number with its own meaning. In essence, Eriugena's view is thus another instance of the Neoplatonic theory of emanation of the world from the One, without severance of the essential and substantial link between them. Plurality, numbers – like all creatures – are 'both eternal and made' (*aeternos esse et factos*) (III.660D). One of the most critical points in Christian Neoplatonism is obviously to maintain the balance between emanationist continuity and creationist difference. At least in intention Eriugena wanted to safeguard both.

From a Buddhist perspective with its radical Absolutising (emptying) of Oneness, additional pressure would be brought to bear on Eriugena's construction. In the same context as his discussion of the supreme singularity of the Monad and the derived meaning of plurality, Eriugena makes it clear (III.663C–670C) that composite bodies and the elements from which they are made do not come 'from nothing' (*de nihilo*), but from primordial causes which in turn derive eternally from God. At most, he argues, the necessary (understand: compulsory) belief of 'out of nothing' means that there was a time when created things were not; but in another sense, potentially, they subsisted always, eternally, in the Word and Wisdom of God. By implication, all things, being from God, are simultaneously both 'eternal' (*aeterna*) and contingently 'made' (*facta*) (III.666B). Buddhism, of course, does not teach some quasi-substantial 'Nothing' into which things disappear and from which they appear, but an absolute petering out of thinking and being to the extent that Eriugena's talk of Monad and God would become problematic. From a Buddhist point of view (tendentiously extended – that is the argument of this book) the notion of emanation would not necessarily be unacceptable, but the world and its

numbers would not derive from a/the superessential (even if quite thinned) Monad/God, but simply make its appearance on Absolute Horizon via an emerging Principle of Pluralising (and Singularising). The way to align Christianity (and the other monotheistic faiths) with Neoplatonism, and Neoplatonism with Taoism and Buddhism, is to extend monotheism and Neoplatonism towards the radically open, accommodating space of Absoluteness.

Via Eriugena, the notion of the paradoxical coincidence of unity and multiplicity would reach Nicholas of Cusa. His phrase 'coincidence of opposites' (*coincidentia oppositorum*) attempted to capture Eriugena's intention of reconciling singularity and plurality, and the transcendence and immanence of God. In a book of 1462 (*De non aliud*: 'Concerning the Non-different') he named God the 'Non-different'. He proposed this term as a more adequate symbol of ultimacy than 'Being' or 'The One'. Like Eriugena, he attempted to negotiate a way between dualism and pantheism, a way that might succeed in reconciling creationism with emanationism. Indeed, the term 'Non-different' underwrites the notion of singularity, present in even the multiplicity of things. But the problem of saving that accent without sacrificing plurality was not really resolved. With the heretic *Giordano Bruno* (1548-1600) the synthesis of Christianity and Neoplatonism would break down. He identified with the broad Neoplatonic tradition as it found shape from Plotinus to Cusanus, but not with the Christian Trinitarian and Christological orthodoxy. To him God, essentially unknowable, was behind, under and in the plurality of all things; and the world, an emanation of the divine unity.

This detour into the Hellenic-European tradition illustrates that the world seems to compel the MM contemplative to come to terms with, and reconcile, what have here been termed Singularising and Pluralising; and that the classic Western model of reconciliation of Neoplatonism and Christianity was fraught with inner tensions.

■ **'The way begets one; one begets two; two begets three; three begets the myriad creatures' (Lao-Tzu)**

How did the ancient Chinese thinkers and classical authors speak about plurality – the 'ten thousand things' – as they called it? Whereas the monotheistic-Neoplatonic school took refuge in sometimes forced paradox, Taoism presented a more harmonious view. In addition, whereas the former sought a high degree of precision in its formulation, the latter was satisfied with a high degree of suggestive vagueness.

The ancient Chinese MM observed one single eternal principle: the *Tao* ('way'), as functioning 'before' the universe itself and also operative in the universe. The *Tao* is not a monotheistic person and not a monistic substance, but a dynamic,

structuring and normative principle. It is a direction, process, flow, energy, in accordance with which the universe in fact unfolds and a good life should be lived. The *Tao* is both a pre-established and a normative pattern of harmony, guaranteeing co-operation and integration in Cosmic and human existence.

The one, all-comprehensive *Tao* expresses itself in two complementary modes: the *yin* and the *yang* – or rather, a two-in-one: *yin-yang*. These two subsidiary principles (the ‘negative’ and the ‘positive’) interact and intermingle. In their dynamic mutuality, they cause and structure the world and the plurality of individual things in the world, and its functioning in all its processes such as birth and decay. These subsidiary principles are neither dualistically seen as split, opposing forces, nor as monistically conflated, with one being an epiphenomenon of the other. They are complementary opposites, manifestations of the one *Tao* and in their balanced togetherness constituting a systemic whole.

In the wake of this ancient MM, came ‘Lao-Tzu’ (supposedly around the 7th-6th centuries BCE, although ‘his’ book, the *Tao Te Ching*, appeared only around 250 BCE). It is a compilation arising over some centuries rather than the work of one hand, even if the unity of the final work suggests one strong MM mind breathing in it. Lao-Tzu projected the *singular Tao* with its *dual* basic modes operative in the *ten thousand things under the heaven*, back into *Absoluteness*, so to speak – that is, into pure, as yet unrealised potentiality, containing within itself the essence of all being and life. Absolutely empty, utterly quiet, pure potentiality, the *Tao* is not only ‘prior’ to cosmic existence, but also actually ‘present’ ‘in’ reality. The *Tao* is *Te* (the ruling force in cosmos). Finding harmony and union with the ‘pre’- and ‘meta’-personal *Tao* by way of mystical intuition is wisdom, happiness, well-being and true morality; and that is the search of the sage. The multiple are manifestations of One, and One merges with absolute Absoluteness: the One is the stage at which the positive move towards Being has already begun (Izutsu 1983:399).

Chuang-Tzu (probably 4th century BCE) exemplified this trend of thinking in his own inimitable way. In his presentation, the absolute *Tao* transforms itself non-dually into the opposites of *yin* and *yang*, and into the many objects of the world. Every single one of the plurality of things, has its own *Tao* and *Te*, its own manifestation of the law of *yin* and *yang* – that is, its own manner of expressing the eternal *Tao*. The mystic path is the process of return to – that is the discovery of – the origin. The return to the state of absolutely undifferentiated ‘nothingness’ (*hsü*: ‘void’, ‘emptiness’) does not spell the dissolution of each singularity (Girardot 1983:249), and the many things interblend harmoniously, without losing their particular distinctiveness.

The singular being remains. Also, the many things remain. Yet, the singular being is not separated from the many other things by borderlines. They all interpenetrate. The taut thinking, in either-or terms of manyness, oneness and noneness, amounting to a deadly trap, is relaxed. These three harmonise easily.

It appears that the inherent human need to reconcile the one and the many was, in classic Taoism, also expressed as a *coincidentia oppositorum*, but without the stresses and strains of monotheistic Neoplatonic thinking. Undoubtedly, the indefinite nature of the classical Mandarin language was an ally in this fluid type of thinking. Taoism is also more consistent and more thoroughgoing in its apophaticism than the Neoplatonism we have looked at.

These classics suggest a remarkable coherence of Singularising, Pluralising and Totalising, readily reconcilable with Buddhism. In addition, there is the utopian promise of the establishment of an MM context that is alignable with contemporary cultural conditions, such as this essay is pursuing. The thinking taking shape in these reflections cannot escape the charm of this ancient perspective.

■ ***'I think, therefore I am'* (René Descartes)**

The ideas of René Descartes (1596–1650), which finally overthrew the medieval dominance of Aristotelianism-scholasticism, were so successful that they could appear as perfectly obvious to his successors. His thinking would provide a huge impetus for the individualism, humanism and rationalism that would be hallmarks of the modern epoch.

The term 'MM' may not be wholly inappropriate to his thinking, in the sense that, by his own admission, his metaphysics derived from an intense experience of doubt and certainty with mystical undertones (taking place in November 1619), and that it proceeded from a direct, immediate experience (of himself as thinking subject). It is not without reason that his main work (published in 1641) – and developed according to a mathematical psychological methodology – is nevertheless called 'meditations' ('Meditations on first philosophy'; *Meditationes de prima philosophia*) (Descartes 1967:169–235).

Let us proceed to the relationship of singularity and plurality in his model of the world. Both foundational themes in his thinking – God and the immaterial soul – functioned in a type of thinking in which duality was both a structural principle and an unresolved problem.

A first split in Descartes' metaphysics runs between the thinking individual on the one hand, and other human minds and a world at large on the other hand (Versfeld 1940:148–170). The foundational point of departure of his metaphysics is the thinking 'I' (more precisely, the thinking 'mind') as indubitable, intuitively known subject. His 'I' was not a transcendental 'I' as would be the case in Kant and Fichte, but an empirical, psychological 'I'. The plurality of 'other' human subjects has the status of an afterthought, and he provides no intrinsic link between the singularity of his own and the plurality of other minds. The notion of not-self, of otherness and multiplicity, is not put forward as a necessary idea. His claim that his conclusions, drawn from his own experience,

apply to the human race as a whole, seems to be self-evident to him, and he provides no grounds for such a carry-over of his observations. He does not argue the case for a plurality of minds and for a necessary relationship between singularity and plurality. 'I' and other minds are not theoretically reconciled as essentially related; relations between the singular 'I' and 'others' are merely accidental, external. Alterity does not appear to be theoretically necessary. To guarantee knowledge of a world outside his own solitary mind, he postulates the existence of God.

Descartes does not proceed from any kind of field theory, any 'totality', as being at least of equal significance as the notion of singularity (the importance of such an all-inclusive theory will be argued in the next chapter). His model lacks a sense of the wholeness of all things. He is not at home in nature. The solitary empirical, psychological 'I', not organically embedded in a world, is the point of departure of his thinking. Today we are urgently in need of a reintegration of humanity and nature.

Descartes does not really argue the case for singularity, identity, as a fundamental point of departure either, as his famous dictum *cogito ergo sum* ('I think, therefore I am') seems to want to imply. From the awareness 'I think' the conclusion 'I am' (or rather 'my mind is') in the sense of being a certain continuous, singular identity, does not necessarily follow. In Chapter 8 and Chapter 12, we had occasion to ponder that Buddhaghosa very consciously did not draw such a conclusion with its substantialising undertones. Clearly, much hinges on what one takes to be 'proof' in these matters. What is called for in a context such as this, it seems, is not only clarity and distinctness, nor a (quasi-) mathematical or formal logical or scientific type of proof, but the presentation of an item in an entire package of reciprocally implied and complementary items. The package as a whole should be coherent and consistent, and shed light on the reality of experience. In the matter of 'singularity' and 'plurality', Descartes has not presented a convincing case, supported by sufficient argument. He proceeded one-sidedly from the perspective of 'singularity' – a limited perspective, and one that should be developed in intimate relationship with the equally valid and complementary perspectives of 'plurality' and 'totality'.

A second and irreducible split runs between God and the world. A perfect, infinite, omnipotent, omniscient and uncreated substance, God, is to him a clear and distinct, necessary and provable idea, equally evident as his notion of himself (meditation III). In chronological order of knowledge, God comes second. Yet, in ontological order, God is Descartes' first principle. We need not enter into the problem of Descartes' circular argument (he knows God with certainty, but God is the basis of his certainty). The only thing interesting us here is the relationship between God and the world. God is for Descartes the prime substance in the sense of something not in need of anything beyond itself for its existence. To prove the existence of God, Descartes takes recourse in both the ontological and the cosmological strategies. According to the first,

God's real existence is proven by an appeal to the very possibility of the concept of God; according to the second, by an appeal to a world, which can only have been caused (created) by God. From the certainty of the existence and perfect truthfulness of that God, who would not deceive us, follows the certainty of the reality of the external world as God's creation. A God is necessary to impose and guarantee the correlations of one's own mind and otherwise only extrinsically related minds, and material things (bodies). There is no organic connection between God and the world.

A third split is the one between mind (soul) and matter (body) (meditation VI). Descartes intended his theory as presupposed and implied by the Christian orthodox view of the immortality of the soul (Cottingham 1992:236–257). The mind (soul) according to him is an incorporeal substance ('thing' [*res*]), distinct and independent from the body, and he was convinced of its continued existence after physical death, released from the body. On the idea of the indubitable reality of God, follows that the indubitably real world itself consists of two created substances: non-spatial, thinking mind (*res cogitans*) and matter (body) (*res extensa* – the latter extended in space and brought into motion by God). These are two completely different kinds of substances, only meeting in the pineal gland and somehow interacting with each other (hence the fitting description of his view of their relationship as 'interactionist dualism'). Descartes does not demonstrate an essential connection between the thinking mind and an external reality. His criterion of truth (individual, subjective clarity and distinctness) does not necessarily imply any meaningful relation to a reality. One painful and extremely problematic implication of this dualism is that the bodies of animals are purely mechanical assemblages of matter: automata, machines. Hence, Descartes endorsed, and perhaps practised, vivisection. Later materialists (such as Julian de la Mettrie [1709–1751]), not Descartes himself, drew the further conclusion that the human being too, is nothing more than a complicated machine (*l'homme machine*). Descartes himself was not a (materialist) monist, but a dualist in a strong sense. He cannot wholly be blamed for the full-scale materialistic reductionism in much of modern scientific enterprise, including the life sciences and human sciences.

Remarkably, because of this unresolved dualism, Descartes was also a link in the development of the idealist tradition in Western thinking, from Plato to Kant's transcendental idealism and further. He consciously linked up with Plato, adapting the Platonic Ideas (eternal archetypes in the mind of God) to become contents inherent in the human mind, to the extent that the *res cogitans* (thinking mind) could seem to be capable of producing its sensual world without involving external objects at all. The two substances of matter and mind have no organic connection. Here a different route needs to be found: one on which mind and matter are understood to be non-dually, mutually implicit, both arising simultaneously. On the assumption of mind and matter being two separate substances, those following in the footsteps of Descartes

had the unenviable task of explaining how these two might actually at times act in unison, as if connected. Nicolas Malebranche (1638-1715) for example, following an older tradition, explained each such occasion as an instance of direct, immediate intervention by God – a perfect example of a *Deus ex machina* attempt, strategy, device to solve a conundrum. Today, the relationship between matter and mind remains of paramount importance, inviting the exploration of a true integration of the two, without falling back on a supernatural divinity, discontinuous with Cosmos.

Fourthly, although Descartes himself was a believing man who deliberately presented his metaphysics as in line with orthodox Christianity, the split between faith and reason was another duality lurking in his thinking. He spent much of his life avoiding confrontation with the still powerful Church of his day, bearing in mind the fate that befell Galileo in 1633. That is why he went to stay in the Netherlands. In the days of early modernity, traditional Christianity and modern science were not comfortable bedfellows. At the very least, it can be said that he did not integrate reason and faith; to him they were two clearly distinct discourses. His stance of radical doubt and his rationalist choice for reason as the sole basis of evident knowledge and understanding (including being certain of the existence of God) undermined 'faith' as a relatively distinct mode of knowing and understanding, yet reconcilable with reason and science. It opened the door for 'faith' as an uncritical acceptance of irrational pronouncements.

A generation later than Descartes, Blaise Pascal (1623-1662), although critical of Descartes in some respects, was nevertheless a Cartesian in his strong distinction between faith and reason. Whereas Descartes took care not to force the issue, Pascal took an essentially fideist position, accepting that reason and faith were irreconcilable. Without renouncing the logic of reason, he leapt into the arms of faith (with its own 'logic'). After Descartes, Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) was another philosopher to accept a rift between faith (obedience) and reason. Revelation cannot be demonstrated rationally; it can only be accepted in a leap of faith.

Understandable as such manoeuvres may be in circumstances where no way out of a fatal dilemma seems possible, it is not the MM way sought on this journey. A meeting and convergence of the functions of faith and reason is required, without subjecting one to the other. By 'faith' I here mean an attitude of fundamental trust, without accepting the necessary existence of a 'real' Being or Person outside Cosmos in whom trust is placed. 'Faith' is here not intended as the blind acceptance of religiously prescribed articles. It is not understood as an alternative to 'reason' in an unresolvable dilemma. Between the two and reconciling them, a mode of cognition can be sensed that can broadly be called 'intuitive', arising from the depth of the human being's rootedness in Cosmos, and taken to be closely associated with imagination and speculation. We are seeking convergence on the other side of the dualism threatening Descartes' epistemology.

Descartes' model with its various modes of duality is entirely home-grown Western by nature. Yet, in passing, let us not lose sight of cross-cultural, cross-religious structural affinities that have been central to our perspective throughout this essay. A prime candidate for a comparative study of a preoccupation with duality would be the classical Indian school of Samkhya. Comparable to Descartes of much later, Samkhya postulated the duality of consciousness (*purusha*) and matter (*prakriti*). Unlike Descartes, those ancient Indian thinkers denied the existence of God (in their terminology *Ishvara*) as guarantor of reality and truth. Again, like Descartes and unlike other schools from antiquity, they did not postulate empty Absoluteness as the womb of all things, mind as well as matter.

Descartes illustrates the necessity of and the difficulties in connecting Singularising, Pluralising and Totalising in a meaningful triadic pattern, shedding light on our human experience of Cosmos. Setting the tone for much of modern thinking, he also exemplified its limitations.

■ **'I and Thou' (Martin Buber)**

The thinking of the Jewish theologian philosopher Martin Buber (1878–1965) on the dialogical structure of reality, found its finest expression in his book 'I and Thou' (*Ich und Du*) (1958 [1923]). It flowered in a long tradition of magnificent Hebrew-Jewish monotheistic reflection, demanding exclusive allegiance and devotion to a single God. This monotheism eschewed the manyness of heathen polytheism and, at least by implication, also the Indian and Greek monism. It adhered to the twoness of a primary, personal Creator God on the one hand, and a secondary opposite – or rather a concentric twoness – on the other hand. The secondary twoness is made up of God's human and sub-human creation and, as central focal point, God's elected people, Israel, amidst the rest of humankind. The long history of Hebraism-Judaism was the response to the call: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is One' (Dt 6:4). God is One, and Other. This monotheism did not withdraw from history as monism did, but was fully immersed in the historical process; its God acted in history. That was a great strength. Additionally, it provided a soil for what is understood as 'mysticism' in these reflections.

As has become clear, this essay does not reserve the word 'mysticism' for a 'oneness' or 'identity' of contemplative(-and)-God. MM is alignable not only with Singularising, but also with Pluralising, particularly in the form of an intense dialogical relationship with a personal God. In this tradition stand not only a David with his devotional songs, but also a Jesus and a Muhammad with their respective experiences of ultimacy, and their followers. Here I restrict myself to the Hebrew-Jewish trunk. At the outset, it must be noted that in the case of monotheistic mysticism, confronted by Neoplatonism, the problem of unity-duality remains: does the mystic attain complete union with God, or does the

ontological duality remain intact? In Jewish mysticism (as is the case in the other one-God faiths) reports of both outcomes can be found. Largely, Jewish mysticism emphasised the otherness of God, either in the sense of a manifest living presence, or an eternally unknowable, hidden God. Only a small minority sought or claimed a complete absorption into God, with pantheistic implications (Scholem 1955 [1941]:122f, 221ff.).

An earlier theologian-philosopher, Moses Maimonides (1135–1204), seemed to have established the unbridgeable ontological gap between God and the world once and for all – yet the word ‘mysticism’ as used here is not inapplicable to him either (Faur 1999). Partly in reaction to Maimonides (Tirosh-Samuels 2003:218–257), mystical Kabbalah from the 13th century onwards sought its own way between the sea of dualism and the rock of monism, as can be observed in the teachings of the two great 16th century Kabbalah teachers in Safed: Moses Cordovero (1522–1570) and Isaac Luria (1534–1572). Cordovero refused to imagine God and the world as separate entities. Well before Spinoza, he expressed the non-dual secret of all things in the phrase: ‘God is all reality, but not all reality is God’ (Scholem 1955 [1941]:253). The concept *Tsimtsum* in Lurianic Kabbalism expresses the idea that God contracts in order to make an Other, the world, possible; in the beginning there was only God; at present the world and the relationship between God and the world are fragmented; but in the end, all things will return to God. Such approximations of the mystery of non-monistic non-duality in words remain elusive. These Jewish mystics attempted to maintain the non-negotiables of Jewish theology. Yet, bound to non-monistic monotheism, they also shied away from dualism and pluralism. A question concerns the extent to which this delicate balancing act with its fair share of seemingly unresolvable ambiguities was the outcome of the meeting of Jewish creationism with Neoplatonic Aristotelian emanationism, (cf. Pessin 2003:91–110) or whether it was a natural development arising from monotheism itself. It was probably a measure of both. The paradoxes of singularity and plurality are inescapably given with every serious effort to understand the world and human existence in it in relation to what may transcend it.

In Buber’s book, the mutual implication of the moments of Singularising and Pluralising can be observed. His initial point of departure (in his doctoral thesis) had been the notion of singularity in a mystical context, yet he increasingly came to see the individual as essentially involving encounter. He would write (Buber 1958 [1923]:16, 32, 44) that there is no I taken in itself, but only the I of the primary word I-Thou and the I of the primary word I-It. In the beginning is relation. Through the Thou a man becomes I.

Buber parted from Orthodox Jewish religion in his youth, but he would remain loyal to Judaism and established a fruitful relationship with Hasidic mysticism. His model in ‘I and Thou’ was particularly akin to Hasidism’s emphasis on individual dedication to God, not excluding communal solidarity and

involvement in life with its joys and sorrows. A significant difference between Buber and the classic Hebrew model is that he does not emphasise the people of Israel as God's primary opposite, but the individual human person, regardless of religious affiliation. This is the existentialist side of his thinking, derived from Kierkegaard and others. Nevertheless, without naming Israel, his model leaves space for collective singularities. Every great culture, he says, 'rests on an original relational incident, on a response to a Thou made at its source' (ibid.:75).

Buber's first distinction is the one between 'I' and 'It', even if he connects them to form one word: 'I-It'. This is the world of objects and facts, of experiencing and using, of science, of institutions and economics and the state, in an end-means scheme and a chain of causality, involving no mutual relation. Here the I is individual, differentiated from other individualities. It is separation. The human being cannot live without It. This is part of the basic truth of the human world, but it is not the whole truth.

The second duality is between 'I' and 'Thou', also combined to form one word: 'I-Thou'. This is the realm of relation, and it concerns our intercourse with nature, our relation with human beings – and with 'spiritual beings'. This is the realm of spirit, of art and religion, of freedom and destiny. Here the I is person in relation to other persons.

A third duality is found between the worlds of 'It' and 'Thou'. Both 'It' and 'Thou' suggest primarily an attitude to our surroundings, therefore Thou may become It, and It may become Thou. The world is twofold, in accordance with the human being's twofold attitude. Buber sees this division as inherent in creation (ibid.:39). More than a useful but slightly overworked ideal type, this duality amounts to a basic split in life. In this Buber is a typically modern person, trapped in the dualism of mind and matter, as has become clear in, for example, Descartes, to continue in existentialism. This is a rift that needs to be overcome. Buber does not provide a picture of integral wholeness, and does not stretch forward towards Totality.

A fourth duality with its own unique shades runs between the human world and 'God'. God, to him, is the extension of the 'Thou' rail of his parallel track, strictly not of the 'I' rail. Buber speaks of an eternal Thou (Buber 1958 [1923]:99f.), not perceived by us. Nevertheless, he says, we feel addressed by a Thou out of a deeper mystery, out of the darkness, and we answer (ibid.:61). It is true, one must readily admit, that clothing the ultimate mystery as a Thou, addressing it as Thou, is a basic human trait, observable in all cultures and religions, and profoundly understandable. Speaking from within the Jewish tradition, Buber describes this relation as being chosen and choosing (ibid.:101). The old problem of union versus duality of mystic and God recurs, we find on his pages. In this encounter, he makes it clear, the I is not to be given up, and remains indispensable in this relation. God is the wholly Other; He is also the wholly Same and Present

in all things. Buber admits the possibility of a mystical relationship in which the relation of I and Thou is not dissolved (ibid.:111ff.). The essential features of the ancient Hebrew faith remain intact. The Hasidic love of the ordinary world surfaces.

The entire history of Jewish mysticism is contained in Buber's writing. God comprises (he says in panentheistic style) but 'is' not (pantheistically) the universe or my Self. He brooks no monism and no pantheism. God is a Person – that is, he enters into a direct relation with humankind (ibid.:168). This chapter of ours can accommodate such accents, but as part of a larger picture. Buber not only did not reach out sufficiently towards a Totality including but not reducible to I-Thouness, but also did not peer back sufficiently into the darkness of Absoluteness, beyond Thou. His mystery and darkness are part of theistic apophatic language.

Totalising

■ §43 Wholeness

Totalising is put forward here as not merely a resultant derivative of Singularising and Pluralising, but a third emerging Eternal Principle. What we are touching on now has an epistemological as well as an ontological side.

Epistemologically, analytical thought focuses on singularity and plurality, on the distinguishing marks of things and the differences between things. It takes things apart, concentrates on aspects. The totalising focus is associative, synthetic and synoptic: seeing things as related. Both types of thinking are essential; dissociated from each other, analysis becomes barren, synthesis swollen. In the history of MM, the emphasis seems to shift between analytical disjunction and associative conjunction. Every system, having become closed, implodes from within or is exploded from without, and new attempts at wholeness arise. Today there appears to be a new need for an integral vision, and it needs to be consciously for today, not for all times. In their own way, these reflections seek such wholeness. By realising its open-endedness and provisionality, any holistic theory may hope eventually to pass on in the large process of things, having been a brief but perhaps relevant moment in an ever-changing context.

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Ontologically, the world appears essentially relational, organic. Twoness (and more) can become more than a mere helter-skelter juxtaposition of fragments, more than an incoherent mass of things; it can become a bonded relationship. Cosmos is about togetherness, adding up to gestalts, hierarchical wholes, contexts ('woven-together'-nesses) of ever-increasing size and complexity. This is not always clearly the case, or at least we cannot always pick up meaningful patterns, restricted as our normal registration apparatus is. Yet without wholeness, there would be no world, no life, no consciousness, no meaning. Empirical totalisations come in all sizes and shapes, all drifting towards inclusion as Totality in all-inclusive Horizon. Conditionalistic Totality in Horizon (CTH) condenses that to which this exploration leads.

Cosmos is a social phenomenon. It is shot through with conflict as singularities meet other singularities and totalities other totalities in situations of plurality. Such conflict simultaneously seeks resolution. Through nihilation, dominance or subsumption in larger totalities, it seeks wholeness. The relationality includes the mutual interpenetration, dynamic involvement and interaction of the individual parts making up wholes, of parts and wholes, and of wholes and wholes in ever-expanding nexus. The relationships between and among the constituent parts (each a pattern of parts) and between the whole patterns and the parts, become ever more subtle, the interpenetrations become more widespread and fine-tuned. Cosmos appears as a multitude of momentarily poised but ever-changing, ever-shifting constellations, ruled by pan-relationality, which we term Totalising. Under scrutiny, every seemingly solid constituent part disintegrates into smaller parts, at the bottom scale of things manifesting merely as flashes of events, petering out on Horizon. The same happens at the top scale of things.

Human beings seek totality, which is not mere eclecticism or synthesis, and not merely meeting halfway in compromise, but integration, which by its very nature intends and tends towards transcendence to higher levels as far as is attainable. From a higher vantage point, ravines and crevasses lower down are less threatening, and observed as part of the mountain, to be crossed and understood synoptically from higher up. From such a point of view, for example, the rifts between science and mysticism, between various religions, between various mysticisms, and between seemingly contradictory positions such as theism and atheism, appear less threatening than at a lower altitude. To remain with the last one for a moment: contemporary 'theism' and 'atheism' are two sides of the same coin. They share assumptions, in terms of which theism says 'is', and atheism, 'isn't'. From a higher altitude, a dimension beyond that dilemma comes into sight.

Life is full of stresses and conflicts, but there is a difference between those that are merely destructive and those that may be constructive and creative, while they are reaching out to something greater such as reconciliation, healing and peace. This is a utopian, 'messianic', 'bodhisattvic'

element in a totalistic vision of the world, yet one shrinking back from the achievement of an end. This vision beckons us away from the views of a Parmenides and some Upanishads, according to which the whole is just eternally what it is. It also leads us away from the idea of a restoration of all things to a primordial condition (*apokatastasis panton*) as final closure, or a final victory of one force over another, after which nothing happens. No, there is an element of incompleteness, openness forward, in the eternal nature of Arche itself. Eventually – at last, possibly – Devadatta will become a Buddha (*Lotus Sutra*); he carries this destiny in him, but will this performative possibility definitely become actuality? The movement of things is not a straight line nor a circle but a spiral, including a large element of freedom and therefore possible failure. Nevertheless, the movement is not an eternal return to what has been; every return is more. Emptiness and form (better formulated as emptying and forming) presuppose each other in a non-ending non-dual process achieving an impermanent optimal, open-ended balance of forces, not a closed-down stasis. The dialectic of Origin and End, of integration followed by and implied in disintegration and transcendence, continues.

On a limited scale, such totalities reach a stage of provisional finality. As totalistic synopses become larger, finality becomes more elusive. There may be a tendency towards homeostasis, but the more complex those relationships become, the more unattainable homeostasis seems to become. It is constantly deferred. Pictures of totality are constantly in the process of breaking down, either from the inside by forces inherent in the tendency to reach only a provisional measure of stable balance in themselves, otherwise by outside forces, knocking them over or luring them into larger patterns.

The human need for wholeness is here taken to be part of an inherently dynamic process towards an essentially open Horizon. History and experience show that to curtail that need prematurely, leads to fixation and closure. The human search for inclusive truth becomes dogma, which by its very nature is exclusive, narrow. The search for free communion and community becomes institutionalised church and state with their fixed borders. The search for genuine authority becomes power, force and violence in one way or another. Beware of anything claiming to be the final truth.

The implication of the view put forward here runs counter to an assumed principle ('the principle of plenitude') that every possibility must eventually be actualised. Accepting such a principle would imply the eventual closing down of the Archeic process. This essay does not sense the world as moving towards realisation of a plenitude of potentialities. No fixed set of initial possibilities needs to be assumed. The movement emerging from Eternity, finding in our Cosmos one relative formation is inexhaustible. The process is absolutely open. Absoluteness has no boundaries. Totality is neither perfect beginning nor completed, perfected end.

Above, I have referred to the intricate relationships between wholes and parts. Singularities are not merely an endless supply of grist to the mill of totalities. It is not one-way traffic, from singular via plural to whole. Singularities have a dignity of their own. The Principle of Totalising implies that in their own way, singularities contain the totalities of which they are part, like a single drop of water reflecting the one lying next to it, and the sun, and the universe. Each singular thing is *pars pro toto*, reflecting the implicit connectedness of all things, like a cell containing and representing the body of which it is part. Each singular moment of time encapsulates everything that has gone before and anticipates everything that may follow. It is for one brief instant a 'now' in which everything hangs together, but in its very existence that moment is annihilated; every now-here derives its glory not only from its own singularity, but from its being part of totality.

At the level of the human being in this perspective, the individual appears to be neither a mere heap, bundle, mass or aggregate of fleeting constituents, nor a perdurable substantial entity. The human singularity is an organic whole, better integrated, or less so, and capable of development to a higher level. The human individual is not sempiternal in any sense (nor is any part of it, such as a soul), but appears from and disappears in an eventually trackless space without mark or definition. Nevertheless, 'before' that occurs, and in the wider context of the great emptiness, a human singularity can achieve wholeness. Personal growth means increasing realisation of one's embeddedness in and response-ability to all things; and that means increasing acceptance of one's responsibility for all things in the contexts of smaller and larger societies, finding their culmination in the community of universal humanity and universal life.

A social, political implication of this perspective for our contemporary world is the search for a balance of individual freedom and a loose, open-ended coherence in ever larger constellations, yet treasuring the smaller, constitutive constellations of language, culture and religion. It means the overcoming of racism and sexism in all its forms. The ultimate horizon of this view is not only humanity, but also the community of all living beings. This implies the overcoming of the human-centred exploitation of nature by humankind and the discovery and development of the interconnectedness of all things. Such an eco-political theoretical perspective and a praxis derived from it, are the paramount needs of our time.

■ §44 Tortoise, sparrow, weaver, bee

The tortoise hatches, shell and all, lives in it, dies in it, finds protection in it and withdraws into it at any sign of danger. They are the religious conservatives and probably exclusivists, if not in theory then in practice and sentiment, with all the attendant attractions and dangers of such a position. The sparrow

concocts its nest from all sorts of bits and pieces, feathers, twigs, cotton fluff – not exactly a work of art, but one never sees an unhappy sparrow, and they raise their young in such nests. Such people are the happy eclectics, the syncretists. Perhaps their achievements are not the greatest, but they do provide shelters and create homes. The weaver finch, connecting twigs and other useful stuff, constructs elaborate nests. These are works of art, engineering feats. Such people are the synthesists, creating new and often impressive constructs by interweaving existing material. Then, there are the bees, flying far and wide to collect nectar from various sources, absorbing and processing it, to produce from within their own bodies precious honey. Such creative ones (yes, ones) are rare.

■ Proclus

In spite of the scholastic hardening in Proclus' Elements of theology ('the first extant rigorous metaphysical system') (Hathaway 1982:123; cf. Kordig 1983:114ff.) of what, in Plotinus, had been a flowing movement of thought, a reading of Proclus' masterpiece in order to uncover his intuition of totality, becomes a rewarding undertaking. Attempting an account of a complex world, seen as a Totality, his system is extremely complex in itself, and not without ambiguities and obscurities. As discovered in previous chapters, the final category of Neoplatonism was the substantialist One, not empty Absoluteness. While taking that into account, it appears that Proclus demonstrates profound insight into the dynamics of Totalisation, which he expresses with great formal rigour.

To him the pre-existing First Principle, the One as such, lies beyond the category of wholeness (*to Holon*) (73, 100)¹. Wholeness occupies an intermediate position between the One and the phenomenal world. Reality fans out from strong simplicity (the One) through wholeness to weak multiplicity; wholeness is re-achieved by returning from the scatter towards the utter simplicity of the One.

Existent things (*panta ta onta*) are not only related to eternal wholeness and the One, but also to one another – either as wholes comprehending parts, or as parts comprehended in wholes (66). Wholeness is related to part in three ways, in the following descending order: whole-before-parts (*holon pro ton meron*), whole-of-parts (*holon ek ton meron*) and whole-in-the-part (*holon en to merei*) (67). The latter means that every whole is implicit in each of its constituent parts. Conversely, in ascending order, every whole-in-the-part is a part of a whole-of-parts (68), and every whole-of-parts is a part of whole-before-the-parts (69). From what has been said, it follows that every

1. The bracketed numbers in this summary refer to the propositions in his classic book.

whole is an existing thing in that it participates in Being, but not every existing thing is a whole (73).

In the system of Proclus the triad Being (*On*), Life (*Zoe*) and Intelligence (*Nous*) fit in at a lower level than the *Henads*. These primordial dimensions are three 'successive' stages in the unfolding of cosmos from the One (101), and they are three 'synchronic' aspects of a single reality (103). 'Successive' here does not imply quasi-temporal sequence, but vertical, sub-ordinate dependence; by 'synchronic' is intended Proclus' notion of horizontal, co-ordinate interdependence. As far as 'succession' is concerned: each is predominant (without excluding the other two) at a certain stage of the emergence of things from the One. As far as 'synchronicity' is concerned: each of the three essentially implies both of the others. Proclus is palpably struggling to articulate a holistic vision, that mission impossible – but inevitable, and necessary. He seems to intend a table of vertical and horizontal categories capable of organising the relations among all things phenomenal and transcendent. This is totalistic intuition at its most intense. It is noteworthy that as he gropes for a holistic understanding, the notion of threeness suggests, at a symbolic level, interconnectedness beyond the juxtaposition of duality.

In proposition 103 Proclus points out that at the phenomenal level 'all things are in all things (*panta en pasin*), but in each according to its proper nature' (Proclus 1963 [1932]:92).

Proclus seems to suggest the following:

- The One is constitutively present lower down in the *Henads*.
- And at a next level, in each of the three aspects of the triad of Being, Life and Intelligence.
- The levels of the *Henads* and of Being-Life-Intelligence are not reciprocally constitutively present higher up in the One.
- The latter triad as a whole is mirrored in each of its three constituent aspects. All three aspects are mutually implicit as cause and consequent in each of the others, and each contains the other two.
- By implication, every singular thing at the level of empirical one-many is implicitly and interpenetratingly present in every other singular empirical thing (103).

In his search for a 'total' view of all of reality, Proclus stands in a long Greek tradition. The Stoics, for example, saw the individual entity as a part of an organic whole, but they do not seem to have articulated the idea that 'part' and 'whole' are mutually implicit, as would be the case in Proclus. They allowed for no reciprocity in the relationship between the many parts and the one whole. Proclus also exemplifies a search that would be continued after him, a search to account for the world holistically – whether in MM or scientific terms (or rather, in both). As for science, the broad approaches of systems and complexity theories in the sciences today, express the same need for

connecting, inclusive, comprehensive complexes. An MM such as Neoplatonism, scanning an ultimate, all-inclusive, all-integrative horizon, seeking the interlocking and interinclusion of many systems – and always open, shifting and never final – would move one or more steps further than scientific systems, but not necessarily be incompatible with them. It aims at a most inclusive context, a most comprehensive matrix, allowing for reciprocal connections among all sorts of individual entities and all sorts of smaller and larger wholes, including MM and science (cf. Fideler 2002:103ff.; Mayer 1982:317ff.; Smith 2002:1ff.).

In previous chapters, I have balanced and weighed up Vedanta and the Neoplatonic system with its ultimate category of the One, against Buddhism and Taoism with their empty Absoluteness. So let me turn to a Buddhist writer once again, and this time, pay my respects to an exceptionally fine MM figure from China.

■ Fa-tsang

Roughly two centuries after Proclus, the Chinese master, Fa-tsang, also lived at a time of destiny – not a time of decay as was the case with the Hellene, but of construction. An epoch was coming together. His thinking was not a last flower, the final synthesis of an ancient, dying tradition, but a first bloom, a pioneering statement of a budding totalistic vision. Politically, the T'ang Dynasty (618–907) under Empress Wu (625–705) was approaching its zenith. Philosophically and mystically, T'ien-t'ai and Hua-yen thinkers were harmonising and systematising a great variety of teachings imported from India over several centuries, making something new and original out of them. Fa-tsang indeed saw all previous Buddhist schools as finding their culmination in Hua-yen. This was not unlike Proclus' attitude vis-à-vis all previous Greek-Roman (Hellenic) philosophies. Whereas Proclus was a rationalist and a scholastic, Fa-tsang was an imaginative person with an uncanny didactic talent to present profound MM points in simple, terse, delightful analogies. His totalistic vision was, I venture to say, the culmination, philosophically and historically, of Buddhism. Of all the MM figures visited in this orientation, I admire none more than Fa-tsang. The model taking shape here would also appreciate the support of nobody more than that of this 7th–8th century Chinese monk.

Fa-tsang's Hua-yen philosophy was driven by the ancient Buddhist intuition of finding an MM way beyond the dilemma of eternalism and nihilism. He also wanted to overcome the Abhidharma view of the human person made up of a large number of quantum-like flashes (*dharmā*), not really adding up to an organic view of human personality and existence. His thinking seems driven by the Mahāyāna pathos for a love including the world as an entirety and every single being in it. He managed to harmonise a positive appreciation of the small, singular thing with the whole in a totalistic vision of nature. All of

phenomenal reality (ontology) and all thought (epistemology) he saw as emerging from, existing in and receding into emptiness.

In his *Chin Shih-tzu Chang* ('*Essay on the golden lion*') (Ch. VIII) Fa-tsang distinguishes three pairs of dialectically contrasting yet complementary characteristics as the basic ontological categories: totality (wholeness, universality, unity) and singularity (particularity, individuality); similarity (identity) and diversity (difference); and integration (conjunction, coordination) and disintegration (disjunction). Anticipating Niels Bohr's motto *contraria sunt complementa* (Verdu 1981:38):

- The first pair of inter-inclusive correlatives moves at the level of phenomenal reality. It expresses the simultaneous need to envision the phenomenal world as one whole, and to give the plurality of singularities making up that phenomenal whole, their due.
- The second pair of opposites addresses the relationship between the level of ultimacy (in Buddhist terms, emptiness) and phenomenal reality. Between these two, a relationship of simultaneous complete coincidence (identity) and transcendence pertains. Emptiness is the true essence of the phenomenal world. Emptiness and the phenomenal world are the same, identical. Yet there is also a differentiation between emptiness and the phenomenal world. There is, of course, also a differentiation between the many singularities constituting the totality of the phenomenal world (the second side of the first pair). Each phenomenal singularity is suffused with, identical with, the same essential emptiness. This second pair of opposites (identity and difference) does not annul the first pair (totality and singularity). In the identity of the phenomenal world with emptiness, the plurality of singularities of the phenomenal world is not robbed of significance, but, on the contrary, is provided with ultimate significance. The difference between this vision (informed, it must be emphasised, by Taoism) on the one hand, and the monistically inclined visions of Neoplatonism and Vedanta on the other hand, is testable on the tongue. In Taoism-Buddhism, Cosmos is affirmed. This is a great stride beyond not only Neoplatonism, but also early Buddhism. I believe Fa-tsang has the edge over his Neoplatonic and Vedantic contemporaries, Proclus and Sankara. Emptiness is not divisible, he argues – and yet it differentiates itself in a most significant way.
- The third pair of opposites deals with the dimensions of integration and disintegration as they are operative at both levels, that is, of ultimacy and the phenomenal world. 'Integration' refers to the coordination of both poles in both of the first two pairs, and to the mutual coincidence of ultimacy and phenomenality. 'Disintegration' refers to the disjunction of both poles in both of the first two pairs, and to the non-identity of ultimacy and phenomenality. Furthermore, integration and disintegration are conjoined in their own dialectical relationship. All six opposites are themselves parts, conjoined with one another and with the complete six-fold system of

categories as mutually implicit and mutually constitutive, and contrasting with one another and the system as whole. Each singular category receives its value from those relationships.

Fa-tsang on occasion illustrated his vision with the example of a room filled with light. He had a room covered with 10 mirrors on all four walls, and in the four corners, against the ceiling and on the floor. In the centre, he positioned a statue of the Buddha, with a torch alongside it. Then he lit the torch. Infinite reflections occurred within reflections; Buddha-nature (emptiness) was everywhere. To top it off, Fa-tsang took a small crystal ball, held it up in his hand and explained (Chang 1971):

Just as all the mirrored reflections in the room are collectively and individually reflected in this small ball, so all phenomenal things in the world in their non-obstructed mutual reflections as well as the Buddha-nature, are reflected in all and each of them. They are non-obstructedly reflected in each singular phenomenal thing. (p. 27)

In another famous simile (the golden lion) (in Ch. VII of his Essay) (Fung 1953:349–351), he suggests 10 mutually implying principles, overlapping with the six categories outlined above. They boil down to the following:

- Ultimacy (emptiness) and the phenomenal world coincide without being monistically identical. Form is emptiness, and emptiness is form, to speak with the Heart Sutra. In his analogy: there is no lion (temporal Cosmos) apart from the gold (Absoluteness), and no gold apart from the lion. In one sense, lion is gold, and gold is lion; in another sense lion is not gold, and gold is not lion. The twosome gold (Absoluteness) and lion (Cosmos) are mutually inclusive, without coinciding undialectically. They are neither monistically one and the same thing, nor dualistically separate; they relate non-dualistically, non-monistically.
- Each phenomenal singularity contains each and all other singularities in the plural. The singular presupposes the many, as much as the many are grounded in the singular. In mutual interpenetration and inter-inclusion, all are each and each is all. Each embraces and is embraced by all (is 'mixed') – yet, precisely so, it is uniquely itself ('pure'). Eye 'is-not' ear, and foot 'is-not' tail ... and yet eye 'is' ear and foot 'is' tail.
- Singular parts and totalistic whole are similarly mutually constitutive. Eye, ear, nose and so on, each in its singular uniqueness, is constituted by the face as a correlated whole, and vice versa. This face as a whole is this face because of precisely those singularities in their individual uniqueness. This eye makes this face; this face makes this eye. It is greatly significant that Fa-tsang manages to transcend what was a temptation to early Theravāda Buddhism, namely to shy away from substantialism to a degree inhibiting the notion of 'wholeness', and settling for the notion of a human being as merely an 'aggregate'.
- Yet individual singularities remain free and uninhibited, and they are not subsumed under one heavy super identity. Each is all and all are each, and yet each remains itself and immediate to emptiness. Each thing contains

every other thing; they all run through each other freely, without obstruction. Each single hair is gold – and precisely because of that, an irreplaceable singularity. In our vocabulary: each singularity is uniquely significant because of its being immediate to Absoluteness.

- MM attention can focus on Absoluteness (the gold) or on Cosmos (the lion) with its myriads of singularities (single hairs). The one is foreground and the other background, one prominent and the other obscure. Alternatively, the MM focus could – and that is the superior perspective – focus on both together and simultaneously, each-in-the-other. Then the dialectical identity of conventional phenomenal reality and ultimacy is realised cognitively. That is enlightenment.
- Complexity and simplicity are mutually constitutive. On closer inspection, each simple singularity (each part of the lion) turns out to be extremely complex. The whole is not a static inert mass but a dynamic interplay of minutiae of infinite complexity.
- There is no closed totality. Every singularity in the Cosmic totality contains and reflects infinitely multiplying containments and reflections in a never-closed process. The whole lion is present in every singular hair. All the lions in all singular hairs are repeated in every singular hair, without end.
- Cosmic totality implies another, higher totality involving Absoluteness as well. The levels of ultimate insight (involving the totality of Absoluteness and-Cosmos) and relative insight (involving Absoluteness-only or Cosmos-only) are mutually implied. Looking at the gold-only and not the lion is ignorance; looking at the lion-only is ignorance. Seeing gold-and-lion in their essential coincidence-and-distinction is insight. Conventional understanding and ultimate understanding are mutually implicit and constitutive. The relative is not to be despised or devalued, neither ontologically nor cognitively.
- Past, present and future coincide in a single instant of time. Each of these three consists of past, present and future; they are nine moments, each with distinct uniqueness. Then, the tenth: the harmonious interconnection of the nine, allows each to retain its uniqueness. It is the lion all over again, but now in temporal perspective. The lion undergoes production and destruction from instant to instant. Thus Fa-tsang postulates a 'now' (the tenth moment), but how different it is from the undifferentiated eternal present of a Parmenides or a Sankara.
- The tenth principle seems to be a gesture towards Yogācāra, and perhaps characterises Fa-tsang's vision as a variety of objective idealism: all is derived from the evolution of mind. Yet, in his case, even that disappears into emptiness.

Another variant of Asian Buddhism would deploy the same totalistic structure: the Japanese Soto Zen of Dogen (1200–1253), some five centuries later and contemporary with Aquinas in Christian Europe. Emptiness (the Buddha nature) is absolute – but even so all the phenomena of the universe, without exception,

are expressions of 'it' (Kim 1987). The ordinary 'is' the absolute; the symbol 'is' the symbolised; there is no gap between the two. Absoluteness and the phenomenal are not monistically the same; they are not dualistically different; they are dialectically, non-dualistically, non-monistically, 'identical' in utter compression. With reference to traditional theistic terminology, one might formulate: there is no 'transcendence' which then also, in addition, happens to be 'immanent in' phenomenal reality; 'transcendence' and 'immanence' coincide.

■ G.W.F. Hegel

□ context

Coming from the clarity of Fa-tsang, it takes perseverance to disentangle the opaque prose and convoluted thinking of the third totalising champion of an epoch I wish to turn to: Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831). Yet the opacity of his writing conceals a heroic attempt to collect his own time – modernity – in the form of comprehensive and consistent thought. Hegel was system builder par excellence. One is involuntarily impressed by the scope of his interests, erudition and synthesising power. He stands much closer to our present world than the previous two. His thinking and writing are one heaving movement, like life itself as he saw it. That is the way he wanted it, and it commands respect.

In keeping with what has gone before in this § I shall, in an overview of Hegel's teaching, refer to one of his texts. This will be neither his first, rambling book (*Phänomenologie des Geistes* [1807]), nor his second and greatest work (*Wissenschaft der Logik* [1812–1816]), but his own summary of his entire system: *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften* ('Encyclopaedia of the philosophical sciences'. The first edition of this work [referred to here as 'I'] appeared in 1817; the second [II] in 1827; the third [III] in 1830. Below the Roman number will refer to the edition used, and the immediately following number to the relevant section in that edition.

This interview will revolve around one question: would the concept 'MM' somehow apply to him and if so, how? The following tendential rendition of the essence of his system as he defined it at the height of his powers will, for reasons of space, have to be ahistorical, that is, without relating it to the development of his own thinking over time and in his other works, and without relating it to the history of the reception of his work. Hegel can be and has been interpreted in many ways, for which his style of writing must largely be blamed. Since his death, several 'Hegels' have emerged and mighty streams of acclaim and critical scholarship exist. Yet, even some of the most critical approaches, such as Marxism, build on Hegel. My interpretation follows generally sympathetic attempts such as those of Copleston (1999[1963]) and Seidel (1976), and more recent attempts such as that of Dunham et al. (2011).

Hegel did not know Fa-tsang, but he knew Proclus and wrote insightfully on him.

Hegel's problem (the relationship between Idea and Nature) is similar to Fa-tsang's problem (the relationship between gold and lion); and both Hegel and Fa-tsang boldly see the schools preceding them in their respective traditions as culminating in their respective totalisations. The basic structures of their models are remarkably similar. Yet, as far as gold-lion is concerned, Fa'tsang's vision does not seem to contain the notions of process and progress, of externalisation, alienation and return, as is the case with Hegel. Hegel's thinking has a developmental aspect, which may seem lacking in Fa-tsang. If that were the case, the prize would go to Hegel. However, here one should be careful. Fa-tsang conjures up an impressive correlation of past, present and future in which the element of futurity is ultimately, harmoniously interconnected and balanced with past and present. This he does in a manner that allows each to retain its distinctiveness: past and future, remembrance and anticipation, from present instant to instant. With Hegel, the teleological element dominates.

Hegel's *Encyclopaedia* was his equivalent of Proclus' *Elements of theology*: his compendium of MM wisdom for an age, the gist of it all. Also, in content and structure Hegel was related to Proclus. They share the passion for a consummate system. As the Neoplatonic One manifests Itself and returns to Itself, so in Hegel the Idea alienates itself in Nature and returns to Itself through successive dialectical steps. In Hegel the return is also an advance. Another telling difference between the Neoplatonism of Proclus and the Idealism of Hegel is that Hegel saw finite Nature as a constitutive condition for the self-realisation of the Idea, whereas in the case of Neoplatonism, the One is perfect from the outset, and the finite (matter, nature) occupies a quite different and indeed awkward and embarrassing position. Hegel sees the teleological process as real becoming, movement and transition; whereas the ancient worldview, exemplified in Proclus, was ahistorical and static hierarchic, the 'modern' worldview, championed by Hegel, is historical, progressive, to the core.

Hegel wished to articulate the gains of modernity, including its science, in terms of an anti-positivist 'Idealist' framework, which, in spite of differences, overlapped with the concerns of Romanticism. This made him part of the broad company including diverse thinkers such as Von Baader, Fichte and Schelling and the MM poets Friedrich Hölderlin and Novalis (G.P.F. von Hardenberg). Hegel distanced himself from what he considered Romanticism's aestheticism and emphasis on feeling; he took his stand on reason.

□ epistemology

Following certain leads in Kant and Fichte, yet also correcting them dramatically, an underlying epistemological assumption of Hegel's system is the reliability of the human mind as source of understanding the ultimate nature of things. There is no gap between a thing-in-itself and the human ability to think.

Hegel's entire speculative historical approach was a post-Kantian attempt to heal that rift. At this point, it is important to note that by human mind he did not intend the singular individual human mind, but a collective human 'spirit', which is not merely the product of individuals put together. In this respect he goes against the grain of modern thinking (here following in the footsteps of Rousseau) with its idea of larger human wholes as the outcomes of 'contracts' made by individuals, and of the common good as the sum of private goods. On the contrary, for Hegel the collective human spirit constitutes the individual. His totalistic interest becomes apparent from the outset, as he in effect awards priority to what here has been termed the Principle of Totalising. It is noteworthy that Hegel does not present the collectivity of the human mind as existing independently of individuals, and insists on the very real interdependence of the many human individuals.

Whatever opens up metaphysically, must according to Hegel, proceed from the assumption of the human mind as gateway. Since his earliest studies at Tübingen, it was impossible for him to fall back on any claim to supernatural revelation, claiming to give information on God apart from the human mind, and captured in scripture, dogma or institution. He called the latter 'positive religion'. In unfolding his panoramic vision, Hegel did not bypass the fact that religion is humanly constituted. He supported the rejection by Fichte of Kant's notion of an unknowable thing-in-itself, and took the bold step of indeed speaking of the ultimate nature of things, of thing-in-itself. Hegel questions the critical philosophy of Kant for taking empirical experience to be the only basis for theoretical knowledge (as empiricism had done), thereby disallowing the dimension of speculative thought about ultimate Ideas. Hegel wanted to correct Kant, in fact the entire tradition before him, in another respect. To him 'logic' did not, as had ordinarily been the case since Aristotle, refer to thinking operations, correct or incorrect, of the mind only; it did not deal with epistemological categories only, but with ontological categories, with reality itself. He made an extraordinary connection between mind (or rather Spirit) and reality, to the point of identifying them. He understood 'logic' to coincide with 'metaphysics' (III:24).

Hegel was at pains to distance himself from irrational modes of knowing. 'Thought' (*Denken*) and 'reason' (*Vernunft*) were what mattered to him. Pure thought thinks itself; the lower order 'understanding' (*Verstand*), on the other hand, deals with finite determinations and distinctions (III:25, 80). To him thought and reason refer to the transcendence, in higher unities, of the limited distinctions made by 'understanding'. Indeed, a higher point of view, above understanding, is attained by means of 'speculative' thought (*spekulative Denken*) (III:9, 82), by which he does not mean unwarranted, wild guesses, but reason operating at its highest, coming to supreme rational insight into the workings of history. He certainly did not satisfy himself with a *docta ignorantia* of some dark abyss, perhaps illumined by some irrational intuition (*Anschauung*). Whereas Romanticism claimed that the dimension of supreme ultimacy was inaccessible to human understanding, Hegel claimed that it was accessible to thought and reason.

The attempt to overcome the dualisms of (1) of things-in-themselves versus the world of appearance and (2) rational concept versus intuitive understanding, is paramount in all of Hegel's thinking. Overall, he was a visionary thinker, speaking only from his own direct insight, and coming up with one of the most grandiose speculative totalistic 'visions' in the history of humankind. He did that as a deliberately modern, secular, rational, inner-worldly person, not exactly identifying with mystics absorbed by outer other-worldly concerns and non-knowing. In the terms of our concept 'MM', he was truly 'metaphysic', but not quite 'mystic'.

□ method

Hegel's dialectical method structures his entire totalistic strategy. It is the vantage point from which he sovereignly and circumspectly surveys heaven and earth. It seeks to overcome the law of non-contradiction which states that 'A' and 'not-A' cannot both be true. For Hegel both can be true as abstractions from the bigger picture, aspects of a higher truth. Thus the resolution of contradictions drives, as it were, Hegel's thinking forward. This aspect opens interesting possibilities of comparison of Hegel with, for example, classical Buddhist fourfold and Jain sevenfold logic, which cannot be pursued here. As a method in his intellectual programme, it means that Hegel seeks higher ground, so to speak. He seeks a higher concept, which would include two lower order concepts, rehabilitating them as compatible rather than rejecting either or both of them as incompatible. Understanding all, he connected and forgave all, allotting each thing its place in the great scheme of things, forgetting nothing.

The teleological (aim directed) dimension of Hegel's thinking must be stressed. It must also be emphasised that for him, teleology did not imply the presence of an anthropomorphic conscious, 'subjective' intentionality, simply similar to the way the human mind works. His 'idealism' was in this respect 'objective': It wanted to conceptualise the nature of things, the workings of reality as such. After that, Hegel moves onto the higher level of 'absolute' idealism, transcending the notion of 'objective'.

The German word *Begriff* (intentionally including the notion of 'grasping'), expresses his intent. Similarly, it is possible to lift, from the English 'concept', the Latin (*con-capere*): 'taking', 'clasping' or 'together'. Hegel's signature notion here is *Aufhebung*, simultaneously containing the paradoxical meanings 'cancel', 'preserve' and 'raise' (to a higher level). By being elevated to a higher level, both lower concepts are 'cancelled', but also 'preserved'. The world process is a never-ending battle of opposites at ever higher levels of actualisation, implying mediation (*Vermittlung*) of the lower pair of opposites. In Hegel's hands this is a sophisticated methodological tool, not to be oversimplified by being reduced to the slogan (not used by him) of 'thesis',

‘antithesis’ and ‘synthesis’. Hegel uses his basic intuition to great effect, for example in his interpretation of history. To him it was not merely a method applied to reality, which would hopefully yield good results to be further tested, but the truth – and not only truth merely corresponding to or in line with reality, but the whole truth of the whole of reality itself (III:6) – in fact truth as reality. That is why Hegel could call the first part of his *Encyclopaedia* ‘logic’. His system as a whole, as summarised in his *Encyclopaedia*, is one sustained application of this method to the field of metaphysics and its applications in nature, politics, art and religion.

The Absolute (Idea, God) to him is not a transcendent, self-sufficient substance; it is not Nothingness either. Choosing between those two alternatives was also the dilemma of Neoplatonism. The notion of ‘becoming’ (*Werden*) to Hegel was the logical outcome of the cancellation, preservation and sublation of the two opposites ‘being’ (*Sein*) and ‘the nothingness’ (*das Nichts*) (III:86–88). In passing, I note the definite article preceding his ‘Absolute’ and his ‘Nothingness’. Again: It seems to award a substantialising character to his notions, which is absent from the Taoist-Buddhist notion. From the point of the route taken in these reflections, Hegel’s Absolute appears to be not as radically empty as is the case in Taoism and Buddhism. To him ‘the Nothingness’ is the direct opposite of Being, not its end and origin. Hegel could say (III:88) that Being and Nothingness are ‘the same’, meaning that they are one, that is, unified in ‘Becoming’.

Hegel reveals his hand very early in his book: His philosophy has, as point of departure, the traditional Western religious triadic theme of God, creation (he calls it Nature) and the human spirit (III:1). But he turns that religious scheme into secular philosophy – that is, pure, abstract thought (*Denken*) without the admixtures of feelings, representations, desire, will and so on that he found in Christianity (III:2–3). This provides him with the basic scheme of Idea-Nature-Spirit, which he then develops in ways that revolutionise the traditional Western religious view of God, God’s creation and the human believer. For one thing, Hegel lets go of the traditional sequence; there is no first and no last (III:575). Hegel did not entertain the idea of Absoluteness as trackless emptiness, as point of departure of his MM. To him ‘the Absolute’ is the totality of the becoming universe, the process of its own becoming, a circle whose end is implied in its beginning.

□ idea (*Idee*) (III:19–244)

In Hegel’s usage, the term ‘Idea’ is interchangeable with ‘the Absolute’; with eternal, infinite universal Thought/Logos; with God. It refers to the universe as a whole, all-inclusive reality as such, a comprehensive totality. In his line of thinking, the ancient Greek tradition, going back to at least Heraclitus, re-emerges. In developing his notion of Idea, Hegel applies his method meticulously and in

staggering detail that we need not follow here. Associations of wheels within wheels, or rather, of triangles spawning triangles, emerge.

Hegel defines ‘the pure Idea’ (*die reine Idee*), the point of departure of all, as ‘the Absolute-in-and-for-itself’ (*an und für sich*) (III:18, 213). Again, ‘Idea’ is not a purely logical, epistemological category. Idea contains the unity of ideal and real, finite and infinite, soul and body; Idea is possibility, carrying its reality in itself (III:214). It is substance as subject. The Idea/the Absolute is free, determining itself and not determined by anything outside itself (I:162) (Hegel 1959).

The ‘unity’ referred to is not unchanging identity, but a process (III:215) involving life (*das Leben*) (III.216–222), knowing (*das Erkennen*) (III.223–232) and willing (*das Wollen*) (III.233–235). The structural similarity of our emerging model to that is obvious. The difference is that whereas our categories are Principles emerging from empty Absoluteness (informed by Taoism and Buddhism), Hegel’s are aspects of what he terms ‘the Idea’, with substantialist overtones. The Absolute is the teleological totality of reality. When Hegel speaks of ‘the Absolute’ (*das Absolute*), he declines the notion of radical emptiness as ultimate category, calling such an understanding (in a thinly veiled barb aimed at Schelling) as ‘the night in which all cats are grey.’ In terms of our map, he operates at the level of Infinitude, with implicit assumptions of certain Eternal Principles, but not spelling them out. In his thinking, Becoming is the highest operative category.

□ Nature (Natur) (III.245–376)

Hegel defines ‘Nature’ as ‘the Idea in its difference’ (*Idee in ihrem Anderssein*) (III:18, 247ff.). It is nothing other than the Idea, but now in the form of alienation, externalisation (*Entäusserung*), devoid of freedom, and demonstrating only necessity and contingency. As such, nature is the opposite, the negative, of the Idea. It is clear that Hegel is seeking an alignment with classic Greek-Western thinking, such as Neoplatonism with its vision of matter as inferior manifestation of the One (III:248). Hegel differs from Proclus by his introduction of the dialectical principle, issuing in sublation. He derives Nature from the Idea; Nature is a moment in the self-development of the Absolute, but it is not deified as such: Nature is divine *qua* being in the Idea, but not in itself; Nature as such is not God – that would be pantheism, and Hegel was highly critical of that.

He creates a developmental model in which Nature is conceived of as a system of stages, each issuing by necessity from a previous one. Here too, he demonstrates his method by his drive to interrelate the most diverse things organically, things commonly thought to be mutually irrelevant or in irreconcilable conflict. We need not enter into the fascinating details of how he accommodates space and time, matter and movement, gravitation and the movement of the planets, light and the elements, air and heat, electricity and chemistry, fire and organic life, sex, sickness and death.

Hegel clearly went to a great deal of trouble and put a lot of thinking into this aspect of his system. As such, the point of departure of his model of nature is promising. It maintains that Nature should be understood as a partial system within a larger context. He directly challenges the Cartesian dualism with its subject-object split, and goes decisively beyond the Kantian attempt to resolve that problem. He opposes scientific, naturalistic realism, according to which that which science uncovers is the whole truth. In principle, he allows for the increasing complexity of singularity and plurality and the reconciliation of these in larger totalities in Nature. Those are most valuable inputs. Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855) certainly had a point in arguing that overall in the Hegelian system, singularity comes a poor second to totality.

Hegel's overall notion of Nature as a living organism, driven forward teleologically, is highly relevant today, even though the manner in which he worked that out is problematic. His system was an effort to overcome the mechanistic view of nature predominant at the time (and still today), which Romanticism tried to overcome in a different manner. He was certainly not anti-science in principle. The point may be made that much of contemporary science, with its emphasis on functionality and complexity, would, from the scientific side itself, open up to 'totalistic' thinking. Overall, Hegel's MM implicitly seems to endorse a movement from Nature (to Spirit). He does not seem to have had a true relationship with empirical nature or a particularly well-informed relationship with the natural sciences, and he forced empirical nature and the natural sciences into the prefabricated mould of his speculative system (I:192–298, III:245–376). In the end and overall, one has the impression of an idiosyncratic edifice, in too many instances unable to escape the umbrage of being branded pseudo science.

A central concern of this study is the optimal compatibility of MM and the various natural sciences of today. To an alarming extent, Hegel takes unwarranted steps from 'metaphysics' to 'physics', causing him to deduce all sorts of explanations of natural phenomena from his own postulated categories in ways that fly in the face of science. Examples of the inadequacy of Hegel's thinking as far as the nature that is investigated by science is concerned, can be multiplied from his works. One such instance is the lack of evolutionary bridges between various forms of life, including the transition from nature to human mind, in his work. Given his developmental thinking, an integration of it with evolutionary theory would seem natural. Evolutionary theory did not originate with Darwin but has been around since the Greeks. Hegel was fully aware of the versions of evolutionary theory current at his time, but he dismissed that outright. His interest in logical relations excluded a sufficient interest in real temporal relations between forms of life (Houlgate 2005:173f.). Compared to the point of departure of his system as such and his impressive historical achievement as far as human culture is concerned, his treatment of nature reveals no significant sense of 'historical' development. It is a weakness in his model, commented on by many.

Hegel came up with curious mixtures of his philosophy and science, and at times raised quite remarkable pseudo-scientific ideas, presented as metaphysically meaningful (Pinkard 2000:562–576). Quite simply, he interfered in science, and burdened and cluttered his MM with science. His dealings with natural sciences were the most glaring shortcomings in his work. He seems to have held empirical science in low esteem, in comparison with lofty metaphysics. We have here worked on the assumption that such mixtures and mix-ups are to be avoided. Shoemaker, stick to your last. Nevertheless, one also walks in two boots. An integration retaining the unencumbered integrity of both the scientific and MM perspectives and procedures is as good as can be hoped for. MM may be viewed as striving to develop a higher order, meaning-providing context for the sciences, but not as the normative foundation from which the sciences and their results are to be derived (as Hegel assumed); likewise, the sciences are the context for MM. We need not resign ourselves to a hopeless fragmentation of experience. Hegel's MM did not accommodate the scientific project as a hospitable contemporary MM should, but held it captive in the golden cage of his system. If some totalistic MM for our time emerges, it will have to be built on a thinking involving both the empirical sciences and the various MM traditions of humankind. In our day, it could only be a gestalt with hazy edges among its constituent parts, loosely hanging together. It could be explored, but not fixed. Looked at from this angle, Hegel's programme was indeed heading for premature, totalitarian closure.

This is not to say that his MM of nature is without value. For example, his notion that nature is 'a living whole' (III:251) is a restatement of an enduring MM view that commands attention and resurfaces in these meditations as well.

□ Spirit (Geist) (III:377–577)

Hegel takes 'Spirit' as 'the Idea, returning from its being different, into itself (III:18). The following quotation contains some key elements of his view of Spirit (III:384):

The Absolute is Spirit; this is the highest definition of the Absolute. Finding this definition and grasping its meaning and content is, one might say, the absolute tendency (*Tendenz*) of all culture and philosophy, and all religion and science sought this point; world history is to be understood from this impulse only.

Is Hegel's influence so pervasive that our venture imbibed it without realising it? In any event, I follow him when he says that 'philosophy' ('MM') shifts what religion does at the level of mythic representation, to a higher gear. Nevertheless, I have put some distance between our empty 'Absoluteness' and his substantialist 'the Absolute'. At least at this stage, it would be premature to endorse his notion of 'Spirit'. Whereas he takes Christianity as his religious point of departure, this exploration would rather operate in an inclusive horizon of religion and religions, even as it assumes that, as religions, Taoism and Buddhism have advanced furthest towards ever receding Absoluteness.

He terms the first stage of Spirit *subjective spirit*. Spirit comes to self-consciousness in the human spirit.

Then the second level of finite Spirit is attained: the *objective spirit* (mind) (I:402ff., III:483–552), actualised in human institutions such as legality, jurisdiction, private morality and social ethics (*Sittlichkeit*) in its manifestations such as family, politics and economics. This dimension, in elaborated form, plays a central role in the *Encyclopaedia*, as in Hegel's lifework as a whole, and in this field (contrary to the MM of nature) he makes a major – though obviously time-bound and also otherwise debatable – contribution. These dimensions do not play a central role in this design of ours and they are only touched on from time to time. As objective mind, Spirit takes part in an objective moral world order that it has produced, and which is actualised in art, religion and philosophy (III:553–557). Objective Spirit culminates as 'the finite worldly mind (*Weltgeist*) in its totality as it unfolds and becomes conscious of itself in its temporal development [...] in finite and teleological wholes' (I:449, cf. III:549). In the process of this progressive teleological development, the collective human spirit comes to a point of complete, absolute self-knowledge. The historical world spirit, objective mind, exists concretely in the politically unified nations of peoples.

Hegel saw himself as the progressive synthesiser and consummator of the modern epoch, the inner contradictions of which (as manifested in, e.g. Descartes) he sought to overcome. This impetus of his thinking is often overlooked, as he is discredited as being a reactionary defender of the post-Napoleonic Prussian state and the grandfather of totalitarian political thinking (Popper 1974 [1945]). Totalism is not necessarily totalitarianism. The first is a search for a wide, open horizon; the second is a closed bunker. In fact, Hegel rejected any repressive order, whether in the form of the old regime or in the guise of the new order. German to the core, he was a progressive democrat in the terms of his time, with a moderate and pragmatic streak. His thinking was a sustained effort to work out the implications of freedom and autonomy in all respects – religiously, morally and politically – that he saw bursting forth in the French Revolution and the new order inaugurated by Napoleon. He had a vested interest in the protection and cautious reform of that new post-Napoleonic order in Germany. He did not foresee the global world order, driven by technology that would emerge in the 20th century. On the negative side, in his historical analyses his method tends to dominate the material. Instead of allowing the individual voices to resonate in a loosely coherent framework, Hegel often forces their individual contributions into his own prefabricated mould. For example, he overestimated the political achievements of the Prussian state of his time.

Now, at a next (third) stage, as a reconciliation at a higher level of subjective and objective Spirit, *Absolute Spirit* (*der absolute Geist*) is realised (I:453ff., III:553ff.). The notion 'God' comes strongly to the fore. Given Hegel's departure, Absolute Spirit/God is not to be understood as entirely transcendent. There is

no divinity outside the unfolding process of history. This is the stage of the self-actualisation of the Absolute in finite history; it is also the elevation of the finite to the infinite. The Absolute is actualised in that the finite, with all its warts, is both cancelled and preserved in the Absolute/God. At this level, freedom is achieved.

I now briefly note his treatment of religion (including I:465–471, III:564–571), taking into account that his discussions of religion and philosophy (I:472–477, III:572–577) flow into each other.

□ religion

Hegel was always interested in religion, but he never associated himself with institutionalised religion. He used the Christian dogmas of Christology and Trinity to express his own system. He himself on occasion spoke of the Absolute as 'God'. As a matter of fact, his own system, presented as preserving, integrating and elevating all previous systems of religious thought and philosophy, is in effect the ultimate 'proof' for the existence of God. He did away with the denial of God (atheism) in the name of reason. He saved God by reason, at a higher level than mere feeling and piety or authoritarian religious dogmatism. Confidence in God, supreme confidence in reason and unsurpassed self-confidence of humanity coincided.

Probably no modern Western thinker took the Trinity and the incarnation of the Son as seriously as had been the case with Hegel. To him the Trinity was the prime model for dialectical thinking of his own variety. The incarnation was the prime model of all reconciliatory thinking: the divine empties itself into the human. If philosophy in the grand sense of the word was for Hegel the metaphysic of the Absolute, then Christianity, addressing God as 'Spirit', was for him the supreme, in fact the 'absolute' religion. Yes, Hegel did not merely incorporate Christian theology as an abstract system of ideas or dogmas in his scheme, but the concrete Christian religion as a whole, with all its social and historical aspects. His 'idealism' does not deal with 'ideas' only, but with all dimensions of concrete reality, in an astoundingly comprehensive vision of all of reality.

All other religions are 'true' to the extent that they are in line with Christianity. This of course does not make Hegel a fundamentalist in the contemporary sense of the word. For him, Christianity was not normative *because* it had been given positively once and for all in one book (the Bible) or in one historical individual person (Jesus), to be accepted (swallowed, as Bonhoeffer would say) in blind faith; Christianity was the best religion *insofar as* it expressed the truth of things, as uncovered and articulated in the thought of Hegel. It is as if he wanted to protect Christianity from positivism, rationalism and Romantic emotionalism (Schleiermacher), but in the process subjecting his protégé to his own dominance.

His interest in the intricacies of Christian dogma took off from the start of his studies at the Protestant theological seminary in Tübingen. Among the formative influences and events at the time was the 'pantheism controversy', launched by F.H. Jacobi's (1743–1819) attack (1785) on Lessing's and Spinoza's alleged 'pantheism' and hence – by necessary implication, it was suggested – 'atheism'. The relationship between God as 'One' and the 'all' of the many things, would remain a pivotal interest for Hegel for the rest of his life. Some 15 years later (1799) Jacobi launched another attack, this time suggesting that the transcendental philosophies of Kant, Fichte and Schelling necessarily led to what he coined 'nihilism' ('nothing-[matters]-ness'). Instead of taking recourse in speculative reason, Jacobi himself fell back, in a kind of realistic fideism, on supernatural revelation and belief. Such encounters led Hegel to explore instead the path of speculative thought.

Giving his own twist to the traditional Christian view, he does not see 'God' theistically as a Person. That God has 'revealed' himself means that God can be known in thought. Repeating Aristotle's view, he in fact defines God as self-thinking Thought. The Christian doctrine of the Trinity functions as a representation of his schema of the three moments in the unfolding of the Absolute as thought:

- 'Creator' represents the Absolute in the aspect of universality (III:567).
- In creation and in the Son, Jesus, the universal dialectically 'others itself', generates the opposite of itself, namely particularity (III:568).
- The Holy Spirit represents the moment of reconciliation of universality and particularity (III:569).

Obviously, his view of the Christian dogma ties in neatly with his notion of Christianity as the highest religion. Hegel's reconstruction has all sorts of intriguing theological implications vastly exceeding our present limited scope. Much has been written about all of this.

Religion presents the Absolute only inadequately, in the form of mythical representation (*Vorstellung*) at best, thereby placing itself over against the Absolute. For example, to him traditional Christianity falsely identified God with the external individual, the empirical historical Jesus (I:470). Only the 'absolute knowing', towards which the philosophy of his own time reached out, could approximate an adequate 'form' for the absolute 'content'. Once again, he follows his usual procedure: The truth of religion is saved by being relativised, that is, sublated into a larger, more inclusive system. The absolute knowledge is the final completion of religion. Hegel distinguishes his position from pantheism (God and the world are identical), atheism (finitude is absolutised), theism (the Absolute is personified), dualism (God and the world are separate), and acosmism (only God is real; the world, though it may be 'in' God, is stripped of value, even of reality)(e.g. III:573). Hegel found the latter in Spinoza.

Inevitably, even encyclopaedic Hegel had his limitations. In spite of his totalistic aspiration and endeavour, the field of his religious interest and

expertise was quite narrow. Today we have to include more in our religious, philosophical and MM purview than was possible to Hegel. The argument of this treatise, for example, operates in the framework of a general history of religions, taken as widely as possible. This was a possibility not available to Hegel. He knew Greek religion well and interpreted it brilliantly; he had a solid knowledge of Judaism and Roman religion, and referred to Persian and Egyptian religion and Islam, but in these instances too, he superimposed his own scheme on them with a heavy hand: they all culminate in Christianity as the apex of religious history. His knowledge and appreciation of East Asian MM was less than that of Leibniz and Schopenhauer. In his *Encyclopaedia*, for example, there are only passing references to the *Bhagavad Gītā* and to Rumi (III:573). In his philosophy of history he saw the cultural contributions of India and China as being on the threshold of the realisation of the Absolute Spirit, which takes place as a movement of progression from East to West, to come to its religious fruition not merely in Christianity, but specifically in German Lutheranism. Just so, he saw it as coming to its most progressive political fruition in the Prussian state. He saw the French Revolution as an extension of the Protestant Reformation. Religiously he made much of the tension, Protestantism versus Catholicism. He interpreted Catholicism as dominated by an obscurantist clergy, an outdated, premodern form of Christianity, bound to be superseded by Protestantism, which he regarded as a secular modern religion. To him Protestantism, sublated onto the level of secular humanism, was not a matter of true belief (in his terms: a 'positive', that is, a doctrinaire book religion); it was the expression of a secular worldview, in tune with the times. It must be noted that he turned away from traditional Christianity at an early age, as alien, not only to the spirit of the times, but also to the natural genius of the Germanic people. What he meant by 'Christianity' and 'Protestantism' in any sympathetic way was his own accommodation of these historical entities to his own system.

□ metaphysical mysticism?

Hegel places a strong emphasis on the 'objective' side of the movement of Spirit. He does not seem to have achieved, or striven after, or advertised the kind of personal enlightenment and integration of will and emotion, coupled with a lifestyle built on a mystical discipline, which marked the classical models of mysticism in Neoplatonism, Taoism, Buddhism, Vedanta or the monotheistic faiths of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. He demonstrated the 'metaphysical' part of 'MM' in abundance, but not the private, individual 'mystical' part of it. The classic Christian mystical ways of purification, illumination and union, historically abundant in Germany and the Lowlands, played no role in his thinking. He knew mystics such as Meister Eckhart and Jacob Boehme well and he absorbed their theoretical inputs, but he elevated such inputs to the level of metaphysical discourse. His own personal interest in a tremendous and

fascinating mystery never becomes the topic of self-disclosure. Yet the absolute Spirit was undoubtedly exactly that to him. He consciously stood away from what he saw as mere feelings, intuitions and so on, as not sufficiently 'thought', and hence deficient (III:20), and looked on mysticism, understood in that sense, with disapproval. He subsumed the irrational under the higher truth of thought. Yet he did appreciate the (Christian) awareness of God's indwelling Spirit, and the Christian's consciousness of one's reconciliation and union with God, as experienced, for example, in the Christian cult (Seidel 1976:233). That should count, I submit, as a measure of 'mysticism'. His 'mysticism' (assuming that it is not a wholly inappropriate term) did not position itself beyond but inside thought and reason.

To some extent, his reticence to reveal his own feelings and experiences must also be attributed to temperamental and personal reasons of privacy, also, partly, to sociological reasons. He saw the thinker of his own time not as withdrawn from the world (e.g. as a recluse), but as a professional figure (a professor at a public institution of a secular state). He did not seek access to his 'Absolute', except as mediated through its manifestations in time, but he also accepted the submersion of the particular and subjective in the larger order of the Absolute.

Hegel largely operates at the level of what will, in Part Three, be discussed as Infinitude. He seems to flinch from empty Absoluteness, probably sensing annihilation in it. He does not thematise the dimension of what has here been called Eternity, as such. Nevertheless, the Principles analysed here do feature to a greater or lesser extent in his system.

In conclusion, 'philosophy' was for Hegel not devoid of metaphysical mystery as would, to a remarkable degree, become the case in the era after him. In the words of Seidel: 'Since its content is the same as religion, namely the truth, philosophy becomes the recollective meditation upon this true content of religion.'(ibid.:245)

□ **totalism or totalitarianism**

What general conclusions can be drawn from the evidence summarised in this profile of Hegel?

But firstly, his fate. In him, his epoch attained its supreme moment of confidence. Not every totalistic culmination is necessarily triumphalistic. That of Proclus was not. Astonishingly, within one generation after Hegel, his system – the system for his time – broke down. He was not destined to be the figurehead of his age, as Aquinas had been for the Middle Ages and largely continued to be in the Roman Catholic Church. The intellectual disciplines integrated in Hegel's vision – history, science, philosophy, theology – retreated into their own jealously guarded protected bunkers, giving up on the big picture.

In Christian religious thinking (theology) large-scale systematic thinking was largely abandoned in favour of historical criticism; 'metaphysics' became a term of scorn. Partial perspectives were totalised; scientistic positivism (Comte) and materialism (Marx) started to entwine the ruins of Hegel's temple of thought. In some quarters, there was a decline into resignation or pessimism (Schopenhauer). What did not happen, was that his MM system was deepened and enlarged. The very idea, ideal of an integrating centre was abandoned, and with it the idea, ideal of a totalistic MM. The disintegration of Hegel's achievement was a symptom of large-scale dissolution, markers of which would be the First and Second World Wars, the outcome of which would be the fragmented world of today.

Why did that happen? Probably the whole project was just too big to handle. Possibly it could not contain the explosion of new discoveries and challenges. Maybe it was felt to be totalitarian, domineering. In all likelihood, the very idea of modernity as a cultural utopia had already started to wither. Probably science by implication seemed to render all previous attempts at MM – and therefore by extension the very idea of such projects – inconvenient. Overall, Hegel's system was a dyke unable to resist the flood of anti-metaphysical sentiment that had been building up since the Middle Ages. Doubtless, some might think, the perennial pendulum that had been swinging in all the philosophical civilisations since their beginnings, between idealism and materialism (ontologically speaking) and between metaphysical rationalism and scepticism (epistemologically speaking), had swung as far as they could in the first direction with Hegel, and by necessity started to swing back; it was in the nature of things that the supreme moment would not last. Perhaps the very fact that the reaction set in so quickly was a testimony to the extreme achievement and success of Hegelianism. It was modernity's greatest moment, impossible to ignore, difficult not to admire, improbable to continue. Yet, one may suspect that the neglect of and forgetfulness towards MM will not last. That dream is a perennial expression of the Eternal Principle of Totalising. Nevertheless, it cannot be a matter of repeating Hegel.

A possible MM today would have to push further back towards empty Absoluteness, which would make any such attempt less serious and more playful than Hegel had managed. It would need to be more open-ended, more provisional, more inclusive of science and more inclusive of all of the religions and MM totalisations that humankind has come up with in the past. These features are lacking in his system. By overemphasising his particular age, seeing it as the apex not only of all historical ages but of the total movement of Spirit, he was not sufficiently open to all ages, and did not do justice to the perennial tendency in all of MM.

Totalism is difficult but open; totalitarianism, closed. The tendency of Hegel's thinking was towards the first. Intentionally and tendentially his thinking was inclusive, bent on seeking balance and harmony at great costs, non-fanatic and

non-extremist. He believed that all serious, consistent thinking must be and is 'system' (I:6, III:15–16). His own 'system' illustrates what he means: each singular concept implicates all the others together with the entirety of the conceptual system as a whole. That makes entry into his thinking difficult; on the other hand, it makes it easy: the entrance is everywhere.

His thoughts constitute one mighty totalistic endeavour. He sees the 'Whole' as the 'Truth'. In fact, that is exactly the point many of his critics, not least Kierkegaard, held against him. That is not the whole Hegel. In principle, he works on the assumption of the essential reciprocity between whole and singularity: the singularity can only be known by knowing the whole; the whole can only be known by knowing the singularities, each individually and all in their interrelationships. The whole, including not only the constituent singularities but also the relationships between the singularities and the relationships between the singularities and the whole, is more than the sum of its parts (I:112–113, 164). Yet, in practice, Hegel does not always seem to see a perfectly balanced reciprocity between the singularity and the whole; he awards the whole priority, and often seems to force the singular parts into the mould of the whole ... yet, as conceived by one singularity: Hegel.

At a more personal level: towards the end of Hegel's life, his demeanour appears to have tended towards closure and the protection of his own thinking. Was this merely a personality trait of an ageing man, as is the case with many ageing persons (not to forget Luther himself, who also later in his life displayed considerably lowered levels of tolerance of views other than his own)? Hegel does seem to have carried a great deal of unresolved anger related to social class and status within himself from youth to old age, and a burning ambition to prove himself. Did this perhaps link with the very structure of his thinking?

Was Hegel personally stuffed with hubris? No, in fact, he was quite an ordinary, almost nondescript, sociable, likeable person. He did have a near-impossible intellectual programme. He did not present himself as a special individual; he was merely the voice of an epoch. Did he present his own philosophy as the end of all philosophy, of all history? No. He would have vetoed any suggestion that his philosophy was the final one. He assumed that history moves on; hence, as the latest philosophy, his was the result of all previous ones, containing them all, and therefore the most comprehensive and richest (III:13) thus far. On Hegel's assumptions, he could not really *not* say that, in his philosophy, Thought thinks itself at a more advanced level than ever before in history. He would not agree that it made him a megalomaniac, for Hegel himself as a human individual – like Alexander, Caesar and Napoleon in related fields of endeavour – was merely a tool in the great movement of Spirit. He had a strongly developed sense of tragedy. He knew that every philosophy, in and for its own time, should realise its own tragic temporality. Be that as it may, even a sympathetic interpretation must conclude that he did take his construct a bit too seriously as the preservation and elevation of all that had gone before.

From today's point of view, it is obvious that Hegel's project is in need of correction. His hermeneutics of history does have a coercive streak, different from the 'tendential' hermeneutics advised in our design. His method and the manner in which he applied it, forced history into the rhythm of his own waltz, exposing him to the risk of being as doctrinaire as any 'positive' religion. It is impossible to view any other time and all previous times except from the vantage point of one's own position in one's own time. That is one thing. Hegel did more than that. At the pinnacle of his career, he seemed to view his own thought as the apex stone of the entire philosophical movement, and fixed all that had preceded him in place, like blocks in a pyramid. The dynamics of Hegel's model is very different from the one suggested in this essay. Does Hegel necessitate any serious overhaul of our emerging attempt at this stage? I don't think so. On the contrary, his strengths and weaknesses confirm the general direction we have taken.

The epochs represented by the three totalisers met above, have perished. The most recent one, represented by Hegel, has perhaps entered its final death throes. Each of these figures made his own unique contribution in their own circumstances. Simply reviving the model of any one of them today as it stands, would be anachronistic. At present no such grand synthesis is in sight. No interest in totalism could pretend to produce the overly ambitious kind of programme a Hegel sought to realise. Largely, our time finds itself in a stage of turning away from systematic systems-of-all. Nevertheless, the need for a totalistic vision remains, and signs of sighs for a new one are discernible. The scope of this exploration does not allow entering into discussions with contemporary figures exploring a large-scale vision in and for our own epoch, such as Ken Wilber (1995) and Jochen Kirchhoff (1998, 1999).

Part Three

Infinite

Rim of a wheel

■ §45 Unground becoming Ground: Infinite being

Infinitude mediates between the Eternal Principles and manifest Cosmos. Like two-faced Janus, the ancient Roman god of gateways and transitions, Infinitude balances on the threshold of Eternity and Cosmos. It faces both backwards towards Eternity and forwards towards Cosmos, providing continuity between Absoluteness and Cosmos. The essential outlines of Cosmos are beginning to be adumbrated at the level of Infinitude, but are not concretely manifest yet. Cosmos with its space-time will concretise from Infinitude as a relatively novel thing.

Infinitude is like the rim of a wheel, giving cohesion to the nine spokes (Eternal Principles) surrounding the empty hub (Absoluteness). Infinitude is the edge of the wheel – almost, for onto it the outside tyre (Cosmos), completing the wheel, is still to be fitted. So Absoluteness, Eternity, Infinitude and Cosmos cohere concentrically, mutually interrelated and interdependent. This rim consists of four joined, interconnected and equally essential sections: Matter with its time and space; Life with its birth and death; Love with its volition and emotion; and Thought with its reason and intuition. The interconnections and meetings of these dimensions (such as intuition linking Life and Thought,

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and volition linking Life and Love) could be described in various ways. In the following chapters, I shall endeavour to understand what each entails and investigate some historical models that have developed over time. Infinitude as used here, intends neither actual infinity (a completed infinity, to which nothing can be added – a paradoxical notion, as Aristotle pointed out) nor ‘potential infinity’ (a potentially endless sequence, to which can always be added). ‘Infinitude’ here refers to a faintly discernible and hardly accessible dimension at the outer edges of human thought and experience: formless, unlimited, undefined, unrestricted, non-concretised and undetermined. Notwithstanding, prior to the concrete world, the beginnings of a relative differentiation within Infinitude itself can be discerned: Infinite Matter, Infinite Life, Infinite Love and Infinite Thought.

These four emerging dimensions are neither merely four different names for the same thing, nor four separate, different substances, unchanging, self-contained, rock-bottom ultimates. What is discerned here does not deny the relative distinctiveness of each of the four sides of Infinitude in relation to the other three. The four are neither simply identical, nor simply different, nor is any one reducible to any other one. They fulfil four distinct and equally necessary functions of one organic whole.

These four are relatively autonomous yet mutually indwelling, interdependent and interpenetrating aspects of the same emerging Whole: Infinite Spirit. The ‘relatively’ qualifying ‘autonomous’ here is important. None of the package of four is operative on its own, but essentially so as a member of this foursome. They have different functions but equal status; there is no first and no last, no hierarchical order of higher and lower, no one is an epiphenomenon of any other one, and they could be listed and discussed in any sequence. It would be possible to start with Thought, to counter the dominant drift of thinking in contemporary materialistic culture. Or we could go through them in the sequence Matter, Life, Love and Thought, so as to stay closer (at least formally) to the contemporary scientific model of the world, in which matter is the point of departure.

It is possible to refer to Infinitude as ‘Spirit’, but not as ‘a’ or ‘the’ Spirit as if a specific individual, singular thing (or person), neither as one member of a generic group, nor as the only specimen of its kind. Alternatively, this quaternary may (saluting Neoplatonism) be termed ‘One’. Again, let me (for the same reason) not speak of ‘a’ or ‘the’ One. Just integral ‘Oneness’, internally differentiated, but prior to Cosmic differences, and containing the germ of such differences.

The drift of this essay would also allow the acceptance of the notion of ‘Infinite Being’ as a wrap-around concept for the totality of emerging four-dimensional Infinitude. Some, seeking to experience contact with the edge of cosmic existence, have concentrated on realising their being one with ‘Being’.

So this essay also accepts the notion of 'Being', but on condition that it is not understood as ultimate category, but as breaking down at Absolute Horizon; and that it is not understood as eternally static, but as dynamic, transient Event.

Cosmos and the multiplicity of singular things making up Cosmos are not separate from emerging Infinitude, just as there are no boundaries between Infinitude and Eternity. Cosmos and all its constituent things are contained in, soaked through with Infinitude. Concrete as the things of the world are, they carry within themselves all four shades of Infinitude. This approach does not envisage the particular things of the world as participating in a transcendent substantial dimension of reality, as Plato did with his hierarchy of a plurality of Ideas (with the Good at its apex) in which empirical things participate. No doubt, contrary to Plato's intention, his scheme could be interpreted in the direction of a dualism of ontological levels. We are steering away from such thinking.

In addition to 'Spirit' and 'Oneness', this dimension, this whole-of-four, may also be referred to as 'Splendour', 'Glory' or 'Beauty', not as object of a physical sensory experience with an accompanying aesthetic pleasure, but as a numinous Archepiphany, arousing awe. Matter, Life, Love and Thought in their togetherness is Splendour. Indeed, the watcher of the empty darkness of the night of Absoluteness and Eternity can feel blinded by the brightness of a light in which neither colours nor the firm shapes of things can be discerned.

The words 'Divinity' and 'God' may, with reservations and in a qualified sense, be reutilised too. Let me keep a distance from the manner in which the word 'God' has traditionally been used in the religions. Firstly, in terms of the vocabulary of this essay, 'God' is by definition not an 'infinite' individual being. Secondly, 'God' as such a being with characteristics is a human construct. Therefore, I will not speak of 'a' or 'the' God. The word 'Godhead' (e.g. Eckhart), being indefinite, and suggesting a stronger meta-theistic position than 'God', might be used as an equivalent for Infinitude. Even so, I would do it sparingly and with great reservation.

Interpreted tendentially, the concepts of gods or God in the religions were attempts to reach beyond the confines of Cosmos and express absolute ultimacy. Nonetheless, they did not succeed. God and gods remained barely masked human figures, with jealousy, anger and all, hovering on the fringes of the world. God(s) did not escape the gravity of earth and its human inhabitants. They were never quite the supra-/extra-Cosmic beings their makers intended, and hung precariously between the strict non-determinedness of Infinitude as set out in this chapter and the determinedness of Cosmos. From the point of view of this exploration, gods presented as transcending Cosmic reality were Cosmos bound anthropomorphic projections. Yes, there were sophisticated efforts to derive the world from such a dimension, as the theologies of the world religions attest. One example is the distinction made in some late

Upanishads between *Nirguna Brahman* (Brahman without attributes, the ultimate) and *Saguna Brahman* (the personally manifest Brahman, and source of the external world). In Taoism and Buddhism, deriving the being of the world from a personal God or gods was never on the agenda. In the theistic religions originating in the Ancient Near East, individual metaphysical mystics at times made valiant attempts to transcend the pull of anthropomorphism. Reaching out to the level of Infinitude and further back has indeed been the subconscious, inarticulate, tendential wanting of all religions.

In the indefinable, indescribable glory of Infinitude all framed mental pictures of 'God' are reduced to their real, limited, significance. At most they are 'icons', pointing paintings, not reproductions, like photographs. As mythological reminiscences or dreams of Glory, conscious of their relativity, *icons* may be appreciated and treasured. Insofar as all such human 'paintings of Infinitude', inadequate as they are, express the insight that Absoluteness, via Eternity and Infinitude, *truly becomes Cosmos*, they are to be appreciated, for Cosmos is to be upheld and loved, in spite of all its blemishes. Somehow, it expresses Beauty, Splendour, Glory.

At this stage of the process of the emergence of things from Absoluteness, actual 'evil' is not a relevant category yet. Infinitude is beyond good and evil. Evil makes its appearance when Infinitude becomes actualised Finitude, concretised Cosmos with its differences and opposites. Yet here, in Infinitude, undifferentiated, undifferentiating Matter, Life, Love and Thought, before subject and object and all the rest of the Cosmic distinctions, shine as the manifestations of pure, radiant light. Shall the mytheme of a Fall be projected into Infinitude to account for evil on earth (as, e.g. in Gnosticism)? No. Infinitude lies beyond the explanatory capacity of myth, which would here confuse rather than clear up anything, and the category of evil is not applicable at that depth of sheer becoming. The realisation of Cosmos is not seen as an event or process of smooth perfection. It is a struggle, with conflicting opposing movements, successes and failures, progressive creative forces and retarding reactionary forces.

■ §46 Four mountain flanks

In Chapters 17–21, we come to the central concerns of religions as found in history. It is as if the religious urge of humanity draws people to one or more of these dimensions – much more so than to the meontological dimensions of Absoluteness and Eternity, as if to a massive mountain with four flanks, much more so than to the empty sky above it. Individual climbers have usually concentrated on one of these flanks, with less or no interest in the others. Ideally, all come into play in a balanced, integrated manner. Corresponding with the distinct aspects of Infinitude, various types of relation to that dimension surrounding human existence have arisen over time: the mysticism of

experiencing and achieving unity with Infinite Being as a whole; the mysticism of realising Life; the mysticism of Love; and the mysticism of *gnosis* (Thought). The mystical identification with Matter has been sadly neglected in history. Under the impact of the magnificent discoveries of modern science, the time has arrived for this dimension to receive its due.

■ Father, Son, Holy Spirit

Let me now pause in the company of the early Christian theologians who tried to understand the mystery fascinating us here. In their case, given their faith assumptions and philosophical background and the conditions of their time, the problem was formulated as the relationship between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

By following the criss-crossing procedure adopted in this study, shifting angles and looking from new angles, established patterns may suddenly take new shapes, and promising new ones may emerge. The Christian doctrine of the Trinity is a case in point. It has come to be regarded by most outside and many inside Christianity as at best outdated, at worst cryptic nonsense, forged by the two hands of ecclesiastical and political power. If understood well, it is a magnificent speculative achievement, transcending the political machinations that have undeniably played a role in its development (and that of Christology, which is so intimately related to the teaching of the Trinity). This theological construct is relevant to attempts to think metaphysically-mystically, beyond the confines of the Christian religion. The observations below do not take sides based on what has come to be accepted as orthodox Christianity. They cut across the board, and apply to the majority of serious theologians of the classic period of the first seven centuries (and thereafter).

From the point of view of our present concern, three limitations of this Christian doctrine as usually held, must be pointed out:

- Firstly, it has largely been identified with a semi-mythological construct of three anthropomorphised 'persons' (Father, Son and Holy Spirit); in spite of the semi-attachment of the 'Mother' (Mary) with her softer touch over the Christian centuries in Catholicism, the ancient Near Eastern family relationships of male dominance still shine through the later rational, philosophically-inspired overlay.
- Secondly, its conceptual apparatus is tied to a substantialising manner of thought.
- Thirdly, it has more often than not been enforced by the instruments of power of an Imperial Church and treated monopolistically, as if absolutely – and therefore exclusively – true.

Dig deeper. This dogma is a construct; it is not the repetition of a revelation. Seen thus, the three Persons appear as a historically, culturally, religiously

bound expression of a profoundly human intuition of the Infinite dimensions of Being behind and in all that we experience in life and all that science, art, religion and philosophy are exploring.

Let me outline the plot of this doctrinal drama in a few strokes, ignoring the intricacies of the debates over time, by highlighting the relevant positions taken and refuted over the first seven centuries:

Early Christianity struggled to articulate the relationship of the man Jesus to God; obviously, this affected the nature of God as such. It took centuries to reach a fairly common understanding. The inner logic of their Trinitarian model compelled the early theologians to specify the exact relationship between Father, Son and Holy Spirit, but this drove them into ever more subtle distinctions. The connection of theological thinking and quite brutal church politics complicated things.

The boat of early Christian systematic thinking ran the risk of capsizing either on the side of *monarchianism* (a very strong emphasis on the unity of the Trinity) or *tritheism* (a view inclining towards the extreme of 'three gods').

With Origen (185–254) (fellow student of Plotinus at the feet of Ammonius Saccas), early Christianity took the final turn towards Greek Platonic thinking, which at the time seemed to provide the best conceptual scheme to express the central mystery of their faith. To Origen the Logos ('Word', Christ) was the first to have appeared from the eternal Father, followed by the rest of creation in a series of emanations. The Word is in any event not of the same essence as the Father. The teaching of Origen would only be denounced in 399 CE, but contemporaries of his already opposed it.

In our present context the monarchian train of thought, specifically its so-called *modalistic* version, is interesting. It was soon rejected as heretical, but even in the 5th century, Augustine of Hippo still showed signs of a lingering monarchianism. According to this view, as championed by Sabellius (early 3rd century), Father, Son and Holy Spirit are three modes (aspects, 'masks' or manifestations) of the one, divine Person, as the one sun is bright, hot and round. This indivisible God revealed himself successively in the world as the Creator, the Saviour and the Sanctifier. Revelation was a process, taking place in these three modes. Yet, to the modalistic monarchians, the three divine modes were not merely a matter of three different and interchangeable names for the same thing; the distinctions between the three, as far as they went, were real. Therefore the name *Patricianism* (*pater passus est*: 'the Father suffered'), hung around their necks by their opponents, implying that according to them the divine unity was so strong that the Father suffered on the Cross, probably went too far.

Since his enemies in the Church burnt all Sabellius' writings, it is not possible to form a truly adequate opinion of his views. Nevertheless, his and

his colleagues' relevance to our attempt must be honoured. Of course, firstly there is the difference that Sabellius held on to divinity as having three modes, whereas our understanding of Infinity is more comfortable with four. (This is of no great consequence.) Sabellius, with the whole of the early Church, derived the threeness from the Bible and built his construction around Jesus the only Saviour, whereas our attempt works on assumptions that are more general. Sabellius seems to have thought of God in concrete, personal terms, acting in history, whereas this venture imagines 'Godhead' at the level of Infinitude, beyond personhood. From the point of view of this study, one can only empathise with Sabellius – as a matter of fact, also with his enemies – in his and their struggle to articulate the relationships between the 'three'. They fought because they cared. Our attempt to articulate the relative differentiation of the four modes of 'divine' Infinitude, neither identifying nor separating them, has a great deal of sympathy for the Christian theologians of long ago.

A watershed was reached with the First General (Ecumenical) Council, convened at Nicaea in 325 by Emperor Constantine. There it was decided that Christ (the Son) is 'of the *same* substance' (*homo-ousios*, from *homos* 'same' and *ousia* 'being', 'essence', 'substance') as the Father, cutting off any notion of subordination in the Trinity as far as Father and Son were concerned (as held by the heretic Arius). Father and Son are consubstantial. Slightly to the right of radical Arianism stood the party of the Homoeans, from its determining formula (*homo-ousios*, from *homoios* 'similar' and *ousia* – thus 'of *similar* substance'). This was an attempt at compromise, declaring the Son, though distinct from the Father, to be 'like' the Father. Orthodox Christianity was poised on the subtle but important difference between 'similar' and 'same'. An iota (*i*) made all the difference. 'Same' won the day. Arianism in all its forms (including *homo-ousianism*) would be condemned finally at the Second Ecumenical Council (Constantinople 381 CE). Abstracting from the power games of that time, the MM philaletheian of today cannot but be impressed by the thoroughness, acumen and passion of all the characters – winners and losers – in their struggle to say what must but cannot be said.

Subtle differences in emphasis between oneness and threeness remained among the leading orthodox theologians of the time. Whereas Athanasius of Alexandria (c. 296–373) stressed the unity of God, (Father and Son are 'one' in essence) the great Cappadocians Gregory of Nazianus (c. 329–390), Basil the Great (c. 330–379) and Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335–395) complemented this with a strong emphasis on the threeness: Father, Son and Holy Spirit are three 'Persons' (*hypostases*).

These developments added up to the classic formulation: 'three Persons, one Substance' (*treis hypostases, homoousios*; Latin: *tres personae, una substantia*). The theologians behind this achievement were not power obsessed hair-splitters, but MM thinkers of the highest order.

Obviously the drift of the argument developing in this essay, reaching back behind the notions of eternal, firm divine 'substance' and 'person' to Infinitude, Eternity and Absoluteness, is different from the substantialist thinking of the developing Trinitarian dogma. The crown witnesses for our model are Taoism and Buddhism, not Platonism and Aristotelianism. Yet this dogma can be accommodated in the kind of thinking developed here. From the depth underneath the anthropomorphic nomenclature of 'Father' and 'Son' and prior to the concepts of 'Substance' (*ousia*) and 'Person' (*hypostasis*) a space of Infinitude opens up. The Trinitarian dogma is relatively true. From our perspective, someone like Gregory of Nyssa, the *apophatic* ('non-speaking') mystic who said that God in essence is incomprehensible and can only be contemplated in darkness, was a great figure. With his view of the limitlessness of God, he approximated an MM inspired by Infinitude and empty Absoluteness as closely as can be hoped for, given his cultural and religious context. This is supreme Christianity, with conscious intentionality virtually coinciding with subconscious tendentiality towards Absoluteness that draws all religion, mysticism, science and philosophy into End, which is also Origin.

At the Second Ecumenical Council (Constantinople 381) the Nicene Creed was adapted and expanded to affirm that the Holy Spirit too is God even as the Father and the Son are. The Holy Spirit is to be worshipped and glorified with Father and Son, even though the Holy Spirit, it was formulated, 'proceeds from the Father' (*to ek tou patros ekporeumenon*) only. Note that the Church of Rome later inserted the phrase 'and from the Son' (*Filioque*) at exactly that point. We will return to this below. By then a doctrine of a Triune Divinity was firmly formulated. The three Cappadocians had made a great contribution towards its refinement. That was not the end of the story.

The Third Council (Ephesus 431) focused on the Person of Christ. Everybody agreed that Christ was fully God, one of the Trinity. So, how was his divine nature related to his human nature? Clearly, the answer, indirectly addressing the relationship between God and humanity, even Creation, would also impinge on the Trinity. Nestorianism (after Nestorius, middle 5th century) emphasised their distinction; his contemporary Eutyches emphasised their union to the extent that his position became known as *Monophysitism* ('of a single nature'). The Council, calling Mary *Theotokos* ('who has given birth to God'), forged a close relationship between divinity and humanity, with Mary as the Mother of God. At the Fourth Council (Chalcedon 451) it was finally decided that Christ had two natures, not one, and that these two are unconfused (*asunchutos*), unchangeable (*atreptos*), indivisible (*adiaretos*) and inseparable (*achoristos*). Again, this had a sideways impact on the concepts of both Divinity and humanity (after all, Jesus Christ, fully God, is the representative of all humankind). The decisions taken at Ephesus and Chalcedon were momentous, with deep significance that can be appreciated from the perspective of this

essay – for Infinitude, with its own internal distinctions, and Cosmos are indissolubly connected. They are, in a sense, ‘one’.

For our purposes, it is not necessary to pursue the story of this subtle speculative balancing act concerning the relationships of Father, Son and Holy Spirit over generations of theologians and seven Ecumenical Councils in various twists and turns further. Yet one more chapter needs to be mentioned. In 589, the Synod of Toledo in Spain (not an Ecumenical Council) inserted the term *Filioque* (‘and from the Son’) into the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed: the Holy Spirit was now said to proceed from the Father ‘and from the Son’. As becomes clear from the declaration arrived at by that Synod (Denzinger & Schönmetzer 1963:160), this insertion (made without any consultation with the Eastern Church) was probably intended as added protection against Arianism: Father and Son were truly equal in all respects. Only in 1014 would it become dogma in the Western Church. Quite apart from its theological value or not, that innovation would have an enormous effect on Christianity. In 1054 it would almost finalise the split between East and West, even though Eastern Christendom (seated in Constantinople) and Western Christendom (seated in Rome) were becoming estranged for various reasons, apart from this theological issue, over several centuries.

No matter how close the relationship between Divinity and humanity became in Mary and Christ, there remained an essential difference between these two realms. With the third Person, the Holy Spirit, actually dwelling *in* the believers, the distinction between Divinity and humanity became so much more subtle. So did the distinctions between the three Divine Persons. The distinctions between the three Persons of the Trinity, made in various ways in East and West, had far-reaching implications for those two Christian blocs, including their very distinct spiritualities.

Were all of the above MM interpretations of the Christian heritage (involving the Bible, the Christian tradition, Greek philosophy), the intuition, the high-flying speculative construction, the careful formulation – were they mere logic-chopping sophistry? Alternatively, in spite of the inevitable human weakness in it all, were they sincere and impressive attempts to express the mysteries of Divinity and the relationship between Divinity, humanity, and creation at large? The second is accurate, I believe. Those *theologoumena* and this essay are struggling with the same generic problem, and, I suggest, this essay provides an interpretive framework for appreciating those Christian dogmas tendentially. Are those old Christian attempts totally irrelevant to our cultural situation today, under the obligation to come to terms with science and reconcile science with a context-providing MM? No. I believe that this Christian construction contributes value to these contemporary debates. Yet it should not be understood in an exclusive, monopolistic, absolutistic sense. Other theologies make comparable contributions, deserving equal respect.

The source documents of Christianity and the inherent logic of that religion are too rich to be captured in any dogmatic system. This applies to all theologies of all religions. Each has its own logic, its own genius. Efforts to capture the flow of religious sentiment in well organised and institutionally backed dams of dogma and scholastic system are not simply wrong, but they must always be seen for what they are, including their limitations and weaknesses. So the doctrine of the Trinity is understood as one impressive yet relative formulation of the perennial human search to understand the process of Absoluteness becoming Cosmos via Eternity and Infinity.

This exploration does not propose a one-to-one correspondence of the 'Persons' and any of the functions of Infinity clarified in these chapters. Yet it does seek a positive alignment. Seen from this perspective, the Person of 'Father', the all-powerful Creator and Sustainer, combines the dimensions of Infinite Energy and Infinite Life; the Son, the Reconciler, is a condensation of the intuition of Infinite Love; and the Spirit, the Enlightener, is a symbol of Infinite Wisdom. In Christian thinking, these functions are not exclusively committed to any one category. The Father is wise, the Son exists in all eternity and the Spirit is powerful, and so on. The main point of interest here is that in many ways in many combinations over many centuries these Infinite functions surfaced in the Christian religion.

Let me take the tendential interpretation of this dogma a step further. As a speculative construction, the Christian doctrine struggles with, has to resolve, the relationships between the 'oneness' of God and the 'threeness' of the Persons, and the relationships obtaining among the three Persons themselves. Since the first efforts to express their faith systematically, theologians of the Church attempted to retain at the same time both the inseparability and the non-reducibility of such entities. Yes, the word 'entities' is not misplaced here; Christian theology did operate with Greek-derived metaphysical notions such as 'hypostasis' as the final ground of things. This essay has taken leave of that manner of thinking. Of course, the problem of reconciling the four Infinite functions with one another, and all four with Eternity and Absoluteness, and with Cosmos, remains. What has been suggested in §45 above is comparable to what has been attempted in Christian Trinitarian thinking. Consider, as an example, the orthodox concept of the '*perichoresis*' (from the Greek *peri* 'around' and *chorein* 'to contain') (the mutual interpenetration and mutual inherence) of the three persons of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Each of the three persons must be understood in its own 'hypostasis', the fathers argued, but each of the three must also be recognised in both of the others, thereby striving to maintain the unity and monarchy ('alone rule') of God.

The attempts to understand and express the relationships between 'oneness' and 'threeness' never ended; it has been given as task to each new generation and every individual Christian MM. Let us remember two Western Christian thinkers several centuries after the classic formative age of the

Trinitarian dogma: Meister Eckhart (c. 1260–1327) and his younger contemporary Jan van Ruusbroec (1293–1381) – kindred spirits, each with a profound view of the Trinity, but with different emphases. Eckhart stands closer to the radical emptiness intended in this treatise of ours. Yet Ruusbroec could also speak of the ‘abysmal indeterminateness’ (*afgrondighe onwise*) of the One Trinitarian God (in his classic *Die geestelike brulocht*, III.D.10) (Alaerts et al. 1981). Whereas Eckhart tended to see the oneness of the Godhead *behind* the threeness of the persons, Ruusbroec tended to emphasise the oneness *in* the relatedness of the three Persons.

The argument put forward in this essay is not interested in accommodating various religious, philosophical and MM perspectives in one particular, traditional, normative system. Rather, its interest lies in accommodating the various particular historical perspectives in a general framework transcending all of them. It argues from the general to the particular, not from the particular to the general. When looking at the Jewish, Muslim, Vedantic, Buddhist and Christian systems from a perspective outside and more general than any of them, their differences become less daunting, their similarities more obvious.

■ **ten Sefirot**

The Infinite foursome also features at least implicitly in other cultural and religious encasings, mythologies and vocabularies, in related religions such as Judaism and Islam, which seriously reflect on Godhead.

Judaism never compromised on the unity of God, but his characteristics of being and bestowing being (creatorship), living and bestowing life, loving and commanding love, and wisdom and bestowing wisdom, shines through on every page of the *Tanakh*. In a later creative figure such as Moses Maimonides (c. 1135–1204), God is stripped of all mythological and positive assertions, in order to safeguard his absolute unity and infinite being; his being alive is not denied, but it is unknowable, beyond all human understanding, in other words: infinite. The same is true of God’s other essential attributes, such as his loving will towards the world and his wisdom. These attributes are neither identical with, nor separable from, God’s essential nature. The same set of problems vexing Christian theology and the thrust of this essay, are present in Maimonides. As in Christianity, the ontological gap between God and the world remains. As far as the relationship between the attributes of God are concerned, Maimonides tended to make God’s will and love subservient to his being and his omniscience; a later theologian, Hasdai Crescas (c. 1340–1411) would stress God’s love and will.

In Chapter 7, attention was paid to Kabbalah and the *Sefirot*. At this point it is enough to note that the ten *Sefirot* (literally, ‘numbers’) are aspects of Divinity, without any ‘being’ of their own and never hypostasised as Persons or

the like. Infinite God is beyond all measurement or number; so these ten are symbolic, not intended to exhaust all possibilities and stipulate any exact number. The relationship between infinite indeterminateness and the relative determinedness coming to the fore in the names of this tenfold hierarchy remains intriguing. Kabbalists went through similar motions as their Christian counterparts: these divine aspects remain relatively distinct, and yet every one of them is identified with the totality of infinite God, and, by that very fact, with all the other aspects. There is neither separation nor confusion. Yet there is a certain hierarchy from *kether* down to *malkuth*. A contemporary interpreter addresses our perennial problem, discussed with so much passion in Christianity, as follows with reference to Kabbalah (Schaya 1971 [1958]):

Although every attribute of divine being may have its particular 'place', its particular 'number' in the causal unity of the Sefiroth, and although each of them radiates the All in accordance with its own eternal mode, yet essentially all his aspects are nothing other than his one and indivisible light. (p. 1ff.)

The structural and functional similarities with the Trinitarian theological construct are clear. The basic intuition of the symbolic value of the number three are comparable. I note with interest that the ten *Sefirot* cascade downwards along three pillars (mercy, severity and mildness) in patterns of three's (three triangles) from *Ein-Sof* to the world (*Kether, Chokmah, Binah; Chesed, Geburah, Tipareth; Netzach, Hod, Yesod*). The differences are equally clear. The Christian doctrine attempted to strike a balance between hierarchy and equality: the Father has a certain priority, the status of the Son is somewhat different in Eastern and Western Christianity (as is apparent in the acceptance or not of the *filioque*), and the Holy Spirit proceeds from one (or both); yet there is no subordination. In Kabbalah, there is a clear hierarchical structure. More than any of the additional religious schemas looked at here, the Christian theologians ontologised and consciously and deliberately personalised their three manifestations, thereby incurring certain difficulties. The Kabbalistic manifestations have names and might be personalised at a more popular level, but, MM speaking, they are manifestations of the Endless. The route followed on our journey also avoids hypostasising the inseparable original dimensions of the one quaternary of Infinity. A thorough comparison of the Christian teaching of the Trinity and the ten *Sefirot* of Jewish Kabbalah would be a fascinating enterprise.

■ ninety-nine Names

In Islam parallel patterns occur; there theologians and mystics wrestled with the same structural problem. God's unity is non-negotiable, but Sufism went further than Islam generally in seemingly crossing the divide between the undifferentiated (infinite) Godhead and the mystic human being, at least in certain figures (such as al-Hallaj [c. 858–922]). Each of the ninety-nine names

of Allah expresses a distinct attribute of Infinite Allah. In Islam (here Islam differs quite dramatically from Christianity) the attributes are just that: attributes, never hypostasised into ‘Persons’. This was the reason why Islamic theology always at least suspected Christian theology of carrying the germ of tri-theism, if not of having the disease. Yet the speculative problem remains. Allah’s Power, Love and Wisdom are infinite. How is that to be comprehended? Here I make only the minimalistic claim that all MM’s are of a kind, and that the ways Islam looked at this problem, can be harmonised with the model of this essay. For example, the most frequently occurring Names, the Compassionate (*Al-Rahman*) and the Merciful (*Al-Rahim*) can be comprised in our Love. Working that out and testing it, would require far more space than is available here.

There is no end to the possible permutations of understanding Infinitude, its ‘oneness’ and its ‘features’, the level of its radicalness and its connection with Cosmos, and the interrelationships among its features. All conceptual and verbal attempts are indeed nothing more than flimsy boats, carrying the traveller across the stream to the shore of Infinitude, beyond which no traveller can proceed, and then to be abandoned. The problem we are dealing with here must not be reduced to a numerical, accounting problem (one, or three, or ten, or ninety-nine – or four). In addition, it touches one of the most sensitive nerves in any MM enterprise, transcending all religious apologetics and polemics.

■ **sat, cit, anānda**

An impressive vision is contained in the notion of *Saccitānanda* (*sat-cit-ānanda* ‘Being’-‘Consciousness’/‘Mind’-‘Bliss’), as found in the MM of some Upanishads and continued in Advaita Vedanta: the ultimate One (*Brahman*), with which all phenomenal things are ultimately identical, is Being, Consciousness and Bliss. These three are transcendental aspects of the ultimate Reality: *Brahman*. *Brahman* (also referred to in the Upanishads with the terms the Infinite, the Absolute and the Godhead) is a unity of these three fundamental attributes, which are not thought of as separate, but as somehow mutually implicit. The argument presented here does not follow the substantialising trend of thinking as far as Absoluteness (‘the Absolute’, in Vedantic terminology) is concerned, probably held by most adherents of Advaita Vedanta. However, Unground is in the process of becoming solidified as Ground, underlying all phenomena. This process culminates in Cosmos, and returns to Unground. It must be added that at that relatively early stage of Indian MM thinking, the phenomenal reality still had some derivative reality, and was not yet the illusion that it would become in later Vedantic teaching. What those Upanishads intended, anticipated by millennia what our model is attempting to express as Infinitude nevertheless manifesting as Cosmos. The three aspects of Brahman can largely be assimilated to our model: the correspondences with ‘Being’ and ‘Thought’ are obvious, and ‘Bliss’ can be assimilated to Life and Love.

As one might expect, the relationship between the Vedantic model of *Brahman* and the Christian model of Divinity (the Trinity) has stimulated lively debates. For our purposes, let us restrict ourselves to the possibilities exploited in the Indian Christian context. In that context, the attempts to work out the relationship between these two models can be reduced to the following three, all three represented by well-known theologians, with various permutations and degrees obtaining among them (cf. Aleaz 1996):

- Firstly, and obviously, there would be the exclusive model, in effect rejecting Advaita Vedanta as irreconcilable with Christianity (e.g. PD Devanandan). All exclusivist thinking runs the risk of ignoring the challenge of our time to think in terms of greater mutual accommodation.
- Secondly, Advaita Vedanta could be reinterpreted in order to assimilate it to the Christian mould (e.g. Swami Abhishiktananda, Bede Griffiths and Raimundo Panikkar). Essentially, in this second framework the Hindu *Saccidānanda* is transformed into Christian Trinitarian thinking.
- Thirdly, the opposite could be done: assimilate the Christian model to the Advaita Vedantic one, intending thereby to do full justice to the intentions of the Christian model (e.g. Brahmabandhav Upadhyaya, RV De Smet and KP Aleaz).

The above three do not exhaust all possibilities. The second and the third are seeming opposites; in fact, they are similar. A further road, walked in this treatise, moves outside and beyond both of these religious and MM complexes, allowing both to be transcended by Absolute Emptiness, yet also allowing them space to stand and be respected as worthy attempts to say the unsayable. The road walked here leads not into the confines of the Buddhist (or Taoist) religion or any fixed Buddhist (or Taoist) theoretical model. It follows the direction pointed out explicitly from within the latter two complexes and, I venture to say, at least implicitly and tendentially present in both the Trinitarian and *Saccidānanda* models: the direction towards Absolute Horizon, annihilating all systems.

■ *upāya, karunā, prajñā*

Another functional equivalent of the Christian Trinitarian model is to be found in Pure Land Buddhism. At the level of popular religion the 'Pure Land of the West' (*Sukhavati*) might be seen as a real place, in which blissful rebirth may take place by the grace of the Buddha Amitabha's compassion, activated by the devotee's reciting of his name. At a more abstract MM level, it is perceived not as a place but a blissful state of being. Either way, it is not ultimate nirvana yet, but a stage just short of that. There are three gateways to final liberation: *upāya* ('skill', 'activity'), *karunā* ('compassion') and *prajñā* ('wisdom'). Popular Pure Land is quite similar to forms of Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam

in that the element of devotion is paramount and mythology is strongly present. Those features enable such religions to have great popular appeal. Pure Land differs from, for example Christianity, in that typically Buddhist, its ultimate category is not a Saviour (in the case of Pure Land, the Buddha Amitabha) but nirvana: emptiness. In addition, the three 'gateways' are not Persons (as is the case in the Christian Trinity).

Our Absoluteness is intended as the ontological equivalent of psychological nirvana. 'Prior to' or 'after' Absoluteness (depending on the direction from which one looks and moves) lies Infinitude. In a sense, our fourfold Infinitude can be aligned to the complex of *upāya*, *karunā* and *prajñā*. These are readily compatible with those in the model developing here: skilful activity with Life, compassion with Love and wisdom with Thought. Incidentally, calling the Buddhist set 'gates' would express their liminal function, connecting emptiness (nirvana) with existence in the world. All three are psychological, soteriological, ethical categories, without explicit ontological associations. A notion equivalent to 'Matter' is conspicuously absent from this Buddhist triad. This is a relative shortcoming. On the other hand, by implication this aspect is hardly avoidable. It percolates through in the question whether salvation ('Pure Land') has a physical, geographical reference or whether it consists of an existential state, and in the clear distinction made between 'Pure Land' and 'nirvana'. Such notions impinge on our categories such as Absoluteness and Cosmos.

Pure Land theorists, or theorists from any other Buddhist sect for that matter, do not seem to take issue with the relationship among the three categories *upāya*, *karunā* and *prajñā*. Taking the Buddhist doctrinal complex as a whole into account, *prajñā* would be the primary category followed by *karunā*, which would in turn be followed by *upāya*.

■ **das Sein, das Nichts, Entborgenheit, Verborgenheit (Martin Heidegger)**

At the end of this diachronical cross-cultural review, let Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) be heard. Heidegger's legacy is a quite consistent corpus of thought, spread out in a large number of writings over decades. The last 40 years of his life circled around one single theme: Being (*Sein*), with little variation in content. That later Heidegger is particularly relevant to this chapter. Would the way explored here move in broadly the same direction and cross the long, swerving yet continuous footpath that this intriguing figure followed through the forest, setting up his signposts?

Heidegger's reworking of the European past is a fascinating aspect of his work. To connect him to some of the preceding figures, a few markers: rooted in Pre-Socratic, Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy as he was, he also knew Neoplatonism well, although this latter debt is never quite acknowledged in

his work. Overall Heidegger presented his own thinking as a magisterial caesura in the history of philosophy, with little admission of learning from and being influenced by others, excepting early Greek philosophy. Given the classic Greek background in which he was steeped, his enduring interest in the problem of Being is understandable. The way he works this out also reveals his Neoplatonic heritage and a similarity of thought with that school. In his early days, he lectured on the phenomenology of religion, Augustine and Neoplatonism and the philosophical basis of medieval mysticism, including Meister Eckhart (cf. Caputo 1978), in whom he was so immersed that a book on mysticism seemed imminent at the time. Eckhart probably remained an enduring if underground influence throughout his life. Heidegger also had an interest in and expert knowledge of medieval scholastic thinking, which had been his first point of entry into philosophy. In his early years medieval mysticism was very high on his list of priorities and he retained a life-long interest in it. Boehme remained an enduring presence in his thinking, notable in both his earlier existentialism and his later religiosity.

Among his more recent predecessors in German thinking Hegel, Hölderlin and Nietzsche are relevant in positioning Heidegger: Hegel, the culminating voice of confidence in the epoch of modernity; Nietzsche, the voice of anguish on breaking ice and a shout of defiance; Hölderlin, the voice of a prophetic announcement of a new dawn – and Heidegger himself, the voice, at first of desperate bravado, then the extended voice of the prophet Hölderlin, claiming to bring the latter's true message to light in a time of forlorn waiting, or perhaps becoming the poet's successor.

Coming to the possibility of links between Heidegger and 'non-Western' systems of thought, it is not clear to what extent Heidegger knew Jewish and Muslim mystical thought. Of India, he had very little knowledge. Only in the last decades of his life was Vedanta brought to his attention. He was pleasantly surprised by the – indeed remarkable – similarities between his own thinking on Being and that of ancient Vedanta. His own thinking was directly dependent on the ancient Greek thinking of Parmenides, which was quite similar to Vedanta. On the other hand, he had quite a sound knowledge and understanding of Taoism. This interest of his in Far Eastern culture went back to an early stage in his career. Yet he was remarkably reticent in referring to it in his own lecturing and writing. There seem to be three reasons for this. Firstly, his sense of academic propriety might have inhibited him from writing about views not accessible to him in the original language (Parks 1987:7, 47ff.). Secondly, he obviously (correctly) understood that engagement is not a matter of superficial matching and mixing, but involves accepting the enriching challenge of the other party in the terms of one's own (in his case: Western) tradition. In that sense, he confined himself to Western tradition. Thirdly, Heidegger did not readily acknowledge indebtedness to others, creating the impression that his ideas and utterances originated in himself or, later, from a special access to Being,

which became a functional equivalent of God. His writing was never a dialogical enterprise with real acknowledged reciprocity, a process of open, appreciative-critical exchange with others.

In his *Sein und Zeit* ('being and time', 1927) (Heidegger 1986 [1927]) he does not address the question concerning Being as such. He focuses his attention on the human being and makes a distinction between being human (*Dasein*: 'being there') and other forms of being. Non-human being simply 'is', but the human being 'exists' – that is, has a special relationship to Being in that it can raise the question concerning the meaning of Being. Heidegger is concerned with understanding the structural elements (*Existenzialien*) of human existence as they feature in everyday life. He set himself the task of analysing the structural elements of human existence in its temporality (*Zeitlichkeit*), being-in-the-world (*In-der-Welt-Sein*), concern (care, anxiety: *Sorge*), resoluteness (*Entschlossenheit*) and, at the root of all, mortality (*Sein zum Tode*), and so on, in great detail. The human individual being 'is' not merely, but has the choice between authenticity (*Eigentlichkeit*) and inauthenticity (*Uneigentlichkeit*). *Dasein* is in constant danger of relegating itself to being merely part of the world, capitulating to tradition, sinking into the anonymity of Mr Average among the They (*das Man*), thereby denying its own uniqueness. Heidegger's fear of everyday existence, his nostalgia for pre-industrial society (with its simple tools, e.g.) and his aversion to industrial society necessitating democratic ('mass') institutions, is clear. This anti-liberal neoconservatism, deploring industrialisation and urbanisation and the like, was the soil from which his National Socialist sympathies would gradually grow from around 1931, culminating in his joining of the Nazi Party in 1933.

With his phenomenological analysis of the experience of the human being (*Dasein*) he operates in a manner comparable to Siddhattha's analysis of human existence. Siddhattha's analysis originated against the backcloth of Emptiness; in *Sein und Zeit* Heidegger does not provide an MM backcloth for his analysis. He does not establish a link to a transcendent side of human existence. That would come later. A difference between Heidegger's negative analysis of human existence and Buddhism's analysis of human existence as *dukkha* ('suffering') is that the latter holds out the promise of peace and happiness, which Heidegger does not. Resonating with the desperate time between the World Wars after the collapse of old Europe, his book was an immediate hit, a book without joy or love, unable to find a way to warm human companionship and, in a larger public setting, to workable large-scale social institutions. He offers diagnosis, but no therapy. At an individual level, his message stalls in the insistence on the freedom to be oneself. It would not be unfair to say that at the emotional, volitional and practical levels of his own existence, Heidegger did not achieve the personal integration and lucidity associated with mysticism at its deepest as understood in the model developing here.

Heidegger was out of touch with the emerging fragile democracy of the Weimar Germany of the time. In *Sein und Zeit* the person, the philosophy, the ideology and the social setting were interdependent (cf. Fischer 2008). The rebel would find a cause. In the following few years the individualistic decisionism of *Sein und Zeit* would leap into the strong arms of totalitarianism and resonate with the decisionism of the Third Reich. What is attempted in this exploration hardly finds resonance with Heidegger's first influential book. It was no MM document.

Heidegger's notion of metaphysics, Being and related concepts, which he raised after *Sein und Zeit* and returned to in a number of lectures and writings, is of interest in our present context. A sample of this turn is given in his inaugural lecture at the University of Freiburg, *Was ist Metaphysik* (1929)?, in which he clarifies that the sciences and pre-scientific, pre-philosophic human existence relegate what falls outside its immediate domain of interest (namely the beingness of things), to the realm of irrelevance, as if it is 'nothing' (*das Nichts*, *das Nichtige*). Heidegger latches onto that. This 'nothing' is not to be substantialised as if it is an object; it 'is' not, is not 'a being', and cannot be 'thought'. It 'is' the absolutely 'not-being' (*schlechthin Nicht-Seiende*), confronted in angst. Yet precisely this 'Nothing' is the condition for the human being (*Dasein*) to exist; the human being emerges from this transcendent 'Nothing', and exists in it. The quest for the Nothing leads to metaphysics, understood as the quest for Being as such and as a whole. The Nothing is not the opposite or negation of the beingness of things, but its essence, enabling being things to be. Science restricts itself to the beingness of being things but presupposing the Nothing, needs to take the Nothing seriously. The human relationship to beingness essentially implies an involvement with the Nothing, and thus metaphysics. Philosophy issues in metaphysics.

Heidegger has now arrived at a three-way split on his road. First, the threat of nihilism is still there, but he seems intent on not going there. Secondly, the notion of 'nothingness' at this stage could become an equivalent of Eckhart's abyss and Buddhist-Taoist emptiness. Would he take this turn, perhaps position himself in line with the apophatic thinking of his German predecessor? Thirdly, might he opt to fill the void with some external powerful force demanding commitment and promising salvation? Would he take this third, fatally wrong turn and perhaps follow the dangerous siren calls luring him in the background in *Sein und Zeit*?

In *Vom Wesen der Wahrheit* ('of the essence of truth') (1930) (a lecture going back to 1930–1931 and repeated several times with slight changes in years to come), he continues his turn towards Being, now in terms of its relationship to Truth. Going back to the beginnings of Greek thinking, he envisions being (*Sein*, Greek *on*) as intimately coupled with truth (Greek *aletheia*), translated by him as *Entborgenheit* ('unconcealment'). He moves decisively from truth as a purely epistemological concern into ontology.

Truth is not confined to assertions; truth is, primarily, a feature of reality itself. The essence of speaking truth, is being open to the thing that is spoken about, allowing it to show itself in a domain of openness and unconcealment. The being thing (*das Seiende*) is the present (*das Anwesende*), that is, the revealed (*das Offenbare*). Existence in the unconcealment also constitutes the essence of the human being (*Dasein*). Truth is not an achievement by the human 'subject' speaking about an 'object' (which is the dominant trend in modern Western philosophy). Truth is an opening of the human being, essentially in freedom, to the openness of the thing; it is the attitude of 'letting be' (*Sein lassen*): letting the being be. Close to the concern of this chapter of ours, Heidegger declares the openness in which the human being stands to pertain not only to singular instances of being, but also to the unconcealment of Being as such and as a whole. To Being in this sense, he applies the Greek term *Physis*. Being as a whole (elsewhere he also calls it *Kosmos*), unconceals itself. But that Being hardly ever becomes a theme of human reflection, he contends.

Pushing further, Heidegger's text reveals a mystery: the mystery of concealment (*Verborgenheit*) of being, which is more primordial ('older', he says) than unconcealment (*Entborgenheit*) – a concealment which makes the unconcealment possible (1930:193ff.). By this mystery, he understands more than an embarrassing puzzle waiting for a solution. He implies a primordial ontological paradox of presence and absence: of being made possible by 'non-being' (*Un-wesen*), of truth made possible by 'un-truth' (*Un-wahrheit*) (which is, needless to say, not the same as 'falsity'). Even in philosophy, in metaphysics, this paradox of Nature becoming unconcealed, thereby strengthening the mystery of its concealment, does not become a theme of reflection. That is why traditional academic philosophy needs to be transcended. The structural similarity of Heidegger's thinking to Neoplatonism is clear. Could his transcendence of unconcealment by concealment be seen as moving in the ambit of the intention of our chapter to see light as transcended by darkness, and the manifestation of Being by an ever-receding darkness? Could this allow being things to be seen in a context even 'older' than Cosmos, namely Infinite Being, and Infinite Being in the still 'older' contexts of Eternity and the utter darkness of Absoluteness? He does not follow through in a similar direction explicitly. Nevertheless, here we may approximate a vital area in his thinking. Our attempt is totally borne by the conviction that the human being proceeds from and is enveloped by the mystery of a series of larger contexts that end on unknowable Horizon.

The free flight of MM seems to be beckoning. Yet it is at this stage that the undertow of a *völkisch* fixation on the German people as cultural and biological entity with its pseudo-mystical blood and soil associations starts to display itself. By the early thirties, he moves freely and enthusiastically in Nationalist Socialist company, even though the anti-Semitic sentiments and ominous intentions of the movement, bent on dictatorship, were clear. The possibility of

an alternative to both Communism and Nazism, based on the notion of a community of free, compassionate individuals, rooted in the vision of a spacious MM, was not developed. He would join the NSDAP on May 1, 1933. As rector of the University of Freiburg (1933–1934) he would promote the Nazi cause: enforcing the Nazi political agenda in the running of the university. It is as if the German cause, in National Socialistic dress, replaced the focus of his conservative Catholic youth.

At a practical level, he was politically naïve and balanced precariously on a tightrope between his role as significant intellectual and being a small, tolerated cog in a big political machine. Somehow, an incipient and potentially great MM seemed to glide high above in the sky in total abstraction and without any practical content and moral implication, unconnected to the subterranean waters of the collective convulsions in his society. Somehow, his political stance was connected to the core of his philosophy at the time. Did Heidegger after *Sein und Zeit* close the lid on threatening nihilism? It would seem not. He clothed National Socialism in the garb of pseudo-mysticism. In order to unlock the MM potential of Heidegger's thinking, the deeply problematic aspects of his thinking and the implications and applications of that thinking have to be recognised and taken into account.

Heidegger's lecture *Einführung in die Metaphysik* ['introduction to metaphysics'] (first delivered in 1935) (Heidegger 1983) provides another analysis of the concept 'Being'. At the time he is starting to distance himself from crude National Socialism as it exists on the ground, but has not undone the heady mix of hyper abstract philosophy and National Socialist ideology. The problem, he explains, is that 'Being' is suspended between definiteness on the one hand (specific trees, and so on), and indefiniteness and vagueness on the other (what exactly 'is' 'Being?'). 'Being' 'is' not a being thing in the sense that God, earth, cup and so on 'is' in our understanding and speech, with reference to the sphere of actuality and presence. Going back to early Greek thought, and through an analysis of the various modulations of the German word *scheinen* ('glow', 'come to light'), Heidegger concludes that Being is Appearing, that Appearing is the essence of Being (ibid.:107). He derives the essential connection of Being and Appearing from the Greek roots, identical in meaning, *phu-* (becoming *physis*: translated by him as 'being') and *pha-* (becoming *phaenesthai*: 'appear'): so Being is Appearance, (as seen above) Unconcealment (*aletheia*). Being is Appearing, making manifest, and becoming manifest. In passing, Heidegger's strong focus on Greek-German thought in his corpus of writing was related to his fascination with the primordial etymology of Greek and German words which express the roots of Being. This was not unlike the role awarded to Hebrew and Sanskrit in other quarters. Let me again register, down to the wording, the proximity to the Neoplatonist Orthodox theology of, for example, a Palamas (see Ch. 18) with its vision of light and glory (*doxa*). That is the good part. The problematic part is that this

lecture remained situated in the context of an acceptance of the state and its apparatus at that time.

In *Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes* (1935/36) he deals with his central concern, Being as Appearing, Unconcealment, from a different perspective once again. A work of art – such as a pair of farm worker's boots or a Greek temple – allows one or another thing (a being) to appear, become manifest in its essence. This is the *aletheia* of that being: what it is in truth. Since it is about truth, art is thus not a matter of representation of, correspondence with, some reality. The temple does not imitate, but presents the god. Unconcealment is concealed, unknown, a mystery encircling all beings, like a clearing (*Lichtung*) in the jungle, allowing them to appear, but not observed and thought about as such. The concept 'clearing' with its association of clarity and light reminds, with all differences, of Gregory and Suhrawardi (see Ch. 18). Heidegger can say that truth originates from nothingness, but this is not taken in any substantialist sense: out of a previous 'non-truth', 'non-being', the truth of the thing, its being, emerges. Could his description of the clearing be related to what this investigation is struggling to articulate: light emerging from darkness, the being of Cosmos emerging from Non-Being Absoluteness, with Infinite Being the link between them? Perhaps. In Heidegger, beingness (being things) recedes into and emerges from the mystery of Being-Nothingness.

A difference between what this investigation has attempted so far and what is found in Heidegger, is that this essay speaks of Cosmos as 'emerging' and introduces the notion of Absolute Horizon as a word to give some meaning to 'emerging'. In terms of Fa-tsang's simile of the golden lion: I am spellbound by the magic moment of 'gold' 'becoming' 'lion', 'being' 'lion'. What a subtle difference between 'lion' and 'gold', what an event, this coincidence! What might 'becoming', 'being' mean in this context? The notion 'Infinite Being' is a take on that magical event. In Fa-tsang's imagery: Heidegger speaks of the lion, of a mystery lurking in the lion and the emergence of the lion, but not of the gold from which the lion emerges. Implicitly, as one may read him, he issues a warning that substantialising dangers lurk in notions such as 'Absoluteness', 'Emptiness' and 'gold'. Speaking could (would?) contaminate the mystery. His warning must be taken seriously. It would be the ultimate error, as Buddhism kept reminding over the centuries. Yet MM systems such as Yogācāra and Hua-yen point a way of speaking before and within, but not about, the mystery, and without desecrating the mystery.

Indeed, our notion of Infinite Being here seems to approximate Heidegger's notion of Being. The problem is that (to make use of Fa-tsang again) Heidegger's notion is not really a connection of gold and lion. In the context of the present argument, this lack of connection is important. He does not entertain an idea of radical Emptiness (Absoluteness) on the further side of Being, and he does not connect Being with the concreteness of being things in this world either.

His thinking lacks mysticism (the gold of emptiness). It also does not provide concrete moral guidance, neither for a wholesome individual existence, nor for a wholesome public (including political) existence in the world (the lion). He was living proof of this. Infinite Being, as intended in this exploration of ours, links both ways: towards Absoluteness and Cosmos; towards radical mysticism and morality. In Heidegger's thinking, the connection is not made. The personal 'mysticism' part with its universal outreach and compassion, inner personal clarity, integrity and wise and skilful action does not materialise. He does not explicitly link his reflections to mysticism, neither as it occurred in Western thought, nor as a homoversal occurrence. In his life, it does not seem to have featured in a serious sense. He stands before the promised land of radical mysticism, so to speak, but does not enter into it.

In a postscript to *Was ist Metaphysik* (1943[a]), he re-emphasises that by 'Nothing' he does not mean a nihilistic denial of the beingness of things (in their 'empirical' presence, we might say), but the equivalent of what he terms 'Being' (*das Sein*): Being-as-such. No matter how hard we search, that cannot be found, he says. All we can find, is *das Seiende* (beings in their beingness). 'Being' as *das Nicht-Seiende*, the not-beingness, is therefore the equivalent of 'the Nothing': the 'space' (*Weiträumigkeit*) guaranteeing each thing its being and constituting the miracle 'that being is'. Thinking about this dimension is true Thinking (*Denken*).

In the same year Heidegger approaches the same problem as part of his ongoing interpretation of Nietzsche since 1935. I here mention only his *Nietzsche's Wort 'Gott is tot'* (1943[b]) ('Nietzsche's phrase "God is dead"'). This phrase expresses not Nietzsche's private opinion, he argues, but a historical movement, and as such the implicit presupposition of Western metaphysics. Nietzsche aims at more than the Christian God; it concerns the suprasensory world as such, which has, since Plato, been regarded as the real world in contradistinction from the inferior sensory world. The suprasensory world (with all sorts of associated notions such as ideas, God, progress, culture, civilisation, moral law and so on) has been the domain of metaphysics, and it has now come to an end. The supreme values have been devalued. There is no aim, no answer to the question 'why?'. Western metaphysics results in nihilism, which is much more than ordinary atheism or unbelief; it is the groundswell of Western history, with universal implications for the modern world. Neither the demise of Christianity nor the revolt of the masses or technocracy is the cause of nihilism. They are its results. Nihilism is grounded in metaphysics itself. Heidegger argues that Nietzsche's own thinking remains ambivalently trapped in metaphysics, for Nietzsche posits the metaphysics of the will to power as the overcoming of nihilism. However, it is not. Nietzsche remains metaphysician, does not understand the essence of nihilism. His own metaphysics is deadly in itself, for it disallows Being, as has been the case throughout Western metaphysics. Being, starting even before Plato and Aristotle, has always been

forgotten, unthought, withdrawn in its truth. This is the 'oblivion of Being' (*Seinsvergessenheit*). Besides, metaphysics is not merely an error. It is a moment in the history of Being itself. Nihilism is the essence of metaphysics, and the Nothing is the essence of nihilism, and the Nothing is Being, we might paraphrase.

Roughly at this time, around his occupation with Nietzsche and Hölderlin in the mid 1930s, he starts to reflect on the end of metaphysics, and his awareness of Being (now written as *Seyn*) starts to take on a quasi-religious shape. These reflections, meditations, on Being (published 100 years after his birth under the title *Beiträge zur Philosophie [vom Ereignis]*) (Heidegger 1989) in form often drops into incomprehensibility. He does not place a high premium on communicability. What Heidegger offers here, is not tentative speculation, conscious of its own limitations, but unverifiable, unfalsifiable and often ambiguous oracle-, revelation-, guru-like pronouncements, open to various interpretations. In content, his writing reminds of an initiate into a rather exclusive cult of God-like Being. His notion of Being as it emerges here, leads one to suspect a functional equivalence with the old Neoplatonic Christian theology of the *deus absconditus*. It suggests itself as a secular theology with the same structural elements as the Christian theology that he abandoned in his twenties. God becomes Being and the fall into sin becomes *Seinsvergessenheit* and *Seinsverlassenheit* ('abandonment of Being'), from which one can be saved, in which process Heidegger himself seems to play a significant role as prophet. The God spoken of by Nietzsche is dead, but perhaps a new, unknown God, announced by Hölderlin, will bring delivery from nihilism, and he might be awaited. Heidegger's assimilative, almost symbiotic reading of his texts, undercutting the otherness of such texts and their authors, is something different from the tendential reading with its recognition of historical differences and of the conscious intentions of authors, which are advocated in this essay.

In addition, all of this still centres in a strong fixation on the German people (e.g. Heidegger 1989:42ff.). During the years immediately preceding the War, Heidegger does not seem to have distanced himself openly from the 'euthanasia' of 'inferior' human beings and the increasingly violent nature of National Socialistic anti-Semitism, let alone resist it or offer solidarity with the pockets of resistance emerging at the time. That continued through the War period. Heidegger was seemingly not aware of the dissociation in his thinking between the two universes of Being and ordinary, including political, reality. He developed no moral basis related to Being on which practical life could be founded. He provided no middle axioms for effective public morality informed by compassion flowing from Being and constructed no ducts through which the potential of his thinking on Being could be channelled into real life. In addition, he provided no concrete moral lead to industrial society from his place of escape and refuge in the idyllic hut in Todtnauberg. His dream turned

out to be a nightmare. Yet, simultaneously with, and unaffected by all of this, as if operating at some Olympian height on a completely different level than ordinary reality, he continued his reflection on sublime Being.

After the War, Heidegger never admitted to any political wrongdoing, assumed no responsibility for what had been done by the National Socialist State, recognised no personal guilt and felt himself misunderstood on all sides. In his thinking, a shift had certainly taken place: Being became its centrepiece. Nevertheless, he still provided no bridge from Being to being a moral agent, acting critically, constructively, concretely in society. What he now did, again astutely in tune with the post-War mood in his country, was to seek a route into an apolitical, private subjectivity. He would find a large sympathetic audience and following.

Shortly after the war, in his *Brief über den 'Humanismus'* ('letter about humanism') (1946), he sets out the direction he would be following for the rest of his life, centring in the notion of Being and openness and his critique of an objectifying manner of speech concerning that openness. I note his insistence that Being is not an object, 'a' Being, some substance under whatever name, with appreciation. The term 'MM' put forward in Chapter 1 of this book indeed intends the awestruck experience, orientated to non-fixable openness, observable in Heidegger's work at this time, as it is in the lives of many others journeying in this domain of human experience. We may applaud Heidegger's positioning of the human being (*Dasein*) as standing in the openness of Being. What is thought (in *Denken*) and brought anew to language born from stillness, is the human experience of openness. In fact, the human being, human language, is the locus where the clearing becomes clear.

Up to a point, this investigation can warm to what he says concerning the role of language. The awe is silent, yet speaks; the speech gives access to the openness and in the human speech, the openness reveals itself. Thought, silence, speech and openness are intertwined. In a Buddhist context: there is not only critical, devastating Nāgārjuna, nevertheless tolerating the level of conventional speech; there is also receptive, constructive Vasubandhu. Furthermore, there is the supremely light-hearted speaking of Taoist Chuang-Tzu and Buddhist Fa-tsang. In the drift of this essay: projective, inventive speech, not claiming correspondence to what Heidegger critically refers to as 'onto-theological' fact, but expressing and promoting the sense of non-fixed Infinite Being in Cosmic beings, could indeed belong to MM. This may happen through playful mythopoetic constructions in full awareness of their own limited usefulness. An essay such as this can be nothing more than a makeshift, homemade compass, carried in hand over a difficult landscape to find one's bearings. Heidegger himself did not quite see it that way. He was not playing, but was deadly serious. What he had to say was not his private opinion, but – still brimming with authoritarianism – presented as the voice of Being itself. What he expected, invited and allowed was not critical discussion, but

discipleship. In addition, his Being did not peter out into a vast and empty beyond, but assumed the marks of a sovereign, hidden God.

The aim of this excursus on Heidegger precludes any attempt at comprehensive interpretation. No doubt, the interesting sociology of his fame, especially the remarkable reception that befell him after World War II in some philosophical and theological quarters, would be a rewarding topic. I also will not touch on his increasing theoretical involvement in the last quarter of his life with technology (he became a pioneer of the ecological movement) and art (including his own attempts at poetry and his fascination with Cézanne). Rather, one more time, let me test the notion of 'MM' utilised in this essay against Heidegger's idea of 'thought' (*Denken*) as set out in *Was heisst Denken?* ('what is thought?') (2000 [1952]). He distinguishes thought from both philosophy and science. His attitude towards philosophy seems ambivalent. On the one hand, he glorifies philosophy; on the other hand, with the claim that in our time we are not thinking, he seems to debunk technical, rational philosophy. By not being thoughtful (in spite of the rationality of the technological age) he intends the oblivion of Being, the missing of a receptive encounter with Being as the source of existence and meaning. The same topic is addressed in his 75th year, in *Das Ende der Philosophie und die Aufgabe des Denkens* ('the end of philosophy and the task of thought') (Heidegger 2007 [1964]). Here it becomes quite clear that he does not think of Thought as the termination of philosophy and metaphysics in a negative sense (indeed: 'philosophy is metaphysics'), but the culmination (*Vollendung*) thereof. The problem he has with Western philosophy and metaphysics (he refers to Hegel and Husserl), is that it is built on the subjectivity of consciousness. Heidegger repeats the basic theme: Truth (*aletheia*), Being, enables the presence of beings. The clearing makes presence possible. Thought (*Denken*) is the raising of the question concerning that dimension. And, in view of our interest in Neoplatonism throughout, he makes clear that by *Lichtung* he does not (as was the case earlier in his life) mean the metaphor of 'light' (brightness), but the spatial metaphor of a 'clearing' (in a forest) (Capobianco 2010:87ff.). There is a connection between the two, but 'clearing' has primacy, for in the clearing there can be light as well as darkness.

Again Heidegger goes back to pre-Platonic Thought (here, Parmenides) for his inspiration. Consciously stepping out beyond Hegel and Husserl, he enquires into the concealedness that makes presence possible (Heidegger 2007 [1964]:88). By this time, he has long left the phenomenology of his early work behind. Presenting in his own manner the style of thinking of Vedanta and approximating the core intuition of Buddhism and Taoism, he refers to 'the calm heart of the clearing' as the 'locus of silence'. Beyond the endeavour of the enquiring subject, Heidegger postulates thinking as receptive 'hearing' (*Vernehmen*) (ibid.:88). That is as far as his thinking of Being developed. Is this stepping out of the confines of philosophy, attained in his old age, perhaps

the outcome of the route embarked on in so much agony in his *Sein und Zeit* 40 years before? Does Heidegger's position mark him as tending towards MM in the sense intended in this model, perhaps the most significant exponent of this tendency in the (post-)modern Western context? Indeed.

Being was the central interest of Heidegger since a turn in his thinking during the 1930s. Now his affinity for pre-Platonic and pre-Aristotelian Greek philosophy and Neoplatonism comes through strongly. He does not present Being as a reality, but is fascinated by the mystery of Being, by Being as mystery. That is also the focal point of this chapter. How does he articulate this sense of awe conceptually? His critique of what he came to see as the essence of 'metaphysics' and termed 'onto-theology', is of central importance. By that, he means Western inclination, going back to Aristotle, to postulate a highest Being, namely God. Importantly from our point of view, Heidegger does not enter into a regress, postulating that Being is transcended by an even higher Being as Ground, and he wants to transcend the metaphorical and mythological speech accompanying that tendency. However, would he allow Being (the seemingly, 'as if', 'Nothing') to dissolve into – and to appear from – Absoluteness, Emptiness?

No less than any of the figures visited in this chapter, except the exponents of Pure Land Buddhism, did Heidegger make 'Nothingness' a theme of reflection in his writing on Being, as has been noted in the Japanese reception of his work. This feature also distinguishes him from Hegel. To the extent that he does that, he confirms the drift of this treatise: experiencing the amazement, the awesome shock of being confronted with the wonder of Being as resulting from the backdrop of an awareness of Absoluteness, emptiness, 'Nothing'. Yet whereas he (continuing the kind of analysis provided in *Sein und Zeit*) sees angst as the basic emotional connection to the Nothing, this essay relates to the attitude of a Siddhattha, resting in Absoluteness in peace. Reflecting all the anxiety of the period between the World Wars, Heidegger probes and probes in deadly seriousness, without the limpid calm of the ancient Indian. Compared to the easy style, seeking clear communication, of a Siddhattha expressing his ideas, in most of Heidegger's writing his forbidding language does not exactly provide easy access to his thinking. There remains a difference between his insistence on Being and the Buddhist insistence on absolute Emptiness.

Looking at him alongside some of the others, our reflections on Being have been worthwhile. It would be banal to conflate such divergent systems into a false identity, and such a procedure has consistently been avoided throughout this essay. Likewise, it would have been pointless to read the model of this essay into his or any other system. Nevertheless, a methodological axiom of this study is that all such perspectives have the same Origin and that, however far they might move apart as they wind through history, they ultimately tend in the same direction and have the same End. As far as their cognitive status is concerned,

all such systems are constructions, at best (self-)educational toys, but some are more open and receptive towards Absoluteness than others. In his thinking, Heidegger, proceeding from the roots of Greek-Western thinking, reconstructs that thinking to be more closely related to Buddhism than is visible at the surface. Parmenides on the one hand, and Lao-tzu and Siddhattha on the other hand, do not appear as such antipodes as is usually assumed.

From the point of this exploration, Heidegger does appear to be problematic regarding his social and political ethics. MM as understood here, is connected to effective social presence and action, driven by love towards all living beings. Mysticism is not morally irrelevant. There is an essential symbiosis between MM, mysticism of purified emotion-volition and mysticism of the compassionate, effective deed. Heidegger set out from an antimodern, reactionary, authoritarian version of Catholicism. Rebuffed by the Church (in his youth he aspired to become a Jesuit), he reacted to that Catholicism by aligning himself to another reactionary, authoritarian movement, National Socialism. He never overcame both by transcending them in a larger framework, which might have prevailed over all resentment.

To summarise and conclude:

- With reference to Absoluteness: Heidegger moves as close to the edge of the abyss of Absoluteness as anyone before him in the Western tradition. It ties in with our focus on the unfolding of Origin. He approximates Indian (Vedantic) and East Asian (Buddhist and Taoist) thinking, but there remains a difference with the Buddhist-Taoist insistence on absolute Emptiness, followed in this essay. Heidegger does not speak of the darkness behind or in, the lighting or clearing – not the darkness of nihilism, but of Absoluteness.
- With reference to the Principles distinguished in Part Two: Heidegger's model is strong on Witting (Ch. 8: the intellectual side of things), yet weak on Wanting (Ch. 9: the emotional-volitional side of things). It is also weak on Becoming (Ch. 11: there is no real connection between Being and beings), yet strong on Can-ing (Ch. 12: Being becomes an instance of power). In his thinking, the Principle of Singularising (Ch. 14) features very strongly: he placed an enormous emphasis on individual authenticity. His model is weak on Pluralising (Ch. 15): in life and thought, he could not relate to otherness; his options were restricted to subordination to or exertion of power over, or virtual identification with some idealised 'other'. Furthermore, his model is not strong on Totalising (Ch. 16): he did not exactly have an inclusive, integrating mindset, and he surprises at times by the exclusivism and provincialism in aspects of his thinking and positioning in life.
- Anticipating Cosmos (Part Four): Heidegger's anticipation of the ecological concern must be appreciated, but again he remains at the level of abstract generalisations; his thinking is not exactly useful for a workable public morality. Towards the end of his life, he set himself up as a prophet of doom,

while airing vague future quasi-religious expectations of salvation. Such a stance is of course unassailable, but it provides no norms and criteria for constructive-critical engagement with the world. After all, one may fear, there may be an inner affinity between Heidegger's initial subjection to an authoritarian version of Catholicism, his later collaboration with authoritarian Nazism, and then his attitude towards authoritative Being, on which he himself was the authority. The greatest problem may be that Heidegger's notion of *Sein* itself is impoverished of warmth.

After these general references to various systems and the relationships among them as far as they may affect our notion of Infinitude, it is now time to pay closer attention to each of the facets of the quaternary of Infinitude.

Energy-Matter

■ §47 Darkness and light

Various religions and metaphysical systems, including Neoplatonism and Gnosticism, despised Matter. Those who stood in mystic awe before it were rare. This chapter aligns itself with such ones. It sees Matter as one of the emerging constituents of Infinite Being, alongside and co-emerging with Infinite Life, Love and Thought.

A closer look at the terms *kataphatic* ('affirmative') and *apophatic* ('negating'), used to suggest two types of mysticism, would be useful in our present context. The first denotes a theology and mysticism of 'presence', celebrating experienceable Being. God is (omni)present, and that presence can be positively affirmed, experienced and thought. Typically, such affirmative speech would attach anthropomorphic and mythological categories to God without any sense of problem: we can talk with and about him. This attitude would celebrate the presence of God Who is so and such and who did this and that in the past, is even doing it right here and now, if only we would open our eyes. However, he has no physical, bodily existence. This chapter is aware of the limitations of this type of speaking about Being as if it were an available entity,

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and as if it were an available person ('he' or 'she'), in this context often referred to as 'a' or 'the' 'supreme Being', or 'God'. This chapter is also critical of the fact that Matter has not been seen as part of that Being (God).

With 'negative' MM, we enter into deeper water. It comes in four shades of intensity:

1. Firstly, it may refer to a lack of application or the weakness of the human cognitive faculty before the brightly, perfectly manifest (but non-material, non-corporeal) divine majesty. This is thinly distinguishable from kataphatic mysticism. Being (God) can be known, but, because of dust or a beam in the viewer's eye, is not known.
2. Secondly, it may refer to the experience of the hiddenness, like a star behind a cloud, of a very real Reality, a very real (non-material) Being. This occurs mainly in the context of the theistic faiths and it could blend with agnosticism in contemporary parlance: God is incognito. It may blend with the idea that God is 'absent', so absent that he cannot be remembered, called to mind or thought. The fact that X is absent, does not mean that X does not exist; X could be in the room next door. His absence may trigger pangs of suffering, but that is precisely because his reality is not in doubt. In the notion of *Deus absconditus* ('the hidden God'), the denotation of *Deus* is not different from its denotation in *Deus revelatus* ('the revealed God'), although the connotation differs. The anguish could be intensified by the question: Suppose, just suppose the unimaginable, that, for whatever reason, X is not coming, perhaps because he is dead? The absence of the Beloved is a recurring theme in theistic mystical literature. It is also an element in the modern Western crisis of meaning. Many Westerners miss that disembodied, absent God. That is not the line followed here, as we attempt to come to terms with Infinite Being. This essay does not share such a sense of loss. It does not walk in the procession of disillusioned doubters mourning the absence (even the death) of Matterless God. Nor does it join the queue of those who celebrate it with paeans of cynical joy. These reflections do not presuppose either the presence or the absence of such an un-Mattered Being.
3. Thirdly, the cognitive negation may, in the minds of its adherents, blend with the ontological dimension: Being as such is without form and therefore incomprehensible, beyond human cognition. Our meditation accommodates that at the level of Infinity: it interprets 'Being' as an aspect of sheer formless Infinity, just, only just, starting to announce its emergence, hovering, as if tentatively, on the threshold of 'is-not' and 'is' and of human cognition – and as showing Infinite Matter as one of its dimensions.
4. Fourthly, apophaticism may (but that is seldom the case) refer to what is termed 'Absoluteness' on this journey. On Absolute Horizon, Infinite Being is transcended altogether. Being disintegrates and with it Matter. That is the ultimate MM Horizon of this essay.

It is interesting to note that in the affirming and negating mysticisms the physical qualities of 'light' and 'darkness' regularly presented themselves as analogies of epistemological and ontological aspects of knowing or not knowing God.

Epistemologically, 'light' in mystic meditation often means clear knowledge and understanding. 'Darkness' means not merely not knowing (which would still imply the possibility of knowing, not knowing being a lapse); no, 'darkness' means non-knowing, the inapplicability of our faculty of knowing altogether. So, as the mystically fascinated observer peers into the depth, one 'sees' an ever-receding darkness the further one looks. The closer to us, the brighter things appear. Yet a remarkable paradox, a turning of the tables, makes its appearance. The losing, the abandonment of the bright certainties of convention and empirical fact and the entering into non-knowing is 'enlightenment'. The refusal to look further than the seemingly obvious, to keep staring at the small patch of bright around us, is blindness. The further we look towards Absoluteness, the darker it becomes, and yet it is not a dull, dead darkness, but a glowing one. Kingsley says of Parmenides: he 'never describes himself as travelling out of darkness into the light. When you follow what he says you see he was going in exactly the opposite direction' (Kingsley 1999:57) – the road is the road into 'the dark places of wisdom'. Indeed. However, let me see clearly that the road leads back again from Darkness to the light of everyday knowledge and science, intensifying their clarity.

Ontologically, 'light' easily becomes a metaphor for existence; 'darkness', for the threat of not-existence, death. Therefore, existence (of Cosmos) could readily be associated with eternal light. Our meditation sees a different emphasis: beyond the light of Existence lies a dimension, not of negative Nothing, but of transcendent Non-Existence, of Absoluteness – metaphorically speaking, absolute Darkness. The world, Cosmos, is a patch of light surrounded by Darkness. Again, that Darkness is not dead dull: it glows with creative potential. The darkness, although not 'seen', has, for the mystical imagining, its Splendour, Glory, Beauty. Infinite Matter is an aspect of an intermediate band, connecting Cosmos and Absoluteness-Eternity. Peering into it from our cosmic side of Horizon, we see Matter emerging brightly; on its further side, Matter disappears in darkness. Again, the road leads back from the awareness of Non-Matter to an intensified appreciation of physical Cosmos as a precious, ephemeral opportunity.

Light as a physical entity, a form of energy, makes its appearance with the emergence of Cosmos. Yet it does not simply bang into existence out of nothing as a purely physical, material entity. In these reflections, physical light is revealed as emerging from a depth beyond comprehension. The Cosmic Event with its physical light starts to happen on Absolute Horizon, emerging as Infinite Energy-Matter.

This dimension of Infinite Energy-Matter on the outer edge of cosmic energy matter is as far as mystic experience can reach. There is nothing to fear, nothing

to desire, nothing to hold on to. People think they see figures in the light emerging from the darkness. They give them names, tell myths about them and make their myths compulsory. People see more than there is, and also less. Their myths are not lies. They are understandable; contain profound intuitions of truth, guiding humankind through all kinds of desert to fertile lands of spirit. There nevertheless is a simpler awe: before Infinitude, not as if there were some Thing or some One outside of us, confronting us. The attitude in these meditations is quiet awe before the emergence of the things of Cosmos ... from mystery that, for lack of something better, may be hinted at as Infinity, including Infinite Energy-Matter. This dimension, it is postulated, lies beyond the sticks and bricks of everyday experience and is not only accessible to mystical experience but also merges with the cosmological dimensions investigated by current theoretical physics.

■ §48 Spectrum of light

■ *to apeiron* (Anaximander)

Let me start this historical survey by revisiting two ancients standing at the beginning of humanity's reflective awareness of Infinitude: Anaximander and Siddhattha Gotama. Their quality has been tested and enhanced by the intense heat of thought over millennia.

From the beginning, the problem of Being was a preoccupation of Greek thinkers. It would remain so in later European thought. The first to whom 'Infinitude' was a central intellectual and mystical concern was the Ionian Anaximander (c. 612–545 BCE) of the cosmopolitan Greek city of Miletus, a melting pot of cultures, languages and religions. That coastal city of commerce lay in south-western Asia Minor (modern Turkey), where Asia and Europe met and mixed. Anaximander found himself in a situation where scientific impulses, a variety of religions and a number of ancient mythologies (Greek, Phoenician, Hittite and other Near Eastern ones) competed, presenting a challenge to a thinking person who would be unwilling simply to pick one or stop wondering.

Anaximander sought an Ultimate 'behind' the manifold. He found it neither in a personal deity to be adored in a religious cult, nor in a natural element such as water, air or fire, but in the speculative idea of featureless indeterminacy, stripped of all quantity and quality. What makes him unique was that the idea of Infinitude was the central axis of his thinking, more so than with any other Greek MM thinker. From the perspective of the comparable situation today (the challenge of science and reason, the meeting and collision of religious discourses, the undermining of traditional mythologies, and the search for the ultimate nature of reality) he was a pioneer of MM, seeking a reasonable, intellectually defensible position with a mystical undertone.

He called the great indeterminacy *to apeiron* ('the Boundless'). That was the central concept dominating his thinking to a degree unequalled in Greek

thought before or after. Using related concepts such as 'Eternity' and 'Infinitude', we have the advantage of two and a half millennia of refinement and development behind us. Anaximander started it all. Having nothing to go on, he did not succeed in anticipating and fielding all possible critical queries. Yet, the vision he came up with contained a basic structure emerging as we today are exploring the same type of problem and experimenting with the same type of strategy to solve it: emergence and return of all things from some indeterminate source, and the evolution of life from, ultimately, that same source. Anaximander could indeed be called the father of the idea of biological evolution in the West: earth developing from wet to dry, and producing living beings, first living in water and then migrating to land. To him the universe evolves from the divine *apeiron* as from a seed. Divine yes, but not a mythological god. In terms of present-day culture, his thinking was neither theological nor quite scientific yet.

His concept 'the Boundless' did not go as far as 'Emptiness' in Buddhism or Taoism. Nor is it clear whether he understood his key concept to mean quantitatively unbounded (spatially and temporally without end) or qualitatively unbounded (utterly indeterminate) (cf. Sweeney 1972:55-73). Probably both, referring to the origin of all, and thus 'inexhaustible in resources, as well as itself without origin and terminus: it is indestructible, immortal, ageless and, for that reason, divine' (ibid.:62). Does the Unbounded just surround the world, or does it also permeate the world? Did opposites arise subsequent to the *apeiron*, or were they potentially present in the *apeiron*? Are they the same as their source, even identical with it, or distinct, even different from it? By implication, was there real change from the *apeiron* to such opposites? Was his view by implication monistic, or perhaps dualistic? Such questions are undecided among his specialist exegetes (ibid.:59ff.). His thinking operated prior to such finer distinctions, including the distinction between matter and spirit. In the end, Anaximander probably did not completely transcend the idea of this primordial source, this *arche*, being a semi-material 'something', some substance. Yet his central category does point toward a limitless openness. His views deserve attention precisely here, under the heading 'Infinitude'. Even Absoluteness may have been the implied direction of the drift of his thinking. He must be appreciated and admired in terms of what was possible to him, given the historical situation in which he struggled. He was the first to break the ground for all who would till this land, and he could not anticipate all possibilities that would only emerge as following generations dealt with such problems.

To Anaximander, the world first crystallises out of the Boundless in the form of warm and cold, dry and wet and so on - in short, in the form of physical opposites. Such categories, taken from nature, were the principles through which his Cosmos emerged in a cosmogonic process of emerging and returning to its source. Such categories seem to have the status of creative potentialities rather than actual realities. That would imply some sort of momentous

change – some eternal self-movement – from mere potentiality in the Boundless to become the ‘real’ world. It becomes something else ... but probably not quite. There was an element of ‘otherness’ between the Boundless and the world, but what exactly was the degree and quality of that ‘otherness’? His Boundless contains in principle everything that becomes. From the Boundless, worlds emerge and to the Boundless they return – notions we can relate to today. We see him manoeuvring between the hard rock of monism and the deep sea of dualism. These are the typical problems and implications we are coming across repeatedly as we explore this type of model systematically and historically. It is also the problem of a chapter such as the present one. Here the material, physical aspects of his thinking are not simply discarded as a naïve primitivism, but as a dimension worthy of scrutiny.

Let us not hide our admiration for his achievement, primitive as it may seem to the historically naïve of today. His *apeiron* itself was probably alive and self-moving, a living body, with awareness, knowledge and consciousness of some sort (ibid.:62ff.). The model emerging in these reflections listens respectfully and carefully to the ancient Ionian; this imagining also suggests Matter, Life and Thought in the creative dimension of Infinitude.

■ **ākāsānañcāyatana (the Buddha)**

The Indian Siddhattha Gotama was probably a slightly younger contemporary of the Greek Anaximander during the remarkable age in human history, starting around the 8th century BCE, termed the ‘axial period’ by Karl Jaspers (1953).

Our present topic brings to light a strikingly similar interest in this dimension between the Greek and the Indian, as well as a striking difference: in spite of their similar interest Anaximander moves closer to the physical world; Siddhattha rather explores the inner world and a dimension beyond Anaximander’s *apeiron*. Overstretching the intentions of the early Greek thinkers themselves, Greek thought became the foundation of an outlook that would eventually culminate in the triumph of modern science seemingly without a mystical affinity. This essay explores the essential connection between science and mysticism, exteriority and interiority, as two sides of the same thing. In terms of the model of Infinitude put forward here: the sciences are the investigation, in the human context, of the outer aspect of Infinitude (the rim of the wheel) as it becomes concretised in Cosmos; mysticism is the investigation, in the human context, of the inner aspect of Infinitude (the spokes of Eternity). In principle, science and mysticism can be linked. Present-day dominant culture has lost that connection and it is called upon, in our own liminal time, to restore the integration, for the sake of humanity and all life on earth. The rupture between the two already started to become manifest in the centuries before the Common Era, and over time widened to the chasm that we witness today.

The Buddha emphasised the concept of *ākāsānañcāyatana* ('Dimension of Boundless Space') as a dimension of advanced meditation. It is noteworthy that the element *ākāsa* ('space') in the phrase does not fly away in the blue yonder, but, while having no objective reality, nevertheless retains a connection with physical reality (Cosmic space). It is an in-between dimension. In Theravāda Buddhism, it is not totally unconditioned; only *nibbāna* (the psychological epistemological equivalent of ontological *suññatā* 'emptiness') is completely unconditioned. The 'Dimension of Boundless Space' (the equivalent of our 'Infinite Matter') features between totally unconditioned Emptiness and totally conditioned Cosmos and Cosmic Space.

According to the Theravāda commentator Buddhaghosa in his *Visuddhimagga* ('the path of purification') (Buddhaghosa 1979), the experience of Boundless Space is a refinement of the experience of physical objects in the world ('gross physical matter', X.1). This refinement becomes possible through the contemplation of nine relatively pure material objects (*kasinas*), such as coloured discs. Having reached a certain level on this contemplative path the mystic, dispassionate and non-attached towards even such subtle materiality, then wants to surmount materiality as such (X.2), and simply withdraws his attention from the sphere of sensory stimulation. What now opens up before him is 'Space' (X.7). The sense of physical materiality is surmounted (X.14, 21), and consciousness of Boundless Space arises. With the abandonment of the perception of materiality in all its variety (X.20) (differentiations of sensory shapes, colours, and so on), the greed associated with materiality also fades away (X.15).

By 'boundless' or 'unbounded' (*a[n]-anta*) space (Buddhaghosa [X.23] interprets) is meant that neither the arising nor the termination of this space is made known. It is not the most advanced stage to attain: ultimately there is simply complete epistemological, ontological petering out, the utter non-signification of *suññatā*, *nibbāna*. With the notion of *ākāsānañcāyatana*, the Buddha and Buddhaghosa touch theoretically on the level of Infinitude, and explain the mystical experience of the serious meditator as taking place in that dimension. This confirms the notion that Infinitude as postulated in this essay is a level accessible to humans who have undergone meditative mental training. Early Buddhism was also aware of the dangers lurking in this achievement. The truly advanced person, the *arahant*, is one who has severed the fetter of attachment and craving, even for Boundless Space.

Early Buddhism moved on the plane of human perception. Its antispeculative stance is unmistakably manifest. Did early Buddhism perhaps have an idealistic implication, reducing all to human perception? Hardly. It simply bracketed such questions out, not finding it a matter of interest. Yet, by implication, one might say, the Buddha did suggest a theory of the constitution of the human person – and, by implication, of nature. I venture to say that the Buddha's judgement of contemporary attempts such as this one, to work more constructively, even speculatively, would have been mildly critical (probably much milder than

rather pedantic Buddhaghosa's). That is what some of the Buddha's Mahāyāna followers did anyway. His message did have metaphysical implications; in the end, it is an inescapable dimension of the human need to understand.

The Buddha's marking of the area of Boundless Space can be understood in terms of our fourfold Infinitude and as operating between Absoluteness (Emptiness) and Cosmos (where today's sciences of the exterior world play their significant part). *Ākāśānañcāyatana* amounts to an extreme rarification of Matter (in early Buddhist terminology: form [*rūpa*]).

Fleeing from matter lies at the root of many evils. The physical matter of the universe, experienced by the senses, investigated by refined instruments and mapped by sophisticated theories, appears as a condensation of Infinite Matter and is therefore precious but by no means absolute. A space for a meeting between the Buddha's ancient Indian meditative tradition (revitalised for today) and contemporary chemistry and physics of the atomic and subatomic world spreads out. In passing, the work of Tarthang Tulku (1977) may be mentioned as one attempt at such accommodation.

■ *hylē* (Stoicism)

As noted in §25, Stoicism appreciated Matter positively. For our present purposes, the very wide and nuanced range of Stoic formulations of their understanding may be summarised as follows (cf. Lapidge 1978:161-186; Long 1996:224-234; Sandbach 1975:71ff.; Sellars 2006:81ff.; Todd 1978:137-160):

- a. The four material ('Cosmic') elements (*stoicheia*), namely earth, water, air and fire are 'horizontally' continuous in the sense that they continuously change into each other. This pertains to the physical level of things.
- b. They are also 'vertically' continuous with a more 'transcendental' (not a Stoic term) tier, namely the ultimate Principle (*archē*) of Matter (*hylē*). Now the metaphysical level of things enters into the picture.
- c. At the metaphysical level, Matter is in turn 'horizontally' continuous with a second ultimate Principle: *logos* (roughly: 'Reason').
- d. The term 'god' or divinity (*theos*) is used to connote both of these Principles: Reason quite unambiguously and directly so; Matter less so, and rather by implication. The word 'god' is used in a wide variety of senses; not excluding the notion of a personal God, but that is not the only or even the usual sense.
- e. Matter is equated with passivity (being acted upon: *to paschon*), Reason with activity (*to poioun*).
- f. These two Principles are essentially inseparably conjoined and mutually implied to the extent that Stoicism may be called a monistic system – yet allowing for a measure of distinction between Reason and Matter. They are two aspects of the same primal substance. This places Stoicism between the two extremes of Platonic idealism and Epicurean materialism

(Long 1996:225ff.). At a transcendental level 'Being' implies 'Matter' (to use our terminology), but is not reduced to Matter in the sense of the 'empirical' physical existence of things. Matter may be said to 'subsist' rather than to 'exist' (Sellars 2006:83): enabling the 'real', empirical things to exist. It is a *hypostasis*. At the Cosmic level, every existent thing is material, being a compound of Matter and Reason.

As far as the genealogy of the Stoic notions is concerned, it is possible that they ultimately derive from Platonism, especially as set out in Plato's *Timaeus* (see §20): Reason might be an equivalent of Plato's Demiurge (fabricator of the universe) in that dialogue, with Matter the equivalent of the Receptacle (recipient substrate), enabling the sensible things to emerge. With the second, Plato probably meant empty space (*chora*), continuous with sensible things. That would not be totally disconnected from the ancient Indian notion *ākāśa* described above. Stoicism is more resolute in its attachment of prime importance to matter than both Platonism and early Buddhism. This essay endorses the Stoic accent.

Stoicism expressed certain ideas that not only anticipated a number of modern ideas, but ideas that remain relevant to attempts today at moving in the direction of a meaningful MM, in touch and reconcilable with modern science, without succumbing to materialism.

■ ***epektasis* (Gregory of Nyssa)**

One of the most important figures from a golden age of Christian theology was Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335–395), hailing from Cappadocia (north-eastern Turkey). Gregory, one of the fathers of the Trinitarian teaching, was a great theologian (cf. Drobner & Klock 1990; Keenan 1989:86ff.; Meredith 1990:128–147, 1999) – not only because he was a sharp-witted and consistent intellect (although his thoughts cannot be reduced to a neat system), but also because during the course of his life, his orthodox theology became increasingly infused with mysticism. He was perhaps the most significant pioneer of mystical theology during the first centuries of Christianity. Rather remarkably, mysticism and mainstream Christian orthodoxy were never organically connected, except in a few rather rare exceptions, including Gregory.

The notion of infinity played a significant role in Gregory's mystical theology, but Matter was not part of it in an essential sense. Since its beginning, Christianity fell back on (Neo)Platonism, not Stoicism, as its default philosophical option when reflecting on the relationship between Cosmos and its Beyond. Standardised school Platonism itself settled for a two-storey image of reality, consisting of the sensory world and a transcendent but real dimension of Ideas as ultimate foundation in which human cognition may participate; it did not emphasise the continuity between the sensory world and the Ideas, and did not grope back behind the Ideas themselves.

As far as the theological, mystical tradition behind Gregory was concerned, its Christian roots mainly go back to Clement (c. 150–215), teacher at the Catechetical School of Alexandria and to his pupil Origen (c. 184–253), who succeeded him as teacher at the same institution. Philosophically, both of these Church Fathers were Platonists, but Neoplatonism also soon made its entry into Patristic thinking. The treatment that befell (Neo)Platonism in the hands of the theologians was not mere application, but adaptation with sometimes a considerable degree of looseness and innovation, particularly so in the case of Gregory.

Working out the ideas bequeathed by Clement and Origen, Gregory made a distinction between *kataphatic theology* and the non-speech of *apophatic theology*. Following Plato, Origen had emphasised the mysticism of light, the essence of God could be known by the human intellect – but that bright essence also transcended conceptual knowing. With its intellectual inclination, Origen’s thinking was vintage Platonism; Plato also had a mystical strain, insisting that the Idea of the Good was beyond conceptual thought. Gregory of Nyssa on the other hand emphasised another aspect, the aspect of darkness. In this respect, this creative pioneer moved closer to the mysticism of Absoluteness than any Christian theologian had done before him. Neither transcending nor bringing into question either the fact of a personal God’s real existence, as taught in the Bible and Christian doctrine, or the (neo)Platonic primacy of Being, he belongs in category (b) in the typology of §47.

In terms of our overall model: a lighter, brighter side of the band of Infinitude (because closer to normal human cognition, situated in Cosmos) can be picked up by the mystically inclined. Any penetration into the further side so to speak, of the band of Infinity, the side of Eternity-Absoluteness, would yield no clearer cognitive understanding. On the contrary, as one moves towards the innermost secret, cognition falters and fails and is destructed – just as Being is. Cognition will be picked up again in Chapter 21.

With regard to the ontological aspect (which is our present concern), a related distinction to the epistemological one could be made between the mysticism of *union* (the mystic, or the soul, becomes one with God), and a type of mysticism to which that would not apply, because – if understood consistently and radically – there ‘is’ ultimately nothing to be united with. Gregory adhered to the notion of a union with God, although he did not propagate or give evidence of an ecstatic experience in this regard. By contrast, the Buddha did not seek any such union, in fact, annihilated it. Here Gregory’s Platonic heritage comes through: Being does not falter. God is, inaccessible to ordinary cognition, present, and in the presence of that Being, the mystic can share non-cognitively but lovingly. To Gregory, God, being perfect, is real, though unlimited (without any determination) and hence incomprehensible. He understands the divine presence not as an objective reality over against the mystic perceiver, but as the reality within, in which the mystic participates. Nevertheless, real Being it is.

To him the peak of the great search is the regaining, through faith, moral purification and increasing knowledge of God, of the original union with the indwelling God as Being.

In the Archeic model the band of Infinite Being lies between Absolute Horizon, where Being dissolves altogether, and Cosmos with its relative being, including all the things in it. Being would become 'less', as it were, the deeper the mystic goes. That is the Buddhist journey, followed here. Nevertheless, it can accommodate the mystics of all traditions who had a sense of realising their unity with Being, Infinite Being, and calling that 'God'. The shortcoming of such theistic mysticisms was that they fell short of appreciating the radicalness of Absoluteness and awarded ultimacy to the category of Being.

Gregory's mystic journey is not a journey reaching out towards Absoluteness-beyond-Being, but towards and into Being, indubitable, unshakeable Being, as the ultimate foundation. His is an *epektasis* ('stretching forward', from Phlp 3:13): a perpetual stretching out of human and angelic creatures in search of God, but never coming to final rest – not because Being is dissolved on Absolute Horizon, but because eternal Being cannot finally be reached. The difference between the two conceptions should not be collapsed. In Gregory, the search for God is an unending quest, a boundless process; but it is not abandoned. With his notion of unattainability, he deconstructs human language and conceptual thinking up to a point, but does not apply it ontologically to imply the annihilation of the substantial reality of divine nature (Mosshammer 1990:99–123). Nor does he conceive of Matter as an aspect of Infinity in any essential way.

His structure is not to be conflated with the *ākāsānañcāyatana*, petering out into the *suññatā* of *nibbāna*, of the Buddha. Gregory's unending progress does not imply transcending the notion of God as an ultimate Substance. Platonism remains essentially intact in Gregory's theory, and Matter retains its inferior status.

Gregory worked his ideas out in (among other writings) his polemical book *Contra Eunomium* ('Against Eunomius'), a heavy attack on not only the thinking, but, sadly, also the person of the Arian theologian and fellow Cappadocian, Eunomius (Gregor von Nyssa 1992). Eunomius accepted the knowability and expressibility, with full clarity and logical rigour, of the essence of God. Gregory rejected that notion, while creating space for a non-intellectual meeting with God – in fact, a union of being with God. We can know a good deal about God's activities (*energeiai*) insofar as they affect us, but we cannot know God's inner essence (*ousia*), which is unlimited: beyond measure, undetermined, immutable, without beginning or end, growing or lessening, with nothing outside of it. His approach was worked out more clearly in the work of his mystical maturity, *De vita Moysis* ('the Life of Moses') (Gregory of Nyssa 1978), probably written a few years before his death. There a distinction is made between the meeting with God in light and in darkness. In the flaming light of the burning bush

(Ex 3:2-14) God is first radiantly revealed to Moses, by implication 'illuminating the eyes of our soul with its own rays' in an 'ineffable and mysterious illumination' (II.19). In passing, this same kind of allegorical interpretation of this very same text would resurface in Sufism. Then (Ex 20:21; 24:15-18; II.162-166), says Gregory, God reveals himself in the darkness of a cloud (II.163):

[7]his is the seeing that consists in not seeing, because that which is sought transcends all knowledge, being separated on all sides by incomprehensibility as by a kind of darkness. (p. 163)

And then (Ex 33:18-23; II.219-244) Moses, in spite of his 'straining ahead' (*epektasis*) (II.225ff.), is not permitted to see the glory of God face to face, but from a hole in the rock which is covered by the hand of God, he is ordered to enter. He will only be permitted to see the back of God after he has passed. This is the final stage of the soul's ascent to God. In Gregory's allegorical interpretation, this in no way signifies any diminution in the Being of God; it merely emphasises that Divinity, Being, is 'by its very nature infinite, enclosed by no boundary' (II.236). Human cognition of God can only be a never-ending progress, since the fullness of God, Being, in its state of being unlimited, is beyond the human cognitive reach. He now moves beyond theological thought before him. After Gregory, such mystical theology of Divine infinity was further developed by (Pseudo-) Dionysius the Areopagite (period between late 5th century and early 6th century), Maximus the Confessor of Constantinople (c. 580-662), John of Damascus (died c. 750) and others.

Dionysius went beyond Gregory in declaring that God is 'beyond all being' and that the hidden divinity 'transcends being' (Parker 1976:3). Yet he had in mind an excessive plenitude, a super abundance of Being, rather than deconstruction in the absolute sense. In his exposition of the Orthodox faith, John of Damascus (1989 [1898]) makes the point that God is ineffable, unutterable, incomprehensible, incognisable, indefinable and incomprehensible, and that 'neither can we know, nor can we tell, what the essence (*ousia*) of God is' (I.I-II). This is pure *theologia negativa*. God is also without beginning, without end and infinite (I.II), but none of this detracts from the fact that God is also most definitely 'eternal and everlasting [...] unchangeable, invariable [...] good, just, maker of all things created, almighty, all-ruling [...] sovereign, judge [...]' (I.II). This is a mould of thought quite different from that of Siddhattha and the movement he inspired.

Of great interest is the connection made in the Orthodox Hesychast tradition between Infinity and light. The notions of Splendour, Glory and Beauty, mentioned in §47, fit well with that. For example, the mysticism of Symeon the New Theologian (949-1022), the greatest Hesychast (from *hesychia*: 'quiet') mystic of Byzantium, was a mysticism of Light. In his silent Hesychast experience, he 'saw' the invisible light of Divine fire, without beginning and immaterial.

Another impressive figure in this tradition was Gregory Palamas (1296–1359), strongly influenced by Gregory of Nyssa. He provided the final Orthodox theological justification for the beauty of light seen in the silence of Hesychasm: what is ‘seen’, is not the undeniable but inaccessible essence (*ousia*) of God, but the suprasensible, immaterial yet experienceable fire of his energies, his manifestation. Palamas’ mysticism was a mysticism of Light, contemplated by Christians, sacramentally united to Christ interiorly, within their own hearts (Meyendorff 1964:173ff., 1974:116f.). This was a reiteration of what Gregory of Nyssa had said nearly 1000 years before. None of the Hesychast theologians, including Gregory of Palamas, laid the same emphasis on the image of darkness, as had been the case in Gregory of Nyssa. Palamas made the classic theological distinction between God’s immanence and presence in the world, and his transcendence. In all of this, God remains the ‘Wholly Other’ Being (Ware 1991 [1963]:78).

Eastern Orthodox mysticism, even in its negative flights into beyond, did not escape from the gravitational pull of substantial Being. Their ultimate was like the further side of the moon, hidden to the unsighted human being but undoubtedly there, rather than like the empty darkness of outer space. Light and darkness are two sides of the same moon. From the perspective of our journey that position is appreciated, but darkness beyond draws my gaze: Emptiness transcending Being more consistently than was the case in the Orthodox mysticism of darkness, and thereby extending its inner tendency. Infinity, including Infinite Matter, aimed at in this chapter, is different from the Divine infinity spoken of so impressively by the Orthodox theologies of light and darkness. A meeting can be imagined, but like that of one river joining a larger one with a stronger current, which ultimately enters the ocean.

Orthodox Christianity paints a Christian religious ceiling of exquisite mystical suggestiveness and splendour. Only the brutally insensitive would want to tear it down. Gaze through the paintings and the ceiling, however, and see the empty darkness beyond. The darkness is the larger, deeper context. Yet the paintings have their relative beauty and value. Critical and negating as it is of mental constructions, Absolutism is also loving and tolerant in its affirmation of humankind and its needs.

In Christian apophaticism, Matter as such did not feature positively as a primordial dimension of Infinite Being. Icons were held in high regard because they safeguard the mystery of the Incarnation: God becoming man and taking on material flesh. To that extent, they avoided a dualistic contempt of matter and body. Icons emphasise that material objects have no divine content in themselves, but that some of them can at least become symbols that represent Divinity. Matter can be redeemed, taken up in the process of deification (*theosis*) in the qualified sense of God-bearing and be glorified in a transfigured Cosmos. It remains creation, essentially different from God. Infinite God has no material dimension.

■ *ishraq* (Shihabuddin Yahya Suhrawardi)

The Arabic term in the above heading (meaning ‘radiance’, ‘light’, ‘illumination’) (Suhrawardi 2006 [1998]) captures the essence of the MM system of the seminal Sufi thinker, Shihabuddin Yahya Suhrawardi (1155–c. 1191).

The mysticism of light and darkness is not confined to Christianity. In our attempt to trace interrelationships within one MM network across religions and cultures, Suhrawardi commands attention. To begin with, it must be stated that Suhrawardi, like other Islamic figures, should primarily be understood within the horizon of the Islamic world with its own, unique structure. Yet, on that assumption, a larger relevance of Islamic MM must also be affirmed; homoversal MM cuts across historical, cultural, socio-political and religious blocs. The great risk attending any search such as this one, for a larger inclusivity, is superficiality. That is, not doing justice to the singular in venturing to come to terms with the general and the universal. Finding an optimal balance is the challenge. Given the constraints of this compendium, more than a cursory analysis of the various criss-crossing lines converging in this genius and flowing from him is not possible. Add to that the fact that Suhrawardi, significant as he is, is an under researched scholar-mystic, and it is obvious that this interpretation – by an enthusiastic non-specialist – can claim no more than probability value. Yet, overall, at least the spine of his MM body seems clear.

The structural similarities between the Christian Orthodox mysticism of light and darkness and this brilliant facet of Sufism cannot be denied. There are factors that need to be substituted – especially the historical figure of Muhammad for Jesus; the sacred scripture of the Qur’an for the Bible and the belief in the oneness of Allah for the belief in the Trinity and the Incarnation. These do not affect the basic fact that both of these religions and the mysticisms evolving from them came from the same monotheistic Abrahamic root experience and share a common dependence on (Neo)Platonism for their philosophical self-interpretation. In a significant sense, Judaism, Christianity and Islam are variations of two basic themes, threads of one history: the attempt to reconcile monotheistic faith and experience with rational reflection, and the idea of ‘God’ with the idea of ‘world’. To emphasise these structural similarities, I shall on the following pages stick to the chronological sequence of three monotheists, regardless of their religious affiliation.

Suhrawardi’s project was cut short by an untimely death, but he remains an MM visionary today and as relevant as ever (cf. Nasr 1964:52–82; Walbridge 2005:201–223). He was born in north-west Iran, wrote in Persian and Arabic, and ended his life in Aleppo at the instruction of the Sultan (Saladin, famous from the Third Crusade). He was not 40 years old, a victim of political and religious manoeuvring at a sensitive political juncture in Syria: Saladin was dependent on the support of orthodoxy and could not afford alienating them. Suhrawardi was sacrificed. He thus met a similar fate as another great Sufi, Hallaj.

Outspoken and provocative as he was, he nevertheless did not dissociate himself from Islamic *shariah* (the divine law).

To Suhrawardi, discursive philosophical reflection and speculative knowledge on the one hand and immediate, intuitive mystical experience on the other hand, were inseparable. Indeed, the brilliance and rigour of his rational discourse are obvious (Walbridge 2005); and yet, in his hands the second became the primary mode of knowing, providing the basis and context for the former (Corbin 1975 [1964]), both together enabling the return of the mystic from the exile of Darkness to the Light. Suhrawardi places the one who achieves both disciplines (speculative knowledge and mystical experience) in equal degree at the summit of the hierarchy of sages.

Light is the shining golden thread that ties his entire system together. He programmatically envisaged an 'Oriental' ('oriented to the rising sun') philosophy, or theosophy, not only in the sense of its eastern geographical position (contrasted to that of the West), but also in the sense of implying inner visionary enlightenment. In Suhrawardi's own self-understanding, he wove together the inspirations of the Arab prophet Muhammad, the much earlier Iranian prophet Zoroaster, and Greek philosophy from its earliest times through Pythagoreanism and Platonism up to Neoplatonism. He was not a superficial eclectic and did not define himself as anything but a true Muslim believer, but the perennialist tendency in his thinking, embracing all, is clear.

The product of his original and harmonising thought was a complete, closely argued, coherent and finely textured system of an idealist type. Like Plotinus, he saw reality as a continuous series of downward grading. Neoplatonic emanationism makes its presence felt throughout Suhrawardi's system, as does, up to a point, the Zoroastrian system – yet without the dualism between the worlds of light and of darkness. Closer to his own time, his innovations largely sprang from critical adaptations of the Aristotelian-Neoplatonic philosophy of the Muslim Avicenna (980–1037). Suhrawardi's thinking was not affected by the rising tide of Aristotelianism in the form shaped by another Muslim, his older contemporary Averroes (1126–1198). In fact, at the very time that Neoplatonic-influenced MM started to take precedence in the Muslim East because of the work of Al-Ghazali (1058–1111), taking off in full flight under the influence of Suhrawardi, Aristotelian rationalism started its ascendancy in the Christian West, under the influence of the Muslim Averroes. In Islam, mysticism gained a new opportunity; in Western Christianity, scholasticism would become the norm for centuries to come. Perhaps that remarkable case of fortuitously sliding doors was one cause of the unfortunate drifting apart of the two religious-cultural blocs of Christianity and Islam in following centuries.

In developing his system, Suhrawardi consciously revived the ancient Zoroastrian teaching of Light and Darkness, assimilated it to the Platonic teaching of the Ideas and to subsequent Neoplatonic developments, and absorbed both

in Islam, as understood in exemplary fashion by Sufis preceding him (his main guides were Hallaj and Al-Ghazali). The outcome, in his masterpiece, *Hikmat al-Ishraq* ('the philosophy of illumination') (Suhrawardi 1999), was an original theosophy of Light/Illumination. *Ishraq* evokes the splendour of the rising sun. Ontology and epistemology merge: *Ishraq* is the illumination and reflection of Being as well as the becoming aware of that theophany. His theosophy of Light was also a theosophy of Being. All of reality is an emanation from the ultimate referent in his system: the pre-existent Supreme Light of Lights (*Nur al-Anwar*), which is absolute Reality, and from which all things spread like rays from the sun. The Light of Glory as Being is the ultimate, necessary ontological category, illuminating all things and reflected in all things. Allah is *wajib*: the necessary and sufficient cause of all things (Suhrawardi 2006 [1998]:61ff.).

In his *Hikmat al-Ishraq* he develops a version of the well-established ontological type of argument to prove that, in order to escape from an infinite regress, there must exist a necessary Being as cause of everything else. His innovation is that he defines this Being as Light. All derived forms of light (Suhrawardi 1999):

[M]ust end in a light beyond which there is no light. This is the Light of Lights, the All-Encompassing Light, the Eternal Light, the Holy Light, the All-Highest Almighty Light, the Dominating Light [...] Everything other than It is in need of It and has its existence from It [...] Nonbeing cannot overtake the Light of Lights. (p. 87)

The original Light of Lights is the ultimate substance, the basic entity manifest in itself and manifesting others, the source from which the entire universe emerges as a hierarchical system of individual lights with ever decreasing grades of intensity in a vertical order of descent. Light takes shape, so to speak. Like Plotinus, Suhrawardi thought in terms of ontological dependence, not historical sequence. To him the world had no beginning in time (Suhrawardi 1999:116). The devolving process of cognition-and-being is graded in degrees of perfection. The sacred Light flowing down diminishes in intensity. Continuing the Zoroastrian impetus, Suhrawardi's scheme may seem to come close to a dualism between a universe of active Light and a universe of purely negative, passive, dark matter, but that would be a misunderstanding. From the reality of immediately clear awareness as 'light', he drew the conclusion that having such clear knowledge was tantamount to being a 'light' at any one of various levels. All these lights are mutually reflective, both vertically and, at each level, also horizontally. Such lights are self-aware 'distinct luminous individual incorporeal things' (Walbridge 2005:213), concrete and in principle perfectly discernible, and differentiated by differences in intensity.

Suhrawardi's MM qualifies as kataphatic in a strong sense of the term. A concept such as *Deus absconditus* would not fit his system at all. His position conforms to (a) in our typology in §47. In his words, 'We ourselves are only veiled from It by the perfection of Its light and the deficiencies of our faculties – not because It is hidden' (Suhrawardi 1999:113).

Physical light, physicality as such, not being self-aware, lies at the bottom of the scale of Light, but in a continuum from top to bottom. Suhrawardi is neither a pantheist nor a dualist. The physical world is not Divine, but it is not God's enemy either. It is Gods' reflection. The physical sun can be praised as, 'one of the greatest and most distinguished manifestations of the glory and the essence of Allah' (Suhrawardi 2006 [1998]:86).

The Light of Lights is absolute Being. The centre of his universe is not empty, but super full. In his hierarchy of light-as-being he could entertain the notion of an immaterial yet real, substantial *alam al-mithal* (imaginal world, as Corbin called it), an intermediate world of all kinds of archetypal images between the ultimate Being (Light) and the shadowy world. This imaginal world intermediate between the beings of pure light and the sensible world is accessible to, can be 'seen' in mystical experience and articulated in the symbolic and mythical discourses of humankind. Not only philosophy but also science (in Suhrawardi's case, interested as he was in light, science was particularly optics and astronomy) follows theosophical vision and intuitive experience, and is dependent on it. This essay, seeking a positive understanding of the sanctity of Cosmic Matter, deriving from Infinite Matter, finds, it appears, some potential support in the MM of Light of Suhrawardi, more so than in the MM of Gregory and his successors.

Suhrawardi would continue to exert a strong influence on Sufi MM in centuries to come. A following, starting with Shams al-Din al-Shahrazuri quite shortly after Suhrawardi's death, became known as *Ishraqis* (*Ishraqiyun*), named after his major book, *Hikmat al-Ishraq*, and they still exist in Iran.

Merging the thinking of (among others) Suhrawardi and Ibn Arabi, the monumental contribution of the Iranian Shi'ite MM Mulla Sadra al-Shirazi (1572–1640) (cf. Jambet 2006; Morris 1981; Rahman 1975) would give new and enduring impetus to an Illuminationist MM, in which Nonbeing is completely enveloped by Being. Contrary to Suhrawardi with his overwhelming Light, Mulla Sadra had a more inaccessible God. His God appears in hiddenness (Jambet 2006:187). Mulla Sadra was an existentialist before 20th century 'existentialism': yet whereas the latter applies to human existence, Mulla Sadra spoke of the existence of God. To him 'existence' is the prime category, the only reality, and that is God. What we are testing in this chapter is neither 'Being' as an abstract concept nor God as real existent entity, but the emergence of Being as Infinite proto-Matter, halfway between nonbeing Absoluteness and real Cosmic existence. 'God', as thought and spoken of in the religions, is here located at that level. Yet it seems that support for the notion of the significance of Infinite Matter as an aspect of God would not find resonance in the thinking of Mulla Sadra.

Abstracting from the important inner Islamic differences, such as those between Suhrawardi and Mulla Sadra, the overall structural similarity of this brand of Sufism to the Eastern Orthodox Christian vision of super essential

Being is obvious. The Eastern Orthodox tradition had a stronger emphasis on darkness; the *Ishraqi* tradition a stronger emphasis on light. Within the Sufi tradition, Suhrawardi may have placed a stronger emphasis on the conceptual 'whatness' of Being; Mulla Sadra on the real 'thatness' of Being (God). Nevertheless, Being, in whatever degree of concreteness or abstraction, remains the necessary core and pivot of the respective Neoplatonic Christian and Neoplatonic Sufi worlds. The similarity with the world according to Vedanta, centring in Brahman, is obvious. This appears to be crucially different from the Archeic view of All taking shape in our exploration, circling around empty Absoluteness. Suhrawardi does not entertain the notion of an ultimate darkness of Absoluteness, which has nothing in common with a darkness of exile, evil or inferiority. It is the Darkness of Nonknowing and Nonbeing, the glorious Darkness of the mystery of End and Origin, the Empty centre devoid of Being (including Matter) in any sense, even of the super essential variety. Suhrawardi's world flows outward from light to darkness; the one emerging here, from darkness to the light of manifest Cosmic being and knowing, with Infinite Matter as a beautiful aspect in between.

This all too fleeting visit to an MM genius confirms that the search for MM community across differences is most worthwhile. I sense an affinity of the notion of Infinitude of Being emerging in this essay with Suhrawardi's intermediate dimension of *alam al-mithal*. Even an uncompromising accent on Absoluteness allows for an intermediate dimension of Infinite Being. I understand the mysticisms of community with God, such as those of Orthodox Christianity and Sufism, with their obligatory retention of the mythological pictures of God handed down in the monotheistic tradition, as at home in that dimension of emerging Being.

Suhrawardi lives in the Light. His system of interreflective lights reminds of the Buddhist Fa-tsang's room of mirrors (see §44). Yet Suhrawardi would not have appreciated the Emptiness in Fa-tsang's analogy, or the Darkness from which the Orient, Aurora, arises.

A last comment: In a sense, one might say, in presenting science (e.g. optics) as ultimately embedded in an MM framework, he anticipated the kind of programme investigated in this treatise. It needs to be done repeatedly, by each generation for its own time, in terms of its own impermanent, perishable scientific, philosophical and religious conditions.

■ ***ahduth shawah* (Azriel ben Menachem)**

Contemporaneous with Suhrawardi in medieval European-Western Asian MM with its undercurrent of common philosophical ideas and its cross-currents of seemingly irreconcilable religious and religio-political differences, Azriel ben Menachem (c. 1160-1238) (cf. Scholem 1974, 1987 [1962]) worked out his system

of Kabbalah in the town of Gerona in north-east Spain. He fits in the Provençal Spanish school of Kabbalah, which was speculative, as distinct from the German school, which placed the emphasis on the devotional and practical sides of mysticism.

It would be unrealistic to trace the various stages and shades of the tradition to which Azriel belonged – including ideas on the *Sefirot*: (1) as ideal patterns determining the eventual creation, (2) as being invested with creative power themselves and (3) as becoming unified with matter and involved in the actual production of the world. What I am interested in here is the possible resemblance of our Infinity, specifically Infinite Matter, with the Kabbalistic system, hinging on the pivotal concepts of *Ein-Sof* (unending, infinite) and the ten *Sefirot* emanating via *Ayin* ('nothingness'). All of this was speculatively developed in many diverse ways. Azriel was a profound MM thinker, not rejecting the rational philosophy of his day, but brilliantly crowning it with speculative mysticism.

As was the procedure so far, let me take a snapshot of this one figure, without blurring the wider historical background. The immediately preceding context was that Azriel studied with Isaac the Blind (died c. 1235, and really the founder of the Provençal school of Kabbalah), whose thinking revels in light mysticism (Scholem 1987 [1962]:288f.). As the latter's most prominent disciple, Azriel took the master's teaching to Spain and audaciously developed it further by adding logical rigour to it, integrating the scattered ideas into one organically coherent and richly textured system, and expressing it in more philosophical language.

As for the subsequent context, Azriel predates the *Zohar* ('radiance', 'splendour') (compiled by another Spanish Jew, Moses de Leon of Granada [c. 1250–1305]) by about a century. That classic would appear around 1300 and was destined to become the authoritative textbook of Jewish MM. Azriel was a seminal, pivotal figure in the development of Kabbalah, for example, it was he who gave the term *Ein-Sof* the technical meaning it would thenceforth carry. The *Zohar* would build on Azriel's notion of God as *Ein-Sof*, presenting God as 'hidden', 'non-existent' (*Ayin*), at least as far as human cognition is concerned: what cannot be known, does for all human purposes not exist. In the *Zohar* the ten *Sefirot* are 10 successive channels of light, serving as media for the manifestations of God, understood as infinite light. After the *Zohar* came Luria with his notion of God's illuminating light spread throughout the created universe. Probably Azriel's thinking also infiltrated the MM of the Christian Jacob Boehme with his idea of *Ungrund* (see Ch. 7), half a century after Luria. Closer to our immediate interest, the structural relationship between Azriel's vision of being and light and that of Suhrawardi seems obvious, but exploring such a relationship in any detail here would not be possible.

In Azriel, having 'the most speculative, productive and penetrating mind in the group' (Scholem 1987 [1962]:360), the process of the Neoplatonisation of

early Kabbalah reached its apogee. According to Scholem he could have had direct or indirect contact with the tradition of Christian Neoplatonism stemming from John of Eriugena's *De divisione naturae* (see Ch. 13), in turn going back to Pseudo-Dionysius. At that precise time, Eriugena's thought was very much in the sights of the Christian ecclesiastical establishment, which resulted in his *magnum opus* being banned and burned by Pope Honorius III in 1225. Jewish scholars could have known of these events and taken note of the contested ideas.

The term in the heading above, '*ahduth shawah* - referring to Azriel's rendering of the notion of indistinct unity, of the coincidence of opposites (ibid.:312) - testifies to his ability to toss and catch opposites in mid-air: the paradox of traditional Jewish monotheistic faith and Neoplatonic emanationist speculation, and the paradox of the coincidence of Being and Nothing.

To Azriel - reminiscent of the Neoplatonically influenced Christianity and Islam with their light symbolism sketched above - God before creation rested in himself, hidden in his own reality, all of his powers united (ibid.):

[A]s the fire's flame is united in its colours, and His powers emanate from His unity ... and they are all emanated from one another like perfume from perfume and light from light, for one emanates from the other, and the power of the emanator is in the emanated, without the emanator suffering any loss. (p. 312)

As pointed out in Chapter 6 with reference to the *Zohar*, 'Nothing' or the 'Nought' (*Ayin*) in Azriel and the Gerona circle surrounding him does not precede God, but is an aspect of superessential God. This Nought or Nothing is the *nihil*, the highest potency, out of which God creates, in a joining of the Genesis account of Creation and Neoplatonic emanation. Nought is assimilated to God himself; is God under the aspect of the superessentiality of his goodness. Here one is dazzled by the dialectical brilliance of Azriel as he juggles the two concepts of Being and Nought (ibid.:420ff.). Is this, however, quite the transcendence of both in Absoluteness? Probably not. It is monotheism transcended and Neoplatonism pushed to the limit, but it is not Absolutism. In the words of Scholem (1974): in Azriel's writing:

Being and Nought therefore are only different aspects of the *superesse* of the divine reality [...] both are modalities of *en-sof* itself that constitute the indistinct unity of 'Ought' and of 'Nought'. (p. 424)

Azriel's concept of *Ein-Sof* is suggestive of the cognitive inconceivability of the hidden God. Ontologically, it occasionally 'seem[s] to point to a neutral stratum of the divine nature', but he remains an infinite Person, 'the master of creation' in a 'theistic reinterpretation of the Neoplatonic "One"' (ibid.:431). With Azriel, *Ein-Sof* becomes the proper name of a Person (ibid.:432), acting through the *Sefirot* as means (ibid.:432). The Neoplatonic hierarchy of Being has been absorbed into the *Sefirot*: the first three correspond to the Neoplatonic world of the intellect, the second three to the world of the souls, and the last four to the corporeal world (ibid.:452). Azriel retains the notion of a hierarchical

downward order from intellect to soul to inferior matter; this model sees them as emerging concurrently, imbued with equal value and dignity.

Admitting the oversimplification of the wealth of Kabbalah and Azriel in this picture, I reluctantly take leave. In sum, it seems that *Ein-Sof* after all does not, as is the case in the Archeic model, signify an ontological indeterminateness, onto which the human, in awe before the incomprehensible, projects humanlike characteristics such as being, person and creator. That is the difference between ‘the Infinite’ of theistic Neoplatonism on the one hand and ‘Infinitude’, ‘Infinite Being’, as envisaged in this essay. This difference has been confirmed in every analysis of the theistic Neoplatonic type of MM thinking so far.

In each of the three examples analysed above, that type of thinking did not leave much space for the veneration of Infinite Matter. That is not to say that Matter was not held in high regard by some in the theistic tradition, in spite of being influenced by Neoplatonism. For example, the first great Hispanic-Jewish philosopher, Solomon Ibn Gabirol (c. 1020–1058), in broad terms adopted Plotinus’ vision of emanation. Whereas Plotinus imagined a process of degeneration through stages of decreasing reality and splendour, finding its nadir in Matter, Gabirol elevated and spiritualised Matter, seeing it as a spiritual entity, part of the World Soul. From the vantage point of our endeavour, that is a treasure from the past. Another example, a century and a half later, came from Christian theism, as represented by Robert Grosseteste. Let me look at him in some detail.

■ ***forma prima corporalis* (Robert Grosseteste)**

During this period, one concatenated set of foundational ideas stretched from Iran and Syria across Europe to Ireland, across the institutional and theological divides of Islam, Judaism and Christianity.

At the time that Jewish Kabbalah was flourishing in figures such as Azriel ben Menachem, Western Christian theology was starting to consolidate the epoch of scholasticism, rallying around Aristotle. Its standardised programme would consist in the provision of definitive answers to difficult questions by systematically arranging, analysing, comparing and improving on the views of previous theological and philosophical authorities by way of rigorous reason, in formalised arguments. I here do not engage with the obvious representatives of that new tradition, but attend to a somewhat atypical figure. In England (at the time not part of the European theological mainstream), scholasticism had not been strongly established yet, but it was in progress. A somewhat eccentric figure, promoting that development yet also developing his own idiosyncratic vision, was the bishop of Lincoln and lecturer at Oxford University and probably chancellor of that institution, Robert Grosseteste (c. 1170–1253) (cf. McEvoy 1982; Southern 1986). Of humble background yet with a standard theological training,

this English clergyman and church leader was a pioneer in the scientific developments, not only of the 13th century (dominated by Aristotle), but of modern science with its experimental method. Only when approaching the sixth decade of his long life did he start to make a serious study of theology, without sacrificing his fascination with earthly things, medicine, stars and the sciences dealing with those phenomena. The new start in his later life meant that, adding to the Augustinian mould of his thinking, he learnt Greek and read Greek Fathers, especially Origen, Basil the Great, Gregory of Nyssa, John of Damascus and Pseudo-Dionysius. His own general religious outlook was congenial to that of Dionysius and his work on that illustrious predecessor was his most notable scholarly contribution in the field of patristic studies.

His independence of mind showed itself throughout his serious theological work. Not a typical scholastic, he did not seek finality of answers protected on all sides, but in imaginative speculations retained an open-ended, even experimental tentativeness of outlook, no doubt coming from his scientific discipline. He did not exactly hide the subjectivity of his views either. The very first sentence of his most famous work, the forceful and original though brief treatise *De luce* ('On light', probably produced when he was around 70 years of age) (Southern 1986:139) makes that delightfully clear (*'in my opinion'*). Grosseteste was adventurous and in theological temperament not quite in tune with the dominant fashion of his time. His emphasis on light as such was a continuation of the Greek metaphysical mysticism of light with its ontological, epistemological and religious components, as can be observed in Pythagoras, Parmenides and Plato, which coloured all of subsequent early Christian and medieval thought (Beierwaltes 1957).

What makes him interesting from the point of this essay is his combination of science and theology, particularly in his views on light. Indeed, fundamental consideration of light as the rarest form of matter in the context of reflection on Being occurred not only in Eastern Orthodox Christianity, Muslim Sufism and Jewish Kabbalah, but also in Western, Roman Christianity. As he matured, Grosseteste developed from scientist to theologian to speculative metaphysician. In the last stage of his life, around his sixties, his life seems to have taken a new turn. He underwent a profound spiritual experience, adopted a Franciscan way of life and became a visionary. However, in *De luce*, mysticism remains in the background; rational metaphysics dominates. For that reason it would not qualify as 'MM' in the full sense intended in our model. Nevertheless, it offers fascinating reading, as relevant today as it was then.

Light was a prominent theme in the Bible and the Fathers, as pointed out above. Not only Gregory but also Basil, with his interest in light as a link between Creator and creation, would have provided special inspiration to Grosseteste. In line with his passion for science, the significance of physical light would have struck him for several physical reasons (Southern 1986:206, 217ff.), such as that it is of central importance in astronomy and that, moving in straight lines,

it conforms to geometry. To him, light was not a mere analogy. MM speaking, at first glance the title of his *De luce* might seem to connect him not only to the Greek Fathers, but also to Suhrawardi. Yet direct influence of Suhrawardi on his slightly younger contemporary is unlikely. Apart from a personal spiritual interest in the interpretation of light shared by both (Corbin 1964:211ff.), the obvious reason for their common interest in light would be the general cultural and philosophical world shared by educated Christians, Muslims and Jews, in particular the shared Neoplatonic model of Being radiating from God, this together with Aristotelianism (cf. McEvoy 1982:149ff.).

Grosseteste also knew the *Book of optics* of the Muslim scientist, famous in Europe at the time, Alhazen (Ibn al-Haytham [965–1040]), as well as the metaphysics of the Muslims Avicenna, Al-Ghazali and Averroes and the Jewish Avicbron (1020–1070) (McEvoy 1982:160; Southern 1986:187). Grosseteste's cosmological design cannot be understood outside of that historical context. He sought cross-fermentation from outside his own religious and philosophical tradition and attempted a synthesis of the various strands of thought floating around in his day. The new frontiers he explored were mainly Greek Orthodoxy with its language and its great tradition, Islam, and Aristotle, combining all of that with an unabated interest in the science of physical nature, particularly light. It strikes as most remarkable for his time. This essay warms to his inclusive spirit.

In his densely argued cosmological treatise, Grosseteste in essence postulates that light is 'the first corporeal form' (*forma prima corporalis*) (Ginter et al n.d.). The book is an interpretation, in terms of the science (Aristotelian) and philosophy (Neoplatonism-Aristotelianism) of the day and Grosseteste's main theological models (Augustine and Basil), of the first three days of creation, starting with the Divine command: *fiat lux*, 'let there be light' (according to Gn 1:1– 3) (McEvoy 1982:158ff.). Grosseteste follows no one slavishly. As for science, in rejecting the idea that the world has no beginning, he distances himself from Aristotle. He also contradicts Aristotle's division between earthly and extra earthly matter; to Grosseteste, matter everywhere is one, although not uniform. As for theology, whereas Gregory of Nyssa takes refuge in an allegorical interpretation of light (see above), Grosseteste, in his own brilliant piece of writing, does not do that: he speaks mathematically, scientifically. It was a different age, and in this respect, Grosseteste stood close to our own age and to the interest leading the journey made on these pages. In and for his time he achieved an integration of science and theology.

Grosseteste's focus on light is supported by his empirical observation that a single point of light will instantaneously expand to produce a sphere of light. By implication light is the prime instance and the origin of the generation and motion of all corporeal things. Grosseteste's universe is dynamic, which distinguishes it quite starkly from the Neoplatonic model. He also saw that extension is a necessary concomitant of corporeity. Thus, the link between

light and corporeity is established. He does not develop the idea of light as link between God and the world, although he does refer to light (*lux*) as the 'first form created in first matter' (*prima forma in materia prima creata*). He conceives of the universe as a process of outward rarefaction and inward condensation. Spreading outwards instantly in the moment of creation in all directions to the outer limit of the universe, light (as outwards spreading *lux*) becomes extremely rarefied. Then, in a reflected form (*lumen*), it starts to contract and condense and turns back to the centre via a series of nine celestial spheres (not subject to change), converging in the geometric centre of the universe as a mass of four consecutive infra-celestial spheres (fire, air, water and earth, all subject to change). Throughout the process of return it remains light, a self-generating force. This is also a process from simplicity in the rarefied higher spheres, continuous with the initial origin of light, to the multiplicity of things on dense earth. It all adds up to a harmonious universe, suggested by the role of the perfect number, 10, in its workings.

How might our notions of Infinite Being and Infinite Matter, in the frame of our developing model as a whole, relate to his system? At first sight, he does not seem to shed a great deal of light directly on our specific theme. Yet, let me read carefully. By 'infinity' (*infinitas*) in his treatise, he means quantitatively unending extension in the physical and mathematical senses. Yet a qualitative, 'spiritual' dimension does announce itself as he continues. Light is not only corporeity itself, but is of a more exalted and of a nobler and more excellent essence than all corporeal things, and is in fact closer to the forms that exist apart from matter, namely, the intelligences, that is, angels. Towards the end of his treatise he claims that in the lower bodies light is more corporeal and multiplied, in the 'higher bodies' it is 'more spiritual and simple' (*spiritualis et simplex*). The first and highest celestial sphere is moved by 'the incorporeal power of intelligence or soul' (*virtus incorporealis intelligentiae vel animae*), an 'intellectual moving power' (*a virtute motiva intellectiva*) which diminishes as it moves the lower spheres.

Scientifically, his booklet with its linkage of light and matter, in a sense anticipates modern science with its equivalence of energy and mass. Metaphysically, it is a creative package, not developed in detail by the author. It is not a comprehensive, fully integrated web of MM writing. He never achieved that. For example, although he has written about angels elsewhere, he does not here elaborate on intelligences (angels) as beings at some intermediate level of being in this scheme. Exactly how the various topics touched on relates to God in his framework is not explained either. Obviously, inspired by Scripture, God would be seen as 'light', but the exact relationship between the Creator God and his creation is not discussed. He does not broach the idea of an emanation of the world from God, although his basic model is largely the Neoplatonic one of expansion and return. God remains in the background as the great mathematician, so to speak. He does not explore light itself (or matter)

as an intermediate dimension between God and the world as Suhrawardi does either, which would have been of interest to this chapter. On the assumption that *fiat lux* is the hidden presupposition under his construction, it may seem probable that God's creative word (*fiat*) would neither allow nor need intermediate beings or levels of being between God and the world. The coming of the world into being is an immediate event from the word of God, not a continuous process, and the ontological break between Creator and creation remains non-negotiable. Yet, as we saw, he does distinguish among levels of being, ranging from merely material to spiritual, in a process of becoming. He makes a distinction between sensible, physical light and suprasensible, metaphysical light. That brings his design somewhat closer to the kind of thinking preferred in our emerging one. The difference remains that whereas Grosseteste proceeds from the concept of a perfect personal Divinity as the ground of Being, this essay proceeds from the notion of devolving Unground. Still, his phrase *forma prima corporalis*, just as a phrase, is attractive from our point of view. Infinite Matter could be termed that: it is a level, a 'first form', of becoming Being, implying Matter.

This overview has shown that there is much to appreciate in Grosseteste, not least his understanding that nature needs to be placed in the centre of attention and his boldness in integrating theology and science as he attempted to understand the universe as a unit, comprising both the natural and the 'supernatural' dimensions. Because of the oneness of all things in God, the natural world is replete with symbols of God. As for the religio-political aspect of things, his readiness to establish links across the various religious blocs is duly noted as encouraging the approach of these meditations and reflections. Yet others in medieval Christianity seem to provide even more support than Grosseteste for the present project. Pre-eminent among these is the Christian pantheist David of Dinant (c. 1160–1217), who was accused of transgressing the ontological break between the Creator and creation and condemned as heretic by the Church in 1210. After all, he taught that there are three primal principles: God, Spirit and Matter, coinciding to the extent that matter may be called 'Divine' and God may be referred to as primal matter (*materia prima*).

There may be insurmountable divisions between the institutions and theologies – each with its own complex and idiosyncratic set of symbolic associations – of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, but not between the mysticisms springing from them. It was rewarding to observe how, at the same time, similar MM ideas evolved in all three of these religions, under the same set of (largely Neoplatonic) influences. Totally embedded as these MM's were in their theological and religious settings, they also transcended such settings as they drifted tendentially towards Absoluteness. Yet the gap between what they intended and what our concept of Absoluteness intends, remains. That also applies to the notion of Infinite Matter (Light), which in this essay

refers to a central aspect of a level of emerging Being; to them (with Gabirol and Grosseteste as examples of promising exceptions) it remained a symbol of something spiritual.

■ ***materia prima* (Giordano Bruno)**

Giordano Bruno (1548–1600) worked at the time when a new type of natural science (pioneered in the astronomy of Copernicus 1473–1543), started to take shape in the 16th and 17th centuries. Bruno sought an integration of the new cosmology with new speculative religious metaphysics, free from the confines of the old school theology, which was still dominated by Aristotle. He proposed integration of the emerging science of the time in a new MM context that revitalised ancient philosophical and esoteric themes in Western tradition. Bearing a Platonic stamp, his thinking also had predecessors in the pre-Socratics and Neoplatonism, Eriugena and Cusanus, as well as Renaissance Hermeticism. He paid a heavy personal price for his daring, for he was arrested in 1592 and ended his life tied to a stake in Rome in 1600.

The single most dominant aspect of Bruno's thinking was his overriding fascination with the notion of infinity in every facet where it may be applicable. He passionately embraced an open universe, in which humankind can find its true destiny.

Stimulated by the idea of an infinite cosmos latent in the work of Copernicus, Bruno was captivated by the speculative idea of an infinite universe without a centre, substantially homogenous in every part, living and with an omnipresent, universal spirit (Aquilecchia 1993:265). In his *De la causa, principio e uno* ('Concerning the cause, principle and unity') he postulates that the universe is 'one, infinite, immobile', 'without end and limitation' (Bruno 1962). Behind all the changes is one, homogenous, substantial substrate. By implication, Bruno left behind the idea of a linear, teleological historical process with a beginning and an end and replaced it with the idea of an eternal cyclical movement without beginning and end. In his mind, this construction was clearly not intended as 'correct' exegesis of the Bible. Nor was it simply the extension of sensory perception. It probably had the status of a necessary speculative projection of the MM imagination. He presented it as reasonable and scientific, but it was tinged with inspired intuition. After his death, science and religion, reason and MM would fall apart: for example, Galileo was no longer prepared to die for the connection, as Bruno had been.

The universe according to Bruno is an emanation from a primordial divine unity. Seen from below, the universe is multiple, but seen from above, it is one organic whole. Bruno embraced both dimensions: the unity and the contingent multiplicity. He introduced the notion of 'monad' (understood as a living, original and indivisible unit) into the MM discourse. In spite of the obvious

proximity of this thinking to, for example, Advaita-Vedanta, the differences in outlook (such as Bruno's celebration of the contingent plurality of individual things) should not be overlooked.

How does he view Matter? Continuing the Neoplatonic model, Bruno views nature as an order of hierarchical dependence. At the top is one Principle (*uno principio*), one essence common to all things. In the process of descending emanation, the supreme unity diversifies into two derived substances: the formal principle (*forma* 'form', or *anima* 'soul') and the material principle (*materia* 'matter'). He also speaks of two forces (activity and passivity) and two minimum elements (*minima*). Reflecting David of Dinant, God is the third of the three absolute *minima*. Soul and matter are not two separate substances, but two aspects of the same primordial substance. None has primacy over the other; both are infinite and divine; both are eternally co-existent and mutually dependent and thus only analytically distinguishable.

He postulates the existence of a World Soul (*l'anima del mondo*), equally present in all things as artist or artisan (*artefice interno*). To this, I shall return in the next chapter. Matter is equally important. In this respect, the revolutionary significance of Bruno for the development of a model appropriate to contemporary conditions is to be noted. Presently the understanding of the true nature of Matter is of prime importance. This essay fully endorses Bruno's extremely high valuation of Matter. Materialistic reductionism, declaring empirically accessible matter to be the only substance of things (known by him in the forms of Leucippus, Democritus and the Epicureans), he resolutely dismissed. All the same, he attempted to integrate elements of their thinking into his own system.

Bruno distinguished two levels of Matter. Matter of the higher order he called 'first Matter' (*materia prima*); matter of the lower order, that is physical nature accessible to the senses, he called 'sensible matter' (*materia sensibile*). Linking up with David of Dinant, Bruno calls Matter 'a divine thing'. He did not intend an identity of the two entities, but a participation: Matter participates in Divinity, which both transcends and includes Matter. All existing things are expressions of Souled Matter; Matter is the non-perceptible, unformed, qualityless, primordial substrate of all things; the infinite, latent primordial possibility of all things. To him Matter is an eternal yet also malleable homogenous substance, the passive potentiality of all things, fecundated by Soul to bring forth the various individual, even oppositional things. The individual Cosmic things arise from and subside back into Primal Matter. Therefore, in the end nothing is ever totally destroyed.

Bruno seems to have groped for a vision according to which physical nature is a set of formations of infinite Matter (and Soul). Matter itself is defined as essentially interdependent with Soul, and as an aspect of God who is both immanent in and transcendent to the world. He would exert significant influence on, among others, Spinoza and Schelling. Today a transcendence of the

dilemma of old-style supranaturalism with its sharp ontological breaks between (a) firstly God and world and (b) secondly between soul and matter, as well as of flat positivistic materialism, remains as relevant as in Bruno's time. It should be stated here that in its overall conception and development the book presented here has been profoundly indebted to Bruno (cf. Krüger 2004). As far as Matter is concerned, the main difference is that Bruno assumed Matter to be not only infinite, but also an eternal substance, derived from an eternal, substantial God. He did not pursue the route towards non-substantial Absolute Horizon, as our argument intends.

■ ***the Universal Infinite One, Ākāsha and Prāna*** **(Vivekananda)**

In order to gain a different perspective on the landscape of Infinite Being as Infinite Matter, let me now veer away from the remarkably homogeneous range of medieval monotheistic and early modern MM to explore a different range, the Indian range of Advaita-Vedanta. Yet is it so different? Does light not also play a central role in Hinduism as symbol of the overcoming of ignorance by understanding, for example in the festival of Diwali – its MM meaning harking back to the Vedas? The Indian school of Advaita-Vedanta goes back to the first forest thinkers of India, from the 7th century BCE onwards. Starting from a polytheist position, these earliest forest dwellers gradually pushed through to a non-dualist position, finding its culmination in Sankara.

Let me turn to a modern representative, Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902). Born from a Bengali aristocratic family and a disciple of Ramakrishna (1836–1886), Vivekananda became famous for his address at the opening ceremony of the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893 (Vivekananda 1964:vol I.3-24). Speaking charismatically and writing clearly, he became the most celebrated modern exponent of Advaita-Vedanta.

Vivekananda speaks a great deal about what he terms 'Infinity', but he does not intend what is envisaged in our Archeic picture. To him 'Infinity' appears to be a characterisation of the ultimate: 'Brahman' ('Atman', 'God', 'Being', 'the Absolute' – note the definite article), implying Its being eternal, eternally pure, eternally awake, almighty, all-knowing, all-merciful, omnipresent, formless and partless (III.123; IV.85), 'Spirit', 'the Universal Infinite One' (I.341, 363), 'the only Reality' (II.248), 'the One Infinite Being' (III.8). Such terminology approximates 'positive' theistic Neoplatonic terminology, but it must be understood that Vivekananda intends transcending that mythologising and personalising modes of speech. Typically, he and the tradition to which he belongs would paint the Infinite in negative language (I.499). Again, we are reminded of Western monotheistic-Neoplatonic apophatic speech. Interestingly, Vivekananda believes that the Occident has missed that notion of the Infinite altogether (I.500).

To him the very notion of Infinity implies a relativising of the world to the point of being mere *maya* (illusion, owing to ignorance) (I.363, II.83, 305). The Infinite could not have become the finite (II.132) since that would have resulted in a 'minus', a limitation, in Infinity. Change implies production by something external and more powerful (II.228). Therefore, Infinity cannot change (II.80) and be divided (II.414, 431, 469f.), and this universe can only have the status of mere appearance and not reality, because of our human looking through time, space and causation (II.130ff.) as if through a veil (II.135). Not that the universe does not exist, but it is not what we naïvely take it to be, namely something different from Infinity/the Absolute. No, the universe simply 'is' the Absolute (i.e. Infinity) (I.418f.). It is merely 'the apparent evolution of God'. This 'whole universe as it exists is that Being' (I.363). Thou are that! Thou art God! (II.134, 399, 471; III.347, 422). God is not a separate Being, and I am not a separate being. God is (and we are) the Universal (II.419), Infinite Being, Infinite Reality (II.339), the Infinite Individual (II.346), the Divine Being (II.401), the Existence Absolute (II.402), the Infinite Soul (II.431) – also Infinite Love in which Love, Lover and Beloved are One (II.53) (see Ch. 20).

Vivekananda's Advaita MM is accommodating, in his words 'friendly', accepting what has preceded it, 'not in a patronising way, but with the conviction that they are true manifestations of the same truth' (II.347). Yet the notion of Absolute Horizon, inspired by historical Siddhattha and legendary Lao-Tzu, takes MM reflection a decisive step back behind Vivekananda's position. He does not allow for Absolute Horizon in the absolute sense of the word, where Being is transcended altogether.

To him Infinity is an ultimate category, but his Infinity has substantialising overtones, as the nomenclature used by him (see above) to characterise it, amply demonstrates. Not only is our Absoluteness not the same as his Infinity; our Infinitude is not the same as his Infinity either. He speaks more definitely, more 'positively' of Infinity even when he intends speaking 'negatively' about it, than our Archeic model, which allows only for formless Infinitude, just, only just, starting to announce its emergence, on the threshold of 'non-is' and 'is'. To him Infinite Being is Perfect Being, on the assumption that a stringent view of causality would not allow for any other view. That is disputable. 'Advaita' ('non-dual') need not have the implication of attaching illusory status to Cosmos. 'Non-dual' could also allow for Unground, wholly inaccessible to us, to 'cause' a relatively autonomous (in a sense) Cosmos, without losing sight of their identity (in a sense).

What about Matter? In spite of the two and a half millennia separating Vivekananda from Siddhattha Gotama, the remarkable continuity in the Indian MM tradition is unmistakable. In Vivekananda the ancient Indian notion of *ākāśa* ('space') utilised by Siddhattha Gotama, resurfaces, but quite independently of the former. In this respect, this essay is moving close to Vivekananda. To him the universe itself is composed of matter and force. All matter is the outcome of one 'primal matter', called *Ākāśha*; and all forces in nature are the manifestations of

one 'primordial force' called *Prāna* (VIII.192ff.). Under the conditions of contemporary science, they would be grouped together as 'matter' and 'energy'. The important point here is that modern Advaita Vedanta in the figure of Vivekananda sees a dimension beyond the 'gross' matter registered by the senses and their extensions in instruments, and insists on a dimension perceptible by the mind. It suggests the dimension hinted at in a different terminology by a David Bohm and others as opening up on the other side of presently prevalent crude materialism in contemporary culture. What Vivekananda does not do, is extend his primal, primordial level towards the depth of Absoluteness, as Siddhattha had done. In its own manner, this essay with its notion of Infinite Matter wishes to capture a most important aspect of that primal, primordial level of emerging Reality - not ultimately deriving from an eternal Spirit, but emerging from empty Absoluteness.

The art of MM composition envisaged in this exploration is the construction of a balanced integration of the categories of Absoluteness, Eternity, Infinitude and Cosmos, each with its constituent aspects. Vivekananda's model has its strengths, but it also emphasises certain aspects at the cost of others. I find that his model loses sufficient sight of the very top and the very bottom of the chain of being (to use that term for the moment): at the top, the non-reality of Absoluteness; at the bottom, the real reality of Cosmos.

This survey of some MM views of Matter from history was worthwhile, confirming the hunch that reductionistic materialism may be the worldview of choice for most of contemporary scientific and science-dependent popular culture or perhaps the only option available to many, but that is by no means the only or the most convincing route to take. Seeking an alternative route does not imply settling for mythological theism or the denigration of Matter as has been the case in most idealistic systems. On the contrary, it may imply the elevation of Matter to a high ontological status indeed, and as aligned to and integrated with other dimensions at such a level as having equal status. To these other dimensions I shall now turn.

Life

■ §49 The urge to be

Cosmic life is here discerned as manifesting an unconquerable urge to be, and to be well, and to achieve such a state of well-being – an urge encoded in Infinitude as background of Cosmic life. It is present in the most primitive forms of life as well as in the instinctual drives of higher developed organisms to live and to preserve life.

Let us think of life and matter as connected in the sense that both, inextricably linked, are intrinsically part of Cosmos as a whole. Here the term *hylozoism* (Greek: ‘matter’-‘life’-ism) becomes useful: not in the sense that matter as such, or every manifestation of matter is explicitly alive, but in the sense that Life as Infinite influence permeates all that is. Cosmic life may be thought of as having its origin in a dimension transcending what is envisaged in both materialistic reductionism and super naturalistic creationism.

The understanding proposed here does not militate against the scientific fact that in the historical sequence of this our evolving Cosmos, matter appeared first and that life emerged from matter. It is suggested that life as experienced and observed in everyday human existence and as studied by science can be interlocked with the kind of MM scheme emerging here.

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Only with the engagement of both discourses together, would human knowledge of facts be able to progress to the understanding of meaning and to the motivation of benevolent praxis towards all life. Empirical nature then becomes Nature as living, meaningful whole. Biological evolution could be recognised as part of the devolution of Spirit from Absoluteness to Cosmos.

Another fact is that wealthy sectors of humanity are hedonistically spoiling earthly life. It may not be the only factor precipitating an ecological disaster, but it is a significant one. As part of an alternative culture, biological life needs to be connected to a 'more', here thought of as Infinite Life. Such an intervention can only be made by humanity itself, following the most profound elements in its MM traditions.

Infinite Life is not the divine possession of everlasting, interminable existence (as Boethius said in his *Consolation* V.VI). It is the possibility of life as we know it, but prior (not in a temporal sense) to its appearance on Earth. Infinite Life is not biological life yet. It is postulated as a life enabling precondition, necessary for biological life on Earth. Infinite Life does not refer to some pre-existent state of affairs. It has the same ontological status as Infinite Matter. As Infinite urge to be, it is a formless reservoir containing the potential for the abilities of adaptation, responsiveness, development, growth, continuation, appetite, sensing pleasure and pain, self-organisation and creativity (the production of novelty implying an element of freedom).

Life on earth is neither the result of a *fiat* from some supernatural elsewhere, nor the result of a blind, chance shuffling of sheer matter. In a way, Infinite Life is a functional equivalent of what is referred to as 'eternal life' in some religions. Nevertheless, it is not the same. It is not an existence of endless duration as somehow a happy continuation of earthly life after death, reserved for some individuals of the human species, the other individuals of that species doomed to an equally endless state of existence as a most unhappy continuation of earthly life ('eternal death'), and all other forms of life just perishing. Such myths serve a psychological and social need in some individuals, societies and religions. Humans have a deeply ingrained need to see goodness rewarded and evil punished, and they appear to need to emphasise their superiority over 'lower' forms of life. All of that is understandable, but the notion of Infinite Life does not serve that need.

All biological forms of life from minute prokaryotes to very clever humans (*homo sapiens sapiens*) express Infinite Life, are carried by Infinite Life while they live out their lives. Then they all die. Biological death is not the end of the story. I am not implying some living happily ever after for some predestined or exceptionally virtuous individuals of one species, either by imputed merit or own perfection. All forms of life die. Death is more than the decay and disintegration of biological bodies rejoining the physical materials and forces of nature. It signifies the return of all biological life to the reservoir of Infinite Life,

to Infinitude-Eternity-Absoluteness. End as termination is linked to End as destiny. Realising that, is salvation and happiness. At death I, you, all – from prokaryotes to humans – become, in a sense slightly more emphatic than we already are, part of the cycle of Cosmos. We are recycled. The droplet returns to the ocean. Our being part of the spiral of Arche as a whole is realised.

Humans are privileged: as far as we presently know, we are the only ones with the ability to know consciously and self-consciously and to appreciate life in the context of Life. What a precious surfacing from the ocean of Infinitude are our lives – if we are very strong, 80 years, with perhaps a bonus of a decade or two thrown in thanks to modern science – before we submerge again into Infinite Life. Only the most finely tuned human minds, touching Infinitude, realise this. Such minds make contact not only with Infinite Life, but also with Infinite Matter, Love and Thought.

This spiral of Origin and End, repeated and symbolised in every birth and hatching and every death of every living creature, is not only a chronological process occurring over a period of time. It is actualised at every moment of every life. Birth and death take place in every body every second. Even if all life on Earth should come to an end, Infinite Life, with Infinite Matter, Love and Thought, functions. In that sense, 'I' cannot die: not in the sense of having an eternal substantial soul or being part of an eternal Substance, but in the sense of being part of an Archeic spiral in which the moment of Infinite Life can be discerned.

The Eternal Principles we can only postulate, but Infinitude can be glimpsed, sensed, experienced, deriving from it a sense of the beauty of Cosmic life in its very transience, with its miraculous arising, its glowing health, its energetic activity and its end, which can be noble. The above is the larger context of our being part of the biological process of procreation, of being born, of metabolism, responsiveness to stimuli, adaptation to the environment, and death and decay.

In their contact with the margin of Cosmic life, some have concentrated on Life. That is the mysticism of the active deed, exemplified by a Francis of Assisi, a Matilda in Dante's *Purgatory* and a Gandhi. It is *karma-yoga*. It is loving the Lord with all one's strength of body. This is achieved by living strongly, promoting the well-being of all living beings. The insight emerging in this chapter gives rise to a morality in which all life is respected, loved and actively served. The preservation of one's individual biological life is not the ultimate good. There is more, and many have gladly sacrificed their lives for a higher good. On the other hand, contrary to much of religion (including large chunks of Buddhism and Christianity) cosmic life, including food and drink, sex, family life and friendship, is not to be despised as evil, but celebrated (cf. Davis 1976).

There remains the mystery of pain and suffering and the inescapable fact that all life seems to be at the cost of other life. The strong become stronger

by feeding on the weaker. Even if we would emphasise the dimensions of co-operation and so on (see the next chapter), the dimension of life at the cost of life would remain. The argument that there is no problem at all, that it is all a matter of human perception with a misplaced sentimentality, does not solve the problem. All we have is the human perspective, and in that perspective pain is pain and life without pain is not possible. All theodicies – from the notion of the best of possible worlds to the notion of an almighty God – have been wrecked on this rock. This essay drifts towards imagining that pain and suffering are inevitable effects of the process of limitation, as Infinitude becomes Cosmos; and that Cosmic life as it is, is part of a larger process. Cosmos is a pearl resting in the mother-of-pearl of Infinite Life. Life on Earth is a secretion of Infinite Life, essentially continuous with and similar to Infinite Life, and irritation is part of its production. In addition, the pearl may still be developing, growing, in the direction of beauty and perfection, we may imagine, as we contribute towards that development. For that to happen, Infinite Life is to be imagined together with Infinite Love and Infinite Thought.

The notion of Infinite Life provides a transcendental basis for a human morality centring in an affirmation of life. At a biophysical level, human life revolves around the experiences of pleasure and pain, the physical reactions of desire and revulsion and the overall tones of suffering and relief from suffering. Human beings are capable of transcending such experiences of life and accessing a dimension here referred to as Infinite Life. From that, human beings can return to life with a strong affirmation of biological life, balancing strength, endurance and moderation in all things. At a psychological level, visiting the domain of Infinite Life opens the possibility of existing with courage, resoluteness and fortitude for the good of all Cosmic life.

■ §50 To life!

■ Greek-Hellenistic thinking

□ Plato

Two centuries after Anaximander, Plato in his *Timaeus* (see Ch. 6 and Ch. 9 of the present publication), put forward the notion of Cosmos as a living organism. He did not get round to working out his vision in detail as far as empirical life is concerned; the biological sciences do not exactly feature in his writing. Yet he certainly put forward creative ideas concerning the origin of the livingness of such life on earth – ideas which this argument would not mind being aligned with up to a point. In short, his Demiurge, stripped of its mythological jacket, is not a particular, personal God, but may be interpreted as the Idea of Life, of Livingness, of which all forms of concrete life, from the universe as the Great Living Being to the many concrete forms of life, are so many instantiations. In the mature Plato ‘Life’, ‘Living Being’, may even be the most embracing of all

Ideas, in which firstly the world as the great Cosmic Living Being, and secondly all living beings, participate. The Demiurge as the Idea of Livingness is the genus of which they are specifications. Essentially the Idea of Livingness, of Living Being, includes the notion of self-movingness. From the Demiurge, understood thus, the notion of a Soul of the World may be derived, and from that, all other souls of existing beings derive their relative reality. Such souls therefore have an intermediary status: on the one hand, they participate upwards in the transcendent dimension of Ideas, on the other hand, they ensoul specific bodies, thereby awarding movement (i.e. life) to them.

Life is the principle, which gives the Cosmos and its inhabitants the element of durability. Plato's notion of the indestructibility of individual souls fits into this framework. Since the ultimate category is Being as Idea (to be precise in our present context: Living Being as Idea), and since that Living Being is deathless, and since all living creatures participate in that Idea of Living Being through their life-giving souls, it must follow that such souls cannot die. This expedition follows a different route, aligning itself with the Buddhist intuition of ultimate emptiness, transcending a notion such as ultimately indestructible Ideas (including a notion of Living Being), and disallowing the notion of the eternity of souls. Plato's Idea of Life is not an intermediate stage (such as our Eternity or Infinitude) mediating between a further level of transcendence (such as our Absoluteness) and Cosmos. His Life, essentially tied to Being, is the ultimate category. That ultimate level, that *terminus a quo*, is not empty in any sense, but perfect fullness, somehow allowing change, but not changing itself.

□ Aristotle

Whereas Plato worked downwards from the top of transcendence, Aristotle (see our Ch. 13) worked upwards from empirical reality. Plato forged a metaphysics with scientific implications; Aristotle was a researcher in the field of natural phenomena, developing theories with metaphysical import. With him, biological life as observable on land, in the skies and in the oceans would become a topic of serious research and thought. The issue at stake now is not Aristotle's pioneering contribution to biology as a natural science, but whether (and, if so, how) he explained the origin of life, the enabling conditions for life. Could 'life' in some sense in his view have been an enabling transcendental condition for the world as such, apart from biological life?

First, Aristotle does not seem to have been interested in any transcendental role for the infinite (*to apeiron*). To him cosmos is finite, and infinity as such does not exist. It is not an actuality, neither as some substance nor as some principle or potentiality that can become actual. To him infinity, in the most general sense, may have meant something like the potentially indefinite extension of anything that can be extended, such as number. Even so, the question remains whether (and if so, how) he sought a transcendental origin of life.

Of the four types of causes distinguished by Aristotle (material, formal, efficient and final), the fourth at first glance allows some connection with a transcendental dimension. Aristotle himself may have excluded the necessity of conscious deliberation in beings themselves in their teleological directedness, but is a link with a transcendental dimension, however it might be understood, necessarily excluded? According to a line of interpretation seeking to connect Aristotle strongly to present-day scientific thinking, the teleological structure of the world according to his physics (the notion that the ground of each thing is to be found in its final cause) might not have been connected to any more than materialist notion at all; Aristotle does not accept any ontologically different, pre-existing Good/God that things in the world willy-nilly measure up to, and he only allows for immanent good as purpose. In this view, the teleological good (final cause) may simply refer to performing well in the things that beings (such as humans – and the universe as a whole) do anyway (Anagnostopoulos 2009:335–347).

In Aristotle's view, God did not create the world, and God does not actively run the world. That would not necessarily exclude a transcendentalist explanation of the world. Indeed, along a second line of interpretation, the teleological process (certainly not effected by God, who is wholly detached) is all done by the natural world itself, having an inherent natural tendency to become godlike. Then the Unmoved Prime Mover is merely a model for emulation – but even so teleology does have a transcendental reference (Sedley 2010:5ff.). The argument of this essay is closer to Aristotle as presented in this second line of thought (if it is correct – it appears that there are a number of unresolved ambiguities in the thinking of Aristotle). But even on this second type of interpretation, even if Aristotle stood in awe before the world as manifestness somehow connected to meaningful hiddenness, a notion such as 'Infinite Life' would have been foreign to his way of thinking.

As for biological life as such, Aristotle's assumption of hylomorphism ('matter-form'-ism) is relevant to this discussion. By that, he meant that the soul is the 'form' of the body and that the body is the 'matter' of the soul. He wished to avoid the extremes of (1) a dualism of body and soul (Plato's potential error), (2) reducing the soul to the body and (3) eliminating the soul altogether (Shields 2009:292ff.). This opens a perspective on comparing Aristotle's hylomorphism to early Buddhist notions such as *khandha* (the five 'groups' of all existence) and *nāma-rūpa* (integrated 'name-form', i.e. 'mind-matter'). By this construction, emphasising the interdependence of corporeality and mentality, Buddhism also strove to find a middle way beyond the soul substantialism of some Upanishads and the reductionist (eliminative) views of the materialists of the time. There is a certain similarity between the Buddha's resistance against materialism and Upanishadic eternalism, and Aristotle's resistance against reductionism (eliminativism) and Plato's eternalism. Whereas the Buddha emphatically incorporated his linkage of name-and-form in an MM package related to absolute Emptiness, Aristotle did not do that.

The dynamics of the movement involved in the interaction of matter and forms has a seemingly unstoppable momentum (Lewis 2009:162ff.). In order to avoid an infinite regress, Aristotle postulates an ultimate, primary Unmoved Mover. To Aristotle that is pure form, which is perfection, that is, divinity. Aristotle's God is pure thought, in its perfection neither desiring nor doing anything (certainly not creating anything), only engaged in self-contemplation. There is no contact with his Unmoved Mover. Aristotle had no mystical interest. Yet the divine contemplation expresses what Aristotle regarded as the highest form of human existence. The relationship of the world to the Unmoved Mover is not unambiguously clear in his thinking. It is not MM in the full sense of articulating a dimension of human experience of transcendence, and of explaining the becoming of the world – including life – from a transcendent source. His thinking does not allow any notion of 'Life' as a transcendental category.

Aristotle takes the distinguishing mark of life to be self-initiated change, which he attributes to 'soul' (*psyche*): being alive and being ensouled are co-extensive. On those assumptions, he distinguishes three levels of life: at the bottom, plants (feeding and procreating) with their specific kind of 'soul'; then animal life (perceiving and moving) with an animal soul; and then the highest form, human life (thinking), with a human soul. Again, (unlike Plato) he does not push the notion of 'life' into any transcendental dimension, continuous with cosmic life. 'Life' ('soul') in any transcendent sense (including 'infinity') is not the ultimate cause of change, including self-initiated change (life).

□ Stoicism

In Stoicism (see Ch. 7), its founder Zeno – very similar to Plato – probably took the Cosmos to be a living (ensouled: sensing, reasoning) being (*zōon*), with individual living things organically part of it (Hahn 1977:136ff.; Sandbach 1975:82ff.; White 2003:128ff.). Zeno's successor, Cleanthes (c. 330–230 BCE), followed the founder in this Platonic view and in a broad sense also reverted to Aristotle's notion of the three levels of life, which he then applied to the cosmos as a whole. He may also have extended Aristotle's view of the human soul to the notion of the world soul. The third leader of this school, Chrysippus (c. 279–206 BCE), continued and probably for the first time developed fully the view of cosmos as a living, that is ensouled, being: sentient, rational and divine. What makes the Cosmos alive is what also causes a human being and all living creatures to be alive: *psyche*, conventionally translated as 'soul'. A better translation might be 'life'. 'Life' in a human being was taken to include sensation as well as perception, emotion and thought. Here Chrysippus followed not only Aristotle, but also a wider trend of Greek thinking. In a living being *psyche* is equated with *pneuma* (literally, 'wind'), understood as a mixture of air and fire, and imparting coherence to the living being. It is significant to note that the Stoics accepted the corporeality of the soul: its being physical

and intimately integrated with the body, yet also being a substance in its own right and not reducible to corporeality (Long 1996:236).

The question is whether the rubric here termed 'Infinite', specifically Infinite Life, intermediate between Absoluteness-Eternity and Cosmos, may be related to Stoicism's *archai*: their Principles structuring everything that exists. It is noteworthy that the Stoics probably derived their notion of *archai* from Aristotle's biology: their Cosmos is a living being; its birth is exactly like the birth of other living beings. Their *archai* are the Principles bringing the cosmos into existence, and in totality (including matter) have an overarching life-enabling function. The *archai* are (in modern terminology) a set of transcendental principles, with one function: to bring about cosmos, centrally seen as alive. Behind and operative in the birth and life of the cosmos and of its parts (the living beings on earth), a dimension of structuring principles is discerned. Our concept of Infinite Life does not coincide with Stoic *archai*, but is aiming in a similar direction.

□ Plotinus

Plotinus (also see Ch. 9 and Ch. 13) saw Infinity (*apeiron*) as the transcendence of all formal determination, including empirical, cosmic being (cf. Clark 1996:275ff.; Sweeney 1992:167ff., 243ff.). Firstly, this applies to the Good, the One: It has no characteristic, is beyond any description. At that level of transcendence, Infinity is perfection, since It seeks nothing. At the bottom rung of emanation, Matter is also infinite, that is, indeterminate, but at that level Infinity is anything but perfection.

Soul (*psyche*) and Mind (*nous*) are infinite to the degree that they transcend cosmic being. As Mind springs from the One, so Soul springs from Mind: it is something other than Mind, while Mind remains unchanged. Yet when Soul produces the next level (Matter, and body, and bodily life, and sensation, and growth) it in itself does change. In his words (Enneads V.2.1) (Plotinus 1991):

Soul arises out of the motionless Intellectual-Principle – which itself sprang from its own motionless prior – but the Soul's operation is not similarly motionless; its image is generated from its movement. It takes fullness by looking to its source; but it generates its image by adopting another, a downward, movement. This image of Soul is Sense and Nature, the vegetal principle. (p. 436)

Plotinus goes on to describe the ambivalent position of Soul: while remaining connected to Mind (intelligence) and via Mind to the One, Soul also reaches down to the vegetal order and the 'life of growing things' as its province. To paraphrase: Soul produces biological life, even as it remains infinite Itself (V.2.1). It fulfils, so to speak, a downward mediating function between the One and cosmic life.

Continuing Plato and Aristotle's identification of 'soul' with 'life', Plotinus views Soul as primarily, essentially alive and the source of life of all living things. Soul, life, is also (as was the case in Aristotle) primarily defined as self-motion and sentience.

Soul, indivisible in Itself, is also unifying. It is the non-corporeal principle informing and regulating cosmos as a whole and every single body in it. Yet Plotinus is not a panpsychist in the sense that he believes that there is only one Soul. There are individual souls, not identical with the large Soul, but particular versions, unfoldings, of Soul. Plotinus adheres to neither a reductionist (life, soul, is reducible to matter) nor a dualist (soul and matter are essentially unconnected) position. To him Soul devolves: from the All to the lesser, from the whole to the single part, from the largest to the smallest. Matter derives its very being from Soul in the sense that Matter is Soul at its weakest. We might interpret: without Soul (livingness), there would be no Matter, no body – no biological ('vegetal') life.

Plotinus' Soul, infinite (undetermined), is productive at the level of biological life, yet without possessing such life. In a sense, life may also be said to be implicitly contained in Mind (VI.7.17). I believe our notion of Infinite Life is an approximate to what Plotinus had in mind with his *psyche* as infinite, yet life-producing power. A significant difference is that whereas our attempt presents the four Infinitudes as equal, much as they are intertwined, Plotinus presents a hierarchical structure of dependence with Mind (in our terminology: 'Infinite Thought') at the top, Soul (in our terminology: 'Infinite Life') in the middle, and Infinite Matter at the bottom. While sharing Plotinus' expansive (from centre to periphery) interest, this essay does not share Plotinus' depreciation of matter, and ranks biological, bodily life higher than was the case in his system. He seemed to have been 'ashamed' of his body, according to his student and biographer Porphyry. Whereas Plotinus (in what has been called 'henological' metaphysics) (Sweeney 1992:255) describes the One as infinite, this essay would radicalise that position by introducing the notion of Absoluteness, transcending both his Oneness and his Infinity.

Greek-Hellenistic thinking continued to play a formative and normative role in Western philosophy and thinking through the Middle Ages and well into modern times, and with reason. Those systems provided the metaphysical basics from which Western science would develop. Yet, from their side, the monotheistically inspired theologies and philosophies in the Jewish, Christian and Muslim contexts introduced the notion of Life in a way that one does not find in their Greek-Hellenistic precursors. In their original contexts, those theologies and philosophies believed in a living God as ultimate Referent, which introduced an entirely new impetus. Life became a value at the highest level.

I shall not at this stage pursue the role of (Infinite) Life in those Greek-influenced theistic contexts further, except in passing to note the case of Robert Grosseteste (see previous chapter), who in this respect, too, developed his own unique vision of things under the influence of Aristotle, and via the Muslim Avicenna (McEvoy 1982:290ff.). Again, one is struck by Grosseteste's empirical scientific interest and his knowledge of the science of his day in his dealing with the topics of the vegetative soul (vegetable life) and the sensitive

soul (sensory life in animals and humans). In his system, the single but tripartite human soul includes the 'rational' soul as a third part. In this way, he sought to maintain an essential connection of the human being to animal and vegetative life. A question interesting us now is: What is the origin of the human soul according to Grosseteste? The answer appears to be: it was directly created by God as a unit, thereby making it an image of God. Here the theistic theologian in Grosseteste takes over. His interest seems to have been restricted to life as it manifests in the human being. Nevertheless, given that limitation, his definition of 'life' in all three of its powers as reducible to the 'single dynamic principle of attraction and repulsion' at all three levels is interesting (ibid.:318f.).

■ Indian thinking

In orthodox Indian MM thinking, Ātman in the sense of the absolute Self ('the Absolute'), has since early days been the supreme category. In one version (*Mundaka Upanishad*, one of the earliest *Upanishads*, and written in verse), life comes out of Ātman (Brahman) like herbs out of the earth (I.II.7) (Basu 1911):

As the spider stretches forth and gathers together its threads, as herbs grow out of the earth, as from a living man come out the hair, so from the Imperishable comes out the Universe. (p. 208)

Telling analogies do not solve theoretical conundrums, but the above analogies of that ancient version of non-dualism suggest that somehow life is eternally latent in Brahman, at some point emerges from Brahman, and always has its roots in Brahman, from which it materialises without any exertion on the side of Brahman. Especially the herb analogy above, carries the overtones of life (*jīva*, etymologically related to 'breath'): the immortal essence of any living organism, whether human, animal or plant, which in a sense is not affected by physical death. It is a compelling set of associations, to which the reflections of this essay are drawn. This includes the notion of 'Imperishable', not understood in a substantialist sense ('never dying'), but as suggesting a dimension transcending both life and death, and in that sense 'imperishable'. That would also apply to our notion of 'Absoluteness': Life appears from Absolute Horizon beyond Life, yet brings forth Life, not as something alien to Absolute Horizon and as something becoming concretised in Cosmic life. Biological life, every single individual carrying it, lives and dies, yet life itself, perishable as it is, reaches back into and forward into a deeper dimension. The term 'Infinite Life' intends to express that.

Generally speaking, the concept *Prāna* appears to have the same function in the thinking inspired by the Vedas. Present in original Ātman (Brahman) and in fact identical with Ātman, is *Prāna*: the life force, life principle manifesting in air (*vāyu*) at the level of Cosmos as it evolves from Ātman (Belvalkar & Ranade 1974 [1927]:146ff., 155ff., 291ff.; Raju 1969 [1937]:vol III: 581f.). At the cosmic level, *Prāna* is the support and sustainer of the world, and also its unifying principle. *Prāna* is not only physical air (however subtle),

but in its various forms also produces movement, action (*karma*) – and, in progressively fuller expression, life with all its biophysical functions: all the voluntary and involuntary activities of Cosmos and all the bodies in it. Life is *Prāna*, and *Prāna* is life. *Prāna* is thus the intermediate, vital and vitalising principle between the absolutely indeterminate ultimate on the one hand and determinate Cosmos on the other hand. Particularly in Yoga and Vedanta this notion, taken to be the infinite source of cosmic and individual life, has been developed to levels of great sophistication, allowing the universe in its entirety to be seen as a living organism. Our concept of Infinite Life aims at a similar function. The difference is that whereas post-Upanishadic Vedanta would see *Prāna*, co-extensive with Ātman, as eternally substantial and unchangeable, this model would emphasise Infinite Life to be evolving from empty Absoluteness.

The factor life as such does not receive a great deal of positive value in early Buddhism, neither at a biophysical nor a metaphysical level. In the meditation system of early Buddhism with its various levels of meditative absorption (*jhānas*), positive emphasis is placed on the attainment of Infinite Space (*ākāśānañcāyatana*: fifth level), which can be thought of as matter infinitely attenuated. There is Infinite Consciousness (*viññānañcāyatana*: sixth level) and Nothingness (*ākīñcaññāyatana*: seventh level). As for love, the meditation of the four *Brahmavihāras* (‘Sublime Abodes’) amounts to Infinite Love (see next chapter). Nevertheless, there is no absorption into Infinite Life. If anything, early Buddhism was quite disdainful of life. In its traditional listing of 40 themes of meditation, the body and its manifestations of life are incorporated, but in the context of disgust. Among the 10 loathsome subjects (*asubha*) are the meditations on corpses in various stages of decomposition, and the 32 parts of the human body, all impure. Such contemplations lead only to the first absorption. In the final analysis, the highest aim of Buddhist striving was to escape from the round of rebirths. In this respect, this essay parts company with Buddhism in that form.

The Buddha emphasised the uniqueness of human life, compared to a tortoise surfacing from the ocean ever so rarely, but the point is that such birth awards human beings a unique opportunity to escape from the round of birth and death altogether. The Indian Mahāyāna vow commits the *bodhisattva* to the benefit of all living beings in their state of woe, but even that is not tantamount to endorsing life as such or providing it with transcendental backing. The notion of Infinite Life in our model, from which all Cosmic Life comes and to which it returns, positively honours and loves Life.

■ Chinese thinking

Chinese thinking in general and Taoism in particular (cf. Fung 1953; Graham 1989; Stepaniants 2002:223f.) affirmed natural life. ‘Taoism’ came to be used for the general thinking of educated people who, especially during the Warring States

period (403–221 BCE), tried to escape from the political disorders of their time by finding refuge, as individuals, in the world of nature. By then educated people had left behind the belief in divine beings for some time already, and the attempt to explain the workings of the universe rationally by means of the two dialectical forces of *yin* (passivity, darkness, femaleness, earth) and *yang* (activity, light, maleness, heaven) had been established. The point of departure of their MM was obviously nature, including living, procreating nature.

In Taoism (in this respect differing from Confucianism), the good human life was primarily a spontaneous life. That would not be a life of self-indulgence, but of harmony with one's true nature, requiring moderation for the sake of optimal enjoyment of sounds, colours and tastes. It would also be a life marked by non-aggressive tolerance. Life is to be prized, and for that reason, one's vital forces are not to be exhausted unwisely. Yet this life of adaptation to the deeper current of nature would also exclude a passionate clinging to life, as becomes clear in Chuang-Tzu (see our Ch. 5): Death is but a change from one form of existence to another, and therefore holds nothing to fear.

In order to lead such a natural life, recluse literati strove to know the laws underlying the transformations in the natural order of things. In this school, the concept of *Tao* ('path', 'doctrine', 'principle'), originally used for human morality, became an MM concept for the all-embracing first principle, producing the entire natural order. In previous chapters, enough (for the requirements of this essay) has been said about the *Tao* and the basic structure of Taoist MM, and its profound significance for what this essay terms Absoluteness. In an exercise such as this, seeking one-to-one correspondences between details would be the wrong way to go. Nevertheless, the downward flow of the *Tao* can be understood and appreciated (Fung 1953:178ff.). From *Tao*, insofar as it is related to reality (the 'Great Oneness'), come Heaven and Earth, emanating respectively into the active *yang* and the passive *yin*, with their harmonious interaction. All things in the universe are manifestations of the *Tao*, operating as it does through its power (*Te*).

Ch'i is another term, like *Te* intimately associated with the *Tao*, and of special interest to this chapter (cf. Graham 1989:101ff.). In meaning, it is quite close to the orthodox Indian notion of *Prāna*. *Ch'i* refers to the *Tao*'s becoming active in the universe as *yin* and *yang*. It is a sea of universal, ceaselessly flowing, vitalising psycho-physical energy. The myriad things solidify out of and dissolve into *ch'i*. And by opening oneself to *ch'i*, the force pervading and unifying everything in the universe including one's own body (primarily as breath), it is possible to become mystically unified with it. Taoism illustrates the need to find a vitalising bridge between Absoluteness and concrete Cosmos, anchored in each of both opposite banks of the river – in Taoist terms: a bridge between *Tao* and the myriad things. The notion of *ch'i* fulfils that need, of which our notion of Infinite Life is a functional equivalent. Taoism's confirmation of a positive, light-hearted acceptance of life, without clinging to it, is deeply appreciated.

■ Giordano Bruno

In Bruno's attempted integration of early modern science and Renaissance Hermeticism, the concept of life was of central importance. Other Renaissance figures with a Hermetical connection, notably Paracelsus (1493–1541) and Tomasso Campanella (1568–1639), likewise saw nature and earth as complex living organisms. In passing: in the emerging early modern period scientific experimentation was not tied to a mechanistic metaphor for reality as is presently the case, but seen as participation in, communication with, a living reality. Bruno also did not think of nature in materialistic, mechanistic terms.

Picking up his *De la causa, principio e uno* again: as discussed in the previous chapter, we see Bruno's emanating reality as manifesting in two derived, interdependent but not identical substances. These are Matter (*materia*) and Soul (*anima*) or Form (*forma*). The universe and everything in it is filled with Soul, as a room filled with a voice that can be heard everywhere in it. Continuing ancient Greek and Hellenistic thinking, he also postulated the existence of a World Soul (*anima del mondo*), which leads nature in the production of living species (Krüger 2004:216ff.). It is also the universal Intellect (*l'intelletto universale*). Thus, Bruno adapted Plotinus' scheme, according to which Soul followed Mind (*nous*) in the hierarchy of emanation. In Bruno's system, the World Soul is the inner, immanent artist or artisan (*artefice interno*), the principle of Life, the life-creating energy, forming nature from the inside. Sometimes he refers to it as 'Nature', or simply as 'Life'. For all practical purposes, he identifies 'Soul' and 'Life'. This implies neither an identity of Life and Divinity, nor an identity of Matter and Life, but it does award a certain primacy to Soul (Life) over Matter.

Life is homogeneous throughout nature, even though it manifests to a lesser degree in a stone than in a living creature, and there is only a difference of degree between organic and inorganic life. Cosmos is a living Organism (Kirchhoff 1980:96ff.). His vision may be seen as a variant of pan-psychism. His substance 'Soul' (i.e. Life) is distinct from but not separate from God: emanating from God, it is also co-eternal with God. In his own way, Bruno was God-intoxicated; it must be added that his version of 'God' is a version of *Deus Absconditus* ('hidden God').

Bruno's views resurfaced in, among others, the 19th century thinker Schelling with his idea of a world soul (*Weltseele*) and the omnipresence of life; and, now, in the work of among others, James Lovelock (1988) and Jochen Kirchhoff (1999). Our model greatly appreciates the martyr from the late Renaissance, not least because of his love for Cosmos as living, true and good.

■ Schopenhauer, Nietzsche

The discovery of life in the context of evolutionary theory was one of the significant achievements of the modern West. Born almost a century before

the arrival of Darwinism, Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860) nevertheless anticipated Darwin's view of survival in a universal struggle of all against all as the main mechanism driving evolution. In a sense Schopenhauer remained a Kantian, understanding Life as the equivalent of Kant's 'Thing in Itself', and biological species in the context of Platonic Ideas: they were the concretisations of transcendent essences. The essence of the world can only be found via experience by the human of his own bodily existence, which is nothing else than the objectified, experienceable form of the action of Will in time and space. Consciousness is but the surface of things, merely slave to the blind Will. This unconscious Will to Life, which is concentrated in the genitals, blindly drives the human being. In fact, all organic life is, analogously to the human being, essentially Will. The same applies to all of inorganic nature from chemistry to the movements of the planets: all phenomena are concretisations of the Will to Life. Schopenhauer's vision amounts to metaphysics in the classical sense: The Will is the Absolute, the Thing in Itself, beyond which no reach is possible. Not surprisingly, Schopenhauer's metaphysics is extremely pessimistic: solitariness and conflict are endemic in existence. Our argument deliberately swerves away from his Cosmic pessimism, to celebrate Cosmos; away from his substantialised Will as Thing in Itself, to a further, always receding Horizon; from his isolation and elevation of the irrational Will, to the acceptance of a dialectical interrelationship of Life with Matter, Love and Thought, all co-arising from, existing in and returning to Horizon.

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), mightily under the impression of Schopenhauer, challenged and stimulated by Darwin's work and falling back on pre-Platonic Greece, proclaimed that life as such is Will to Power and that Will to Power means the Will to be master of itself and its surroundings, not the mere adaptation to those surroundings. This is not only a biological but also a social and psychological fact of life and a moral imperative. Life is inherently self-affirming at the cost of others. That vision is affirmed as antidote against the threat of nihilism following in the wake of the necessary 'death of God'. Although he rejects substantialist metaphysics, his view of Life as Will to Power amounts to a transcendental, foundational, semi-metaphysical meta-category. This essay parts ways with Nietzsche, including his bland rejection (smacking of resentment) of religion; relativising, transcending, absorbing of things into an ever expanding Horizon is something else than flat rejection. Our view incorporates Love, complementing Life, into the foursome of Infinitude, becoming Cosmos.

■ Schweitzer, Driesch, De Chardin

The first decades of the 20th century saw further MM responses to the challenge of materialistic Darwinism, including those of Albert Schweitzer (1875–1965), Hans Driesch (1867–1941) and Teilhard de Chardin (1881–1955). Schweitzer presented his ethics of universal respect for life as rooted in the will to live,

which to him was not only a biological but also a spiritual phenomenon. Hans Driesch challenged mechanistic evolutionary theory and proposed the notion of an autonomous life -force, akin to mind, operative in the universe as a whole, taken to be the organism within which all other organisms function in accordance with a principle of entelechy (Greek *entelechia*: the realisation of potential). Teilhard de Chardin placed evolutionary theory at the centre of a worldview revolutionising Christian thinking and spirituality. The above authors, each significant in his own right, are noted in passing. *Henri Bergson* (1859–1941), a close contemporary of the three above, who also attempted to provide a large-scale MM context of explanation for the phenomenon of life, will now summarily be viewed from our slit of interest.

■ Henri Bergson

Bergson was born in the year (1859) that Darwin's *The origin of species by means of natural selection* appeared. Half a century later (1907), in his own book *Creative evolution (L'évolution créatrice)* (cf. Bergson 1975 [1907]; Conze 1963; Deleuze 1988 [1966]; Hancock 2002:139f.; Lacey 1989; Russell 1971 [1914]), he came to terms with evolution and set out his views on biological life and its origin in brilliant style. Bergson studied biology in his youth, remained fascinated throughout his life by the phenomenon of biological life and knew Darwin and Neo-Darwinism well. In a broad sense, he accepts evolution, referring to it as 'transformism' (*transformisme*). Bergson also knew Plotinus well, lectured on him and approached biological evolution from a perspective that may be called Plotinian in a broad sense. The important question is whether he managed to effect a meaningful relationship between MM on the one hand and on the other hand empirical science as practised by its experts, without compromising either – a murky grey and notoriously dangerous area of overlap. Does his metaphysical evolutionary model tie in successfully with the facts of science, specifically biology? Did he somehow envision biological life as sprouting from a transcendent root?

To start with, in his book (Bergson 1975:296ff.) he presents a critique of the notion of 'nothing', 'void', 'nought' (*le néant, vide, rien*) in a discussion which is relevant to our notion of Absolute Horizon as the Origin of Infinite Life and Cosmic life. He posits a principle of creation, but insists that it is not to be seen as a conquest over nought, thought of as a kind of pre-existing substratum or receptacle – if not physically, then at least logically. He argues that the notion of efficient causality exercised by anything (including 'an absolute': *un absolu*) and involved in the existence of the world, must be dispensed with, since it tries to solve a false problem: the idea of 'nothing' inevitably assumes the subsistence of a 'something' (ibid.:303).

Bergson does not see nature as a massive given and thinks of it as a complex process of actualisation of some virtuality (Deleuze 1988 [1966]:96), which is however not extended intuitively or speculatively to the brink of Absolute Horizon.

Such 'Horizon' is not the same as the quasi-substantial 'Nothingness' rightly debunked by Bergson, who called the latter a pseudo-idea, a contradiction in terms, parasitic on 'existence' (Bergson 1975 [1907]:308ff.) and in fact not subtracting from 'being', but adding to it. 'Absolute Horizon' does not intend Bergson's quasi-'annihilation' (ibid.:320). Bergson posits at each moment only things participating in the flow of duration, but does not share the fascination with the Horizon of being. In this respect, he seems to lack an interest that was present in Plotinus.

A set of concepts important to Bergson include 'current of life' (*courant de vie*), 'vital impetus' (the usual translation for *élan vital*) and 'an original impetus of life' (*un élan originel de la vie*) (ibid.:94ff. and passim). An important question is how it is explained and related to the other dimensions that need to be taken into consideration when envisaging a worldview. If this current, this impetus, does not appear from an absolute transcendence, then what is its status? It seems that for Bergson, life (let us say Life) is the dominant Cosmic force, simply there since the beginning of the world. That is as far as he seems prepared to go. His *élan vital* appears to hover not quite comfortably between the two chairs of biological science and MM. He takes part in many a biological argument and seems to have aspired for a complete and successful integration, but it is doubtful that he achieved that. Bergson's *élan* is not really amenable to scientific treatment by means of experiment and measurement. His argument is less of a biological argument than was the case with his fellow vitalist, Hans Driesch. In the case of Driesch, his philosophy stood and fell with its scientific success. That was his undoing. Driesch stands as a beacon warning against rocks. Bergson's thinking is less dependent on science, yet as far as he was concerned, its integration with the science of the day was also intimate and, from today's point of view, it must be said, rather dated.

As far as our aspects of Cosmos other than Life are concerned, Bergson does not materialistically derive Life from Matter, but seems to assume a conflict between them. Throughout its various modulations, his model amounted to a duality of a certain kind: not a dualism in the sense of sitting embarrassed with two totally unrelated basic principles in his lap, but in the sense of accommodating both, however as opposing principles and not reconciled as correlative in a positive sense. If we read Bergson tendentially (cf. Deleuze 1988 [1966]:91ff.), perhaps the split is not as bad as it seems. Bergson's *élan*, though decidedly not a physical force, may be a degree of matter, just as matter may be a degree of duration. The duality (seeming dualism) would then be subsumable into a unitary view. This interpretation would salvage a great deal, but it does not exactly lie on the surface of Bergson's writing. At least on the surface, his Life is badly alienated from his Matter. Overall, in this respect his position seems to be weaker than that of Plotinus who clearly stated a substantial continuity between Matter and Soul (the principle of Life). To Bergson, Matter appears to be a dead downward weight,

Life an upward striving force, fighting and overcoming Matter. His duality is starker than Plotinus' distinction. He also falls back behind Bruno's view of the Soul as immanent artist or artisan. Like Bruno, Bergson also compares evolution with the creative work of an artist; however, creative evolution is not an inner force immanent in Matter, but its adversary. The duality could be and has usually been understood as a dualism. The opposition between Matter and Life surface in his rejection of the Darwinian model of natural selection (which he labels as mechanism) on the one hand and teleological finalism on the other. His own view is presented as an alternative to both, albeit closer to teleology than to mechanism. His eschewal of mechanical materialism with its associated rigid intellectualism is meaningful, but not his countering of materialism by an equally one-sided vitalism. Bridging links are not provided clearly.

Not unlike another precursor of his, Schopenhauer (see above), Bergson also devalues the intellect. Whereas Schopenhauer monistically relegates intellect to being a surface phenomenon, an instrument of the Will, Bergson seems to postulate an opposition between the impetus of life and the intellect. On the one hand, there is the primitive vital phenomenon of instinct and its noble cognitive extension, namely intuition; on the other hand, there is the less fortunate evolutionary development of intellect, ending up as abstract logic. He does not view intelligence as succeeding instinct in the course of evolution. Rather, he sees both deriving semi-autonomously, divergently but not without contact and interaction, from the same evolutionary urge. Whereas instinct becomes intuition, intelligence is inherently flawed in that it cannot move and reach that far. Intuition is connected to time and Life, which is continuous flow (duration); intellect on the other hand, moving upstream against Life and time, as of necessity freezes the flow, sees separate things in order to act and is connected to Matter with its separate spatial entities. He feels that the tendency towards separation is irreconcilable with the flow of duration; form is only a snapshot view of flux.

This essay postulates that Infinite Life with its two aspects of continuity and entity emerges from Absoluteness and is mutually intimately and positively implied in Matter with its time and space, Love with its volition and emotion, and Thought with its intuition and intellect. The interconnections (such as intuition linking Life and Thought, and volition linking Love and Life) could be spelled out in various ways, but imagining them as a harmonious whole rather than as pitted against each other in conflict, is a better way to go. Bergson unnecessarily, mistakenly, sees conflict among these dimensions. He forces fissures where bridges are necessary. As will be argued in Chapter 21, Thought, involving the two equal and mutually implicit forces of intellect and intuition, is in turn interdependently linked to Matter, Life and Love, among which it has a steering function. In Bergson's terms, rather than forcing a split between instinct-intuition on one side and intellect on the other, exploring intuition as a positive link between instinct (Life) and intellect (Thought) would do more

justice to these notions singularly and the composite of the four in their togetherness.

His position concerning the flow of life and the possibility of individual living beings is comparable to that of early Buddhism (with which he does not demonstrate any direct acquaintance). To Bergson 'duration' (*la durée*), presented as an alternative to both unchanging substance and nothingness, is what lies at the root of things. His views are reminiscent of the ancient Buddhist notion that the world is a continuous, impermanent (*anicca*) flow, devoid of substance (*anattā*) and therefore 'empty' (*suñña*), but decidedly not understood as negative quasi-substance. Both early Buddhism and modern Bergson face the same difficulty of manoeuvring between the notion of static, unchanging things and that of non-existing non-entities. Buddhism (taking into account the many divergences of opinion since its earliest days) managed to salvage the relative identities of changing entities as complex combinations of factors and as centres of action (*kamma*) by means of its *pañca-upādānakkhandha* scheme (non-substance, yet continuity as well as relative individual identity). A question would be whether Bergson succeeds, or whether to him duration as perpetual, multiplex becoming on the one hand and entity on the other hand, remains vague and unreconciled. To this reader the latter is the case; Bergson does not succeed in finding an optimal balance, an integration. In passing, our vision places a high premium on the contingent individual being, in all its impermanence and non-substance, as a most valuable centre of action in the world. In comparisons of this kind across time, the danger of anachronism looms large, yet the measure of similarity, if not in answer then at least in problem, between Buddhism and Bergson should not be denied. Again, and importantly, Bergson cuts himself off from any equivalent of the Buddhist notion of 'emptiness'.

Bergson, of Polish Jewish descent, turned Christian in his early fifties, bravely confirmed his Jewish identity at the end of his life. In his last major book, *The two sources of morality and religion* (originally published in French in 1932), (Bergson 1954), he has moved into 'mysticism' more deeply than was the case with his 1907 book on evolution. Now the mystical flavour of his metaphysics becomes more pronounced than before. He presents mysticism (equated with intuition) as guiding all of our thinking, not only religious but also scientific, as well as our practical action. It is the apex of what he terms dynamic religion, which is contrasted to static religion. Religion, both in its lesser static form and its superior dynamic form, is seen as a crystallisation, a popularisation, of the mystical dimension, which is associated with intuition, transcending abstract intelligence.

Bergson takes the daring step of presenting mystical experience as an argument in favour of the existence of God. Not surprisingly, Bergson conceives of God in terms of (in our vocabulary) Life (and Love), and decidedly not in

terms of (in our vocabulary) Matter and Thought. Instead of achieving a harmony among these basic forces, he maintains an antagonism among them. This is an anticlimax. He also lets the opportunity slip to develop a more radical new notion of godhead. Not surprisingly, Bergson undervalues the role of intellect in mysticism, where it could play a constructive role in the form of speculation, aware of its own limitations and its status of being mythopoetic construction. Bergson is more irrational than his model Plotinus. He does not seem to have found a balance regarding the relationship between the *élan vital* of the first book and the God of the second book: Is God seen as distinct from and the source of the vital energy or is God identified with it? His thinking remains unclear; in any event, throughout his writing career he never settled for pantheism. A reader of Bergson comes under the spell of the charming vagueness of his thinking and writing; that is its attractiveness, but also its weakness.

It is time to move on to the aspect of Infinite Love. Life is to be lived, and loved.

Love

■ §51 Prior to lover and beloved

What sort of MM discernment could provide a background, not only to understand reality as it is, but also to promote a morality of love towards all beings? It would need to be a morality that would not succumb to the law of claw and tooth, and not elevate it to the basic law of nature. In this context, 'discernment' is listening to the depths of the human spirit, envisioning a kindness-understanding, kindness-promoting frame of thought.

Psychology and other sciences speak about the empirically accessible origins and manifestations of emotions in all their many shades. We have to know and come to terms with that. MM explores a more remote hinterland of emotions and volitions. The world is here taken to be in principle, *ab Origine* – shot through with Love. This view is neither presented as fact proven by hard science, nor as arbitrary private opinion, but as one not only articulating with an ancient intuition of humankind, but also having a strong bearing on how people exist in the world of today. That is a very important test for any metaphysical framework. Emotions and volitions in humans and other beings are not the chance outcomes of blind contingency in an indifferent process of evolution. Yes, they do arise in an evolutionary process, but that process itself is part of the Cosmic process, with roots in Infinity, in Infinite Love.

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Love is here understood as the urge to co-be well, and the volitions and sentiments (emotions) motivating and enabling the interactive ability to achieve that. In the dimension of Infinitude there is no fall from grace, no dualism of eternal spirits, no s(S)ubject or object of love, no lover and beloved. There is only Infinite Love, without quality or qualification. Such a notion can neither be verified nor falsified by an appeal to the 'facts'. It can be known by its fruits.

I wish to understand the volitions and emotions of the higher forms of living beings, particularly human beings, in a context that would encourage an ethos of universal love among humans and extend from humans to all 'lower' forms of life. Of course, such love is not the overall factual truth of life. Life as we know it is mostly selfish, greedy and dominated by conflict and hatred. It employs all kinds of instrumental end-means strategies - with a few strands of co-operation and harmony sparsely woven into that fabric.

The love intended here is a potent force with a direct bearing on reality, with enormous transformative potential. Love is of the essence of mysticism and also a powerful creative force. Define humans as essentially selfish, and they will act selfishly; define them as essentially benevolent, and they may act kindly. It might ask for patience in order to get there. Without utopias in that sense, the human species cannot live.

In human beings, there is an ingrained categorical imperative to love. Love comes first and last, hatred and greed in between. As Infinitude becomes Cosmos and bursts open like a ripe pomegranate spreading its seeds, Love incurs the inevitability of dissonance, friction and conflict.

Love encompasses emotion, volition and behaviour. 'Emotion' refers to the affectional tone or quality of this dimension of life, such as suffering and joy. 'Behaviour' refers to the actual actions/deeds - mental, verbal and bodily - and patterns of behaviour, determined by and determining those actions. Between emotion and behaviour operates 'volition': the will, driving action.

Infinite Love as Emotion is a beacon, like the Southern Cross in the night sky. At the bottom of the longitudinal axis, indicating the empty centre of the southern celestial pole as it rotates around that centre is sheer kindness, arising from the still centre of Absoluteness and Eternity. The next star, on the lateral axis of our constellation, is joy, happiness without qualification or reservation. This is bliss, arising in conjunction with Infinite Being and Infinite Life, precursor of the happiness of earthlings and their possible fellow inhabitants of Cosmos. As the third star, also on the lateral axis, there is emotional feeling with an implication of suffering, eventually co-suffering with Cosmos and its suffering children. Passion, with its implication of compassion, is adumbrated in the depth of Infinite Love and subtly written in the fabric of Cosmos as a whole. The top star on the longitudinal axis of this constellation is peace, equanimity. In the constellation of Infinite Love, is unagitated, equanimous peace.

Love contains pleasure and pain, joy and sadness, yet they do not overwhelm it. Love remains clear, calm and quiet. These are the co-ordinates of Infinite Emotion.

Infinite Love is the dimension experienced in the mysticisms of the Abrahamic religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, which introduced the dimension of God as Love (Emotion and Will) into the human discourse. That was their greatest gift to the world, in mythologised form. However, look behind the myths; sense the empty depth behind those faces in the clouds, prior to lover and beloved, subject and object. This model discerns Infinite Love as a primordial structural dimension of the world and as arising on a Horizon inaccessible to human thought or experience. Love, but of no Lover, is in the process of becoming.

Let me not project evil with the concomitant of suffering into Infinitude. Nevertheless, let me not deny the possibility of suffering, and of co-suffering, written into Infinitude Itself. In addition, let me not come up with any kind of mythological or other explanatory device for evil. Shall we produce a theodicy, a vindication of divine justice and providence in view of the reality of evil? No. Yet, we assume that somehow in Infinitude, beyond our reach, stirs Love that will save Cosmos from evil.

The entire gamut of emotions felt by humans and other forms of life, derive from Infinite Love and tend towards the experience and expression of love in thoughts, words and actions. That is the origin and destiny of the emotional, volitional aspect of existence. The notion of Infinite Love provides a transcendental root for a morality centring in love for all living beings. Fun and laughter, weeping and lamenting, wrath and forgiveness, happiness and anguish, anxiety and confidence, sympathy and callousness, cruelty and mercy – they all arise from and long to return to Love. Even anger and hatred parasitise on it as perversions, and can only be appeased by love. Love seeks harmony: finds it where it exists and creates it where it does not exist. Lovers of Infinitude in the various religious contexts where they can be found, have a deep sense of transcendent beauty illuminating the world and reflecting in the world as if by mirrors.

Some, seeking to transcend the greed and hatred inherent in human existence, have sought and found relief and salvation at the edge of earthly existence, where Cosmos emerges from and merges with Infinitude. Theirs has been a mysticism of love – of emotion, volition and surrender. It is *bhakti-yoga*. It is following the command to ‘love the Lord your God with all your heart (*kardia*), with all your soul (*psyche*)’ – ultimately transcended in Absoluteness. This essay does not deal with the emotional side of religion (shorthand condensed as ‘love’) in a theistic context. Nor does it endorse atheism, whether in the form of rabid antitheism or in the form of disinterested a-theism. It is a meta-theism, sympathetic towards but also critical of the mental pictures of

gods projected by human beings since an early stage in their emergence as a species. Humans attach names and characteristics to nameless, featureless Infinitude between Cosmos and Eternity-Absoluteness. Although not necessary, this is probably unavoidable and not bad. That is how human minds work; they see things in accordance with themselves. As such, prayers, the emotion-filled encounters of humans with their God, are neither right nor wrong – but they are efficacious, because human emotional-volitional life derives from Infinitude and is intimately connected to Infinitude. Every volition and sentiment is a prayer, expressing or seeking attunement with Infinite Love.

An implication of this argument is that there is no essential difference between natural love (love of cosmic, physical beings for other cosmic, physical beings) and mystical love (love of cosmic beings for Infinitude or a Being or Person discerned there). They are manifestations on one continuum. Touch a stone with respect and you feel the secret of Love under your fingers. Caress a living being with love and you give sensible form to Infinite Love.

Let me listen to the voices of a few lovers of loving Infinitude, in chronological order.

■ §52 Wise, inclusive balance

■ Mencius

Mencius (Meng K'o, Meng Tzu, Mengzi) (c. 370–290 BCE) (cf. Chan 1963; Cheng 1985:110f; Fung 1953; Lau 1970), who lived about two centuries after Confucius (c. 550–480 BCE), continued his master's humanism, but added an element of mysticism to it. While not rejecting the traditional Chinese feudal system, Mencius nevertheless built a large measure of human-heartedness into that social model, saying that an ideal government should be benevolent, its ruler should be a sage and the welfare of the common people should be its highest aim. His political philosophy was based on his belief in the inherent goodness of human nature: what had been possibility in Confucius, became definitive teaching with a strong MM component in Mencius. Thereby he added significant depth to the teaching of Confucius.

As one among many of his sayings demonstrates, he taught that (Lau 1970):

[N]o man is devoid of a heart sensitive to the sufferings of others [...]. Suppose a man were, all of a sudden, to see a young child on the verge of falling into a well. He would certainly be moved to compassion, not because he wanted to get in the good graces of the parents, nor because he wished to win the praise of his fellow villagers or friends, nor yet because he disliked the cry of the child. (p. 81)

He also built his philosophy of education from this point of departure: The environment surrounding an immature person should promote the development of the germ of inclination towards goodness innate in human nature. Every human being is a potential sage.

His moral philosophy of altruism (*shu*) and commiseration (*ts'e yin*) was not developed along mere utilitarian lines, but had a transcendent, metaphysical root: Heaven. Human-heartedness has been given by Heaven. Moreover, his metaphysical root has a mystical dimension (ibid.:129ff.). Originally, the human individual is one with the spirit of the universe and may recover 'the lost mind', the 'child-like mind', the original nature and return to that oneness. Such experience, the supreme human state, is a state of love and is to be achieved through works of love, removing the obstructions to the free flow of the original energy (*ch'i*). This *ch'i* was part of the general Chinese cosmology of the time. As part of human nature and expression of the life force, Mencius also distinguished 'will' as active part of the mind, alongside aspects such as humaneness and wisdom (Cheng 1985:129f.).

Taking into account all differences between then and now, there and here, the present sympathetic reader can pick up a voice in which love was a central category. Acting lovingly is not a matter of obedience to external commands, but of looking inwards and reconnecting with one's own intrinsic nature, which is essentially connected to Heaven. Mencius not only believed 'that a man can attain oneness with the universe', but he also had 'absolute faith in the moral purpose of the universe' (Lau 1970:45f.). He imagined an MM-centred in Love.

■ anonymous: *Avataṃsaka Sutra*

From the perspective of this chapter, I now interpret a Buddhist Mahāyāna sutra (*Avataṃsaka Sutra*: 'Flower ornament scripture') (Cleary 1993).

Infinite Love as set out in this model finds no direct equivalent in the *jhāna* system of early Buddhism as such. There are levels of meditative absorption in Infinity of Space and Infinity of Consciousness, but not of Infinite Love (nor of Life). There is a close approximation in the Sublime Abodes (the *Brahma-vihāra*), as set out in the *Tevijja Sutta* (the 13th *sutta* of the *Dīgha Nikāya*). The difference is that the four sublime virtues (benevolence, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity) are extended universally, pervading all four quarters of the globe, above, below, all round, in all directions, everywhere, across the entire universe, not omitting anything, not passing anything by. In the terms of this model, it amounts to Cosmic penetration and omnipresence, not Infinitude. Yet the connections are clear. The practice of the four Abodes of universal cosmic love is but a single step removed from experiencing 'Brahmā' (shorthand for what humanity has called 'gods' or 'God'). In §51 the four Abodes were utilised to express the dimensions of Infinite Love.

Mahāyāna Buddhism leaves no doubt concerning the transcendental function of Infinite Love. The *Avataṃsaka Sutra*, dating from around the 1st to

2nd centuries CE, originated somewhere in the Indian cultural sphere (India, Central Asia) and was composed in Sanskrit by an unknown number of anonymous minds from an unknown number of heterogeneous original sources. In the Indian culture of the time, some Buddhist texts were published under the names of their authors: These were works of scholarship and were known as *sastras* ('treatises'); other texts (*sutras*) emerged without identifying their authors, but were attributed to the Buddha. This did not entail a claim that it had been literally proclaimed by Siddhattha Gautama, the Buddha, or a theory of verbal inspiration by a celestial Buddha, but signified that the teaching corresponded to the central teaching of the Buddha. In that doctrinal setting, the anonymity of authorship would not have been an embarrassment, signifying loss of intellectual property and prestige, but the expression of the very teaching of non-self.

This massive MM text as a whole teaches the interrelatedness of all things and what such a vision entails. It pictures Cosmos as seen through the enlightened eyes of a Buddha or advanced *bodhisattva*. Buddhahood, bodhisattvahood, is the supreme epistemological principle. It is also the supreme ontological principle: In the Sutra these two mythological personages signify the principle of transcendent and enlightened reality, in addition to supreme insight. The *Avatamsaka Sutra* is about Buddhahood taken as the transcendent essence of the world, the emptiness of the world, as seen from a perspective of supreme insight. These two principles are continuous and coincidental: the world is a miraculous, radiant, dreamlike vision. The Sutra approximates an idealist position, as would be developed in Yogācāra philosophy.

Book One (*The wonderful adornments of the leaders of the worlds*) (I.55–149) provides remarkable suggestions of what this attempt approximates with the term 'Infinite': unlimited potential mediating Emptiness and concrete Cosmos. Right at the outset of this first book, the various realms and states of being are presented as aspects of universal, comprehensive and Cosmos-embracing Buddhahood (symbolic of radical emptiness and supreme insight), which is inherent in all beings as the potential for enlightenment. The Buddha body fills Cosmos without end and cannot be grasped (I.65). Formless, it is nevertheless always abiding in compassion and pity (I.70). 'Signless, patternless, without images' it ('he') is nevertheless seen 'like clouds in the sky' (I.72); 'like space, inexhaustible [...] formless, unhindered, it pervades the ten directions' (I.73); his 'accommodational manifestations are like conjurations' (I.73). The realm of the Buddha is 'boundless, immeasurable', 'signless, formless, present everywhere', its sphere of action is 'free from hindrance' (I.109). 'The sphere of the Buddha is boundless', his voice 'limitless and inconceivable', and he 'appears in disguise in all kinds of forms' (I.121); and so forth. This piles up mental images to the extent that mind is exploded and the reader is filled with an overpowering

sense of empty Buddhahood manifesting as potent Infinitude and then as concrete Cosmos. All of this includes the aspect of love and compassion. In effect, it amounts to the same as the Yogācāra construct of the three bodies (*trikāya*) or levels of Buddhahood: the mundane, cosmic level; the supra-mundane Absolute beyond the reach of conceptual thinking and intermediate between them, the intermediate level of Glory and Bliss (*sambhoga-kāya*), manifesting universal compassion.

The last book (*Gandavyūha Sutra*) (XXXIX.1135–1518) describes the pilgrimage of a young man, Sudhana, towards enlightenment, sent on his way by the *bodhisattva* Manjushri, the metaphoric personification of Wisdom. On the way, Sudhana is taught by 52 masters, spiritual guides and noble friends: not all monks or even Buddhists, and none claiming the whole truth or demanding allegiance to a fixed system in the form of institution or set of dogmas. At the third last stage of the pilgrimage, Sudhana encounters the *bodhisattva* Maitreya (XXXIX.1452–1502) and he is invited to enter Maitreya's Tower. Maitreya (meaning 'the Compassionate/Loving One') is a metaphoric personification of Compassion – in the terminology of this chapter: Love. At the request of Sudhana (XXXIX.1489ff.), Maitreya snaps his fingers, the doors open and Sudhana may enter the Tower, a metaphor for Infinitude as intended in this essay. It is as vast as all of space, as measureless as the sky, adorned with incalculable beauty and glory such as chambers of jewels, jewel lotuses, bejewelled promenades and stairways and radiant gems. Inside the tower are hundreds of thousands of other towers, similarly arrayed, each infinitely vast, each distinct, all reflecting in each single object of beauty and glory in every one of the multitude of towers, each gem mirroring the entirety of all the towers with all their objects of beauty. It is a truly inconceivable realm, flooding Sudhana with joy and bliss, clearing his mind of all limiting conceptual thought. The book continues to pile up staggering, concept-transcending visions of beauty.

Realising the truth of reality, namely that the phenomenal world is suffused with this dimension, beings on the path towards enlightenment and Buddhahood are filled with love. They (XXXIX.1500–1501):

[A]re tireless in guiding and perfecting all beings, because they are aware all is selfless; they never cease taking care of all beings, because they embody universal love and compassion. (n.p.)

Sudhana then returns to Manjusri, personification of Wisdom, with whom he started out. This suggests that Wisdom was in him from the very beginning of his pilgrimage. Finally, he visits the *bodhisattva* Samantabhadra ('Universal Virtue/Good'), personifying moral perfection for the sake of all other living creatures. From him he learns that Wisdom is only good to the extent that it is of value to all living beings. In the end, Compassion for living beings is what matters.

Book Twenty-five (XXV.530–693) is another lengthy celebration of what has been the source of marvel of this chapter of ours: the origin of love in the phenomenal world from a dimension of what has here been termed ‘Infinite’. Book Twenty-five (entitled ‘The ten dedications’) once again starts by blowing to pieces the common-sense world of a limited number of stable, fixed entities: in a state of deep meditation, there appears to the *bodhisattva* called Diamond Banner (XXV.530):

[A]s many Buddhas as atoms in a hundred thousand Buddha-lands from beyond as many worlds as atoms in a hundred thousand Buddha-lands in each of the ten directions. (n.p.)

The intention of such hyperbole is to smash conventional thinking and open up a space for ‘Infinite’. Within that context appears ‘volition’ and ‘emotion’, to be expressed in practical deeds. Book XXV speaks of 10 indestructible ‘dedications’ or ‘vows’, all directed at the saving of all sentient beings. This includes giving, forbearance, energy, compassion, kindness, joy and equanimity:

I should be a hostel for all sentient beings, to let them escape from all painful things. I should be a protector for all sentient beings, to let them all be liberated from all afflictions. I should be a refuge for all sentient beings, to free them from all fears. I should make a resting place for all sentient beings, to enable them to find a place of peace and security (XXV.531f.) [...] with a most profound intent, a joyful mind, a pure mind, a mind conquering all, a gentle mind, a kind, compassionate mind, a mind of pity and sympathy, with the intention to protect, to benefit, and to give peace and happiness to all sentient beings [...] (XXV.533), [...]. (n.p.)

And so on, ending once again with an evocation of a dimension of staggering vastness and non-obstruction, beauty and goodness. This dimension of Buddha-lands, Buddhas and heavenly bodhisattvas, both transcendent and non-dually present in phenomenal reality, is the source of the love of the ordinary bodhisattva (the human being seeking enlightenment). Buddhahood is not the aim eventually to be attained, but the beginning, the origin of compassion in the world. The void or emptiness that is the essence of things, the lack of inherent nature in all things, the principle of interdependence and interrelation, the beautiful world existing in a Buddha’s vision: that is the groundless basis of compassion. In the vocabulary of this essay: Cosmic love derives from Infinite Love in the Horizon of Absoluteness.

The difficulty faced by such a text is that it oscillates between the impossibility of saying anything (given the nature of its central orientation) and the necessity of saying something (given its commitment to exist compassionately in the world, including its need to speak and its commitment to communicate with people). In the 6th century, this problem would even lead to a split within one of the two main branches of Mahāyāna: the Madhamika school (founded by Nāgārjuna roughly in the same period that gave rise to the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra*). Whereas the Prasāngika sub-school uncompromisingly rejected every conceptual position, the Svātantrika sub-school allowed for

adopting a position in the ongoing debate about truth, with the proviso that its relativity be written boldly in its programme. It would appear that the *Avatamsaka* was closer to the second strategy. The Svātantrika epistemology took up a middle position between Mādhyamika and the second main branch of Mahāyāna: the Yogācāra school, which developed a grand speculative MM of the idealist variety. Given the nature of Buddhist thought, such oscillation is not weakness to be overcome, but inevitable and wholesome tension between silence and speech.

Moving on the edge of Absolute Horizon, this investigation is only too conscious of its own vulnerability. Balance is never a stable position, but always an unsteady act of compensating for excess in two or more directions. To speak or not to speak: that has always been the dilemma of MM. In the words of the best, the silence speaks.

■ Rāmānuja

We now move from one Indian MM classic to another: the *Bhagavad Gītā* (produced round about the beginning of CE – also see Ch. 6), which elevated passionate, self-surrendering, loving devotion (*bhakti*) of devotee to god or goddess as a path to salvation, to a status at least equal to the way of thought and knowledge (*jñāna*) and to the way of works and action (*karma*); the former with its risk of abstruse metaphysics, the latter with its risk of hard asceticism.

The *Gītā*, part of the epic, *Mahabharata*, is a story of war and battle between families. This scene becomes the site for mystical experience. The great warrior, Arjuna, is taught by his charioteer (in reality the hero god Krishna) to do the right thing – that is, to do battle. The central message of the poem is unconditional emotional surrender to God. This admonition is followed by the injunction to selfless, compassionate love for the fellow human, whether enemy or friend (12.18). Behind such injunctions, together with their moral implications, is the eternal World Spirit, Brahman. The Ultimate, the deity as Person and the god-man charioteer, all merge. It is theism with pantheistic leanings.

In this section my concern is with the South Indian Rāmānuja (tradition has awarded him a long and fruitful life: 1017–1137 CE), the greatest exponent of Hindu *bhakti* and Hindu theism (cf. Kesarcodi-Watson 1992:98ff.; Lott 1976; Overzee 1992; Van Buitenen 1953; Veliath 1993). Rāmānuja read the *Gītā* as expounding *bhakti* to be the most advanced stage of mystic attainment. The easiest way to locate Rāmānuja is to contrast him with his fellow Vedantins, Sankara (788–820 CE) on the one hand, and Madhva (13th/14th century) on the other hand. Sankara's monistic system, known as *Advaita* ('not-dual', 'not-different') *Vedānta*, taught that the individual, the world and the Absolute (Brahman) are 'not-two', but one. At the other end of the Vedantic spectrum,

Madhva's monotheistic system (perhaps influenced by Christianity or Islam) taught that the individual and the Supreme are different; it is hence known as *Dvaita* ('dual', 'different') *Vedanta*. Standing between those two, Rāmānuja's position, which spread out over a number of books, became known since the 16th century as *Viśiṣṭadvaita*. He taught that the Supreme, Brahman, is the only all-encompassing reality, and is one – but Brahman has qualities, attributes, modes, forms, distinctions and various manifestations. This was where he mainly differed from Sankara, whose monism inevitably ended up ascribing illusionary (*māyā*) status to the world, which resulted out of ignorance and false imposition (*avidyā*).

Rāmānuja's MM struck a fine balance between feeling and intellect, *bhakti* love and consistent systematic thought. He was intimately in touch with the popular religion of his time with its emotional overtones, and particularly with the *bhakti* mysticism of the wandering ecstasies roaming India from the 7th to 10th centuries (Kesarcodi-Watson 1992:110ff.). Structurally, Rāmānuja nevertheless developed his system entirely from the enscribed tradition of sacred revelation (*śruti*): the Upanishads. He counted the *Gītā* (really a *smṛiti* scripture, that is, acknowledged to have been composed by human authors) as having the same status. He did not see himself as speculating, but simply as elucidating the tradition.

On that basis, he proceeded to promulgate realism as far as the existence of the world is concerned, yet at the same time he saw the world as non-different from Brahman. He seems to have imagined a version of what moderns would come to call panentheism: the phenomenal world is part of all-embracing Brahman. Rāmānuja rejected the distinction between *Saguna Brahman* (Brahman with attributes) and *Nirguna Brahman* (Brahman without attributes). The material world is a quality of the deepest depth and highest height of Brahman, the Supreme. Unity, yes; but it is an internally differentiated unity. That is the locus of the real world, the world of experience.

The formative and normative core dimension of Rāmānuja's MM is widely agreed to be the inseparability, the organic interrelatedness that he postulates between God and the universe. The world of names and forms, the entire body of sentient and non-sentient beings, is the body of Brahman. In itself, this master metaphor is by no means self-explanatory and could be taken to mean various things and have quite divergent implications. On balance (so his thoughts may be safely reconstructed) Rāmānuja's universe is inhabited by – more, organically integrated with – Brahman as its living soul, Brahman being the dominant force. The organic relationship of God and universe precludes reducing his system to dualism, monism or pluralism. God and universe, though inseparable, are distinct, the universe being of a lesser status and entirely and eternally dependent on God and being instrumental to God. Yet it is part of a living, conscious, loving Being – a Person: Brahman.

The following quotation from Rāmānuja's commentary on the *Gītā* (*Gītābhāṣya*) contains the essence and gives the flavour of his thinking (Van Buitenen 1953):

God, the Supreme Person, is modified by all existing beings and things which modify him by constituting the body of which He is the *ātman* [...]. God is said to be the quintessence of all entities. All these entities with their peculiar individuality and characteristics have originated from God, are shesas ['dependents'] of God and depend on God inasmuch as they constitute his body, and God himself is modified by all these entities of which he is the *ātman* [...]. God himself, however, does not depend on them (II.I.3.8-11). (p. 101)

Consistent with the above, Rāmānuja saw the *jīva* (individual soul), though non-identical with Brahman, as inseparable and having its true Self in Brahman. The soul's highest bliss consists in having a direct intuition of Brahman.

At the religious level, Rāmānuja worshipped Vishnu as the Supreme God, flanked by his consort, the goddess Lakshmi. At that level Vishnu (a name for Brahman, the Supreme Reality) is worshipped as a Personal God. By such mythological means, Rāmānuja provided ordinary people with a religion in which emotion and love played a greater role than the intellect as the means to salvation. At that level, his system is devotional theism, and the vision of God as responding to human devotion and entering into deep personal relationships with humans forms the ultimate basis for a morality of love in everyday life. He connected the religious level with the MM level. Metaphysically speaking, the object of loving devotion, Brahman, while being One, is thought to manifest non-divisibly in the two modes of individual soul (*jīva*) and material world (*prakṛiti*). The various existing entities, animate and inanimate, are His modes (*prakāra*).

Rāmānuja's 'Brahman' operates at the level of Infinity as intended in this essay. His idea of infinity is that of unbounded, measureless, unfathomable maximum - including infinite bliss. Brahman has unlimited qualities: He is not only perfectly blissful, but also all-knowing, all-powerful, all-embracing, endowed with limitless, maximum mercy, affection, generosity, friendliness, sweetness, compassion (yet excluding suffering and being affected by human weakness), boundless love for his devotees, and grace (*prasāda*). In his infinity he is not only 'a subject enjoying bliss' in 'immeasurable magnitude', but also the 'cause of bliss' in the world (Veliath 1993:67), and he can be experienced and enjoyed in loving meditative devotion (*bhakti*) and bliss. That is the central focus of his teaching. His Brahman is very different from the qualityless Brahman of Sankara. It must be added that by adjectives such as the above-mentioned, Rāmānuja did not emphasise non-fixity (the core of our definition of Infinity), but immeasurable immensity, transcending the capabilities of rational thought. In his system, the inexpressibility of Brahman is due to his superlative qualities. His thinking amounts to a form of kataphatic mysticism.

Rāmānuja differs fundamentally from Sankara. To Rāmānuja, Brahman was differentiable. He allows for manifestation as event, not merely as eternal stasis: Vishnu is the origin of the world (the Creator); it sustains the world (the Preserver) and eventually reabsorbs the world (the Destroyer). The Will of Brahman drives this process. During the stage of extinction (*pralaya*), distinctions do not exist and the supreme principle (Brahman) has not yet re-evolved. Therefore, Brahman can, at that stage, be called 'Non-being' (*Asat*) and 'Undeveloped' (*Avyākṛita*), but only in the sense that he is not connected to names and forms. Subtle existence is never denied (Van Buitenen 1953:55, 116f.). Brahman evolves and assumes various forms out of love, for the benefit of the world and purely as sport or recreation (*ibid.*:59). This essay, seeing the world (Cosmos) as Infinitude becoming Cosmos, appreciates Rāmānuja's realism and his emphasis on Love.

Yet we must go further. Following the more radical emptying thinking in the Indian Buddhist tradition, it would see Infinitude as absorbing anthropomorphic mental pictures of gods in a spaciousness and relativising them to the point of disappearance. It sees Infinitude as devolving from an even deeper Eternity, itself appearing from and disappearing on the edge of an inaccessible Horizon. Rāmānuja does not have an intention towards Absoluteness. From our point of view, theistic personalism can be accommodated in the space of contourless Infinitude anthropomorphised in various ways ('Person', and so on) by human beings with their mystical yearning for transcendence. Such a loving Person is not the root and cause of all; it is a manifestation of a deeper truth, and a projection of the human mind into Infinitude.

Comparing religions, philosophies and MM systems from various cultural contexts, historical origins and epochs and relating them structurally, requires extreme caution. Seeking to integrate them into one differentiated whole is even more difficult. Considering all necessary provisos, we dare say that Rāmānuja's mysticism of Love is kindred in spirit and structure to what is found in Judaism-Christianity-Islam, to which I shall now turn.

■ Bernard of Clairvaux

Since its inception, Christianity evolved as a religion of love. During the 12th century, love blossomed as a central theme in Christianity as well as in Judaism and Islam. Human subjectivity, the world of emotion, was discovered. In secular life romantic love was celebrated in literature and music (the troubadours), and in Christian faith and theology, mystic love was elevated to new heights. Even in this company, the theology of love of Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) stood out in its fervour (cf. Bernard of Clairvaux 1987; Bernard von Clairvaux 1994; Dreyer 2007; Evans 2000; Leclercq 1976 [1966]; McGinn 1994; Pranger 1994; Sommerfeldt 1991; Stiegman 2001:129ff.). His position was assured when, a century and a half after his death, Dante made

him his final guide in Paradise, accompanying him to the very end of his journey that culminated in his vision of God.

Bernard was a multi-faceted personality: man of action, of deep sentiment, of thought. Wielding immense influence in the 12th century, he was not a philosopher in the technical, academic sense of the word at that time and he took pains to make that plain. Nor was he a theologian in the rational, systematic sense of the word, which at the time was in the process of becoming scholasticism, as was the case with his great adversary Peter Abelard (1079–1142). Concerning the teachings of Christianity, he was a solid, conventional theologian: guardian of orthodoxy rather than explorer of frontiers. He was steeped in the Bible and the thinking of the Fathers, whom he interpreted intuitively, in private prayer and communal sacramental liturgy. He never studied at one of the new academic schools of the day and the locus of his theology was not the schools with their new analytical, critical style of thinking and their secular learning, but the cloister with its strict discipline in accordance with Benedict's Rule, aiming at a secure faith. Working in that spiritual setting, in the circumscribed Christian context available to him at the time, Bernard exercised his considerable gifts of synthetic ability, creative originality and his great talent for literary expression. His main contribution, marking a relatively new departure at the time, was that he was outspokenly an experiential thinker, with equal emphasis on experience and thought. He was a champion of a new subjectivity with a deep understanding of the range of emotions. His was an intellectual spirituality, a spiritual intellectuality, an experiential theology – in the vocabulary of this endeavour: MM.

Bernard's insistence on a mysticism of love (*dilectio, caritas, amor*) in his historical context, is impressive. He was not only church politician, defender of the faith, polemicist and heretic hunter, but also – above all – contemplative. To the two comings of Christ (in his incarnation and in his final return at the end of time), Bernard added a third: the advent interiorly in the soul of the Christian. The 14th century Flemish mystic, Ruusbroec (1293–1381), would pick this up. Bernard expressed his understanding of union with God in Christ in various smaller works, but particularly in his large work, *Sermones super cantica canticorum* ('Sermons on the Song of Songs'), which consisted of 86 sermons on the love between Christ and the individual Christian. To Bernard, this intimate individual relationship is possible only because of the relationship between Christ (the bridegroom) and the Church (the bride). This masterpiece was the mature articulation of Bernard's MM of love. He started this work in 1135 and it was still unfinished 18 years later at the time of his death. Totally immersed in this biblical text with its erotic imagery of passionate love and marriage, Bernard's mysticism was not untouched by the chivalry and courtly love of his century, but that was incidental rather than essential. His corpus of sermons is a celebration of the love between Christ in God and the individual in the Church. First comes carnal love, then rational love, then spiritual love;

first the love of the slave, then the love of the hireling, then the love of the son. To forge a link to the wider mystical tradition: the first is Bernard's equivalent of *karma-yoga*, the second of *jñāna yoga* and the third of *bhakti-yoga*. Across cultures and religions, Bernard and Rāmānuja sing the same song to the sun, like birds of the same species in different trees.

To Bernard spiritual love is essentially a going out of oneself (an *ecstasis*, *excessus*), a being raised (*raptus*) above the ordinary capabilities of one's faculties, God entering and taking possession of one's soul in a union of love. Bernard testifies that such an entrance occurred to him many a time (Leclercq 1976 [1966]:74). He utilises the standard map of the soul's progress through ascetical purification, virtuous illumination and loving union. Alternatively, these three stages are called contrition, devotion and piety; or confession (*confessio*), devotion (*devotio*) and contemplation (*contemplatio*) – the third being the highest and properly mystical stage. In the amorous analogy of the *Song of Songs*, these three stages are described as the kiss of the feet (penitence), the kiss of the hands (active virtue) and the kiss of the mouth (the personal encounter with the Beloved).

Additionally, he frequently distinguishes four steps in the growth of love on the human side: love of self for the sake of self; love of God for the sake of self; love of God for the sake of God; love of self for the sake of God (McGinn 1994:183ff.). In the mysticisms of other religious orientations, similar roadmaps, comparable stages of mystical development, have been developed in other doctrinal settings. In Bernard's Christian mystical event of love, Christ the God-Man (included in the divine identity) and the Church (site of the encounter) are the cardinal determining factors. This is quintessential Christian sentiment.

What about God, the source of love? Adhering to the traditional teachings in the Western Church concerning the Trinity and Christology, Bernard describes God (*ibid.*:152f.) as not only Eternity, but also as infinite Love, these two being identical and both beyond all measure, each representing both in their togetherness and both together representing each singularly. God is also Power and Wisdom, all four integrated as the length, breadth, height and depth of God. That is his definition of God. The saintly heart responds by 'embracing', 'clasping' and 'retaining' God with the two arms of fear and love (*ibid.*):

What is more loveable than his love which determines the fact that you love and are loved? And yet, when eternity is added on to this love, it becomes still more lovable, for the certainty that it will never end frees it from all suspicion. (p. 156)

God, the holy origin of all things, is Love. He loves in the spontaneous perfect freedom of his infinite nature and he initiates all love. Love is not a quality of or an accident in God, but the divine substance itself (Sommerfeldt 1991:101). That is Bernard's central theological motif. As Love, God is present, and although not changed or affected by what is outside himself, can be moved from within by his own love (McGinn 1994:194). The presence of God is dynamic movement,

not flat, unchanging condition, for as the soul advances God becomes more and more actually and effectively present (*sermon* 74). In Bernard's mysticism, the Word become flesh is more fundamental than his death or resurrection. One of the characteristic features of his mysticism of love is his interpretation of the Incarnation as expressive of God's wish to be known by humans, and as taking beautiful form in the flesh (*caro*) of Jesus. God's love and loveliness is before us in the form of Christ, attracting our human love. Bernard does not shy away from a heavy emphasis on precisely the body of Christ and, tied to that, from anthropomorphic language about God (Stiegman 2001:133ff.).

Bernard's notion of infinity denotes the ineffable immeasurability of God and his qualities, including love, in a *kataphatic* sense, not in the *apophatic* sense as associated with Neoplatonically inspired mysticism, which was not in vogue at the time (Evans 2000:103ff.). God is the Being of all things (*esse omnium*): he is their cause, not the stuff of their being (*factor causale, non materiale*: Bernard certainly had no pantheistic inclinations). Precisely as such, God is utterly incomprehensible. The following excerpt illustrates the close association of the infinity of God in himself and at the same time of his close presence to his creatures (Sermon 4.III.4) (*ibid.*):

He who governs all is all to all, yet he has no particularities. All that we can say of him in himself is that 'he dwells in inaccessible light' (1 Tm 6:16). His peace is beyond our understanding (Phil 4:7). His wisdom is beyond measure (Ps 144:3). No man can see him and live. (Ex 33:20). Yet he who is the ground of all being is not far from each of us (Acts 17:27), for without him is nothing (Jn 1:3). But, to make you wonder more: Nothing is more present than he (*nil eo praesentius*) and nothing is more incomprehensible (*nil incomprehensibilis*). (p. 226)

In Bernard's view of the presence and the infinity of God, a certain dramatic tension, a mystery, remains. Christ, the Lover, is not just available and that is that. God can never quite be found. Love as described by Bernard is a dynamic principle, ambivalent, hovering between fulfilment and postponement. In the words of Pranger: the 'sense of mystery remains and is intensified by the suggestion of the simultaneous overwhelming presence, as well as absence, of the beloved' (Pranger 1994:142). The greatness of Bernard is that he was aware of the non-final balance between divine presence and divine infinity; and of the ambivalent relationship between sacred and profane, Spirit and flesh (in our terms: Infinitude and Cosmos). Our notion of Infinite Love 'embraces' and 'retains' (to borrow the abbot's own terms) his medieval Christian model of God as infinite Love, but in a wider, deeper ambit of Infinitude emerging on Absolute Horizon.

Insofar as his affirmation of the body of Christ tends to be an affirmation of Cosmos and the body, it is to be applauded. It is to be noted, though, that Bernard's attention to the carnal love of Christ quickly moves on to a spiritual love. In addition, in the end, and in tune with his time, he probably saw no intrinsic worth in the fleeting world and no value or beauty in sexuality – in

spite of the explicit message of the *Song of Songs* (Dreyer 2007:126ff.; Stiegman 2001:135ff.). His allegorical reading of the biblical book did not rub off on his view of real life outside the cloister. Nevertheless, could his writing unintentionally but shyly tendentially and ever so slightly have opened the door to a true celebration of Cosmic life? At least he avoided the extreme dualism of spirit versus body, flesh and matter, as Gnostic Catharism, flourishing at the time, taught. He assumed not an absolute break, but a measure of continuity between flesh and spirit.

Let us throw open the window to the sanctity of profane (Cosmic) love without losing – in fact, by radicalising – the sense of mystery and non-fixed Infinitude, and by relating Infinitude to Absolute Horizon. At both ends of the spectrum (Origin and Cosmos) this essay would want to place different emphases than the great Christian mystic had done: Origin would be emptied more and Cosmos would be affirmed more. Appreciate the object of love in its precious reality and its absolute contingency. The ambivalence of the emergence of Cosmic beings from Absoluteness constitutes their beauty, the loveliness of earthly love.

In some respects, Bernard was ahead of his time, in others he was a child of his time. He should not anachronistically be blamed for what, from our present historical situation, might appear to be problematic. Nevertheless, this mystic saint's instigation in 1146 of the Second Crusade (which would end in failure in 1148) appears remarkable, even taking into account the vast chasm in time and cultural conditions between now and then. His role was largely determined by his very intimate ties with the powerful institution of the Church, in the hierarchy of which he held no prominent position, yet on which he wielded enormous influence. Indicative of this was his canonisation in 1174, shortly after his death. He was not exactly a solitary on the fringes of institutional life, but a powerful political figure, swaying the Church. In that context, his take on Islam was typical of the Christian sentiments of the time. He saw Muslims as hardened sinners, having turned down the opportunity of hearing the gospel and being converted, and therefore as enemies deserving of religiously inspired military violence in a holy war. The mystic of love's active involvement in the power politics of Church and State in his day reflects the unique historical conditions of the time, no less brutal and complex than our own. To him the Crusade was an opportunity for demonstrating one's love for God. From the point of view of our argument, an MM of love for today would command a different course.

In the terms of the model put forward in this treatise, the mystical-intellectual programme of Bernard can be appreciated, yet a nostalgic return to him and to what he stood for would be problematic. Today we exist in a new horizon with new opportunities, invitations and challenges. An emotional focus on, an attachment to one system of – for example – Christianity (as was the case with Bernard) is understandable and acceptable, but a myopic theoretical position espousing Christian (or any other form of) exclusivity is to be turned down.

A deliberate choice for a limited Christian world of thought such as the one inhabited by Bernard would be reactionary. He lived in a different epoch, and must be understood and appreciated over this vast distance in time, circumstance and mentality. This essay proposes an open, inclusive MM, positively accommodating all of humankind's religious projects as so many searches for ultimate meaning, all oriented towards the same north pole. That is the space to be explored here.

Bernard was a troubadour of divine love. From its own religious preconditions, Islam sang equally remarkable songs of love. Reading Bernard flanked by Rāmānuja and Rumi is like looking at a family photo, observing family features.

■ Jalaluddin Rumi

During the 12th to 13th centuries, the theme of love flourished in Islam, influenced by Sufi thought and producing its finest flower in the mystical love poetry of the Persian poet Jalaluddin Rumi (1207–1273).

Through his spiritual friend Sadruddin, who was a disciple of Ibn Arabi, Rumi knew the thinking of Ibn Arabi well. Considering their common Sufi sentiments, they were different mystical types: Ibn Arabi's was essentially a mysticism of Thought; Rumi's, a mysticism of Love. Although Rumi was a great MM in the sense of this essay, his mysticism was less integrated with theosophical reflection than was the case in Ibn Arabi and (to mention another great Muslim theosophist) Suhrawardi. Ibn Arabi was overwhelmingly a theosophist; Rumi, overwhelmingly a theophile. That is not to say that love (*hubb*) was not a prominent theme in Ibn Arabi's thinking. On the contrary, he wrote a great deal and most profoundly about it. To him God's love has a most significant corollary: God's being known. All things come from God and wish to return to him. God's love to be known is the creative force that brings all things into existence and occasions their desire to know and love him. The world is God's self-disclosure, so that to love the world is to love God. To Ibn Arabi love has divine roots: it sprouts from the deepest roots of things, in his terminology, from *wujud* (non-manifest Being) (Chittick 2007 [2005]:35–51).

This chapter turns on the view that Love (understood to contain the whole range of emotions operative in Cosmos) is not an epiphenomenon of matter, which did not bang blindly, lifelessly, lovelessly and thoughtlessly into being. Matter, Life, Love and Thought co-emerge as mutually inherent on Absolute Horizon. That is in line with Ibn Arabi's thinking.

In Chapter 6 note was taken of Rumi's vision of the world leaping out every moment from the 'nothingness' of *'adam*. Now it is time to see how his appreciation of the world and its emergence might be related to the texture of love in his thinking (cf. Bausani 2004:9ff.; Nicholson 2003 [1898], 2004:481f; Padmanabhan 2004:461ff.; Schimmel 1980 [1978], 1992, 2003). To him love

was not pretty foam on the world, but a structural element in the nature of the world (Nicholson 2003 [1898]):

'Twere better that the spirit which wears not true love as a garment
Had not been: its being is but shame.
Be drunken in love, for love is all that exists. (p. 51)

Like Rāmānuja and Bernard before him in other religious worlds, he breathed in the atmosphere of a mystical tradition, in his case based on the Qur'an and its reception. Love, directed at God alone, had become a central aspect of Islamic mystical poetry. Like Bernard, he knew the earthly love stories of his own medieval culture and they fed into his mystical poetry, describing the pain of separation and longing and the joy of union. Yet, different from Bernard's, Rumi's mystical love was religiously inclusive: He was a friend of both Christians and Jews and at his burial they took part in the funeral prayers, each in their own religious idiom. He understood that the various religions long for the same inexpressible essence; that the religion of love is different from all religions and knows no difference between sects. The transcendence of God, the Infinite, is the basis for his tolerance of all religions. In his own way Rumi interpreted all religions tendentially – all aim at the Infinite:

Every prophet, every saint has his path
but as they return to God, all are one (Rumi 2008:10).
Those drunk with God, tho' they be thousands, are yet one (Nicholson 2003 [1898]:61).

All of this love, expressed by the poet in a multitude of staggering images, is a Divine gift. It is rooted in the eternal Kindness of God, originates in God, is co-eternal with him and is his foremost quality (Schimmel 1980 [1978]:341). In his *Divani Shamsi Tabriz*, named after Rumi's spiritual mentor, Shams Tabrizi (1185–1248) and written in the New Persian language, he drew on a revered *hadith* (Nicholson 2003 [1898]:15):

David said: 'O Lord, since thou hast no need of us,
Say, then, what wisdom was there in creating the two worlds?'
God said to him: 'O temporal man, I was a hidden treasure;
I sought that that treasure of lovingkindness and bounty should be revealed'. (p. 15)

About God, he himself spoke in exuberant kataphatic poetry, veiling the blinding brightness of God, the One Eternal Sun, by metaphoric language, like stained glass pieces protecting from, yet also revealing the sun (Schimmel 1980 [1978]:47, 336). His unsightedness was not caused by darkness, but by excessive light; he did not withdraw into apophatic silence, but could not contain the flood of kataphatic love-intoxicated words gushing over his lips.

The essence of Rumi's poetry was his preoccupation with God, his burning love for God as Creator (*khaliq*) and Ocean of Love, ever continuing his work of creation ex nihilo ('*adam*'). God is the Living, the Everlasting, and the spark of not only his Power and Wisdom but also of his Love, Kindness and Mercy can be discovered in everything. Love, like Being, Beauty and Goodness, belong essentially and exclusively to God and are manifested in a thousand

mirrors in the phenomenal world. Divine Love is a positive Cosmic force in the world, without which the world would be frozen. Sun, earth and mountains are lovers, and everything in the world loves something. Love shuns extreme asceticism: like Bernard, Rumi sees human love between woman and man as a symbol of the love between God and the believer; but more than Bernard he appreciates it in its own right as good and divinely inspired. The world, though merely mirror, is affirmed as positively beautiful.

Rumi approximates Absolute Horizon more strongly than was the case in Bernard. To the Persian poet, God is utterly transcendent, virtually to the point of non-existence from a human point of view, beyond personalism. However, as far as I can see, God remains an eternal noumenon, the Ground of Being, of all Creation (Padmanabhan 2004:468), an inconceivable superabundance, closer to Neoplatonism and Vedanta than to Taoism and Buddhism. His God is 'inexpressible reality', the 'non-dual reality', 'the Absolute One without attributes', 'strikingly similar to the monism of the Upanishads, of Sankara's *Advaita* and of Plotinus' Sublime' (Padmanabhan 2004:469, 478). Yet his MM, brushing the limits of what is possible in Islamic orthodoxy, does not transgress the boundaries between God and human being set in the basic tenets of the Qur'an. After all, he stands closer to Rāmānuja than to Sankara.

According to Rumi scholar R.A. Nicholson (2004), Rumi was:

[A] pantheist in the sense that he identifies all real being with God and regards the world of phenomena as a mere image of the divine ideas reflected from the darkness of not-being: the universe in itself is nothing, and God alone really exists. (p. 481)

On that assumption, this essay would emphasise both the emptiness of Absoluteness and the reality of the world more strongly than this interpretation of the Persian MM poet allows: on this journey of ours, the world is seen as real and from Infinitude to Cosmos real novelty, real change occurs. Rumi's notion of God is understood to overlap with our notion of Infinitude. His accents differ. First (as said): our notion of Infinite Love, eventually petering out at Absolute Horizon, extends further into emptiness than the Love he sings of so eloquently in his poetic imagining. Second: alongside Infinite Love, and intimately integrated with it, emerges Infinite Thought. Rumi attaches little value to Thought (which will be considered in the next chapter). To him, discursive reason, compared to love which flies to heaven, is a donkey carrying books, and a stick in the darkness for the blind compared to a candle for those who can see beauty (Rumi 2008):

Love resides not in learning
not in knowledge
not in pages and pamphlets
Wherever the debates of men may lead
that is not the lover's path. (p. 115)

And (Rumi 1996):

My religion is to be kept alive by Love:
life derived from this animal soul and head alone is a disgrace. (p. 182)

■ Hasdai Crescas

Remaining in the Middle Ages, to the Jewish scholar Hasdai Crescas (1340–1410/11) will and love constitute the highest good of human existence (cf. Epstein 1975 [1959]:217ff.; Frank, Leaman & Manekin 2000:263ff.; Guttman 1988 [1964]:224ff.; Langermann 2007:229ff.; Lasker 1977, 1997:399ff.). Why and how love?

Barcelona-born Crescas was an outstanding teacher of Jewish law (*halakha*) in Christian Spain, but during his life and after his death he remained in the shadow cast by the other Spanish-born Jewish philosopher, Moses Maimonides (1135–1204), whom he criticised trenchantly. The fact that Crescas did not win many adherents and did not become the source of an enduring school in Jewish thought, may be attributed to the untimely nature of his thought: at a time when Aristotelianism was not only the fashionable but the dominant paradigm, Crescas explored another one, a novel and original paradigm, intended to oust Aristotelianism. It was too early to have much effect. He also strove to re-establish the traditional doctrines of Judaism, preserving Jewish identity and loyalty at a time of severe crisis. His central concern was the defence of Jewish orthodoxy against the double threat of intellectualist Aristotelianism (particularly in the garb of theistic Aristotelianism as championed by Maimonides) and Christian theology. Considering the common philosophical culture prevailing in Europe and particularly Spain at the time, the possibility that Crescas might have been influenced by figures such as the 13th century Muslim Al-Tabrizi (Langermann 2007:238f.) and the Christian theologians Thomas Aquinas and John Duns Scotus from the same century, should cause no surprise. As far as his own influence is concerned, Crescas could, according to some, perhaps have foreshadowed the thinking of Giordano Bruno and Baruch Spinoza.

Crescas was not a theosophist in the sense deployed in our model. Striving to combine rational argument and erudition in the general Western philosophical tradition with *halakhic* studies and apologetics in his religious tradition, he was a philosopher-theologian, which is not quite the same as being an MM. Combination is not the same as integration and transcendence, and could still imply a certain disengagement of the two. That was the case with Crescas. Although the Kabbalah could have influenced him, he did not write with a mystical intent, as his main book, a philosophical treatise under the title *Or Adonai* ('The light of the Lord', completed in 1410), indicates. This comes out in the way he deals with infinity. He makes a great deal of infinity, but does not use the Kabbalistic term *Ein-Sof* in this respect. Although Love is the central tenet of his thinking, he does not relate it to the notion of infinity, but immediately connects it to God as positively revealed and known. The target of his interest in infinity was Aristotelian physics, in the context of his refutation of naturalism as a threat to orthodoxy. While accepting infinity as real and

defined as unfinalisable magnitude, Crescas refuted Aristotle and argued for the infinity of empty space as the receptacle of all things, and the infinity of time and number, as well as of causality. In the medieval context, entertaining the possibility of an infinite universe was a novelty and a great achievement. In his application of the notion of infinity to causality, Crescas did away with Aristotle's argument for the existence of a *terminus* (called 'Prime Mover' by the Greek) in the chain of causation, intended to end what would otherwise amount to a futile infinite regress. That is a significant theological offshoot of his anti-Aristotelianism. Crescas obviously accepts God as cause of the world, but this is unrelated to the notion of causal or temporal infinity. He accepts the notion of *creatio ex nihilo*, not in the sense of an Absolute devoid of being, but in the sense of creation stemming from God alone as its eternal Ground. That is his traditional Jewish faith, not intending a version of absolutism at all. In the context of creation, Crescas places a high premium on the Will of God: the world is not a natural necessity, but it is a divine necessity – the outcome of Divine Will, and in that sense, he postulates, necessary. Creation is the necessary diffusion of Divine Love, which is the highest attribute of his Will. This act of free Will to create, is a corollary of the notion of Divine creation *ex nihilo*.

Will, Love, are essentially part of the eternal, unchanging nature of God. Not Thought but Goodness is the central feature and primary content of his God idea, organising the various attributes of God into a whole. God is centrally a volitional, emotional being, blissful and joyous. Crescas' emotional-voluntaristic emphasis is what distinguishes him from Maimonides, who awarded priority to reason. He therefore severely criticised Maimonides' formulation of the basic tenets of Judaism. Among the sine qua non non-negotiables (*pinnot*) of Judaism, Crescas includes the Love of God, which Maimonides did not have among his list of non-negotiable dogmas. Crescas awards the central position to God's goodness, grace and love. Compared to that, the beliefs in immortality and retribution, the coming of the Messiah and the eternity of the Torah, penitence and the power of prayer, though true, are of secondary importance – for Love seeks no reward and desires nothing in return. Denying such beliefs would amount to heresy in Jewish terms. Crescas, pious Jew and expert in the *halakha*, does not dispute that, but does not award the highest priority to it.

Here a certain ambivalence in Crescas' position emerges, structurally similar to the ambivalences observable in the cases of, for example, the Muslim, Ibn Arabi (see Ch. 5 and Ch. 7). Transcendentalism, understood as the tendention towards Absolute Horizon, can accommodate traditional loyalties, but is not reducible to them. The intuition of absolute ultimacy, transcending every cultural and religious form, can be found both inside and outside the various existing religious camps. In this essay the emphasis falls on the structural similarities cutting right across religious divisions – yet without sacrificing an appreciation of the uniqueness and value of each of these religious organisms, growing from various cultural soils over time. So, Crescas

is not censured for his religious obedience. On the contrary, it is appreciated, but not as an absolute.

Crescas distinguished a further, lower tier of religious conviction: opinions left to the discretion of the individual Jewish believer. Among these, he included beliefs concerning the spatial locality of heaven and hell and, remarkably, views concerning the knowability or unknowability of the Divine essence. From the perspective of the explorer on the present journey, a sense of ultimate ignorance, beyond Neoplatonic apophaticism, is (to stay with Crescas' scheme) neither a matter of private opinion nor of semi-compulsory belief or a fundamental religion-specific item; it transcends all of those. Then, Crescas was the leader of a religious minority persecuted by Christians in a time fraught by unbelievable social tensions in Spain. His own son was killed in that context. That situation would not have stimulated apophatic thinking – it was a time to take a strong defensive-offensive stance. Yet, in passing, let me not forget a theist from the same epoch, the Christian, Nicholas of Cusa (1401-1464), with his ideal concerning a peace of religions (*De pace fidei*, written around the fall of Constantinople to the Muslims in 1453). Ours is a different time, inviting the mystically inclined as never before to be aware of a wider Horizon, transgressing the boundaries of all historical religions and science, while embracing all of them.

An implication of the Catalanian's imagining of God is that in the human personality, feeling and free will are not secondary concomitants of the intellect, but the primary and central factors, their realisation constituting the supreme goal of human existence. Not knowledge but active love for God, expressed in morality and the participation in religious observance, bring about true communion with God. Thus, the state of ultimate human happiness is not achieved through rational philosophy, but through revealed religion and living according to the Torah, the purpose of which is to bring the believer to eternal life, through love for God as expressed by observing his commandments.

■ Novalis

Novalis (Friedrich von Hardenberg: 1772-1801) was lawyer, poet and scholar of literature, philosopher, natural scientist (metallurgist) and mathematician. The life span of 29 years granted to him was not enough to integrate all of that (Schmid 1976). Celebrated (alongside Hölderlin) as one of the pioneering poets of German Romanticism, Novalis was no mere youthful, irrational, impulsive, death-obsessed dreamer but an accomplished metaphysical mystical poet-thinker, also standing in the tradition of the medieval mystics (including Meister Eckhart).

Like Rumi six centuries before and from a vastly different religious and cultural world, Novalis celebrated earthly love as arising from a great depth.

Connecting him to the medieval Jewish orthodox theologian-philosopher, Crescas, is more difficult. It may seem like leaping across a broad and deep chasm. They lived in utterly different, seemingly completely incongruous epochs and their respective worldviews may appear to be completely incompatible. Yet there is bedrock underlying the chasm between these two figures, connecting their seemingly disconnected worlds and providing structural continuity across the vast differences. That bedrock is their shared emphasis on love. Novalis stood for something quite different, yet not unrelated. In the thinking of both of these figures, love was the central organising theme. Yet the contrasts in the connected divide are equally significant. Whereas Crescas accepted a dichotomy between the immanent and a supernaturally transcendent (was there really another possibility available to this 14th century theologian?), Novalis stood in a different tradition. His thinking continued the presupposition of an emanating Absolute, differentiating itself, and the return of the finite that has come about in that process, to the Absolute. Significant names in this tradition are Plato and Plotinus, also Jacob Boehme and (contemporaneous with Novalis) Franz von Baader (see Ch. 9), all allowing for an appreciation of Christianity. Novalis' position is an affirmation of love as world-immanent.

Novalis assumes a divine longing for unification. This *eros* manifests in human love (including sexuality) as well as in nature, in history as well as in Cosmos. Realised via nature, *eros*, from a human perspective, includes sympathy between human and nature. This erotic principle, this longing for unification, for losing own, separate identity, is operative everywhere, in the larger context of a sympathetic coherence of nature as a whole. *Eros* has cosmological significance. The human is the product of that love, the revelation of the principle of love, and awakens to nature in the experience of a feeling of *eros*. Human sexuality expresses, is woven into, a cosmic erotic principle, which is ultimately rooted in what he calls 'night'. Novalis, standing at the beginning of the 19th century and Nietzsche at the end of it, had opposite attitudes towards Christianity. Novalis found a new Christianity: in Christ the principle of love was realised; Nietzsche vehemently rejected Christianity. Yet both are similar in their affirmation of this-worldly life, *eros*. That does not mean that Novalis simply rested within the confines of empirical reality. He assumed a stark contrast between that reality and a background depth beyond it. The symbol of the first is day; of the second, night, as he worked it out in his six *Hymnen an die Nacht* ('hymns to the night') (published in 1800) (cf. Gäde 1974; Haywood 1959:52ff, 145ff.; Novalis 1988 [1978]; Ritter 1974:141ff.).

To Novalis night is the symbol, discoverable by turning inwards, of a principle of transcendence beyond time and space, of absolute identity beyond the differences and divisions marking individuality. For all purposes, his notion of 'night' is the equivalent of the term 'God', implicitly understood by him as Mother Goddess.

Paradoxically, the loss of individuality through love also constitutes the true realisation of the self in love; and night is also eternal life. Night is the realm of death, unification beyond individual identity, absolute identity. Night is sacred, ineffable, and yet imaginable in poetry. It is not transcendence in a supranaturalistic sense, and it is not completely separate from day. Access to the deeper knowledge of night, compared to day, is given by love, because love is the essence of night, the primordial 'Mother', the 'Queen of the world' (*Weltkönigin*) herself. Love links light and night.

Unlike day, night is not 'something', does not have the quality of reality, is 'nothing'; it is radically devoid of the categories of time and space. To Novalis, night (the dimension of identity) and day (the dimension of non-identity) are oppositionally, dialectically simultaneous, and yet night has priority, is the origin of day. As a higher dimension, it is the negation of the empirical world; yet it envelops the day, the empirical world, and gives meaning to it. Death is the beginning of life. Day is dependent on night. Moreover, night does have a quality: the dynamic principle of *eros*, which is the creative centre of all, and that is mirrored in human love, including erotic lust. By human love, the world is to be sanctified. The first four hymns work out the discovery of night as 'nothingness' beyond time and space; the inner world in the human soul; the site of bliss and love; present in the day, the world of light, life; providing meaning to earthly existence.

This structure of his thinking is filled with Christian content: Christianity is a religion of night, over against the religion of light, which does not address the problem of death. The deep love of night, although vastly transcending love in the form of human sentiment, is available to the human person through Christ, who embodied the highest form of love, namely the gift of the self for the other, and comes to fulfilment in the day, in human love. Novalis produces his own personal mythopoetic rendering of traditional Christian mythology: the six hymns are a myth of initiation and salvation, through life and beyond life. Novalis accesses deep archetypal layers of human religious consciousness and approximates inaccessible Absolute Horizon, clothing all of this in Christian imagery and symbolism.

The six hymns witness to a growth in Novalis, from the intimate personal experience of the death of his beloved Sophie to the universal revelation of death as the door to mystic union with Christ. This is classic apophatic Christian mysticism, transformed into a mysticism of love, overflowing to become an appreciation of the value and beauty of cosmic life and human *eros*. At first it is a withdrawal from ordinary life, then a return to it, but in the context of, ultimately, Night. The six hymns can also be understood as structurally akin to Mahāyāna Buddhism, Night being the equivalent of transcendent Emptiness, yet infusing ordinary life and finding expression in a compassionate existence. Essential structure must be distinguished from mythopoetic expression.

While assuming polarity of Divinity and nature, Divinity and humanity, spirit and body, humanity and nature, but subsuming it in a larger context, Novalis overcomes dualism, separation, of what is inherently connected. Love is central: human love derives from cosmic *eros*, which derives from Night (Gäde 1974:239ff.). Read together with the authors above, he offers support for the postulate of a confluence (dynamic, non-finalised movement) of views towards an understanding of Cosmic and human love expressing Infinitude, which has Love as a central feature.

Thought

■ §53 The stick insect as messenger

How did the stick insect come to look the way it does, just another twig among twigs and surviving thanks to this ploy? It could not have planned this camouflage, given its humble intelligence. Yet, could it – somehow – be a messenger of a profound dimension of things? Could all forms of life, natural law and logic, mathematics and music be the results of blind, mechanical connections of material causes and effects over long periods of time, and nothing more? Alternatively, could some individual mythological Person outside nature have planned and produced life in all its detail? Neither of these solutions seems quite convincing.

Look down a different road: from empty Horizon and Eternity and inextricably connected with Infinite Energy-Matter, Life and Love, arises Infinite Thought – and from that Cosmos arises, and with that Cosmos is infused. Throughout, we need to bear in mind Nāgārjuna's insight into the constructing, fabricating nature of the human mind, which renders all religious and metaphysical systems ultimately empty. Yet, instead of bluntly rejecting the traditional religious notion of supernatural creation, this orientation would absorb it tendentially into a naturalistic hermeneutic, inviting it into an MM space which, in its own way, follows the command to 'love the Lord your God [...] with all your mind' ('thought': *dianoia*). In Indian vocabulary, what is proposed here is in line with *jñāna-yoga*.

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Human 'thinking', in any serious sense as generally understood in the disciplines of the various sciences, philosophies and theologies, is equated with reason. It is taken to connect concepts logically, concepts and objects factually, and aims and means effectively to master the world. The dominant paradigm of today, led by science and technology, more or less exhausts the scope of the word 'thinking', with artistic insight accommodated in the margin, and religious and mystical insight falling off the page as superstitious mystery mongering. 'Thinking' is exclusively taken to be correct or incorrect, right or wrong, with reference to the rules of logic and rigorously proven correspondence with facts.

Seen in a wider context, human cognition is like a house with four walls: one is absorption, learning, retaining what is good from individual and collective experience and the past; a second is creative thought, anticipating and achieving novelty, improvement; a third is correct analysis, taking apart, awareness of the individual, the specific; the fourth is synthesis, seeing widening connections of complex wholes. MM thought at its best, as observed in figures visited so far, partakes in this:

- (1) It would be open to the cumulative attempt to understand comprehensively since an early stage of human existence. It would see itself as part of it and be informed by it.
- (2) It would anticipate the future and, like all responsible thinking today, be concerned about the future of humanity and life on earth, and in its own way pioneer the kind of awareness required to co-exist as humans, and as humans with all other species of life, into the future.
- (3) It would subscribe to the rigours of analytical thought, including conforming to the rules of logic and remaining critically aware of the real differences among religious and philosophical schools of thought.
- (4) It would spot unsuspected connections and create new ones. It would allow for and encourage synthetic, even speculative thought, with a clear awareness of the need of integrating it with the other three. It would overcome the fragmented nature of things – including the disconnectedness of science and religion, and of the plurality of religions.
- (5) In addition, good MM thinking as observed in the type of thoughtful person visited so far, would rest on the foundations of a subconscious common to humankind, be dug into the soil of Cosmos, and would have a roof that could be opened to the sky above. MM is experiential knowing, cognitive experience of Infinity beyond the split of knowing subject and known object and is capable of being developed by dedication and practice. At the pinnacle of human thought, instinctual life, emotional intelligence and conceptual cognition meet and are extended to become 'knowing', 'insight' and 'wisdom' in the sense investigated here.

MM 'thought' can guarantee no certainty of the kind secured by tying thought exclusively to fact and logic, nor to the tradition of an indubitable

divine revelation. Yet, MM knowing unknowing is something quite different from mere uncertainty and doubt, the latter two being regularly demonstrated by the disillusioned ones of today. Such resigned or rebellious uncertainty and doubt are merely the obverse side of dogmatic certainty, not a true alternative to it. It is the tail of a coin of limited value, of which dogmatic certainty is the head. Both are locked in at the same level of thinking as opposites, one being the 'yes', the other the 'no'. What is needed is to transcend the coin itself, to absorb it into a unit of higher value. That would not amount to a rejection of the coin with its two sides and its lower value, but to its transvaluation, the honouring of its relative, limited value while stripping it of any claim to absolute value.

In this way, the fruitless and at times banal tussle between traditional 'religion' and 'science' with their respective claims to indubitable certainty and the inevitable counter-claims might also be transcended. We need no quasi-scientific religion or quasi-religious science, but an MM aligned to a strong and confident science, yet one conscious of the limits of its methodology; an MM radicalising and relativising all religion, yet understanding its ultimate drift. This essay in meta-theism with its notion of Infinitude, differentiates clearly between itself and the mythological world pictures with their larger-than-human beings. Perhaps there are smarter-than-human living beings elsewhere in the universe, aware of what happens on this little planet, perhaps even conscious of the sighs and prayers of humans. Thoughts are efficacious because they are connected to Infinitude and via Infinitude to every other being in Cosmos. In that sense, every thought makes a difference for better or worse, to the one who thinks and to the larger context.

The model developing here presents Infinite Thought (together with Energy-Matter, Life and Love) as the origin of thought-full Cosmos, in which, through an evolutionary process, Consciousness comes to manifestation, through prehuman consciousness, and within species specific human consciousness. Human consciousness manifests in the consciousness of individuals as well as in socio-culturally structured collective epistemes. Human cognition (thought) is exercised in art, science, philosophy, theology and so forth, but its apex is MM wisdom. Here the human being 'knows' and 'thinks' not only logically and factually, but also intuitively, viscerally, at a level touching Cosmos as a whole as well as in the transcendent dimension of Infinitude. At this level, finite thought realises its unity with Cosmos and, beyond that, with Infinite Thought. 'Realise' here means both: 'understand' and 'convert into lived experience'. That is the experience sometimes termed 'enlightenment', occurring in some form or another in different religions and mystical systems. At its most advanced, human thought evanesces on Absolute Horizon, and knows it.

The notion of Infinite Thought provides a transcendental basis for human understanding. This includes the knowledge and explanation of things (the natural sciences and technology). It also encompasses the following: interpretive insight

into situations and the historic dynamics of human existence (the human sciences); also intelligent, appropriate, skilful action in the field of individual and social life (such as morality, civil existence, social institutionalisation, and politics). In addition, human understanding embraces aligning actions with anticipated outcomes and the application of reason in comprehensive philosophy, and it includes the imaginal worlds of mythology and art in all its forms, from music to architecture. Ultimately, such human understanding evolves into enlightenment.

‘Thought’ in this context refers to emerging function and process, and is not intended in a substantialised sense: there is Thought as Thinking, but (to follow the lead of Buddhaghosa) no Thinker, and no Thought as fixed Idea. In this model, Infinite Thought is assumed as a stage in a process, arising from Eternal Principles and concretised in Cosmos and its children, including humans.

What has been termed ‘metaphysical mysticism’ in these reflections is a kind of experience and intuition of ultimacy linking up in particular with Infinite Thought, but without severing the ties with the other modes of Infinitude. It does not amount to an idealism reducing the world to a fabrication of the human mind. Cosmos is real and it does derive from Infinite Thought, but not Thought in isolation, in abstraction from Infinite Energy-Matter, Infinite Life and Infinite Love.

MM understanding (insight, wisdom) is a precious experience in which the individual human person relates to the appearance and disappearance of things from and into an inaccessible depth. It lies beyond the purely rational cognition of science and philosophy; beyond religious traditions of supernatural revelation; beyond theology, that is, the attempt – rather, the whole gamut of similar but mostly conflicting religion-specific attempts – to combine the previous two; and beyond religion-specific devoteeship and piety. In the sense intended here, it is the pinnacle of human growth and mental development.

The world is not dark and blind. A great wisdom works in the laws of thought; in the laws and workings of the natural order; in the evolution of life; in the consciousness of living beings. MM is a becoming aware of this wider context.

■ §54 Circles

The various world orientations and their thoughtful theoretical expressions are circles, not separated by impenetrable boundaries, but joined by porous membranes, all eventually dissolving and surrounded by a circle including and transcending all the smaller ones – and also dissolving them. The large, all-inclusive space is the metaphysical-mystical one, transcending religion-specific thought. It is possible to move in the large circle without necessarily being in any one of the smaller ones. Yet, by implication, one is inside all of them, for the large one includes the smaller ones. Where one takes one’s social stand, ‘inside’ or ‘outside’, is not an either-or choice. Being mystical outsider may create its own social form of friendship, the lighter the better. By entering into a few of

these circles, one seeks for windows to the others and to the ultimate expanse surrounding and permeating all of them.

■ Indian Buddhism

The Buddha rejected all attempts at factual statements that exceeded the human conceptual ability, as meaningless, false (not corresponding to reality, therefore misleading), existentially irrelevant and dangerous. In the early *suttas* fourteen such unanswerables (*avyākata*) were listed, including the question as to whether the world is eternal or not; it also included the question whether the soul is identical with or different from the body. These two questions could be recast as early anticipations of what would become the problem of all forms of idealism (and materialism). As for the second of the two questions, the relationship of soul:body is not identical with, but related to the question of the relationship of mind:matter, and idea:reality. In the context of our present argument, we could put it as the question of the relationship between Thought, Love, Life and Matter. The Buddha rendered all answers to such questions epistemologically deeply suspect.

The problem was seen to be the propensity of human thinking to proliferate viciously and invest its concepts with the character of objectivity, thereby weaving an entangling network in which one becomes hopelessly entrapped, accompanied as this process is by desire and hatred. The early *suttas* refer to that process as *papañca* ('expansion'; then 'illusion', 'obsession'; then 'obstacle' to spiritual progress) (Ñānananda 1976).

The Buddha's seed of radical epistemological critique slumbered through the phase of Abhidhamma and germinated fully with the Mādhyamika of Nāgārjuna several centuries later. However, from the beginning the aim of meditation was to transcend all conceptual constructions and the affections and volitions accompanying them. In the more advanced stages of early Buddhist meditation, this occurs progressively from *jhāna* to *jhāna*. The first *jhāna* still contains analytical, conceptual thought (*vitakka*, *vicāra*). In the second *jhāna* that is left behind and, as far as the cognitive dimension is concerned, a state of deep concentration (*samādhi*) and one-pointedness (*ekodibhāva*) is reached. In the third *jhāna* that is transcended, and a state of profound mindfulness (*sati*) and attentiveness (*sampajañña*) is achieved. In the fourth *jhāna* the possibility of 'higher knowledge', based on meditative, contemplative experience opens up beyond sensory perception, rational knowledge, supernatural revelation, religious tradition, hear-say, unitive contact with Divinity or mere authority. This is true 'knowledge and insight' (*ñānadassana*), 'knowing and seeing' (*jānāti passati*), 'wisdom', 'mystical insight' (*paññā*), seeing and understanding things as they really are. Open to every person, private yet communicable, it is nevertheless not the pasture of many (Jayatilleke 1980 [1963]:467).

Early Buddhism shows another route to follow: the higher *jhānas*, with their own vistas. Transcending the fifth *jhāna* (the dimension of the ‘infinity of space’: *ākāśānañcāyatana*), the visitor to these heights experiences the sixth *jhāna* (‘infinity of consciousness’: *viññānañcāyatana*). Nevertheless, even that is a consciousness, albeit an extremely attenuated consciousness. There is just consciousness, and in it there is no split between a subject who is conscious and an o(O)bject of consciousness. This level of experience corresponds with what this chapter is terming ‘Infinite Thought’. This sphere is reminiscent of the mystical experience of ‘God’ in theistic religions. Yet it is not the highest stage. Even subtler dimensions follow, namely the experience of ‘nothingness’ (*ākiñcaññāyatana*), the experience of ‘neither perception nor non-perception’ (*n’evasaññānāsaññāyatana*) and then the ‘extinction’, of all ‘perception’ and ‘feeling’ (*saññāvedayitanirodha*). These dimensions are here assimilated into what I term ‘Infinite Thought’, faintly discernible and hardly accessible at the outer edges of human thought and experience: non-concretised, formless, undetermined, unlimited, undefined, unrestricted, and then disappearing altogether. Beyond that is sheer emptiness, *nibbāna*: Absoluteness. That is the outermost Horizon of human cognition.

Even the cognitive experiences of the advanced *jhānas* were ascribed to the predispositions of the meditating subjects (Dharmasiri 1974:197). All that precedes *nibbāna* are mental imageries and creations, determined and mediated by sensory, affective, discursive, social and other factors. All of these peter out in *nibbāna*, which is per definition non-experience, non-cognition. Applied to the focus of this chapter, the implications are obvious. ‘God’ and ‘gods’ are not the ultimate. They are conditioned concepts. The entire band of Infinitude as set out in this treatise would forfeit any claim to ‘factual’ truth. That is perfectly in order and is accepted wholeheartedly. At best, it could have a limited value as a tool to suggest the ultimate mystery that suffuses Cosmos.

An interesting theorem of early Theravaḍa Abhidhamma was the quantum-like nature of experiential moments or elements, of mental states (*dharmas*). This ties in with the nature of the problem dealt with in this chapter, and in this book as a whole: human experience of the world, including thought, as flashing forth, hovering between reality and non-reality, as part of (indeed making) a stable world of common sense – but ultimately flimsy, non-self-evident, relative. This is fundamental to our endeavour. Also remarkable is the apparent comparability of this ancient Buddhist notion with modern quantum physics. The dialogue is on.

Buddhist Abhidhamma developed another concept relevant to our present interest: *bhavanga-citta* (Nārada 1980:32f., 58, 163ff., 208, 211, 227) which means the continuous stream of human consciousness in a passive state, not interrupted by stimuli, not responding to external objects and not conceptualising – and more fundamental than even the four deeper *jhānas*. Modern Buddhist commentators are unclear about whether this is somehow identifiable with the ‘subconscious’ in Western psychology. Yet an assimilation

of such a concept, not only with human depth consciousness, but also with a Cosmic Consciousness and eventually with Infinite Consciousness as explored in this chapter, is an inviting route to follow. Indeed, Yogācāra offers significant pointers in this direction.

The epistemological critique of early Buddhism had a mystical function. Conceptual thought and feeling, all experience, disappear into unthinkableness, inexperienceableness, hinted at by the word *nibbāna*. The Buddha rested in knowing unknowing. No positive conceptualising of Absoluteness is possible. Certain notions of divinity (in his time, including *Brahmā*) are at best pragmatically tolerable at a lower level. This critique would deny ultimacy to all forms of theistic mysticism. 'Infinite Thought' in this model is intended as an equivalent to *viññānañcāyatana*, a stage in transcending conceptual thought. A further step is taken here, one that the Buddha would probably have viewed with misgivings. Infinite Thought as a field of mystical experience en route to Absoluteness is in this model postulated as possible because of a prior event: the emergence of Cosmos from Absoluteness. The mystical experience of Infinite Thought is the way back towards Absoluteness, possible because of the first move from Absoluteness to Cosmos via Absolute Thought. That reconstruction would have fallen under the Buddha's verdict of being speculation on an 'unanswerable' problem. Yet, in our contemporary situation, I suggest that this step may be taken in full awareness of its provisionality.

The Buddha's epistemological critique was continued and reformulated by Nāgārjuna who demolished all conceptual constructs in the period between 2nd century and 3rd century CE. Yet it was not the end of Buddhist attempts to give an explanatory account of meditative mystical experience. Yogācāra was intensely interested in mind or consciousness in the process of becoming purified and eventually passing over into Emptiness. That was Yogācāra's point of departure. Add to that the difficult, unresolved problem (bequeathed by the Abhidharma scholastics) of the exact status and role of *viññāṇa* as one of the five constituents (*khandhas*) making up the human person, particularly in its function of linking one birth to the next. An enduring 'substance' (*attā*) it could not have been; *bhavanga-citta* could not be construed to have such an implication. This invited clarification, even if it meant fairly elaborate conceptual construction, which is precisely what the Yogācāra school – also known as *Vijñānavada* ('doctrine of consciousness') – undertook. It is a sophisticated speculative MM theory of consciousness. It is not necessary to reconstruct the entire system here. Suffice it to say that it cannot be seen as anything but a speculative construction, basing itself (with sufficient reason) on the epistemological example of pragmatic radicalism set by the Buddha and reiterated by Nāgārjuna. It was not an exercise in intellectual agility and power, but a therapeutic device. It was not pre-Nāgārjuna realism (the Abhidharma epistemology) but post-Nāgārjuna idealism. It had gone through the fire of Mādhyamika. The argument of this essay identifies with that.

They moulded the concept *ālaya-vijñāna* ('storehouse consciousness') as central category, which really was a tendential interpretation of the notion of *viññānañcāyatana*. In that system *ālaya-vijñāna* is not an entity available at the level of empirical experience. It has the function of a necessary postulate to explain the possibility and working of deep meditation as well as rebirth. Clearly, they were bound to find a middle path between substantialism and nihilism. The *ālaya-vijñāna* operated at an ontological level between Absolute Emptiness and empirical reality. It was the level, the site, enabling the possibility of bodhisattvic vows and commitments to serve all beings. More than that, it was the condition for phenomenal reality, for the common and shared human world, as such. In *ālaya-vijñāna* as purified consciousness there is no split of grasping subject versus grasped object, *ego* versus *alter*, which is the hallmark of empirical thinking in the common human world. It is not the immutable 'oneness' of the Vedas-Upanishads either. It transcends the pre-critical realism of the Abhidharma as well as the substantialism of Vedānta as well as the total speechlessness of extreme Mādhyamika (only allowing for conventional speech and thinking). Our notion of Infinite Thought gropes for what Asanga, Vasubandhu and others have achieved in their thinking on consciousness. In their model, *ālaya-vijñāna* is outside time and space; moving, unfolding; the source of individual identity and of human intersubjectivity; mediating between absolute emptiness and phenomenal reality; actualising the constitution of the world.

What the Yogācāra metaphysical theorists of mysticism designed, may be called a variant of idealism of a phenomenalist type: the world as seen through the eyes of an enlightened person is constituted by a bodhisattvic consciousness. That implies an awareness of the constructed nature of the conceptual apparatus itself as a mediating bridge: evoking an awareness of an ultimate dimension in the midst of the ordinary common-sense world, but not ultimate itself. It was an idealism dissolving itself in a mysticism of Absolutism. In other words, it would have avoided the trap of *papañca*, against which the Buddha warned so insistently as a prime danger. The Yogācāra 'Idealist' system is based on the understanding that language and conceptual constructs have a pragmatic value, which makes them relatively but also (in a sense) 'truly' significant and life changing. Yogācāra illustrates the Buddha's image of the useful raft to be left behind after crossing, and Wittgenstein's image of the useful ladder to be kicked away after ascending.

A shortcoming of all Indian Buddhism was that it did not achieve a positive relationship with Cosmos, Nature. That would come later in East Asian Buddhism. This exploration moves along the religion-transcending MM trail blazed by the Buddha. It attempts to provide a theoretical underpinning of MM thought in relation to ordinary modes of cognition, befitting the present-day context. Doing so, it has an interest in the sciences investigating Cosmos, as

any MM for today should, more than original Buddhism would seem to care for or allow. A thorough empirical cognition of nature was the particular genius of Western thinking. Neither early Buddhism, nor Mādhyamika, nor Yogācāra had any explicit cosmological interest to speak of, although they did imply, or rest on, certain time-bound cosmological assumptions. They had an exclusive existential-soteriological focus: the clearing of the human mind of impediments and the attainment of liberating insight. In today's world, non-human nature should not be left out of the picture. Human existence and Cosmic existence cannot be separated. Taking the step beyond ancient Indian Buddhist thinking to attain a positive, loving relationship with Cosmos and to achieve a calibration with contemporary science is a most important undertaking.

■ Abū Hāmid al-Ghazālī

The concerns of the Persian Muslim, Abū Hāmid al-Ghazālī (c. 1058–1111), set out in his spiritual autobiography *Al-Munqidh min al-Dalal* ('Deliverance from error') (McCarthy 2006 [1980]), written towards the end of his life, are of interest in the context of this investigation.

Al-Ghazālī received excellent training in jurisprudence and theology and at a young age became one of the foremost Muslim academics of his time, teaching in Baghdad at a newly founded university (the Nizāmiyah).

Nevertheless, after four years, he became disillusioned with the legalism and intellectualism of the Sunni's. Overcome by doubt concerning the value of speculative reason and reasoned argument in apologetic defence of the faith (*kalām*, theology) he tumbled into a religious crisis, finding that his teaching had been motivated by the quest for fame and that he was standing on the brink of a crumbling bank. He then abandoned his career, wealth, social position and family and set out, around the age of 37 (1095 CE), in search of truth. Withdrawing to Damascus, he entered solitary seclusion with spiritual exercise among the Sufi mystics by practising meditation (*dhikr*) for 2 years. Eventually, via a pilgrimage to Mecca, he returned to his family and after more than 10 years (age around 48, in 1106 CE), resumed the teaching of Sunni theology, now in Nishapur. Thus Al-Ghazālī was a transformed person when he emerged from his mystical retreat and resumed his teaching. He died five years later, destined to become a revered and normative figure in all of Islam. His legacy was that he overcame the barren scholasticism into which theology had fallen at the time by integrating it with moderate Sufism. That was his outer journey.

In his autobiography, he also describes his inner journey: how, driven by a thirst to grasp the real meaning of things, he left the lowland of mere conformism and inherited beliefs to follow the path of independent investigation, scrutinising the creed of every sectarian and philosopher, theologian and Sufi, devout worshipper and irreligious nihilist. He recognised

that by birth all people share the same original religious constitution (*fitrah*), but are then socialised to embrace Christianity, Judaism or Islam. To Al-Ghazālī (anticipating Descartes' radical starting from scratch) the search for the real meanings of things, beyond scepticism, started with epistemology: with the search for indubitable certainty. Trying to reach beyond the not so certain certainties of the senses and reason, he delved critically and experimentally into the claims of various categories of those who seek truth. In his search, he never doubted the three fundamentals: faith in God Most High; the mediation of revelation by the Prophet; and the Last Day. Throughout his journey, he was led by a combination of faith based on revelation in the Qur'an; rational argument; and personal experience.

The first category of those who seek truth critiqued by Al-Ghazālī were those who engage in polemical, apologetic 'theology' (*kalām*). In his view, the limitation of *kalām* was that it simply conserved the creed of the orthodox for the orthodox. Its attempts at penetrating into the study of the true nature of things could not proceed beyond the religious divisions, because of their very point of departure. They were stuck in a limited methodological ambit, namely the defence and explication of one religion, their own.

Finding theology unsuitable for his requirements but not rejecting it altogether, Al-Ghazālī then studied philosophy (*falsafa*), the second category of truth seeking, with enormous energy for three years, again pushing through relentlessly to the very limits of that discipline although not formally trained in it. He first wrote a summary called *Maqāsid al-falāsifa* ('The intentions of the philosophers'). Then, around 1094, he wrote a penetrating critique of philosophy in a book entitled *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* ('The incoherence of the philosophers'). Of the three philosophical schools, 'materialism' and 'naturalism' are rejected as 'godless'. However, 'theism' (represented in Socrates, Plato and Aristotle), though not 'godless', is nevertheless partly 'unbelief' – as was the thinking of the Muslim philosopher, Avicenna (980–1037), who synthesised Aristotle with Islam. Al-Ghazālī applies a sliding scale: mathematics and logic are relatively in order, but the metaphysics of these philosophers contain 20 grave errors. Seventeen views are stigmatised as heretical innovations. Three amount to 'unbelief' (i.e. they are totally incompatible with Islam): these are, firstly, maintaining the eternity of the world; secondly, the notion that God does not know particular things; and thirdly, the denial of the resurrection of bodies and their assembly at the day of judgement (Al-Ghazali 1997).

Having done with philosophy, Al-Ghazālī embarked on a study of the third category of truth seeking, namely the doctrine of the *Ta'līmītes*: those who fall back on the charismatic teaching of the infallible *imam* (the head of a Muslim community). Substituting mere authority for argument, he found they had no saving cure from the darkness of conflicting opinions.

Then, finally, he studied the theory of the Sufi mystic way of the purification of the mind and the constant remembrance of God, practised it and gained

experience of its fruits. At the end of his journey he wrote, ending in a prayer (McCarthy [1980] 2006:):

I know well that, even though I have returned to teaching, I have not really returned. For returning is coming back to what was. Formerly I used to impart the knowledge by which glory is attained for glory's sake, and to invite men to it by my words and deeds, and that was my aim and my intention. But now, I invite men to the knowledge by which glory is renounced and its lowly rank recognised. This is now my intention, my aim, my desire. God knows that to be true of me. I now earnestly desire to reform myself and others, but I do not know whether I shall attain my desire or be cut off by death short of my goal. Yet I believe with a faith as certain as direct vision that there is no might for me and no power save in God, the Sublime, the Mighty; and that it was not I who moved, but He moved me; and that I did not act, but He acted through me. I ask Him, then, to reform me first, then to use me as an instrument of reform; to guide me, then to use me as an instrument of guidance; to show me the true as true, and to grant me the grace to follow it; and to show me the false as false, and to grant me the grace to eschew it. (p. 72)

Al-Ghazālī refuted Aristotelian philosophy in his *The incoherence of the philosophers*. Yet he retained confidence in logic and aspects of natural philosophy. Truth not open to doubt at all can be found, he claimed: not through argument and rational proof, but through divine grace and mystical experience. His main work, *Ihya Ulum-id-Din* ('Revival of the religious sciences') is the explication of that approach. The very first chapter of this systematic work deals with the excellence of knowledge. The signs of a truly learned man ('a learned man of the hereafter'; in the language of this essay: a truly MM person) are listed in this work (Karim 1982:73–109):

- (1) A truly MM person does not seek the world.
- (2) His words and actions correspond.
- (3) His mind remains directed at what is useful with a view to 'the next world' (in the parlance of our design: the dimension of existence oriented towards Absoluteness).
- (4) He lives moderately, with simple needs, satisfied with little.
- (5) He avoids ruling powers.
- (6) He is reticent in giving *fatwa* (legal decision).
- (7) His main concern is 'secret knowledge', knowledge of the heart, mystical understanding.
- (8) He is of firm faith (a faithful Muslim).
- (9) He is humble, silent.
- (10) He avoids evil actions.
- (11) He relies not on what is learnt from others, but on his own insight and knowledge and enlightened heart.
- (12) He avoids novelties and innovations.

Such excellent knowledge is understood to flow from noble intellect (ibid.:113ff.). The central question directed at Al-Ghazālī in this chapter is: What is the source of intellect? His answer is straightforward traditional Islamic belief (ibid.:119ff.): God, the Creator, the First, the Last, who exists by himself without any partner,

is single without any associate. He is, in addition to other features, the All-knowing, whose knowledge is without limit and eternal without any increase or decrease and without any defect. God is eternal and everlasting, without beginning or end; without form, not occupying space; not composed of a body; existing by himself; omnipresent; Almighty; All-knowing, with eternal knowledge; wise by his knowledge (ibid.:128–135).

One of the central interests of this investigation is the relationship between mysticism and institutionalised religion. This was also the concern of Al-Ghazālī. His elevated status in Islam is attributable to his success in reconciling traditional Muslim orthodoxy with mystical Sufism, to a high degree of satisfaction on both sides. Before him, they had been harbouring a great deal of mutual mistrust, in which the execution of the outspoken Sufi, al-Hallāj, in 922 was a particularly tragic chapter. Al-Ghazālī's achievement did not come easily, and he paid a personal price for it with great integrity. He provides a fine example of religious leadership.

Al-Ghazālī is appreciated. His strenuous engagement with philosophy cannot be denied. He contributed a great deal to the debate that would occupy the attention of Islamic scholars in later centuries. Faced with apparent conflict between reason and revelation, he gave preponderance to revelation over reason (Bello 1989:145). His notion of God is traditional personalised theism. He did not quite fulfil his programme of radical doubt, and did not extend his epistemological critique to the basics of Islam itself. The promising mystical shoot in Al-Ghazālī's thinking did not fully develop in its own right, bearing its own fruit. It remained subservient to traditional faith. Probably things could not have been different in medieval near Eastern European theism, also including Judaism and Christianity. Obedient faith of the heart, overriding cold orthodoxy yet not questioning basic faith assumptions, would remain a feature in those religions until the present day. However, religion-specific faith, religion-specific theology, religion-specific spirituality do not exhaust the possibilities. There is also the wider expanse of Infinitude and Eternity.

■ Moses ben Maimon

Moses ben Maimon (Maimonides [1138–1204]) is an impressive example of medieval philosophical theology with a largely hidden suggestion of mysticism (cf. Guttman 1988 [1964]:152ff.; Kellner 2006; Rudavsky 2010; Stern 2005:105ff.).

Destined to be graced with the epithet 'the great eagle', Maimonides was one of the most respected, if not necessarily broadly followed, Jewish thinkers of all time. Born in Cordova, Spain, as the son of a family of rabbinic scholars, he died in Cairo as the personal physician of the sultan Saladin, the Muslim hero of the Crusades. In between, under political duress suffered by the Jews under fundamentalist Muslim rule, Maimonides for a time perhaps publicly lived the

life of a convert to Islam in Cordova; then wandered around in Andalusia while engaged in serious study; left Spain, travelled to Israel where he made a heart-rending pilgrimage to Jerusalem; eventually settled in Cairo in 1166, where he received the highest judicial authority in the Jewish community and became a prominent physician. He was buried in Tiberias, Israel.

Maimonides knew little of Christianity, but knew Islam well, having lived among Muslims all his life. He probably knew the work of Al-Ghazālī (Dienstag 1975:XXXIXff.), although no connection becomes explicit in his works. His diet of Greek philosophers included Plato and Plotinus, but his main philosophical witness was Aristotle. He received this vast philosophical heritage through a filtering process of centuries at the hands of Hellenistic and Muslim commentators. A question would be to what extent Maimonides managed to mould all of that into a completely unified and consistent view. It may not have been the case (Guttmann 1988 [1964]:431), yet reducing Maimonides' thought to a syncretism of uncritically accepted Aristotle, Plotinus and Jewish faith would be mistaken; he presented a magnificent drive at real synthesis (Diesendruck 1975:184ff.).

In his overall aim to synthesise philosophy and Judaism, reason and faith, he attempted to replace mythologised supernaturalism with a naturalistic, rationalist conception of the world. In the process, he pushed God out to the fringes of thought as far as possible, without sacrificing the basis of Jewish belief. Throughout, and as philosopher, he remained a faithful Jewish believer, in constant dialogue with Jewish tradition and Jewish faith concerns. Faced with an apparent conflict between reason and revelation, Maimonides applied a hermeneutic of demythologising. He was unwilling to sever ties with the wide community, yet sought to educate (in that sense reform) the historical Judaism of his time, realising full well that his message was, and would remain, for the few. He found himself in the difficult position of being a religious leader, with the responsibility of having to steer a cumbersome ship through troubled waters in the right direction, ensuring that it does not capsize to either side. His efforts must be appreciated in that context.

As a means to reduce tensions – that is, the psychological perplexities among his readers, social conflict and the theoretical complexities of the relationship between revealed religion and philosophy – Maimonides resorts to the ploy of simultaneously working on the two levels of exoteric and esoteric meaning and writing. The first, for the masses, is clear but superficial, the second difficult and hidden. His main concern as a loyal Jew seems to have been his desire to safeguard the unity of the Jewish community by simultaneously serving both the intellectual class and the broad base of faithful believers. He was an elitist intellectualist, serving broader education by diplomatic, subtle, oblique undermining of the false and inferior rather than by open, direct attack on it.

Proto-Kabbalah (emerging over centuries) was also a factor in Maimonides' historical context, but unlike Al-Ghazālī in a comparable situation, he turned

away from it. What put him off from the Kabbalah of his time might have been what he probably perceived to be superstition. Kabbalah remythologised around a pearl of mysticism; Maimonides demythologised and rationalised. Yet even Maimonides, the prince of reason, accepted the limits of reason.

I here restrict myself to his major theoretical work, *Moreh Nevukhim* ('The guide to the perplexed') (1190), written in Arabic but in Hebrew script from around 1185 to 1190 (in his early fifties), and translated into Hebrew 10 years later. It addressed those intellectual believers who were committed to the reconciliation of Jewish Scripture with Greek philosophy – and thus, not unexpectedly, found themselves in a state of chronic perplexity. After initial consternation in some Jewish circles, it became a respected classic, though not necessarily one followed broadly.

In his epistemology, Maimonides decries sense percepts, convention and tradition as reliable sources of knowledge, but accepts a priori rational axioms as a valid base. He values knowledge, that is, scientific knowledge in the Aristotelian sense (including metaphysics), above all things. The human cognitive faculty of mythologising imagination, though potentially useful to explain things to the masses, is of a decidedly lower order than reason. As for the possibilities and limitations of human reason, Maimonides makes a distinction between those topics that can be apprehended fully, those that can be apprehended partly and those that cannot be apprehended at all. In the third type of topic a distinction is made between those objects that humans would not necessarily, essentially, be interested in knowing; and those that humans long to know, in spite of their being unknowable.

Maimonides senses that the literal, anthropomorphic, exoteric linguistic level of Scripture needs to be transcended esoterically, understood metaphorically, allegorically, and so brought in line with philosophy. Not that Scripture differs essentially from philosophy; quite the contrary, but the linguistic levels differ. An implication is that the inapplicable attribution of sensory qualities such as corporeality to God needs to be replaced by a deeper, more sophisticated view, recognising God's transcendence of such a level of expression and comprehension. Sensory mediated, superficial apprehension needs to be transcended in deeper, intellectual apprehension. So as to minimise conflict and perplexity the crossing over from surface to depth needs to be done carefully, utilising the exoteric wisely in order to attain the esoteric. 'Carefully' in Maimonides' case means more than friendly, diplomatically: it also means indirectly rather than directly, equivocally rather than unequivocally.

Not quite surprising, given his historical context, Maimonides' concept of God is a synthesis of revelation, the Aristotelian 'First Mover' and the Neoplatonic 'One'. He eschews anthropomorphic language about God, in fact contends that all statements about God are inapplicable. Yet, while metaphysical truths about God are ruled out, he (following Aristotle) nevertheless allows for the possibility

of proving that God exists. Following Neoplatonism, his view of God rests on the axiom of negative predication: only negative predications bring us anywhere near understanding God. Positive affirmations lead nowhere, and run the risk of substantialising God's characteristics, thereby falling into the sin of polytheism. *That* God is, can be known, but not *what* or *how* God is. This is Neoplatonic apophatic Jewish theology, intended to safeguard the uncompromising starkness of the revelation to Moses of one, eternal God. This basic principle of the Jewish faith, shorn of all anthropomorphic add-ons, is highlighted in majestic simplicity. To ascribe attributes to God is to Maimonides quasi-knowledge; to deny such attributes is esoteric (i.e. philosophical) true knowledge (Maimonides 1946 [1881]):

Know that the negative attributes of God are the true attributes: they do not include any incorrect notions or any deficiency whatever in reference to God, while positive attributes imply polytheism, and are inadequate (I.LVIII). (p. 81)

Maimonides takes extreme care not to compromise God's absolute transcendence. God 'is' (since he 'must be' rationally) essentially and necessarily; singular (internally non-composite, non-complex); incorporeal (immaterial); changeless (not subject to generation and corruption) and without emotions. It is no easy matter to determine Maimonides' position precisely, partly because of his distinction of exoteric-esoteric. For example, it is not clear why he should have bothered to provide proofs for the existence of God. Might it be part of a stratagem on Maimonides' side, to make provision for the weakness of some, erecting a halfway house to complete silence save the rationally necessary minimum? In any event, rational metaphysics is according to him ultimately transcended; every attempt to know God rationally is destined to fail. Maimonides' reason for that failure is God's utter transcendence.

Maimonides provides four proofs for the existence of God. Of these the fourth argument (given in II.I), and unmistakably derived from Aristotle, is relevant to our present argument. Maimonides takes his departure in the observation that phenomenal things pass from potentiality to actuality. For that to happen, such a thing must have a cause, which in turn must have been in a state of potentiality itself, and so on. Therefore, there must be a first cause in which there is no potentiality and that exists in an eternal state of actuality. Not being in a state of potentiality means, ipso facto, being free of materiality (here Plotinus announces himself). So one, immaterial God necessarily exists.

From the point of view of this essay, at least five aspects of his argument appear to be problematic:

- (1) Change is seen as somehow an unbecoming notion.
- (2) Petering out into infinity is assumed to be not only an embarrassment, but also an impossibility.
- (3) Somehow the need is felt somewhere along the line to suspend, even deny, continuity between cause and effect (God and world) in the process of becoming (Maimonides rejects emanationism, here deviating from Plotinus).

- (4) Materiality as such is degraded (for Maimonides that implies being a state of mere potentiality).
- (5) The norm for what is acceptable is rational (Aristotelian-Neoplatonic), substantialist philosophy.

His line of argument is quite different from that followed on our peregrination:

- (1) Change, non-terminable in some unchanging, fixed entity, is of the essence of things.
- (2) Appearance from and disappearance into unlimited, undefined, unrestricted yet potentially infinitely pliable Infinity and beyond that from and into Eternity and untraceable Absoluteness is both metaphysically (rationally) and mystically (existentially, soteriologically) preferable above the sheer *fiat* of terminating that process in some unchanging entity or substance.
- (3) There is ontological continuity from one stage to the next in that process of becoming and decaying – in other words, no sharp ontological break exists between the world and what lies beyond it.
- (4) Matter is central to the entire process.
- (5) Reason (particularly of the substantialist variety) is not the ultimate yardstick – mystical insight can go where strict reason cannot, even if reason provides most important restraining checks and balances.

Maimonides provides no coercive reason for the abrupt termination of the process. The line of reasoning of this investigation, continuing Buddhist thought in this respect, does not attempt such 'proof'; it simply accepts change as the nature of things, there being neither reason nor need nor possibility for trying to stop it in its tracks.

Maimonides' speculative staircase does not lead to where he intends it to lead. A question presenting itself to the reader is whether this and the other philosophical 'proofs' proffered by Maimonides may have somehow been presented tongue in cheek, may have hovered somewhere on a continuum from esoteric to exoteric? Is there a deeper secret in his wisdom, apart from philosophical reason? At the surface of things Maimonides appears to have been less attracted to mysticism than, for example, Al-Ghazālī. Almost in passing, Guttman (1988 [1964]:156f.) makes the provocative suggestion that according to Maimonides, metaphysical knowledge, in addition to a high degree of intellectual achievement, also requires the purification of the entire human personality. Truth culminates in momentary illumination or intuition. This feature of his epistemology, distinct from his acceptance of the Aristotelian notion of metaphysics as a demonstrable science, derives from Neoplatonic mysticism.

How does Maimonides' line of argument impinge on the nature of Divinity, in the terms of this chapter, on Infinite Thought? In addition, how is human understanding and intelligence to be understood and explained? Maimonides

did not leave space for suprasensible, suprarational intuitive human cognition, organically rooted in and ontologically continuous with a trans-Cosmic dimension, which is where our journey is going. He places a massive emphasis on the ontological otherness of God, attempting to restore the austere, simple faith revealed to Abraham and Moses, by state of the art rational (i.e. Aristotelian) philosophy. Nevertheless, he stops short of taking transcendence to a stage where any proof of the existence of a substantial Transcendent becomes inapplicable and irrelevant – which seems to be the ultimate tendential drift of his line of thinking. Maimonides' writing is hedged in between traditional monotheism (in the Jewish form) and Greek-Hellenic philosophy of a strong rationalistic type. Reconfiguring the tradition of revelation in the Scriptures by means of a hermeneutic focusing on metaphor and allegory as he did was a good, understandable move, but mysticism remained underdeveloped and secondary to rationalism.

■ Thomas Aquinas

On his way to attend the Council of Lyon on March 7 in 1274, the Dominican friar Thomas of Aquino (1225–1274 CE), who would be the theoretical mainstay of the Catholic Church for centuries, suddenly died. He was 49 years old. The most fascinating biographical event of Aquinas' life is that during Mass on the feast of St Nicholas, on 6 December 1273, 3 months before his death, he had a mystical experience of such magnitude and intensity that he stopped writing altogether. He is indeed reputed to have had a great love for solitude and meditation throughout his life, and many mystical experiences are attributed to him by legend.

The *Summa Theologiae* remained unfinished. Supposing that the time had been granted to him and that he were to write again, what turn might his thinking and writing have taken? Having mystical experiences per se does not exclude speaking and even writing, as history shows. What did he see? What did his silence mean? The word 'revealed' in a statement reportedly made his great experience seems to confirm the traditional theistic nature of his experience.

Thomas is here understood as someone whose thought was not merely the exercise of reason, proving and disproving strictly in accordance with the rules of logic or Scripture, prescribed and prescriptive belief and tradition; but someone whose thought also had a more radical mystical tone, suggesting experience of a dimension transcending the domain of reason, authority and tradition.

Staying with his contribution to the problem of the existence and nature of God (Aquinas 1963), two aspects will be analysed: Firstly, his use of reason by looking at his five ways of explaining how the existence of God can be accounted for rationally; and secondly, his views on the infinity of God to see what light it might shed on the usefulness of postulating Infinite Thought.

Thomas' arguments do not set out to prove the existence of God as specifically understood in Christianity. He had a more preliminary line of argument in mind, namely the rational possibility on empirical grounds of monotheism in a more generic sense, without recourse to special revelation in Christian Scripture. That is where Aristotle comes in. As little as Maimonides had done before him, did Thomas uncritically apply Aristotle; he too sought a higher synthesis, transcending Aristotle, and in some respects, leaving him behind (Diesendruck 1975). His strategy implied the possibility of a general consensus, at least up to a point, involving not only Christianity, but also Judaism and Islam. In his historical context, at times marked by severe conflict between these three religions at the political and theological levels, the acceptance of such a degree of theoretical commonality and overlap was a noteworthy feature. Thomas was deeply indebted to Maimonides (he made a careful study of the *Guide to the perplexed*), and both he and Maimonides were indebted to Arabic thinking, including that of Al-Ghazālī. Equally noteworthy, given their passion to attain larger syntheses, is the fact that none of these three figures made an attempt to envision an inclusive MM transcending both the various religions and theologies of the time. The epoch did not allow that. Nor did the structure of Thomas' thinking (to stay with him) really allow that. His philosophical argument *that* God exists and his theological reasoning concerning the *how* and *who* of that existence are mutually implicit and hardly separable. The theological reasoning could not brook any compromise.

Thomas developed his set of five arguments in his *Summa Theologiae*, a work of great comprehensiveness and subtlety (Aquinas 1963). These arguments occur in an article (article 3) under the title 'Can God's existence be made evident? (*utrum Deum esse sit demonstrabile*), which is part of a 'Question' (Question 2): 'Whether there is a God' (*an Deus sit*) (ibid.:3-18). Having only a propaedeutical character, the proofs are not dealt with extensively by him, yet that does not diminish their strategic significance in his overall system, as the history of the reception of Aquinas proves.

- (1) His first argument, derived from Aristotle and also found in Maimonides (see above), argues that some things are in motion (*motus*, defined as 'the reduction of something from potentiality to actuality' [*de potentia in actum*], i.e. change) and therefore require a mover ('something in a state of actuality' [*aliquid ens in actu*]). An infinite regress of movers is 'impossible'. Therefore, there is necessarily an unmoved 'First Mover' (*Primum Movens*): God.

From the point of view of this essay, this first argument is problematic. The argument that change, movement from potentiality to actuality, proves the existence of something not taken up in that movement, begs the question. The 'therefore' (*ergo*) is not compelling. The obvious conclusion to be drawn from the universal fact of change would be: change is a universal fact. That happens to be what Buddhism postulated in its principle

of ‘impermanence’ (*anicca*), not necessitating any fixed, unchanging ‘substance’ (*attā*) at all, but rather implying the corollary principle of ‘non-substance’ (*anattā*). This journey follows through in the Buddhist line of thinking. Thomas followed Greek-Hellenic substantialist thinking. Could it have been possible for him to blend faith in Jesus with Buddhist philosophy instead of with Greek philosophy? Indeed, I argue (but he had no access to it). Thomas shies away from the idea of infinity, understood as a never-ending process of non-fixation (see below). Why should that be a problem? If things are infinitely interdependent, just simply admit that such non-terminable conditioning is a transcendental principle of reality as far as observation may penetrate and reason may reach. That was the argument of our Chapters 11–13. Thomas leaps from the empirical fact of change to a postulated fact of absolute, substantial non-change. Rather wade from the empirical fact of change into an ocean of change as far as reason can swim and imagination and intuition can float, and then just stop: that is where this line of thinking is heading. As said with reference to Maimonides: the acceptance of appearance from and disappearance into unlimited, undefined, unrestricted Infinity and beyond that from and into Eternity and totally untraceable Absoluteness makes a stronger case than the sheer *fiat* of terminating that process with recourse to some unchanging entity or substance. Thomas’ presentation of this argument as universal understanding (‘everyone’ [*omnes*]), may have applied in the limited horizon of the time and situation, but not in a wider ambit of thought.

- (2) The second argument, derived from Aristotle’s notion of efficient cause and structurally similar to the first, argues that some things are caused by efficient causes. Nothing can be its own efficient cause (to do that, it would have to be prior to itself, which is impossible). So everything must be (and therefore is) caused by something else. An infinite regress of efficient causation is impossible. Therefore, there must be (and therefore is) a First Efficient Cause (*Causa Efficiens Prima*): God.

Again, this argument cannot be deemed compelling. Firstly, replace the oversimplifying notion of unilinear causation with the notion of multiple and interdependent causation (see Ch. 13); that is what is found in nature. Secondly, overcome the horror of infinite deferral of finality. Thirdly (not said but presupposed in Thomas’ argument), there is no pressing reason to postulate one single cause outside of the realm of empirical multiple intercausality. Fourthly, abandon the notion of discrete things (with the implication of One ultimate Substantial Being) in favour of the notion of fluid, continuous process of multiple co-constituting, non-substantial factors. Then Thomas’ problem and answer lose their relevance. This line of argument was condensed in early Buddhism’s term *paccaya* (‘condition’). Thomas’ argument also raises but does not solve the problem of the relationship between the ultimate Cause and the rest of reality. As Christian theologian, Thomas would have felt obliged to postulate an

ontological break between that Cause and the world. Somehow, the need was felt to suspend, deny, continuity between cause and effect (God and world) in the process of becoming. In the perspective adopted in this endeavour, that problem also falls away.

- (3) The third argument runs that things in the universe are contingent (i.e. can either exist or not exist), since they are found 'to be generated and to corrupt' (*generari et corrumpi*). It is impossible that everything in the universe is contingent, since that would imply that there would be a time when nothing existed. That implies that nothing would exist now, since there would be nothing to bring anything into existence. Therefore there must be (and therefore there is) a non-contingent, Necessary Being ('some being having of itself its own necessity': *aliquid quod sit per se necessarium*): God.

This argument follows the same direction as the previous two and appears to be equally unconvincing. To begin with, Thomas' extreme discomfort with the empirical fact of generation and annihilation, and thus with contingency ('to be and not to be': *esse et non esse*), is palpable. The rest of his argument follows from that. There does not seem to be any compelling force in that approach. Buddhism's sense is quite different: contingency in the sense of non-self-sufficiency at any level whatsoever is indeed the very fabric of reality, but there is neither purpose in nor possibility of trying to overcome that fact by fleeing into the arms of a postulate of some not-arising, not-perishing substance outside of and not continuous with empirical reality. Accept that reality as a whole is shot through with the processes of arising and decaying. Stop the fabrication of constructions somehow to deny that. The acceptance of this fact was developed earlier, in Chapters 4-6. Thomas' approach also leaves the problem of the relationship between contingent beings and the Necessary Being unresolved. Observable contingency of empirical things drifts into contingency as MM category. Postulate no fixed, non-contingent *terminus a quo*. Things (and Thought) just appear from and disappear on an inaccessible Horizon. The notion of Infinite Thought is merely a flimsy pointer into the ocean of contingency. Aquinas' arguments assume that the universe in its totality can be understood rationally. This essay declines that. It merely attempts to see coherence in things as far as we can see them.

- (4) The fourth argument teaches that varying perfections of things occur in the universe. That necessitates the existence of an ultimate Standard of Perfection ('something which is to all beings the cause of their being, goodness, and every other perfection'): God.

Thomas does not explain whether that Standard of Perfection refers to an original perfection from which the universe has fallen or/and a future perfection towards which all things are striving. In the context of the present argument, it makes no difference either way. The point is that the real being of a causing 'Maximum' of Perfection, ontologically transcending

the realm of relative degrees, is taken to be rationally evident. This is not a compelling argument. Rather stay with the reality of relative degrees in an emerging, evolving universe, perhaps spiralling in a direction. No one has a superior outsider perspective, from which it may be said to move from or towards perfection. Reason does not provide such omniscience either. Of course, humans may design mythological, performative, inspiring utopias, and have done so over the ages. Let us be clear: that is not the language of fact and reason. The very real factual existence of a Being, pushing or pulling towards perfection, cannot be claimed to be rationally compelling. 'Therefore there is something' (*ergo est aliquid*) of this kind, is not compelling.

- (5) The fifth argument claims that all things in the universe act towards ends. Such acting presupposes intelligence. Not all things in the universe are intelligent. Therefore, there necessarily exists an Intelligent Being 'by whom all natural things are directed towards their end': God.

This argument is directly relevant to the topic of this chapter. The premise of the argument, namely that natural bodies observably (*videmus*: 'we see') 'act for an end' (*operantur propter finem*) is dubious. Such a statement would not be an observation, but an interpretation, an imputation, operating on a level of abstraction beyond direct observation. That is not a major issue. The remark that natural bodies act 'designedly' (*ex intentione*), that is intelligently, seems to be arguably acceptable. That is, some individual things do so intentionally and intelligently and some do not. In the context of the essay, one may ascribe a certain intelligence to Cosmos as a whole in that sense, perhaps also to 'natural bodies' (*corpora naturalia*) such as Earth. Aquinas certainly did not entertain such an idea. According to him, unintelligent things do intelligent things (act towards ends), concluding that 'therefore some intelligent being exists' (*ergo est aliquid intelligens*), directing all things to their end.

The leap to One Intelligent Being is not compelling (cf. Dharmasiri 1974; Nyanaponika 1981). This book argues that the world is to be explained on its own terms; such explanation must reach as far as possible, but stop short of making definitive statements about another level of being, ontologically continuous-discontinuous (i.e. 'analogous') with the world, as Aquinas does. This exploration would rather assume that intelligence ('Thought') is a pervasive quality or function throughout Cosmos; that it is more manifest in some instantiations than in others – that it emerges mysteriously from vast and shapeless mists, to which the epithet 'Infinite' may be given. We postulate that Thought emerged further back, from a transcendental Principle of Witting, still extended from this world; and eventually from this side of an absolute mystery, perhaps half suggested by a self-annihilating term such as 'Absolute Horizon', where the world ends. That seems to be the furthest limit that a combination of empirical observation, reason, plumbing of the best of humankind's mystical traditions, intuition and imagination, can reach.

The MM model emerging on this journey seeks an optimal combination of empirical science, reason and imaginative, intuitive ‘poetry’, without claiming ‘therefore it must be’ for its notions. ‘Therefore some intelligent being exists’, held by Aquinas, is not a compelling conclusion. Likewise, rather than of an omniscient Person, ontologically discontinuous (‘totally different’, to use Karl Barth’s phrase) with the world, I would speak of Infinite Thought and Eternal Witting extending backwards from, but continuous with, this world, as far as we can ‘see’. Unacceptable would also be a flat positivistic denial of any meaning transcending reductionist science.

Having demonstrated the existence of God, Aquinas proceeds to analyse ‘how’ God exists, but first making very clear that ‘we cannot know what God is’ (*quid sit*), but only ‘what he is not’ (*quid non sit*) (Aquinas 1963:19). This represents the Neoplatonic, apophatic strain in his thinking. The various ‘qualities’ he then analyses (God’s simplicity [*simplicitas*], perfection [*perfectio*], limitlessness [*infinitas*], unchangeableness [*immutabilitas*] and oneness [*unitas*]) are mostly descriptions of what God is not, rather than what God is.

Of interest to us now is Question 7, where Aquinas deals with God’s limitlessness (infinity: *infinitas*) (Aquinas 1963:95–109). Does it have any bearing on this our chapter? I read apophatic thought as en route to Absoluteness, but, perhaps paradoxically and untentionally, confirming Hyper-Reality. This appears to be the upshot of Aquinas’ argumentation here. By ‘infinity’, he admittedly moves away from the classical Greek preoccupation with limit, structure, form, and moves into the trail blazed by Plotinus (Caputo 1982:125ff.). Even so, by infinity Aquinas understands perfection, completeness, actuality, not formless potential in a process of actualisation. His is the infinity of perfection. To Thomas, God is ‘being/existence itself subsistent’ (*suum esse subsistens*), and therefore ‘limitless and perfect’ (*infinitus et perfectus*). The one implies the other. The great Christian scholastic offers no support for our notion of Infinitude in general or Infinite Thought in particular.

At the outset I raised the speculative question whether Aquinas’ explicit writing might have taken a different turn after his great experience if he were to have been granted the time? Would he have transgressed the limits of the double role of Church theologian and philosopher and taken a step into free roaming MM bound for Absolute Horizon? Probably not. Every epoch affords its own possibilities and lays down its own conditions and limitations. Yet Thomas may be read tendentionally, trying his best to process the rather heavy double tradition of mythological monotheism and Greek substantialising philosophy without quite succeeding in breaking through to an openness of thought and style that his thinking may subconsciously have wanted to find. Indeed, the seemingly dry scholasticism as a whole of which he was the prime representative had its mystical undercurrent. Aquinas’ fellow-Dominican, Meister Eckhart (c. 1260–1327), was one of those who spoke openly about what remained mute possibilities in the *Summa* (for Eckhart, see Ch. 4). In his

sermons given and written down in his peripheral German vernacular and not in centralising, controlling ecclesiastical Latin, Eckhart could more freely express ideas that may well have been latent but in any case silent, in Aquinas' formal arguments. Let me not forget the church-political constraints under which both men worked. Rhetoric, strategy and tactics played a role in all of that. As it turned out, Thomas was canonised (in 1323), Eckhart condemned 6 years later (in 1329).

■ George Berkeley

In the context of this chapter, modulations of idealism are relevant. In previous chapters we have listened to the voices of MM thinkers who may in one sense or another be called 'idealists' – Plato, Plotinus, Proclus, Yogācāra, Eriugena, Leibniz, Schelling, Hegel and Whitehead – coming to terms with aspects of their thinking. Let us now engage with the Anglo-Irish Anglican bishop, George Berkeley (1685–1753) (cf. Berman 1994; Dunham et al. 2011:73–88; Hoffmann 1978:247–268; Tipton 1974).

In his system, written down early in his life in his *A treatise concerning the principles of human knowledge* (1710) (Berkeley 1939:509–579), gives prominence to the notion of infinity, directly coupled with knowledge – so let me pay close attention. Below I shall restrict myself to his *Treatise*, and not take into account his most comprehensive book on religion, *Alciphron* (1732).

Overly condensed: Berkeley assumes two ontological realities: minds (spirits) and ideas; matter is mind-made. Minds are the subjects, active, and they perceive ideas; ideas are the passive objects of perception by minds. There is nothing else. There are two types of minds: infinite mind (God) and finite (human) minds. The ideas held by finite minds are faint and derived from the ideas held by Infinite Mind. Finite minds hold two types of ideas: ideas of imagination and memory, and sensible ideas (ideas pertaining to the sensible world). Infinite Mind creates in finite minds the ideas concerning the sensible world. Humans do not perceive a world out there, but merely the ideas of God; this saved Berkeley from solipsism (the notion that the individual's inner world is all there is), with its at least latent threat of nihilism (there is no trans-individual truth, meaning). In his words, he (Berkeley 1939) believes that:

[A]ll those bodies which compose the mighty frame of the world, have not any subsistence without a mind, that their being is to be perceived or known; that consequently so long as they are not actually perceived by me, or do not exist in my mind or that of any other created spirit, they must either have no existence at all, or else subsist in the mind of some Eternal Spirit (6). (p. 525)

Berkeley chooses the last option.

In itself, there is no world out there, no matter. Matter, the physical world, does not exist as such, neither in the sense of a multitude of individual things,

nor in the sense of a general substance, underlying phenomenal things. That is the centrepiece of Berkeley's edifice. To make the point strongly, compared to Giordano Bruno (Ch. 19), Berkeley is at the opposite end of the scale. He is not Gnostic with the dualism inherent in that system, nor is he a Neoplatonist. Berkeley pushes beyond the limits of Neoplatonism. He also parts company with Descartes as well as Spinoza. He is removed from any form of scepticism (as held, e.g. by David Hume [1711-1776]). Berkeley was sure of his case, and saw it as firmly ensconced in the Christian belief system and dogmatic structure. This makes him a rather unique figure in Western metaphysics. The 'being' of matter consists solely in its being perceived by minds (6) (*ibid.*). Our senses do not present us with things, but with perceptions of ideas. To prove this thesis, Berkeley indulges in a series of detailed and sometimes intricate arguments supposedly demonstrating that the notion of matter as something ontologically distinguishable from mind is contradictory, unintelligible or meaningless.

Berkeley presents not merely a variety of phenomenalism (in general, the view that the physical world is constituted by mind in the act of cognition, which is not the same as being caused by mind). He arguably held what has been termed immaterialism or subjective idealism. In a strong sense: the physical world is utterly and completely dependent on mind, to the extent of being produced by mind, leaving no space whatsoever for matter and the physical world to exist apart from, even relatively so, from mind – indeed the product of mind is as a dream. A problem with his construction, often noted, is that he leaves us with no criterion as to how reality may be distinguishable from imagination, truth from mere appearance and error, one person's experience from another person's. He provides no means of a reality check. By implication, science does not investigate a 'real' reality, but only connects ideas. As said, probably the notion of God saves Berkeley's system from solipsism, which is not to deny that God was in all likelihood the starting point of his entire philosophic venture. Another telling objection raised is that he cannot account for causality: there are no things that can cause other things; there are only sequences of ideas. On the whole, his construction appears to be one-sided, unbalanced, incomplete.

In the model developing in this exploration, matter is, contrary to his view, elevated to something of exquisite importance. It is interesting but perhaps not entirely surprising that the Church, for his denial of the existence of matter did not censure Berkeley. Despising matter was always held in somewhat uneasy balance with the appreciation of matter as God's creation. What concerns us most here, is how God, infinite Spirit, features in Berkeley's model, and whether he has a mystical side.

Berkeley provides at least one proof for the existence of God, neither unrelated nor completely dissimilar to the well-established cosmological argument. In short, it runs as follows: No idea can cause another idea; nor can

matter cause anything; nor can finite human minds be causal factors. That leaves only God as infinite intelligent Mind to account for reality, that is, the reality of ideas. This is where his mystical side manifests itself: since the issue of matter has been solved by denying matter, only God remains, filling the entire horizon. In God 'we live, and move, and have our being', as he puts it (ibid.:575f. para. 149). With this in effect panentheistic vision, Berkeley wants to inspire his readers 'with a pious sense of the Presence of God' (ibid.:570 para. 156). Driven by a desire to overcome the Great Machine theory, he was, in the phrase of Tipton, 'impelled by a desire to bring men to a sense of the immanence of God' (Tipton 1974:297), with an implication that the world is eternally immanent in God. Assuming this to be a valid interpretation, what he produced may be called a Christian monism, in essence not that far removed from Advaita Vedanta. A full comparison would be a fascinating undertaking.

In his *Alciphron* it becomes abundantly clear that Berkeley did not challenge any of the classical dogmas of the Church. Nor was he ever seriously suspected of doing so. He was a fiercely committed Christian. Apart from his views on matter, he held no exceptional views. His proof for the substantial existence of God does not, as far as I can see, prove such existence. It seems to be not so much the end result of line of rational argument, but the a priori premise of faith from which his argument unfolds. In his own manner, he exemplifies the classic programme of *fides quaerens intellectum*.

Space and the limited perspective from which Berkeley is observed here do not allow entering into a fuller investigation of his model with all its intricate implications and arguments. The two main, in fact insuperable difficulties are (1) that he denies matter any relatively independent existence, and (2) that he works in terms of a substance model of mind (Berman 1994:69f.), God being the Supreme, Infinite Mind. It is a kind of Neoplatonism, yet going further at both extremes than Plotinus had considered: at the bottom end of the scale, matter is denied; at the top end Mind is substantialised. Throughout this journey so far, there has been a sense of unease about both dangers as latent in Neoplatonism and raising their heads in theistic thinking from time to time. That has been pointed out regularly. In Berkeley, it went excessively far. What he delivered was not MM in the sense intended on these pages, but traditional Christian piety, taking the latent distrust in matter to the extreme limit. He offers no support for our notion of Infinite Thought. Rather than the two opposite theories ('only matter' and 'no matter'), both one-sided, it would be more rewarding to pursue the mutual implication of matter and mind.

Does our contemplation add up to a variety of idealism in any of the senses encountered so far? No. Essentially it is an attempt to resay, in a 'secular' context, the classic dictum of the *Heart Sutra*: 'form is emptiness, emptiness is form' (*rūpaṃ śūnyatā śūnyataiva rūpaṃ*). However centrally important the notion of Infinite Thought is in this model, it is not the only factor taken into

account, nor the dominant factor. Before it is Absolute Horizon; alongside it is Infinite Matter, Life and Love. The 'is' connecting form and emptiness (the verb as such is lacking in the Sanskrit) is not an equivalent of *esse* ('being') in the classic Greek-Hellenic-theistic sense of the word. In the latter sense, 'is' implies permanence and substance behind, under, in changing 'form'; 'form' is not 'emptiness', but presupposes eternal Being; and there 'is' eternal Being, and that Being may be Mind, Spirit (in which case the outcome would be an idealist system). In this essay on the other hand, 'is' is understood to imply 'become', with intensive and extensive connotations of change, impermanence, non-substance; the real 'is-ness' of 'form' (matter, the phenomenal world) is not denied, but affirmed, and it is understood as issuing from Emptiness, Absolute Horizon.

■ Immanuel Kant

In his critique of human reason, Kant (1724–1804) – partly responding to Berkeley – made knowledge dependent on the constitutive input of the human mind – that is, of a priori forms of perception (space and time) structuring sensory inputs, and a set of categories of thought organising the phenomena of experience into concepts, and combining these in judgements. Conjoined, the manifold of sensory data together with the forms of perception plus the categories of reasoning, make valid empirical knowledge possible; outside them, no such certain knowledge is possible. The human mind has no access to things in themselves as they may or may not exist outside of human perception and experience. All things are, essentially, things-as-known, things-as-constituted by the human subject, not things-apart-from-human knowing.

This amounts to a transcendental idealism, which, in effect was comparable to the outcome of the critique of Nāgārjuna. The effect of Kant's work was the breakdown of metaphysical edifices and religious dogmas claiming to make true statements about what lies outside of spatio-temporal human experience and the reach of the categories of human knowing. To him, the traditional proofs for the existence of God are inapplicable (Kant 1952:561–604). However, God is a useful idea (*ibid.*:574). The ideas of everlasting soul and eternal God are no more than regulative ideas on the side of human thinking; they do not necessarily correspond to anything out there. Attempting to think coherently about such notions and proving them with reference to phenomenal reality, lands us in irresolvable antinomies.

At first sight, this devastating line of argument of Kant may seem to lead to atheism and nihilism, as some of his contemporaries were quick to point out. After all, the eternity of God and soul may or may not be true. He disposed of 'God' as a pre-critical human construction, but once that stream had been entered there was no turning back. Yet, Kant did not intend the annihilation of

religious beliefs and their eternal referents. On the contrary, he saw his critique as creating space for faith. He did not deny the 'real' existence of a Thing-in-Itself (*Ding an sich*) either, even if it cannot be 'known'. Human eternal life and eternal God are postulates, necessary for a moral life – even if they cannot be 'known' theoretically for sure, and even if it cannot be ascertained whether they 'really' are. Practical faith goes where theoretical reason cannot go. God, world and soul as necessary regulatory ideas, even as real entities, were not threatened. Of that, Kant wanted to make sure. That strategy would be used in liberal yet pious circles in Christianity many times in the centuries after Kant. It boiled down to a version of apophaticism, this time Protestant apophaticism.

Kant was steeped in modern science, including physics and biology, as it manifested in his time. It is of great significance that he felt obliged to go the way he did, in order to reconcile that science with the need to create space for ultimate meaning, and with the faith and religion of Christianity. Given the parameters of our meditation, his concern with science is nothing but laudable.

In the perspective of this extended meditation, Kant did not go as far as he might have gone. He certainly did not go as far as Nāgārjuna had gone. Kant's retention of the 'Thing-in-Itself' was a remainder of substantialism. And unlike Nāgārjuna he left space for 'faith' as a saving experience, whereas Nāgārjuna, for all his commitment to the Buddha, did not leap from the sinking boat of the quasi-certainty of factual knowledge into the quasi-secure boat of the certainty of faith. Nāgārjuna found salvation in the absolute abandonment of substantialising thought in any shape or form whatsoever; Kant found salvation in postulating substance in the shape of Thing-in-Itself and the form of God.

This is the ultimate difference, awesome in its basic simplicity and in the range and depth of its implications, between the two epistemological titans of Buddhism and Christianity. This experiment sides with Nāgārjuna, but not because he is a Buddhist. This is not about comparing religions and preferring one above another or belonging or not, to any of them. It is about the depth of MM thought wherever it may be found. As it happens, the type of thinking represented by Nāgārjuna provided sustenance for the religion of Buddhism for centuries to come. That same type of thinking could have – still could – provide sustenance for faith in Jesus, even it would require a rather drastic overhaul of Christian theology, beyond the kind of thinking represented in the figures of an Aquinas and a Berkeley. Nevertheless, it could be done, but that is not my concern here. More to the point: The thinking of Nāgārjuna does not necessarily spell the end of all constructive ('metaphysical') thinking. What it does do, is annihilate any pretence at finality and absolute certainty. Before Nāgārjuna came the Buddha; before Kant, Plotinus. After Nāgārjuna with his Mādhyamika came speculative Asanga and Vasubandhu with their Yogācāra and equally speculative Fa-tsang with his Hua-yen. In comparable fashion, after Kant came Fichte, Schelling, Hegel and others. In the West, with thinkers

such as Heidegger and Derrida, a new approximation of the more radical epistemology of Nāgārjuna arose, with possibilities for intercultural dialogue. The notion of Infinite Thought, put forward in this chapter, moves into the space opened up most widely by a Buddha and a Nāgārjuna, while appreciating the Western apophatic tradition.

Could it be that the West, in which Kant was such a towering figure, finds itself at an early stage of a third development in its orientation towards radical meaning? By the 'West' is here understood the cultural sphere from Europe to the Middle East over the last 2500 years, with North America becoming a major force in it over the last two centuries and other parts of the world gradually drawn into its ambit. Similar developments took place in Greece-Rome and in India in the centuries BCE. In Greece a traditionalist and mythological era was superseded by a rationalist enlightenment, which in turn was followed by a period in which mystery religions with a strong emphasis on experience developed. A similar development took place in India: at the time of the Vedas and Brahmanas, traditionalism and mythological thought were dominant; with the Early Upanishads came rationalism; and with the Middle and Late Upanishads (and Buddhism and Jainism), individual, personal experience, with mysticism as one of its implications, came to the fore. In the West, a similar development is discernible. All three elements mentioned were present from the start of this era and played a certain role throughout. At the beginning, monotheistic religion with a strong overlay of traditionalism and mythology was the dominant force. Gradually reason, combined with empirical science, took over as leading force to take central position over the last few centuries. Might the present time be marked by the exploration of dimensions beyond both traditionalist mythocracy and rationalism-science? That may well be the case, and our MM map would lend support to it, integrating what is sound from all three (traditional religion, science and reason, and intuitive experience).

■ Sri Aurobindo

Idealism is not the prerogative of the West. Yogācāra has been noted before. Staying with the chronological sequence followed in this §, I shall now briefly turn to another Indian MM thinker to whom the term 'idealism' is applicable: Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950), continuing a trend in Indian thinking with roots more ancient (Dasgupta 1962 [1933]) than was the case in its European counterpart.

Aurobindo is exemplary of the kind of MM that has become possible in our day: Born in India and completely immersed in the Indian MM tradition (particularly Yoga and Vedanta), he was also thoroughly English educated (at the University of Cambridge), with a solid grounding in classical and modern

European languages. To add to this exceptional mix, Aurobindo was an Indian nationalist, political activist and political prisoner. During his imprisonment, he had life-changing spiritual experiences, as a result of which he withdrew from political life and taught at his *ashram* in Pondicherry (then part of French India) after his release from prison, from 1910 until his death, further disseminating his thinking from there in his writing, mainly in his monthly journal *Arya*. His writing included commentarial interpretations of some Upanishads and the *Gītā*, setting out his own MM vision.

Subsequently his work has become absorbed in thoroughly inter-, transcultural syntheses with Western psychoanalytic, humanistic, existential and transpersonal psychologies. Aurobindo's own background encompassed a wide reading in Western and Indian thought and other influences as well. To mention one aspect, through his collaborator, 'The Mother' (Mirra Alfassa), he absorbed aspects of the occult Kabbalah of Max Théon; Aurobindo's notion of the 'Psychic Being' (see below) is a case in point. Such are the possibilities and realities of today. It must be added that Aurobindo was neither mere recipient nor syncretist. He reworked all that he absorbed in a highly original manner, resulting in a remarkable system (perhaps best known as 'integral psychology'), in turn relevant to a possibly emerging pluralistic MM discourse of today and tomorrow.

For present purposes, the most direct access to his thinking would be to view it as a variant of MM idealism. The ontology of Aurobindo amounts to envisioning the world as developing from The One, which is the ultimate source of all. This ultimate Reality is the equivalent of the Upanishadic concept of *Brahman*. The One unfolds via a complex hierarchical system of principles, faculties, manifestations, active steps in which each lower rung participates in the higher. The supreme One, the reality behind the appearances of the universe (the equivalent of the *Brahman* of the Upanishads) has, according to Aurobindo, following the great tradition, three aspects, namely *sat* ('being'), *cit* ('consciousness') and *ananda* ('bliss'), which in their togetherness may be termed *Saccidananda*. In a process termed 'involution' by Aurobindo, the One sequentially becomes:

- (1) Supermind (the link between the utterly transcendent and phenomenal reality).
- (2) Overmind (ego-less knowledge, the highest stage attainable by the human mind).
- (3) Intuitive Mind (direct perception, including the perception of significance).
- (4) Illumined Mind (spiritual light, vision).
- (5) Higher Mind (pure conceptual thought).
- (6) Mental Mind (the ratiocination of ordinary human thinking).
- (7) Life (including the emotional dimension, and containing subconsciousness mind).

- (8) Matter (manifesting at more gross and more subtle levels, and in possession of a subconscious level of awareness) and, at the bottom.
- (9) The Sub- or Inconscient (utter emptiness, potentiality). This is the downward way of involution or descent.

The essential way of return, termed 'evolution' or ascent, starts from the Inconscient and returns into The One through the same sequence, but in the reverse order (Aurobindo 1974:92ff.).

In addition to the above vertical ('down'-'up'), sequential visualisation of reality, Aurobindo's vision (as far as human existence is concerned) also implies a 'concentric' ('centre'-'periphery') model. At the centre of human life is:

- (1) Central Being (eternal, utterly transcendent Spirit); surrounded as it were by the layers of.
- (2) Psychic Being (the soul of every individual person, capable of development and evolving through successive lifetimes).
- (3) Inner Being (the subliminal faculties of the human being); and, at the outside.
- (4) Outer Being (the surface level, mainly consisting of the mental, vital and physical aspects of existence).

The function of Integral Yoga (a term for the teaching and practice of Aurobindo) is to discover the inner Psychic Being as a manifestation of Central Being, resulting in a transformation of the outer layers of existence. This is achieved through psychic and spiritual transformation, and attainment of the higher states of consciousness mentioned above.

Aurobindo's ontology is vintage Indian thinking. It also reminds of that of Plotinus, 2000 years earlier (Chatterji 1982:257-272). Both encapsulate an entire tradition and absorb inputs from other traditions (in Plotinus' case, from India; in Aurobindo's case, from the West). To both all things emerge from the One and return to it. Whereas 'emanation' expresses Plotinus' conception, Aurobindo speaks of 'involution' from the One and 'evolution' back to the One. Aurobindo's vision, being modern, is understandably more dynamic than Plotinus' static vision of participation but no actual development. To both, matter is at the bottom scale of the eternal movement of things, with Plotinus more negative in his evaluation of matter and the body than Aurobindo. To Aurobindo, matter contains *in potentia* everything that will emerge in the process of evolution. To him, the body is transformable and divine life is establishable on earth.

Aurobindo's system is an objective idealism: all are seen as manifestations of Consciousness, and the 'Central Being' of all is Spirit. Aurobindo starts and ends with Supermind, and does not thematise a Horizon emptying the One as Being-Consciousness-Bliss. This exploration appreciates the fact that to Aurobindo, matter is not completely down and out. Plotinus came close to

such a fatally negative perception of matter and body, and some of Christianity followed him. Aurobindo sees consciousness in life and matter, even if only veiled in matter. Matter, carrying the potential of evolving all, has that potential because of its being veiled mind. In this essay, matter is awarded a higher status: it co-emerges co-equally, mutually implicit, with Life, Love and Thought. It is neither idealism nor materialism. In his conception of the triunity of *sat-chit-ananda* Aurobindo, like Sankara before him, in effect awards pole position to *chit*. Yet Aurobindo allows for matter to be transfigured in the ongoing process of evolution and to become a perfect instrument for divine self-expression on earth. That is appreciated.

According to Aurobindo (having learnt this from his first mentor, yogi Vishnu Bhaskar Lele in 1908) it is not 'I' who thinks; it is Thought occurring in me. From this teacher he learnt to silence his mind and experience the spaceless and timeless Brahman. That was of pivotal importance in his life. Prior to that, and prior even to his prison experience, he had mystical experiences, including experiencing a vacant Infinite. After 1908, his attention was singularly focused on the One. Our venture finds: Thinking is but no thinker – neither substantial 'I' nor substantial 'Thought' or 'Consciousness'. Notions such as Supermind, Overmind, Intuitive Mind, Illumined Mind and Higher Mind, the One and Brahman are all dissolved in Absoluteness. Reality is pulsating, boiling up from Absoluteness and falling back into Absoluteness every second. This does not exclude, but includes, a dimension of progressive, spiralling movement, including ends and new beginnings.

Part Four

Cosmos-Event

Light show

This chapter concentrates on how Cosmos – our home, the world of common sense, the object of science – may be understood and valued from this MM perspective. The necessary has cumulatively been said in previous chapters. It is time to draw some summary conclusions for this investigation as a whole, and to add a few clarifications.

■ §55 *Totum*

■ outsider and insider perspectives

This envisagement of the world combines two perspectives:

- The first perspective is like a description of a brilliant light show of fireworks by an observer, astounded by the scene, standing outside of it. From such an imagined outsider perspective, our Cosmos appears like a flash among countless others exploding from some unseen, unknown source, precious in its fragility, lighting up, for a brief second, a dark, impenetrable night sky. We are of course not standing outside; we can only imagine it.
- The second perspective is like the experience, the description by a mini observer inside one of the bursts of heat and light of the light show, and part of it. As such insider mini parts, we cannot see the darkness outside of

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it; the light is too bright; it can only be imagined, presupposed. We cannot know the whole show, and we cannot know the source.

Then something interesting happens. From within that flash two and two are put together; certain leads present in the situation are followed up. Through fact and reason in all of its various forms and shades (such as logic and mathematics), through intuition and speculation, through science, larger pictures – virtual outsider perspectives – have been constructed. This has been going on for some time (give or take a few hundred thousand years), by each epoch for its own time. It would be good not to forget what has been done before.

The full truth cannot be known by the thinking mini observers. What they can know partially, is overwhelming enough. Perhaps the knowledge that the full truth cannot be known is the highest truth attainable. The brightness of here and now gains in meaning by understanding that it emerges from an impenetrable darkness.

This exploratory argument was inspired by the insider experience of some visionary human beings and their quasi-outsider projections. In the writing down of it thus far, it has largely unfolded as if from an imagined outsider perspective, as an account of the process 'before' the Cosmos event. Such an imagined outsider perspective is imagined to be justified because the human beings who imagine the 'outsider' view are part of Cosmos, which in turn is part of a larger process. An enlightened person, one who has achieved a high degree of insider-outsider vision, would be someone who sees the light show in its ephemeral contingency against the backdrop of darkness, without fear. It would be someone who realises that, after all, all statements and mental constructs are to be Nagarjunated; they implode, have to admit defeat, but remain significant.

■ **contingent, significant, beautiful**

Early Buddhism taught that the aggregate 'human person' is not to be clung to. To do that, is a recipe for disillusionment and suffering. The present investigation finds that Cosmos should not be clung to. Nevertheless, its value and beauty may be joyfully celebrated. In line with the East Asian MM system of Hua-yen, Cosmos becomes a thing of the most fragile beauty, balancing on the slenderest swaying bridge: the 'is' between Emptiness and Form – in Fa-tsang's analogy: the distinction between 'gold' and 'lion' (see Ch. 16). I find the seemingly obscure Chinese Buddhist speculation of 12 centuries ago fascinatingly relevant to our contemporary reflection on Cosmos, informed and challenged by modern science as such reflection must be. There is no line of separation between Absoluteness and Cosmos, only the subtlest but nevertheless significant distinction. The Horizon is everywhere. The deeper we enter into

the mystery of becoming, the subtler that distinction becomes. It is like penetrating the depths of the very large and the very small. The strongest telescopes and microscopes and most esoteric mathematics take us closer to the mysteriously receding line between being and ...? Ultimately, we cannot say or know; 'Absoluteness' and 'Unground' say nothing. From the perspective emerging on this pilgrimage, Cosmos, the surface of Infinitude, appears as radically contingent, yet its contingency does not detract from its significance. On the contrary. The world is to be loved, for it is an embodiment of a mystery to which it is not monistically, dualistically or analogically related.

Cosmos appears as a Whole of relationships, condensing in transient entities, surrounded and permeated by an unfathomable depth, each illuminating every other one and illuminated by it, and all reflecting the totality: breathtakingly beautiful. Marvel at the ephemeral single leaf in Cosmos, leaf-Cosmos; at Cosmos in the single leaf, Cosmos-leaf in an ever-receding depth. In a sense, *Totum* (Whole) coincides with, 'is', each *pars* (part). *Pars pro toto* and *totum pro parte*: the singular represents, contains, 'is' the whole; and the whole contains, 'is' every single one of its parts. Add *pars pro parte*: each single constituent of every larger whole represents, contains, 'is', every single other constituent. There are no separate entities of any kind in a strong sense, only conditionalistic relationships taking short-lived shape in relative entities. No singular event, no situation, occurs in isolation; it is always suspended in relationships, which ultimately disintegrate on Absolute Horizon.

With the event of Cosmos, possibilities take definite shape, yet that definiteness is relative, not absolute. Between different things are porous membranes. Each event exists 'here', with boundaries: not absolute, but relative, and it merges with other entities. As event, it also exists 'now': at this time, having had a beginning when it appeared and a future when it will disappear, losing its identity, and yet not completely lost. It is, to use a contemporary term of great significance, recycled. It continues to exist in whatever attenuated form. The same perspective would apply to Cosmos.

Contingent existence, whether in large or small format, is (to fall back on a venerable image) like a drop of water for a brief second seemingly disengaged from the moving ocean, but still sharing the same constitution as the ocean and every single other drop flying from and falling back into the ocean (Emptiness). The drop neither exists as separate entity nor disappears entirely; it is, so to speak, objectively remembered and recycled. It will not reappear again in the self-same form, with the same identity, but the ocean will continue to produce others in which this one will, so to speak, re-emerge. This vision celebrates each such short-lived, relative entity in its own right as significant and beautiful.

Cosmos as a whole, and each of its parts, is a passing form, not in the sense of being an illusion or a veil of some eternal Substance; but in the sense of really emerging, in radical contingency, from Absolute Horizon, to which it returns.

To continue with everyday pictures for the moment: water manifests in the intangible invisibility of gas; in relative solids such as the shapes of a frozen polar landscape; and in the impermanent fluidity of liquid. It is all water. Analogously, Arche can be seen under the aspect of the non-substantiality of Unground-Eternity-Infinity; the relative solidity of Cosmos; and the historical and evolutionary impermanence and changing of Cosmos.

■ Spirit: matter-life-love-thought

The individual human person is, according to classic Theravāda teaching, an indivisible unit of matter and mind (the latter consisting of feeling, perception, emotional-and-volitional-factors, and consciousness) intimately intertwined and interdependent; none reducible to any of the others. That model is here extended to imagine a model of Cosmos, which, as far as its own basic constituents are concerned, is neither monistic, nor pluralistic in the sense of harbouring irreconcilable aspects, nor reductionist, but integral.

The possibility of defining Cosmos as a living, conscious being opens up. The ancient Buddhist teaching does not say that or recommend thinking that, but is here interpreted to suggest a perspective on the riddle of Cosmos, beyond both idealism and materialism. Various dimensions of Cosmos may be imagined as originally and essentially mutually implied: matter, life, soul (love) and mind (thought). In the first fraction of the first nanosecond of the historical becoming of Cosmos there was latent life and consciousness, and its beings are all concrete manifestations of energy-matter. This does not militate against the evolutionary idea of increasing complexity and historical emergence, development, over time.

Cosmos is Spirit, and as such a connection of matter, life, love and thought. It is not primarily one of any of them (most certainly not a disembodied 'Spirit'), but essentially all four together: a being in which all singular things, human and non-human – all of them interconnected and all somehow consisting of connections of matter, life, love and thought – participate. In that sense, they are all 'Spirit'. This exploration therefore opts for an organic worldview over against a mechanistic worldview, yet aligning itself with creative developments in science over the last century. Equally strongly, this approach distances itself from the disengagement from matter as became the norm in Western mysticisms influenced by Neoplatonism.

Plato's concept of an ensouled, rational World Animal (dominating his mature philosophy) is returning to life. Nevertheless, everlasting, as he took it to be, that Animal is not. Of course the notion 'animal' in this context is a category mistake if taken literally (which Plato did not do anyway), pushing the kernel of truth too far. The view of Cosmos as a living being was not peculiar to Plato, but generally prevalent in 4th century and 5th century BC Greece

(Hahm 1977:57ff.). This essay also resonates with the Buddhist notion of the Cosmos as Buddha, the 'Great Resplendent One' (*Maha-Vairocana*, see Ch. 7). Alternatively, Cosmos may be thought of analogically as a *bodhisattva*, moving towards full enlightenment in the Horizon of Emptiness.

The ancient Theravāda model of the human being does not presuppose a personalistic theism. The Indian mythological figure of the god Brahmā itself falls under the aspect of non-eternalism. This applies to our Cosmos as well. Creationism is not presupposed. Analogous to individual existence as driven by *kamma* (i.e. causal action yielding positive or negative outcomes), the Cosmic process is imagined as neither pointless nor guaranteed fixed in advance (predestined) in some way. Cosmos shapes itself. There is an element of ongoing self-creativity in it all. Here the moment of truth in 'pantheism' is to be acknowledged. It is not merely an excuse for 'atheism', as Spinoza's thinking was branded by critics such as Jacobi. The word 'pantheism' itself, is not as self-evident as it may seem. The '-theism' part of it can in a wide sense probably be taken to suggest ultimacy ('divinity'), not necessarily in personalistic form. '-Theism' could simply express a sense of awe, even mystical awe. That is not a problem, on condition that 'divinity' is not taken in a substantialist sense or reduced to a mythologized magnified person. The 'pan-' part would, in general, express a sense that all things ultimately hang together. That is in order, and this model endorses it. Then a fork in the road appears. The 'pan-' could intend: (a) Cosmos (on the assumption that there is no wider context than Cosmos in and for itself), or (b) Void or Emptiness surrounding Cosmos (on the assumption that there is a wider context).

Ancient Stoicism assumed (b). From the perspective of this particular observer of the great light show, (b) could be endorsed – on condition that 'Emptiness' is not taken in a quasi-substantialist sense. As far as (a) is concerned, issue is here taken with the supposition that Cosmos is all there 'is'. It is accepted that Cosmos is 'divine', as manifestation of 'divine' (Empty) Unground. So 'pantheism' as a word is not necessarily taboo. All depends on how it is used. To say, 'Cosmos is divine', or 'everything (conjoined) is divine', or even 'every thing (in the singular) is divine' (even 'a god', stretching it very far) could be fine, depending on context and intention.

'Pan-en-theism' literally means 'all-in-God', and by implication also 'God-in-all', making above all sure not to be understood as saying 'all-is-God'. It seeks to escape from the trilemma atheism, pantheism and atheism emphasising a sharp ontological break between God and cosmos. It is not a clear-cut case either, except insofar as it rejects (a) above. Our exploration is clearly in line with that. Everything depends on how the 'theism' concept is filled with content: something like 'Emptiness' is one thing; any substantialising connotation as found in, for example, the Indian Vedic tradition or in Plato, Plotinus, Spinoza or Hegel in the Western MM tradition, quite another.

Earth shares in all of that, as do other stars and planets, in various modes and degrees. This view allows for manifest forms of life in Cosmos outside of Earth, and for the existence of living beings – perhaps vastly infra-human and perhaps vastly supra-human – as yet unknown to science. If they are out there, they too would be Cosmic condensations of Infinitude, but they would not be supernatural and they would not be the ultimate source of Cosmos.

■ Cosmic Origin and End

In the ancient Buddhist scheme the human person, like all existing things, is impermanent and non-substantial, yet nevertheless a process continuing through time and marked by intervals, that is, by the events of birth and death. That was early Buddhism's third way, offered as an alternative to both eternalism (there is a substantial 'Self') and nihilism.

The contingency of Cosmos implies that it has a temporal dimension. It had a temporal beginning, and will have a temporal end. During its temporal existence, from some 14 billion years ago to an unknown end in time, Cosmos is constantly, continuously, emerging from Absolute Horizon. Time, history, is part of Eternity. From the cosmological perspective explored in these reflections, the following arises: just as the historical end (whether as big rip, big chill or whatever other possibility may emerge) is not absolutely final but relative, just so its historical beginning (in a big bang or whatever other possibility science may put forward) is not an absolute but a relative beginning in a continuous cycle or spiral of supra historical Origin and End (Chs 4–6).

Cosmos had not only a beginning, but it has an eternal Origin in a movement of devolution. It will not only have a temporal end, but has an eternal End as destination. The history of Cosmos is not seen as an event or process of smooth perfection. It is a struggle, with all kinds of conflicting opposing movements, successes and failures, progressive creative forces and reactionary retarding forces. Cosmos is not perfect, but it is not inherently evil either. As a self-transforming, self-regulating whole, it is in a process of development, of the adjustment of its various aspects, which inevitably leads to strains and pains. It contains an element of unrest, emerging from the deep, hidden recesses of Eternity and Infinitude. Yet the process of becoming Cosmos is not as such evil; nor is evil a substantial, eternally co-present, irreconcilable alternative. One may have a *bodhisattvic* dream: not of an *apokatastasis* ('return'), thought of as a restoration or reconstitution of an originally perfect condition, but of a Cosmic *bodhisattvic* process towards ultimate peace.

■ §56 ... *pars pro toto*

Humanity is an almost negligible microdot in Cosmos, not the centre of the universe with a right to dominate. Yet it is nevertheless a noble microcosm, an epitome of the universe, *pars pro toto*, reflecting and illuminating the whole. The meaning of being human is to realise that, and to feel, think, speak and live in accordance with that insight, among all the other singular parts and larger wholes making up Cosmos. 'My' singular identity is that of Cosmic being; part and member of Nature in the widest sense; a living being, a human being, part of the human species; existing in friendship with kind, thoughtful folk of all times and places who are also astounded by the darkness. Furthermore, I am father, daughter, friend or in any other station in life; then come cultural, national, ethnic, linguistic, religious and other conventional markers of identity, none of which are essentially constitutive in isolation or above any of the others. This is a humanism in which 'I', human person, am a constantly changing, relatively balanced totality of the above and much more.

■ human constitution

The individual human being is a radically contingent event. 'I' emerges from and is suspended in Eternity, Infinitude and Cosmos from which it appears every moment; and every moment it is in the process of disappearing, returning into the vastness of Cosmos, Infinitude and Eternity. The human being is a flow of change. It is essentially non-self-sufficient, but exists in relationships of interdependence. And it consists of a vast number of similarly contingent smaller systems, decreasing in size *ad infinitum*. Every human being is a unique singularity, but precisely as such part of similarly contingent larger systems, increasing in size *ad infinitum*. Emerging from Cosmos and *pars pro toto*, it is a mixture of the same constituent elements as the rest, namely energy matter and life, together making up body; and pathos and thought, together making up consciousness. In conception it is constituted as a unique combination of these, and in death it is unbundled, disintegrates back into the larger Cosmic pool. The human being is not reducible to any of these four. All four coexist mutually inherently, interdependently: the body is wise, consciousness does not exist apart from matter. This is neither monism, nor dualism or pluralism; neither materialism nor idealism. It is conditionalism.

■ human development

The human person can be transformed and can develop spiritually, 'metaphysically-mystically'. All mystical traditions have provided ways such as meditational practices towards transcending the ignorance, hatred and greed plaguing humankind. The following, restating ancient Buddhist practice, could be a roadmap.

Initially comes full immersion in and close attention to any concrete, specific singular situation in all the richness of its texture. This is associated with four distinctive but mutually implicit roads, ending as Absolute Horizon:

- the road of calm beyond all emotional disturbance and all conceptual constructions, eventually petering out in sheer silence
- the road of wisdom, gaining insight into the contingency of all things, their arising from and returning to non-substantial Absolute Horizon, and how that understanding opens a possibility of meaningful happiness
- the road of love, embracing in solidarity every singular event, no matter how minor, every singular situation, in its ever-increasing relatedness to ever-larger wholes, ultimately issuing in Cosmos, and
- the road of non-violent strength, effective in promoting (not necessarily flamboyantly, but quietly) the good of the singular here now, and, in increasingly larger circles, pluralities and wholes.

Relating to a situation (from the very small to the very large of Cosmos) involves an intellectual dimension in a broad sense, a dimension of understanding how the situation coheres, internally and externally. It has an aesthetic dimension, envisioning and constituting harmony and beauty, including the elements of stark contrasts and tragedy, where there is discord and ugliness. There is a moral dimension: love celebrating with the happy and sorrowing with the suffering, also effective, fitting, response-able action, drawing the situation forward; and then it also involves a dimension of peace, of stillness, quietness, even in words spoken and actions done. All of these have as source the discovery of Cosmos and all in it as emerging from and returning to the ultimate depth of Absolute Horizon. The language used above is quite specific, but is also an instance of *pars pro toto*: humanity is seen as a community of seekers of meaning, singing different songs that can nevertheless be heard as harmonious.

The achievement of MM maturity comes in degrees. There are the truly great ones, sometimes known and sometimes not. Not all spiritually advanced people made it into halls of religious fame; some avoided it at all costs. The factors that go into the making of primary reference figures are many and varied, including sociological factors such as the needs of majorities of the time. Nevertheless, that human history produced exceptionally advanced people, deserving to be honoured as exemplars for all of humanity, cannot be denied. This imagined map is in part a tribute to such people, 'great' in the qualities described above and some as far advanced on the roads mentioned as humans can probably go.

■ life after life

As part of contingent Cosmos, the contingent human person is not eternal and has no eternal component such as an immortal soul. The perspective emerging

on this pilgrimage is obsessed with neither life nor death nor individual life after death. Decay and death are essential aspects of the process of Cosmos. They have no sting.

In the religious systems visited along this journey, particularly the following views leading people through the valley of death, are noteworthy:

- (1) The Taoist vision of alternating life and death, florescence and decay of all things, manifesting the two interacting energy-modes, the *yang* and the *yin*. This makes for an easy acceptance of death as part of nature but without any obsession with death, and a positive acceptance of life, making the most of it and continuing life for as long as possible ('immortality'), but without any obsession with it either. While not necessarily denying life after death, Taoism does not focus on life after death, but on happy, healthy, simple longevity in this life.
- (2) The vision of the *reincarnation* of an eternal soul in a series of different perishable bodies, as held in, for example, mainline Hinduism. Views of this type were recurrent in most ancient cultures, including Greece. Earlier than Plato and a major influence on the latter, Pythagoras, for example (continuing a trend in ancient Greek religion) believed that the human soul was immortal and passed through a series of reincarnations (a process referred to as *metempsychosis*: 'transmigration'). It would have been surprising if this type of view did not arise in various localities in societies living close to nature, either as hunter-gatherers or as agriculturalists. Human life could easily be seen as analogous to, even part of, the eternal cycles of life and death and returning life in nature. From this point of departure, various accents could be placed: the process of reincarnation could be seen as a wonderful assurance of eternal life; as a series allowing the transmigrating individual to progress from one life to the next on a learning curve; or as a terrifying burden to bear. All of these occur. Assuming such a common context of origin does nevertheless not exclude all manner of historical intercultural influence (say, between India and Greece).
- (3) The vision referred to as *rebirth* in mainline Buddhism. According to this, there is no eternal substantial soul/self, yet nevertheless a continuity, capable of continuing over countless births and deaths and entering into new aggregates to form new persons. The difference between this 'continualist' view of consciousness and 'substantialist' reincarnation of 'selves' is not always clear. In Buddhism itself, various accents could arise. The eternal process of *samsāra* terrified early Buddhism. On the other hand, it was believed that it takes a vast number of rebirths to form the qualities of a Buddha. Nevertheless, the Buddha taught that release from the cycle of *samsāra* was possible to both members of the order and the laity; that is what the attainment of (*pari-*)*nibbāna* was about. At death the *arahant* 'disappears' from human registration without a trace. Though not

common, it is not held up as unattainable either, and many were assumed to have made it. For example, the First Buddhist Council, convened after the Buddha's *parinibbāna*, was attended by no fewer than 500 *arahants*. Such escape was the ideal, the norm in the school for *arahants*. In Mahāyāna, rebirth as a death trap was transformed into a utopia of compassion: rebirth becomes a series of occasions to serve all living beings, as long as it takes for all of them to be saved. At least in some MM Zen quarters any obsession with unending past and future was consciously disfavoured – what matters, is the contingent now. From the premise of radical contingency, I do not see the necessity to semi-hypostasise the radiating effects of a person's life to a single identifiable, admittedly changing yet uninterrupted, even indestructible, horizontal continuity of being and consciousness. It must also be borne in mind that the two main types of Indian Buddhist teaching concerning rebirth ('Hinayāna' and Mahāyāna) were intimately connected with the cosmologies dominant in India at the time (cf. Kloetzli 2007 [1983]). The type of cosmology gaining ascendancy in our time commands a serious rethink of such ancient models of 'life after death'.

- (4) The Platonic vision of an eternally immortal soul transcending physical death. Plato's writing is ambivalent in this respect, but, taking all into account, he probably did not postulate in a serious metaphysical sense the transmigration of the soul – even taking into account the long myth of Er at the end of the *Republic*, where he used popular lore to make the point that being just is a good thing. It is the same kind of operating at two levels that we find in Buddhism: the lower level of conventional (including mythological) wisdom is tolerated and used for a higher cause. In the theistic religions, the Platonic vision of an everlasting soul was often (for example, in mainstream Christianity) combined with the vision of a resurrection of the perishable selfsame body inhabited by the immortal soul during life, to exist as one individual in all eternity in a state of eternal bliss or woe.
- (5) Stoicism gave its own twist to the notion of the afterlife: the souls of the dead continue to exist until the great conflagration, when they return to God (like the human person and matter do). There is the great Cosmic return, but not the eternal return (reincarnation) of individual souls.
- (6) The materialistic view – to complete the picture of the major options deriving from ancient Greece and India and presently available to people: it excludes life after death, and affirms complete annihilation of the individual entity and its disintegration into matter and matter alone.

Except for perhaps the materialistic view, the others contain speculative, imaginative, often strongly mythologising elements. They do not, cannot, present hard fact, are not scientific hypotheses, but intend to have the effect of motivating people to reflect on the importance and consequences of one's

actions and attitudes in this life. The route taken in this exploration is no different; its constructed nature was clear throughout. As far as an after-life is concerned, it leads in a direction, harmonisable with, for example, Taoism and the type of Zen referred to above.

This attempt at understanding accepts the recycling of the human person (an integration of non-separable body and consciousness) in the larger process of Cosmos (likewise an integration of body and consciousness). It endorses neither reincarnation nor rebirth as understood above. It does not accept the idea of an eternal pre-existence of the soul as a not-yet-embodied substance. It does accept the notion of life before life and life after life, since Cosmos is alive and since Life emerges from and returns to Absolute Horizon via Eternity and Infinite Life. It does not accept the notion of the continued existence of this particular individual, an eternal soul or a single stream of consciousness. 'I', this brief constellation of matter, life and mind will disintegrate and its elements will return to Nature somehow to emerge in other brief manifestations of existence, which is of matter, life, emotion and thought, perhaps even in other human beings. 'I' will not live forever, but will shortly die; in fact, life is a process of dying, as death is a moment in the process of life. Life and death are not alternatives, but degrees on a continuum. Shortly 'I' will have flashed for a brief moment in the flash of Cosmos in the great light show; will have played a small part. Then it will be over; but it will also not be over. Every particular 'I' as an impermanent sum of patterns of thought, sentiments and behaviour will continue to exert some influence, more or less, for good or bad, radiate light or cast a shadow for a brief period, make a difference to the Whole. Every 'I' will 'return', but not as 'I': aspects and elements will somehow, sometime, resurface from the great ocean in the great circulation. The process of Nature, consisting of matter, life, love and thought in all their forms, combinations and degrees of manifestation, rolls on. Dying is just as awe-inspiring as being born: returning to the great mystery is just as magnificent as emerging from it. There is a deeper dimension than death at that supreme moment after a lifetime, highly developed people may experience their return as a mystical experience: glimpsing not only the totality of Cosmos, but also the splendour of Infinity.

With death, human beings, like all beings, disintegrate; return to the Cosmic package of matter, life, passion and thought; to Infinity; to Absolute Horizon. There is an afterglow, weak or strong, good or bad, enduring or fading quickly. I imagine a robust acceptance of life with all its ambiguity, its non-permanence and its non-substantiality. That includes a robust acceptance of death. That is becoming very significant in a technological society where dying is avoided at all costs and life can be extended to a degree unimaginable to previous generations and still, today, to certain societies. So, 'I' will presently die, like a leaf falling from a tree, returning to the fertile jungle floor. Of course there are differences: 'I' am slightly more complex than the leaf, and 'I' know that 'I' will fall and disintegrate – the leaf does not. On the other hand, a flourishing life

on earth after humans, without humans, is perfectly thinkable, but one without leaves? Hardly. And yet, spiritually, humankind is latently a tip of an unfolding branch of the Cosmic tree, of Spirit.

■ growth points

In a utopian sense, this envisagement postulates a potential progressive presence of the human person in the larger scheme of things. In the process of the devolution and involution of Cosmos from Origin to End, humankind is imagined to be of some significance, puny and flawed as this latecomer on the scene is in many respects. Humankind and Cosmos are related in an organic non-dualistic mutuality. As *pars pro toto* with exceptional mental abilities, its containing within itself of all things and the Whole, brims with possibility and promise. It carries a latent potential not only to destroy life on Earth, but to enhance it; to not only spread greed and strife, but also non-violent compassion; and to promote knowledge, understanding and wisdom, and above all an awareness of the devolutionary-involutionary connection of Cosmos with Unground. That is what I meant by 'progressive' above. Novelty for the good may be added; humanity is an agent in that – or rather, could be; this is not recording fact, but utopian, performative language. Assuming an interconnectedness of all and the universal presence of mutually implicit thought, passion, life and matter throughout Cosmos, increases in human consciousness (love and thought) will impact on life and matter. The scientific evolutionary perspective (great as far as it reaches) that consciousness follows matter and life, is to be enhanced (which implies a degree of correction) by the awareness that, in the larger scheme of things, matter, life, passion and thought move in interconnected togetherness. This is also something else than the type of idealism assuming that matter and life follow consciousness. Earthlings are taken to be susceptible to whatever forces and influences may be at work elsewhere in Cosmos, unbeknown to them.

Within humankind, some persons, acting with profound insight into situations, whether single events or larger wholes; with great love and compassion for all beings; with sincere and noble intent; with effective power, are here understood to take not only humankind but also Cosmos forward in its spiral, potentially towards the good. Some are the truly great ones, none being the exclusive saviour of the world. Such ones have Cosmic significance, loving solidarity with Cosmos, realising (understanding, achieving) what all humans are in principle. They have opened windows on Infinitude and a Horizon beyond Cosmos. Utopia is not fact. Still, they and others like them are beacons, illuminating the world and beckoning a bewildered humanity. At the present time (meaning the time of recorded history, this epoch of Cosmic unfolding), such beings represent the peaks of human, earthly and Cosmic existence in all four its essential aspects; they are eminent models of being human, the best

partes pro toto. It would be a crime of humanity against humanity and Cosmos if such treasures were discarded on the rubbish dump of history.

The notion of the key position of humanity as such and of some individuals in particular in the large scheme of things, is a recurring MM theme in networks of historical connections. A few isolated examples will have to do. The Cosmic relevance of the respective messianic figures in Judaism and Christianity and the bodhisattvic and Buddha figures in Buddhism may be best known, but are not the only expressions of this notion in MM history.

In Christianity the centrality of humankind in Cosmos, continued from Hebrew religion was a commonplace, and this was not unique to Christianity. What was quite unique in Christianity, was the degree to which that centrality was telescoped into one Person, Jesus Christ. For example, in the theology of Paul, reflecting aspects of the Jewish and Hellenistic thought of his day, there is an original man, a heavenly Adam, a pre-existent Logos (incarnated in Jesus), the pattern of all men and with great future Cosmic significance. In the Jewish Kabbalah of Isaac Luria *Adam Kadmon* ('original man') plays a central role in the creation of the world as the embodiment of the divine manifestations, and as the original essence of humankind; and mystic persons anticipate and promote the redemption of not only themselves and the world, but of God. In the thinking of the third leg of the monotheistic tradition surveyed in this envisagement. Islam, a structurally similar wave of thought can be discerned. To Ibn Arabi, for example, the human person has Cosmic significance and is so to speak the viceregent of God on Earth. The human person actualises the totality of Divinity and contains all Cosmic attributes, is the perfect microcosm, the 'perfect man' (*insān kāmil*). This is not human hubris and megalomania, but the acceptance of a burden of service and responsibility. Another medieval Muslim MM, Mulla Sadra, also spoke of the human person as 'the perfect man', the true microcosm - who is the true servant, the spiritual guide, not in the sense of counsel and teaching, but in the sense of realising in himself the return of all corporeal creatures into God (Jambet 2006:412ff.); this person is the prophetic harbinger of the final universal peace, when all will have returned to God in the process of Origin and Return. The differences as well as the similarities between Christianity and its two sister religions in general need to be noted. In Christianity the Cosmic significance of humanity was singularised, individualised, contracted into one, personalised. But that person was not entirely separated from others: he represented all. This essay emphasises the key position of humanity as a whole in Cosmos, attaches great value to some singularly great and gifted ones, but no exclusive role to any single individual person.

Not only in bodhisattvic Buddhism, but also in (e.g.) the modern Hinduism of Sri Aurobindo a comparable strategic role is awarded to humankind at its best. In Aurobindo's view 'man' (he still uses that language) occupies the crest of the evolutionary wave, since in 'him' Mind/Consciousness made a crucial breakthrough, and that change will be the major contributing factor in future

evolution – indeed, that is not only possible, but would, according to Aurobindo, give the truest meaning to earthly existence (Aurobindo 1974:27–34). The differences of this view from the three theisms should not be underestimated, and yet the similarities and confluences, when viewed from a higher perspective, should not be denied either.

■ morality

This perspective on Cosmos and its creatures, large and small, would encourage loving, skilful, transformative existence in the world. The morality announcing itself would create space for a positive appreciation of concrete existence in all its forms; involvement in life with all its difficulties; enjoyment and sharing of its gifts and beauties; amelioration of suffering among all beings; an eventual letting go, aware of Absolute Horizon. Opting for simplicity, it would veer away from the hedonism of modern materialistic consumer society. It would be able to tolerate the sometimes extreme opposites and paradoxes that existence throws at us, doing its best to make the world optimally liveable for all beings.

A basic moral axiom of this MM orientation would be: act in such a manner that your actions in thought, sentiment, word and deed respond affirmatively and creatively to a situation as a whole. This morality would reject all absolutistic, totalitarian prescriptions and programmes as per definition confining.

It is not a morality of obedience to a supernatural law, of supernatural punishment and reward, but of acting in accordance, as far as possible, with the natural order of things, and fully accepting accountability for the consequences of one's actions. The key aspects of such a morality are the overcoming of lack of insight, and correspondingly, of selfishness and greed, and of hatred and resentment. Insight and universal compassion come together as responsibility, that is, co-response-ability. Co-response-ability means the ability to see and take into account as many factors as possible in and surrounding the situation in which action is to be taken. It also signifies the multifactorial sets of antecedents in the dynamics of the historical process preceding and leading up to the present situation, as far as possible; and the consequences of actions in a given situation: the foreseeable and intended, the foreseeable but unintended, and the unintended and unforeseeable, as far as possible. In all of that, one is one actor among others, but cannot necessarily be accountable for the actions of others crisscrossing one's own. Anticipation of the future outcomes of present actions could, and would, involve a utopian element: thinking new possibilities and turning them into reality-changing possibilities. Given the complexities of the situations in which human individuals have to act responsibly, to ascribe to them absolute freedom would be unrealistic; they have limited, relative, more or less, space to operate in effectively. As far their own will and intentions are concerned, there are no

restrictions on freedom to will the good. Such a morality would advise that the individual actor should find personal clarity in freedom concerning moral issues; live as naturally, easily and compassionately as possible, affirming all existence; avoid setting the self up arrogantly as a holy paragon of virtue, always bearing in mind that the world is shot through with sometimes unresolvable ambiguities and contradictions; and, aware of the relativity of all things human, avoid being the all-knowing taskmaster and judge of others.

The social and ecological implications (Gottlieb 2006) of this approach are obvious. In this picture of the world, each entity, no matter how weak, derives value from its being an expression of the Cosmic nexus, rooted in Infinitude and beyond. This morality therefore opposes the manipulative exploitation of nature by modern technocratic society and all forms of religious, gender, racial and other discrimination among people. Politically, economically and socially in a wider sense, it opposes all forms of institutional violence ensconced in centralistic, totalitarian power structures, in favour of open, light structures of co-responsibility. It has significant implications for the judicial, educational, political, economic and other spheres of life. What the practical implications of such an approach to various sectors of society would be, lies outside the scope of this essay.

■ sin, karma, tragedy

Above, mention was made of the exceptionally great and the good. What about the bad and the ugly? Names could easily be multiplied. Evil is part of human sentiment, thought, speech, behaviour and institution. In accordance with the line of argument unfolding in this essay, human nature is not, in the final analysis, evil, nor did it become evil through some historical accident. Arising from depths beyond good and evil, humankind is a species fraught with tension and conflict in individuals dealing with themselves and others and groups and nature as a whole. Humankind is a species at war with itself and struggling to come to terms with its greatness and its pettiness and cruelty; its ability to advance in those aspects of life that matter most, yet also its hatred, greed and stupidity seeking selfish individual and collective gain wherever possible. Like Cosmos, humankind is not perfect, not inherently evil either. It is a struggling actor in a world process wanting harmony.

This view does not subscribe to the notion of an original perfect nature, spoiled by the sin of disobedience committed at some point in humanity's past by a progenitor, but to be restored some time in future. Nor does it accept the notion of karma in the sense that individuals exist and will continue to exist in states of happiness or unhappiness, wholly caused by their own past actions. This is not to deny that we largely create our own fate, and that every deed in thought, word and action has results in our lives and in the

surrounding situation. The individual and collective actions of humans in their thoughts, sentiments, words, behaviours and institutions are fully part of the conditionalistic processes of Cosmos. These actions make a difference: synchronically around them and diachronically in what will follow. One's actions in thoughts, words and behaviours feed, for good or for bad, into the contexts in which they are enmeshed. In their actions, humans do some good but also make huge mistakes because of lack of insight into situations and the deeper truth, lack of good intention and will. As far as all these shortcomings are present and determine human action, such actions are evil. Goodwill, intention and sentiment may be present, but insight into the full complexity of a present situation and intelligent anticipation of the outcomes of deeds, once done, may be lacking. To that extent, the notion of 'tragedy' becomes relevant. People may intend good and act in ways expressing such intentions, but the unintended and unanticipated outcomes may be horrific.

The concept of 'tragedy' is taken to include, in an adapted sense, some of the substance of the notion of 'sin': the association with evil, but not the need for supernatural forgiveness for acts committed out of short-sightedness but perhaps with goodwill. Likewise, it includes, in an adapted sense, some of the notion of 'karma'. It places a strong emphasis on will and intentions, and situates human actions wholly in the wider network of the general conditionality of things. The possibility of tragedy presupposes the reality of responsibility: the ability to anticipate, at least up to a point, the outcomes of actions, and willingly to shoulder such outcomes. It does away with the exact correlation of actions and outcomes according to some calculable *quid pro quo* law, predictably operative from one birth to the next, not to mention the simplistic moralistic correlations sometimes operative in such views. People act, and results follow, to some extent expanding into and interacting with the larger scheme of things. This process cannot be reduced to facile formulas.

■ surprises, acceptance, forgiveness

Life as a whole is not a tragedy, but abounds with good outcomes, which may be unanticipated and contrary to all expectations. From evil empires, good can accrue. From the rubble left by tyrants, plants can grow. Such 'blessings' do not come out of the blue or as gifts from the hands of a supernatural Person, sometimes when asked for it and sometimes without being asked. They are the outcomes of the natural workings of a conditionalistic Cosmos where powerful though unnoticed single events or sets of events can significantly reshuffle hosts of factors, which can lead to paradoxical new developments, in nature as well as in human life. All acts should be in good faith as well as is possible, in terms of what is foreseeable, and then the outcomes left, not in the hands of fate or the gods, but in the nexus of Cosmos. A wise understanding of history would not link events by simple straight lines of causes and effects. The world is much

more complex than that. Cosmos not only produces tragedy, but also creates spaces for giving and receiving, for grace and gratitude and the casting of one's bread upon unknown waters. Given enough time, the eventual return may be good.

It cannot be denied that life is full of suffering, some arising from nature and some caused by people and their actions, sometimes self-induced and sometimes induced by others. To reduce all natural suffering and injustice experienced in life to deserved karma or divine punishment is preposterous, just as it would be pointless to justify or explain natural disasters by appealing to karma or divine retribution. Things happen in the unfolding of situations. There are good and bad accidents – that is, events without apparent causes from a narrow, shallow human point of view, and Cosmos rolls on. As far as natural suffering is concerned, one changes what can be changed for the better and bears with fortitude what cannot. Such events are reminders of an infinitely larger, always changing context, surrounded by Infinitude, Eternity and Absolute Horizon.

As far as human wrongdoing and injustice are concerned, the first step of this ethic is forgiveness, understood as the letting go of hatred in all its manifestations, such as boiling anger and long-simmering resentment, and of actions of revenge. Then follows the replacement of such sentiments and actions with non-violence and benevolence towards the doer, empathy with the doer, and, ultimately, equanimous inner strength. By forgiveness is not understood ignoring, repressing or forgetting the injustice or the anger. Nor is forgiveness necessarily believed to be the entirely adequate response. Why forgiveness? The question here is not primarily what psychological reasons there may be. That forgiveness is psychologically wholesome to the one who suffered an injustice is well established (Enright 2001). The question is what MM reasons there may be.

This attempt at insight does not rest on the assumption of a hierarchical ontological break between a natural and a supernatural world, with the implications of obedience or disobedience and guilt on the side of humans in the natural order, and reward, punishment or forgiveness on the side of the divine, supernatural order, dependent on the meeting of certain conditions. Again, relativising and demythologising such theological schemes is not the same as rejecting them wholesale. From the contextualising point of this perspective, forgiveness is natural, in the sense that it fits better into the larger scheme of things than revenge. Understanding invites acceptance and forgiveness.

To begin with, the better we understand the external single factors or the sets of factors behind and around an act or a system of violence conditioning it, the more we will be able to forgive. There may be mitigating circumstances. The level of development of the doer needs to be taken into account. How much foresight, roundsight and insight did the doer of the deed have?

How much could he or she (or they) have had, given the circumstances? What internal conditioning factors in the mental make-up of an actor may there have been? This is not meant as condoning evil acts or excusing them, but placing them in an understandable context. The mature, superior, noble person is privileged, obliged, not to be bowed by the ignorance, hatred and greed of the immature. The intention of the perpetrator and the possibility of unintended, unanticipated tragic outcomes are to be considered. Did the doer intend evil, or was the action or system based on good intentions, however uninformed or oblivious of their future outcomes they may have been? Intention matters a great deal. To what extent should Darwin be held accountable for economic exploitation, Nietzsche for Nazism, religious founders for the fanaticism of followers?

A clear realisation of the contingency and impermanence of all things would make a difference in one's evaluation and response. That concerns the deed, its context and its outcome. Things could have been different; they are accidental, contingent, not fixed fate. This perspective also has a bearing on the actor. Such a person is not seen as a solid, substantial Doer of Evil, but as a passing arrangement of factors. So is the sufferer of injustice. That does not mean that the perpetrator should be absolved of responsibility, but it does make a difference in one's response to the situation and to the doer of evil.

In the end, realisation of the non-substantiality of all things and their End in Absoluteness makes a difference. There is the possibility of calm, in realisation of the larger context regarding the dissolution of all things. All things End. How trivial are yesterday's fights, yesteryear's wars. Empires come and go, and in the end, they all become mere shadows.

There is, in the larger picture, the assumption of the possible drift of the world process towards the good, into which attitudes and actions of goodwill would fit far more constructively than destructive ill will. Life is not about the survival of the strong at the cost of the weak; it is about responsibility for the benefit of as many as possible, ideally for all. In the long run, in the larger picture, victory belongs to forgiveness.

Do the above add up to passivity in the face of evil? By no means. It is the beginning, but it does create space for adequate measures to be taken to deal with situations transformatively in the longer run. Issues such as effective resistance, compensation, restitution and so on, have not been touched on. Forgiveness, also self-forgiveness, does not always come spontaneously, and it demands a great deal of insight into the self and the dark corners in the own mind. The same perspectives as above apply: not to ignore, condone, excuse; to admit honestly; to be as realistic and benevolent towards the self as towards others; to accept forgiveness if it is given by those offended, and to practise self-forgiveness and compensation as far as possible.

■ conditionalistic totality in Horizon

The term 'conditionalistic totality in Horizon' (CTH) expresses the general drift of what has emerged in this essay. It emphasises the following:

- (1) The radical contingency of things, constant change, multifactoriality, relationships above substances, mutuality and reciprocity, complementarity and interinclusion.
- (2) The search for harmonious totalistic syntheses excluding all forms of totalitarianism (implying exclusivism and violence of any sort).
- (3) An ultimately silencing awareness of Absolute Horizon, inviting not only critique, but also relative acceptance of what is.

This underlying strategy has been applied across the board in a number of contexts, such as the relationship among the constituent aspects of Cosmos, the constitution of the singular human being and all other beings, the relationships between singularities and wholes of every type, and the relationship between Unground and Cosmos.

This strategy was also applied to appreciating different religions in their singularity, yet valuing the plurality of different religions as instantiations of a homoversal search for meaning, and the mutual implication of all. As for the religions, I do not attach absolute value to any one of them, but see them as relative ways, some indeed more suitable than others, towards MM silence. They are all precious cultural products, parts of the one human heritage, but not one could be set up as exclusively true; nor is any inclusively true in a totalitarian, overriding sense. There is a larger space, dissolving them all. And within that space of silence the correlativity of the various MM systems of schools such as Platonism, Neoplatonism, Stoicism, Buddhism, Vedanta and Taoism and a fairly large number of representative figures of such religions and MM systems were investigated. A point was made of breaking down barriers, for example, the artificial ones erected between 'Eastern' and 'Western', 'Indian' and 'Greek-Hellenistic' religions and MM systems. In fact, Greece was as much part of Asia as of Europe further to the west and north, even more so. Naturally, the various visions from Africa, Australasia, the Pacific islands and other parts of the world are equally part of this whole, but space did not allow going into any detail. Mediterranean Africa itself was a meeting point of Africa pushing up from further down south, towards Europe and Asia in its several varieties. This does not amount to a relativistic, even nihilistic flatland where all distinctions and differences are obliterated. On the contrary, distinctions and differences were deemed important on this wandering filled with wonder. The best way to treat such systems is as interrelated moments of one larger fluid complex, realising that ultimately they all End. This is not the same as saying that everything is eventually lost. Nothing is.

This perspective also has implications for the relationships between religion (at its apex: mysticism) and society in general. As far as society is concerned,

the material and mental aspects are mutually conditioning. All attempts at giving words to the ultimate dimension of things are conducted from within the cultural space dominant at any time and in the vocabulary and concepts available at the time. Yet, at a certain point, all such cultural universes break down, and the most thoughtful minds transcend them, but they often return to them as wise, diplomatic leaders, educators, participants. Available social and cultural meaning at one level and the unavailable meaning of Absoluteness at a next level are interdependent. In this ambivalence, mysticism has the function of de-absolutising any social (economic, political, educational – and religious) claim to triumphalist dominance. It is radically critical of totalitarianism of any kind.

The natural sciences provide an important input in humankind's orientation in the world, but are not final in that they are methodologically restrained from dealing with meaning in a transcendent sense. There are also the religious and MM roads of discovery, leading beyond science into such areas. Science, Religion and MM should not be collapsed into each other and neither should become subservient to the other. It is a matter of finding an optimal, complementary balance of significant yet distinct approaches to the world, assumed to be compatible and mutually conditioning.

■ §57 Trees and the forest

In a ravine stands a forest of trees in which many generations of birds made their nests, raised their young and created their societies. In a small cleft of Cosmos, a collection of symbolic systems produced by one species of life, *homo sapiens sapiens*, is to be found: religions (also arts and sciences and philosophy) stand like trees growing over millennia from the soil of Unground towards the sky of Emptiness. Those worldview systems were and still are the environments in which cultures and individual people build their homes. A problem has been that most people do not see the forest of systems of ultimate meaning but only the individual tree that they inhabit, where they were hatched and on which they perch and feed. Unfortunately, some would want to see other equally precious trees chopped down. Of course the various trees are similar, even the same, in the sense they are all made of wood and that they all have roots, trunks, branches, leaves, flowers and fruit. They are also interconnected by reproduction. Yet, in another sense, each one is an individual, separate tree. They are not all the same, and every bird has the right to live in whatever distinctly different tree it prefers. One of my main concerns was to respect the right to distinctness of each singular religion and MM encountered along the way. They do not all add up to the same, as superficial ecumenism maintains. Another concern was to be aware not only of the differences and similarities of the plurality of trees, but to see the forest as a whole. To start seeing other ways of looking at the world than through the

system of one's own group, is a great step forward. It is a responsible kind of macro-ecumenical exercise among individual religions. However, it is not enough; it is still possible not to see the forest for the trees.

One of the objects of this adventure was to stand back and to recognise the gestalt in what, to the cursory glance, would appear as a mere disconnected jumble of trees, probably competing for the same space. Yet from a sufficient distance one becomes aware of the commonalities in weather and soil type, the good years and the bad years, the droughts and the forest fires leaving their marks in and on all of them. From a certain distance and perspective one perceives one jungle giving coherence to the many trees, and to several species of trees. These reflections were interested in the individual trees and in the types of species, but also in the forest as a whole, and above all in the clearings in the forest and the shafts of sunlight penetrating the thick canopy from an open sky. Gestalt is not fact; its recognition is partly discovery, partly invention, partly imagination, partly construction, dependent on interest, relevance, distance and perspective.

In previous chapters, visits were made to predecessors walking this terrain since the arising of MM in the full theoretical sense of the word, roughly two and a half millennia ago. The extent to which the roads open to us today were opened in ancient classical times, is remarkable. Equally remarkable is the extent to which the same concerns have found original expression in modern figures such as F.W.J. Schelling (to mention a striking example). At the end of this exploration and staying with the format in previous chapters, I shall now acknowledge a few contemporaries in our present situation; some treading a path similar to the one followed here, some trying out other possibilities, some more daring than others are. Again, space constraints do not allow a large gallery of portraits of positions and their representatives.

■ materialism

□ Richard Dawkins

Materialism is at present probably the most dominant species of worldview, at least in the English-writing world. From this group the provocative work of Richard Dawkins has drawn a great deal of attention. In Chapter 2, I commented on aspects of his work, but let me return to the question of the materialist implication of his thinking. For this, I focus on earlier books of his, *The blind watchmaker* (1986) and *River out of Eden* (1995).

That Dawkins is filled with a sense of 'awe' (Dawkins 1986:5) before the natural world is obvious on every page, and his work contains fascinating detail to back up such amazement. But then an inconsistency cracks open. On the one hand, as a biologist, he avoids the issue of an inclusive explanation of 'why'

things exist at all by passing the buck, so to speak, downwards to the physicists, who deal with the most basic dimension of all things; biologists cannot and do not have to give such explanation. While pursuing the above line of thought, Dawkins in the same breath declares triumphantly that the mystery of existence has been solved completely (ibid.:ixff.). In passing and without making a fuss about it: here Darwin emerges as a kind of Messiah and Dawkins speaks in almost apostolic missionary fashion.

He works on the assumption of, shall we say, a chain of being. Such a 'chain' can be seen as either a bottom-up or a top-down structure. He thinks in terms of the first: an upward development of a chain of being, link by link, with study of biology one link higher up than that of physics and study of physics the most basic. He calls this mode of argument 'hierarchical reductionism' (ibid.:13). Here a metaphysical choice comes into play. To comment on this immediately, this essay opts for a very different model, one that might be compared to a web: an intricate system of subwebs of being, interconnected to others and stretching infinitely in all directions. To mention one thing: one may guess that life has its own directness to ultimacy, just as matter and consciousness have. As a general principle, one can safely say, explanations should be as simple and economical as possible, and also indispensable. The line of argument followed by Dawkins is underdone: by implication, he explains life (as well as consciousness) by reducing it to lower matter and matter alone ('the ricochets of atomic billiards chance to put together [...] life') (Dawkins 1995:xi).

Moreover, where does matter come from? His argument supplies no sufficient reason to think that the mystery of being has been solved. The question 'why' living things 'exist at all' (Dawkins 1986:3) is really passed on to physicists, who are then burdened with the question as to what it is that may be 'below' matter. Dawkins suggests the possibility of 'literally nothing' (whatever that might mean) or 'units of the utmost simplicity' (ibid.:14). It begs rather than answers the question. Nevertheless, he presents the mystery of existence as fully solved. An undercooked fish is presented with an extravagant dressing of over-the-top assurance and finality. The book claims too much for too little. Can it really be an 'intellectually fulfilled' atheism? (ibid.:6). Natural selection, 'cumulative selection' (ibid.:43), all by itself, does not seem to be a sufficient all-explanatory postulate. That is not to say that gradual biological evolution should be denied; but it should be absorbed into a wider context. Nor is 'explanation' to be reduced to the mechanistic questions of how things are put together and how they work from an engineering point of view (ibid.:21ff.).

This is unguarded triumphalist modernist ideology, seemingly so oblivious of the determining role of its socio-cultural setting that it serves as any religious and political ideology does. The problem is also not at all that this model is 'atheist', but that an inadequate alternative to 'theism' is developed. The scope

and range of the book are narrow. The problem is not that Dawkins goes too far, but that he does not go far and wide enough. A closed materialism is insufficient. His model, lacking a wider framework and a reflexive, self-critical epistemology, is closed, totalitarian. In this book at least, he seems to be oblivious of previous cumulative efforts over the millennia to develop integral theories of reality. At least, no attempt is made to engage with them. There is no broad based consideration of the histories, challenges and possibilities of the various MM traditions devised in different cultures over millennia.

By way of comparison, Neoplatonism makes the opposite choice than Dawkins: its chain of being develops top-down. That model has the same structural weakness as materialism (as espoused by Dawkins). It is also hierarchical reductionism, but in the opposite direction: matter derives from life, which derives from consciousness. Our theory does not endorse Neoplatonic spiritualism either. Yet, here at least, a wider open space is assumed. Its strength compared to the chain of Dawkins, is that it envisages a space beyond both life and matter; Dawkins' model plugs such a possibility in advance.

On the other hand, the basic problem with traditional theism, overall more similar to Neoplatonism than to materialism, is the problem of a missing link: there is an absolute ontological break between the world (including life) and its assumed Creator. The entire popular debate between 'theism' and 'atheism' (not really a debate at all, but all-out kill-or-die trench warfare) is simplistic. Both are insufficient. A larger theory of all-embracing interconnectedness of being, emerging from a mystery (one that cannot be comprehensively solved by appealing to engineering) is the type advocated in this essay.

If materialism (at least the version tasted above) is undercooked, traditional theism as usually presented, is overcooked. It literalises myths of, and produces arguments for what 'must' logically be the case in another ontological dimension altogether, instead of simply allowing the world to be, to emerge from an unapproachable yet necessarily assumed Horizon, ever so subtly until it can be seen in all its beauty right in front of us – for physics, chemistry and biology to analyse. The postulate of an individual, personal Maker or Designer analogous to us is superfluous and unwarranted. This envisionment assumes the ontological continuity of all dimensions of Arche as far as the physical and spiritual eye can see.

Yet dispensing with simplistic anthropomorphic views of supernatural gods is not as weighty as Dawkins suggests. At a certain level, his *The God delusion* (2006) is compulsory reading, but the real job starts after his critique. I do not think the book made any real creative advance beyond his earlier thinking. He presents a big picture, but it is a reductionistic one. Still, it appears to be more open-ended than *The blind watchmaker*. Could, should he have moved further into MM? Indeed. Reductionistic materialism has run its course and done what could be done on its assumptions.

□ Howard Bloom

Recent decades saw various attempts – from within the natural sciences, computer science, mathematics and logic and their applications in various fields – at understanding Cosmos comprehensively in new ways. Such endeavours proceeding from science, turn away from religion and theism and yet venture into or at least touch on the dimension of metaphysics. One of these contributions is the exuberant 2012 book of Howard Bloom: *The God problem. How a godless cosmos creates* (Bloom 2012). For comparable projects see Talbot (1991) and Kraus (2012). Admittedly, Bloom's fascinating book is rhetorically rather profuse, overwhelming the unsuspecting reader with excessive numbers and figures zooming into the zillions with brilliant metaphors and stacks of synonyms on every page. That is fine; his book is the outpouring of a strong Aha!-enthusiasm, and an effort to gain subscribers to his programme; in Bloom's terminology, it is a recruitment strategy.

Bloom's book does not offer more of the same presented by Dawkins, but strikes out on a course confirming this essay in some respects. He consciously steps outside of the materialistic paradigm (ibid.:562). In addition, he moves beyond the old mythological concept of God and old mythological creation stories. Yet he remains acutely conscious of what he terms 'the God Problem'. Having dispensed with 'God', how is 'creation' to be understood, explained? That is his 'problem'. He works from within science and mathematics, seemingly without knowing or concerning himself much about how the other half (non-scientific meaning-makers such as philosophers, apart from a few) lived over the last 2500 years. He does link up with some mathematical-philosophical titans such as Pythagoras and Plato and science-philosophical heroes such as Aristotle, but a connection between the two discourses in a wider sense has not been forged. The ravine between the two cultures still gapes deeply and steeply. Taking the difficulty of the 'translation' (a favourite word of Bloom) of meaning into account, he cannot be blamed too heavily. He did not want to write a history of ideas; he wanted to make a point, state a case. Yet he does shape building blocks towards a bridge from the perspective of science.

It is to be applauded that Bloom does not simply fall back on the chance 'ricochets of atomic billiards' of matter as sole bottom explanation of everything. One warms to his idea that ultimately the emergence of Cosmos is to be explained with recourse to what he terms (among other names) 'Ur patterns' (here Plato with his Ideas plays his role): a limited number of 'simple rules', 'axioms', 'a handful of primal commandments' (Bloom 2012:556) and their corollaries. From these the entire universe (in fact, many simultaneous and consecutive universes) with their ever increasing complexities are to be explained as unfolding of the implicate properties of such rules. Several of the Eternal Principles put forward on these pages occur in Bloom's book in the form of such basic rules. The Principle of Totalising is one of those.

To Bloom, changing context is a creative principle of the highest order: take an old thing, repeat it in a new context and what you get is something new. What counts, is 'iteration with a new big picture, with a new unifying concept, with a new grand design' (ibid.:407, 505ff.). The universe is all about connection and reconnection, communication, conversation, meaning (ibid.:422ff., 478ff.). In our terms: Cosmos is a process of Totalising and re-Totalising in contexts of ever-increasing size and complexity, coupled with Witting, Wanting and Willing. Signs of these last three, in other terms and with different names, are not lacking in Bloom's book either.

He does not shy away from the 'anthropomorphic' shape of pictured reality. This is a significant insight, transcending the quasi-objectivism assumed by most of science. The fact that he speaks of the universe with all its physical features such as atoms and photons and so on as 'persisting', as 'driven, motivated', as having 'volition' and 'primitive patterns' of 'will', as making 'choices', as having 'competition' and 'dominance hierarchies' and 'needs' and 'desires' and 'love', 'hunger' of evolution and 'craving' (ibid.:509-563) – not as mere figures of speech but as actual descriptive terms – all of that is a new dance of discovery performed by one of the excited 'bohemian bees' in the hive of scientists, having found new flower patches (ibid.:522ff.). It is congenial to the argument of this essay. Such terms, he rightly claims, are acceptable because of an inherent isomorphism between human thought and the deep structure of reality. Good, although a reflexive critique of anthropomorphism would have been most welcome. The real problem is that his arguments stall, are not sufficiently contextualised in a wider Horizon. 'Free will began in the first flick of the big bang' (ibid.:513), he claims; but 'consciousness starts with humans' (ibid.:513). There is no connection between the two. They are loose ends. True, we may all be 'children of the big bang' (ibid.:539) (assuming that it is correct science) but he asks not what might lie behind the Big Bang and the rules; 'behind' not in a temporal sense, but in a deep-structural, MM sense. His world just bangs into existence (i.e. similar to Dawkins); not randomly, but according to a set of rules (i.e. different from and an improvement on Dawkins). This essay endeavours to tie up such loose ends with its concepts of Infinity, Eternity and Unground, which encompasses Absoluteness, Origin and End. The Mystery cannot be explained, but it can be deepened beyond the reach of science, mathematics, computer programmes (such as those of Stephen Wolfram) and 'the raw force of reason' (ibid.:552). Not as belief, not as substitute for science, but as complementary and context-providing to science.

In short, has Bloom solved the 'God Problem'? No. The Big Bang to him, starts 'from scratch', 'from nothing' (ibid.:544, 555), without any further discussion, as if these are self-explanatory concepts. The universe creates itself. Up to a point, our envisagement also argues that. Yet it cries out for a larger context. Of course, one need not go the way of Aristotle back to his

Unmoved Mover or theism with its uncritical view of a personalistic God. Yet, simply to stop with the Big Bang is too abrupt. There is an even bigger picture, necessary to what Bloom calls 'emergence' and 'complexity'.

This leads to his treatment of the law of entropy and his insistence that the universe is not simply on an unstoppable way down and out, but that there are larger forces in play. He couches this idea in terms of another metaphor, called (from his secular Jewish background) the 'Big Bagel' model. It is a cyclical model of sorts: the universe started and will return to raw energy, and a new Big Bang will emerge. It is about 'annihilation and rebirth' (ibid.:549). This notion approximates our idea of Cosmos emerging and returning to Absolute Horizon. On the last two pages of his book, he comes close to real MM concerns. Indeed, an interesting move in science.

■ idealism

Not all contemporary physicists are materialists. In fact, there are signs that what might be called 'idealism' in a broad sense is making a comeback. Throughout this investigation, MM thinkers usually labelled 'idealist' in one way or another were visited and engaged with quite extensively. This essay itself is not idealist in the sense that matter is seen as absolutely secondary to mind. But it would not mind being called 'idealistic' in a loose sense, such as accepting that the world in its entirety, including matter, is mind-dependent in a conditionalistic sense. Nor would it mind being called 'materialist' in the sense that the world in its entirety, including mind, is matter-dependent in a conditionalistic sense. But it would not locate itself in either of both camps.

Rather than survey the possible range of meanings of 'idealism', let me again simply compare notes with two fairly recent books.

■ T.L.S. Sprigge

British metaphysician T.L.S. Sprigge (1932–2007) proposes a version of 'absolute idealism', which he also refers to as 'pantheistic idealism', 'panpsychism' and 'pan-experientialism'. His philosophy is presented as in line with what has been put forward by Spinoza (whom he takes to be a 'partial exception' to idealism), F.H. Bradley (1846–1924) and Josiah Royce (1855–1916); actually, as a synthesis of Spinozism and Bradleyism. As in previous cases in this § I shall concentrate on one book, now Sprigge's final contribution: *The God of metaphysics* (2006). The broad version of metaphysics endorsed by Sprigge may be showing signs of recovery after G.E. Moore and Bertrand Russell's attacks on it early in the 20th century. In his own view, the idealist case needs 'to be tightened up somewhat', but its 'real core' was not vulnerable to those criticisms (Sprigge 2006:266). At least in this last book of his, his metaphysics

appears as a metaphysical version of Christianity, stripped of mythological accretions and theologoumena such as the notion of the Trinity. Towards the end of his life and at the end of his thinking, Sprigge settled in a pantheistic kind of religion with a Christian flavour. In his later life, he actually joined the Unitarian Church. In his book the reader finds illuminating stocktaking of previous figures in his tradition (also of Kierkegaard, as critic of Hegel), but one does not get the sense of any provocative new start or fresh contribution. A venerable liberal school seems to have come to an end. Idealism of this kind can clearly be a religion to live and die by. Sprigge illustrates that.

As can be expected, Sprigge's thinking is carried by two convictions: that materialism and any description of the human being and any other animal in purely physical terms (*ibid.*:473) is to be rejected; and that the individual human being is assumed to live in an 'inconceivably vast total reality' (*ibid.*:475). Both of these express basic assumptions of this essay.

Would the term 'MM' be applicable to his thinking? Indeed, up to a point, but one not far up the road. On every page, there is evidence of the 'metaphysics' part of his thinking. The 'mysticism' part is referred to seldom and tentatively, and only really comes to the fore on the last pages of his book (*ibid.*:541f.). Yet somehow it seems to be implied throughout, not unrelated to how we understand the term. Sprigge's argument moves in three steps. First come the metaphysics. Secondly, after that come the religious implications of the metaphysics. In effect, Sprigge intends his metaphysical position to provide support to a variety of liberal Christian religion and theology. Thirdly he mentions the possibility of mysticism, albeit vaguely, as a kind of extension of religion. He does not enter into a satisfactory conceptual clarification of what he means by the term, and seems to associate it with 'enthusiasm' of some kind, which can be somewhat 'intellectualist' (*ibid.*:161); and compatible with 'religious experiences' (*ibid.*:541) in a general sense. It seems to be 'a sense of a greater whole with which we can feel at one and thus be relieved for a time from our usual daily worries', as when sitting perched on a rock with the sea lapping around it (*ibid.*:541). Nevertheless, he believes that any serious philosophical treatment of religion should at least 'take account of mystical experience' (*ibid.*:542). In a voluminous book such as his, this is rather scanty.

Mysticism as understood in this essay is at least implied in his view of religion, as supported by metaphysics (*ibid.*:8ff., 523ff., 534ff.). Religiously relevant metaphysics might, he says, have something like a religious truth value; might prompt certain 'cosmic' emotions; and might have something to say about how best to live. That corresponds closely to the definition of mysticism in this volume, namely as referring to enlightened intuitive wisdom and insight into the depth of reality; lucidity of emotion and will; and transparent universal generosity in sentiment and deed. Reason is one of its avenues along which mysticism proceeds in my view, but not the only one, and it emerges from and

expires into a very clear sense of silence, transcending reason. Such a sense of silence as transcending rational metaphysics, as constituting mysticism and as being the very marrow of an MM enterprise, is lacking in Sprigge's thinking. Finally, he suggests social communality, normally with communal ceremonies, as constitutive of religion. In this respect, too, mysticism tends to be minimalistic, personal and small group oriented rather than social power oriented.

As far as his metaphysical methodology is concerned, it cannot be described as entirely convincing. One reason is that his obtaining of truth limits itself to the application of reason. The factor 'imagination' is admitted (ibid.:476f.), seemingly to indicate that the ideal, essential facts of reality uncovered by reason are not necessarily subjectively experienced or experienceable in sensory accessible reality, but are (must be) imaginable at a higher level, that of reason. At times, he operates with rather tortuous applications of sheer reason, the linkage of which, with other dimensions of knowing in a wider epistemological framework, remains undeveloped. There is a lack of a reflexive sense of the element of constructedness in all of metaphysics. The problems raised by Nāgārjuna in the East and Kant in the West do not seem to feature. The business of metaphysics is 'to know something of the general character of reality as it really is' (ibid.:476): admittedly, only 'something', but that something obviously corresponds to reality. There is insufficient sense of the radical relativity of 'ultimate' knowing; of ultimate silence; of the empty hub of all, around which our theory in its entirety revolves.

Correlating with the above, Sprigge argues that 'nothing exists except experience', and that the physical world 'must somehow be composed of experience' ('consciousness') (ibid.:484). Bluntly put, 'consciousness [is] somehow more basic than the physical' (ibid.:499). At a 'noumenal' level, the physical world consists of a complex system of interacting streams of consciousness (ibid.:500). Reality, the physical world as it appears to us, consists in the existence of innumerable streams of consciousness (experience) interacting with one another. Besides experience, nothing exists at all. All those streams are included in a single, absolute, all-embracing consciousness (experience). This final referent (the final 'subject', we may say) is variously called by him 'an infinite individual'; 'an infinite being'; 'the Absolute', existing and possessing certain attributes; 'a Being'; 'an eternal reality'; 'an Eternal Consciousness'; 'a or the God'; 'the universe'; 'one total cosmic consciousness'. Perhaps the most condensed formulation of his position is: 'a great spiritual being living out its life in innumerable centres of experiences and combining these all into one great experience' (ibid.:543).

I find that Sprigge conflates what I have termed Cosmos and Infinity, and fails to recognise an emptying Horizon beyond the category of Being. As result, his 'Absolute' turns out to be a substantialised entity. Sprigge also downplays matter. He correctly argues that nothing, including physical

reality, is unthought, but, I think, overlooks (1) the fact that thought itself points beyond itself towards a deeper depth, and (2) that thought and matter (to stay with these two for the moment) are mutually interpenetrating co-constituents of reality. Harmonising and co-ordinating both offer better prospects than subordinating one to the other or collapsing one into the other. Idealism and materialism need to be subsumed under a more inclusive perspective.

His ethics, insisting on compassion and the removal of suffering as far as possible, resonates very well with the intention of this essay, as well as his obvious ecological concern (1996:267–302). Sprigge knows that the ideal metaphysical thinker (he mentions Spinoza and Whitehead with particular appreciation) should be scientifically well equipped, but overall his references to science are rare, and one gets the impression that he is not really comfortable with science and does not feel it necessarily incumbent to enter into discussion with it. It is noteworthy that Sprigge's references to 'non-Christian' religions and metaphysics are extremely sparse, and really limited to a few isolated allusions to Buddhism, Islam and Advaita Vedanta. There is no serious considerations of such models in his frame of reference.

□ **Jeremy Dunham, Iain Hamilton Grant and Sean Watson**

A new generation championing the cause of idealism in today's world, focuses on its need to come to terms with nature as unlocked by present-day science. That, we receive well. An example is *Idealism*, by Dunham, Grant and Watson. (2011), that provides critical overviews of philosophical idealisms of the distant and recent past as well as of contemporary forms of idealism, including its presence in contemporary biology.

The authors straight away distance themselves from any form of two-world idealism usually but incorrectly ascribed to Plato. Rather, they defend a version of organicist, one-world idealism in which 'knowing' ('Ideas', to pick up the most typical term) plays a world-structuring role. On an assumed scale stretching from reductionistic materialism on the one hand to reductionistic idealism on the other hand, and positioning Dawkins close to the materialist extreme, Berkeley and Fichte could perhaps be positioned close to an idealist extreme. By 'reductionistic' I here mean an idealism neglecting or denying the constitutive reciprocity of 'Idea' ('Form') and matter, awarding absolute priority to the first. In the terms of our model: at a 'vertical' or 'diachronic' level (both analogues are really inapplicable), this model of ours views the three dimensions of Principles of Eternity, Infinitude and Cosmos as mutually constitutive. Speaking 'horizontally' or 'synchronically' (again, inapplicable terms), the various Principles at the level of Eternity (three sets of three), the four dimensions of Infinitude (including Infinite Matter and Infinite Thought) and the four dimensions of Cosmos ('Spirit') (including matter and thought)

are seen as mutually constitutive without any priority awarded to any one aspect or dimension. Abstracting from their detailed historical analyses and their dialogue with contemporary idealist thinkers, Dunham et al., could be understood to suggest a comparable position.

Skipping the details of their argument:

- A first point concerning the relationship between idealism and biology is noteworthy: our authors opt for an 'organisational', 'systemic' view of life largely following idealists such as Hegel and Whitehead and the two systems-biological models of (a) the team Maturana and Varela and (b) Stuart Kaufmann (2006:223-255). Conflating the two biological approaches, they take the world as a whole to be a system of relatively autonomous networks of living entities. Each living entity is a self-productive 'autopoietic', 'autonomous' system, internally consisting of purposefully coherent parts. In turn, they are embedded in and interacting with multiple other and larger organisations and finally in the universe as ultimate organisational, organic entity. In fact, purposiveness is the motor of cosmic novelty. Like Bloom, they reject entropy as an absolute. That is also the position of this essay: Cosmos is not simply winding down; its winding down is part of a larger spiral movement of devolution and involution.
- Following the above-mentioned biologists, Dunham et al. do not derive the world from thought, and equally reject any representational notion of knowledge (knowledge taken simply to copy or extract information from an external reality). Instead, endorsing the position of the above-mentioned biologists, they take cognition (implying even choice and freedom) to be 'immanent to all of life', 'co-extensive with life', even bringing forth a world. Cognition is 'immanent to all of nature'. In fact, outspokenly in line with a Parmenides, they aver that there is an 'unbroken coincidence of our being, our doing, and our knowing'. The organisational forms, irreducible to lower levels and instantiated in multiple forms, are real, are in fact 'real Ideas' (ibid.:248f.). I find this fresh approach to the physical sciences, correlating old and new in new ways, promising indeed.

■ theism

In conclusion, I wish once more to visit the domain that has dominated Western thinking about ultimacy for millennia: theism. By 'theism' I mean the belief in a personal God (not necessarily excluding a plurality of such beings), separate from and vastly superior to the world. This God is Creator, Sustainer, Saviour and Judge of the world; often supernaturally revealed; with whom a relationship of personal faith and obedience is possible, in fact expected; and serving whom has more often than not been normatively institutionalised in rite and organisation. This core can be accompanied by various sets of sometimes

mutually exclusive corollaries in various religions such as Judaism (YHWH and Israel), Christianity (Trinity and Jesus Christ) and Islam (Allah and the prophet Muhammad).

It is no secret that in today's world theism is in trouble, and not simply because of the wilful, sinful disobedience and lack of faith of unrepentant sinners. Enough has been said in previous chapters about the MM difficulties facing theism, largely triggered by modern science. I do not wish to return or add to such difficulties, but would rather now briefly focus on one endeavour from within theism to recast it in a mode reconcilable with science in its many forms, at the same time saving, not merely appearances, but its historical intentions. I shall here restrict myself to Christian thinking.

The adaptation, updating, of Christian theism ranges from a more extreme 'left' to a more extreme 'right'. A synonym for the 'left' on the spectrum may in this context be theological 'liberalism'; for 'the right', words such as 'traditional', 'conservative', and 'fundamentalist' come to mind. The difference among the latter three is the degree of reflexivity in that position about its stance. 'Traditionalism' simply amounts to a continuation of a past without thinking much about it, without justifying or defending it; it simply continues the way things have always been. 'Conservatism' contains a stronger element of critical thinking about a stance: it is a conscious choice, an act of taking up a position over against other possibilities, adopting one, excluding others. 'Fundamentalism' (taken in a wide sense) is a thoroughly thought out intellectual position, often well conversant with contemporary discussions in fields (particularly science) impacting on that religion, and with apologetic (reasoned defensive, vindicating) and often polemic (attacking) strategies.

The course of reflection on these pages moves outside the strictures of theistic religions. In principle, it is friendly disposed towards all forms of liberal theology, eager to discern signs of a drift towards Absolute Horizon. Figures such as Church historian Adolf von Harnack (1851-1930), philosopher and sociologist of religion Ernst Troeltsch (1865-1923) and New Testament scholar Rudolf Bultmann (1884-1976) remain outstanding representatives of an old school of Christian liberal theology, beacons of scholarship and intellectual integrity. All three were tragic figures, witnessing the crash, around the First World War, of the values they stood for. Could they have anticipated more? In hindsight, probably. The crash was not sudden; it came about partly because of an epochal erosion of classical Christianity, partly because of a lack of an integrating MM discourse, continuous with the human past as a whole and relevant to the times, deeply indebted to science.

Nor do I have any quarrel with innocent traditionalism and cautious conservatism. The attitude of loyalty to a treasured past and a well-intending group with a rich history behind it is a great good. They carried human societies through difficult times; they are living monuments to the human capacity to

endure hardship for the sake of what is ultimately valued. In times of quick change with as yet unknown but certainly revolutionary implications, conservatism is a valuable measure to sift useless, dangerous novelty from real value, proven over time. Tradition is precious, and it should receive, where possible, the benefit of the doubt.

□ Teilhard de Chardin

Teilhard de Chardin (1881–1955) is an MM thinker in the classic mould, developing a vision of the universe as a developing totality – both the vision and the universe infused with a spiritual quality. Restricting myself to his main work *The phenomenon of man* (1959), I shall not set out his system, but only address what I see as the essential strengths and weaknesses of that system. Given the ambition and scope of his work, Teilhard could, with a great deal of justification, have been presented here as a totaliser of his epoch, as Proclus, Fa-tsang, Thomas and Hegel had been of their respective European classical, Chinese T'ang, European medieval and modern epochs (see Ch. 16). No doubt, he intended something similar. In view of the overriding apologetic interest of his book he is here read as a revisionary theist:

- Firstly, concerning his overall *strategy*. At the outset, Teilhard makes the point that his book is neither metaphysics nor theology, but purely and simply 'a scientific treatise' (Teilhard de Chardin 1959 [1955]:31). It turns out to be much more. Up to a point, it is evolutionary science; then it becomes a total, Christian speculative worldview, 'a light illuminating all facts, a curve that all lines must follow' (ibid.:241). Teilhard, ordained as a Jesuit priest in 1911, made the vow of obedience to the Church and adhered to that all his life, with its implication of accepting the duty to proclaim the truth of Christianity as institutionalised in the Church. His attempt to present his system as mere science was probably an effort to throw the custodians of doctrine in the Church off his trail. This tactic (however sincerely it undoubtedly would have been intended) certainly did not succeed, and one can see why. The watchers on the wall saw it for what it was: an adventure way out of the ambit of historical orthodoxy. What he came up with, was in essence a form of Christian philosophy or Christian natural theology – that is to say, in his case: it was admittedly not based on revelation, but on reason and science, specifically biology. Towards the end of his book, he leaves little doubt concerning the apologetic interest of his book. His science, his Christian philosophy and his natural theology developed as a basis for the continued acceptance and propagation of the classical Christian doctrines. It appears that he intended his system to be a necessary explication, perhaps adaptation, but not revolutionarily so, of Christian theism. Here I have no interest in evaluating the orthodoxy of his Christian philosophy or theology, nor the correctness of his science. From today's vantage point, his science

would appear as dated in some respects. More relevant to my understanding, is what Teilhard produced over and beyond those two discourses, namely a full-blown metaphysical system as a blending of science and Christian philosophy and theology. Certainly, he had a point: the two discourses should not be isolated. He went way beyond the asymptotic parallelism mentioned in Chapter 2, and invested in a strategy of liberal integrationism (discussed in that same chapter). His combination of evolutionary science and Christian faith and theology is like a pair of Siamese twins, joined so intimately, sharing vital organs to such an extent that separating them would cause one or both to perish. In spite of his claim that what he is coming up with is not metaphysics but 'hyperphysics' (ibid.:32) and his motto that science, philosophy and religion should 'converge' and not 'merge' (ibid.:32), the outcome of his project is, in the terms of our model, a complete 'MM' fully merging those discourses. At this stage, under present circumstances, his project seems premature and overambitious. Having said that, all such attempts such as his must be welcomed as experimental 'gropings' (his term). I am moved by his personal integrity, the profundity of his questions and answers and his anguish at being misunderstood by the Church and being thwarted by that body in his efforts to publish or even write about what he believed in as the right way to go.

- Secondly, concerning his view of *Christianity and the other religions*. One of the central concerns of this essay was to take the relationships between the various religions (mainly the 'Semitic' theisms, and the religions of India and China) to a new level – transcending each and thereby saving each. How does Teilhard fare in this respect – after all, he spent many years in Egypt and China? Not too well, I fear. The temptation of liberal religious programmes is to surreptitiously tame 'other' religions and harness them before one's own cart. Guided by a belief in the superiority of Christianity, Teilhard proceeds to extol its historical role. Simplifying his, at times, quite ornate language and imagery, his argument boils down to the following: In the historical developments since Neolithic times, the diversity of human collectivities (with the competition that the co-existence of various forms of life inevitably entails) continued to develop (ibid.:228–234). In due time, especially five regions proved to be particularly favourable to the rise of superior civilisation: (i) Central America; (ii) the South Seas; (iii) the Yellow River; (iv) the Ganges and Indus Rivers; and (v) the Nile valley and Mesopotamia. As things worked out historically, in the conflict and struggle for influence surrounding these foci, the contest for the future of the world would centre in the last three, Europe being an extension of the last one. In Teilhard's view, old China lacked the inclination and impetus for deep renovation of the world. As far as India is concerned, we are heavily indebted to the mystic influences emanating from that sub-continent. Yet India got lost in metaphysics, and due to its 'excessive passivity and detachment' it was 'incapable of building the world' (ibid.:232), of directing human

evolution. The Western zone of the world (Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece, Rome and particularly the Judaeo-Christian ferment) became the force of the future. This was not merely in an accidental historical sense, but in a necessary cosmo-evolutionary sense, in the great spiral of life. The voice of Hegel, representative *par excellence* of supreme Western self-confidence, is discernible in the background. At the end of his book (the epilogue, *ibid.*:319–327), the secret is finally fully unveiled. The Christian phenomenon reveals the Presence of Omega. To Teilhard, claiming to speak not as ‘the convinced believer’ but as ‘the naturalist’, this is not merely belief but scientific fact. This fact is confirmed by the substance of the Christian creed. It is also confirmed by the ‘existence value’ of Christianity, introducing, by ‘Christian love’, a new state of consciousness. Here Teilhard is completely carried away by his conviction of the superiority of Christianity as the harbinger of a necessary stage in the evolution towards Omega, simply postulated as scientific fact. This fact finds further confirmation in the success of Christianity. Other ancient religions are bound to untenable myths and steeped in pessimistic and passive mysticism. Yet Christianity is forging ahead, more vigorous and more necessary to the world than ever before. In fact, the Christian faith is destined to take the place of biological evolution in the process of cosmogenesis. One may perhaps, as attenuating circumstance, adduce the fact that this was written before the collapse of European cultural and religious triumphalism with World War II. Only up to a point. There is no sign of any informed theoretical approach relating Christianity to any other religion. From the perspective of this book, Teilhard’s thinking here is lacking. He did not appreciate the forest, mentioned at the start of §57.

- Thirdly, concerning *God and world*. Coming to the content and structure of his theory, Teilhard uncompromisingly affirms a personal God, conceived of as necessary for an understanding of evolution. The Incarnation of Christ is an evolutionary occurrence, in which Christ subdues under himself, purifies, directs and super-animates the ascent of consciousness. In his complete integration of Christian creed and scientific evolution, he sees the final vision of Christian dogma as culminating in ‘a superior form of pantheism’, presented as ‘essentially orthodox and Christian’: God is not simply identified with the world, but ‘God shall be in all’ (*ibid.*:322, 338). That coincides perfectly with what he terms ‘the Omega point’ (*‘le point Oméga’*). How does that relate to evolution? In effect reinterpreting Aristotle’s Prime Mover as the great teleological cause (*causa finalis*) motivating the process of evolution, evolution is understood to be drawn forwards by the Omega Point towards its completion in that same pre-existing and transcendent Omega Point. The magnetic force dominating his entire system has been laid out. The rest falls into place. Abstracting from the details of his system: the world is the process of evolutionary development starting as pre-life (*‘la Prévie’*) (matter). Matter is ‘the without’ of things (*‘le dehors’*), which

nevertheless, even in its most rudimentary form, has a corresponding and co-extensive 'within' (*'le dedans'*): consciousness (*'la conscience'*). This rules out reductionistic materialism. The world is driven forward by the 'Law of complexity and consciousness' (*'Loi de complexité et de Conscience'*): inherent in the world is an evolving spiritual energy, drawing it forwards in an unstoppable upward curve which not only counters but eventually outstrips the second law of thermodynamics (entropy). His book largely consists of filling in this movement with a great deal of detailed science, of which biology is the mainstay. Whether the science is good or bad, is not for me to say, but that at least some of it is outdated, is obvious. In Teilhard's thinking, pre-life becomes life (the biosphere: *'la biosphère'*), from the very beginning moving progressively in a precise direction, towards a precise predetermined destiny. At this point, the comment may be made that his edifice is impressive when placed next to that of Plotinus. It turns out to be both very similar to and in a significant sense the very opposite of Plotinus' vision (Oosthuizen 1974). What in Plotinus, representative of ancient thought, is an ahistorical participation of the less below in the perfect above, in Teilhard, typically modern, becomes a thoroughly historical, in fact teleological, movement from the less towards the more, the perfect, which has all the while been present in rudimentary form in the less. Apart from Plotinus, Bergson is the most significant figure in Teilhard's model, but other shadows, such as that of Schelling, exactly a century before Teilhard, hover in the background. To Teilhard, personalisation of the universe, coinciding with the Omega point, is the ultimate destiny, the final end. The identification of the world as inherently divine and the body of the divine, is a promising line of thought which also offers a fascinating comparative perspective on non-Christian theology (Overzee 1992). Yet his thought falls short. As indicated above, the strong identification of science and mystical-speculative Christian philosophy, in his mind supported by orthodox theology as undercarriage, is not compelling. He has not sufficiently problematised, relativised and transcended the concept of a personal God in the direction of, first perhaps, a demythologised, 'trans-personal' being and then, finally, what has here been called 'Absolute Horizon' where all thought with its content (including personhood) silently expires. That, and nothing less, is the End (destination, but also termination; termination as destination) of all. That is where the current ultimately takes us. Teilhard knows of End as eternal crowning glory, but not as humble return to emptiness.

- Fourthly, concerning *the central position of the human being*. Central to Teilhard's thinking is the central position of the human being in the cosmic evolutionary process. Clearly, the Christian teaching of the Incarnation plays a vital role in his thinking (ibid.:321f.). According to Teilhard, the specific direction of cosmic evolution (geogenesis), extended and centred in biogenesis, has consciousness at its basis. Evolution is primarily psychical transformation. The progress of earth, life and consciousness has an essential

corollary in the progressive perfection of the brain as the sign and measurement of consciousness (the process of cephalisation, cerebralisation), in conjunction with other conditions, such as becoming biped. It finds its culmination in the human being. With the human being, consciousness, which was an essential factor from the start, becomes thought (*'pensée'*), which marks another irreversible qualitative crossing of a threshold, forward in the universal scheme of things, enabling the beginning of interior life. This step, the event of noogenesis (*'la noogénèse'*) outside and above the biosphere, transformed the entire structure of life, introducing another order of complexity altogether. Again, this is filled in with a wealth of scientific detail, now derived from Teilhard's own palaeontological knowledge and experience. Hominisation, introducing the noosphere (*'la noosphère'*), did not affect this species only, but marked a transformation affecting the entire planet. The earth finds its soul. At present (Teilhard writes in the late 1930s) a critical change in the noosphere is occurring. The discovery of evolution has made all the difference. In fact, 'man discovers that he is nothing else than evolution become conscious of itself' (ibid.:243). Not only conscious of it, but taking an active hand in shaping it (ibid.:274f.). Teilhard, while emphasising that the higher was in principle present in the lower from the beginning as its aim, nevertheless sees a straight arrow from matter to life, to consciousness and thought. His thought is much higher than his matter. This essay senses a stronger co-presence, equality, mutual inherence, of matter, life, and consciousness and thought, which allows humankind to be the intelligent servant of earth, first among equals. I find that Teilhard's theory disturbs this relationship, allowing insufficient room for the necessary strong criticism of humanity's de facto role today as a scourge on earth. Extending the Christian triumphalism discernible in this thinking, he preaches human triumphalism. In passing, one may wonder whether Teilhard could have been aware of the structural similarities of his thinking in this respect, with the thinking of his exact contemporary, the Hindu, Sri Aurobindo (see Ch. 21). A dialogue, teasingly attractive and possibly fruitful, passed Teilhard by. His predispositions may not have allowed him to indulge in an open dialogue with India. Yet, ironically, what he presented as pure Christianity seems to converge remarkably with this version of Hinduism.

- Fifthly, concerning his view of an *evolutionary, personalising All*. Teilhard's model unfolds a grand synthetic vision of all things, driven by the energy of love, coming together in a move towards even further transcendence. The present time witnesses a coalescence of things not possible before now, he argues. The roundness of the earth relentlessly brings about the confluence of thought, a concentration of the energies of consciousness. Humankind has become a single organised membrane over the earth, one great body in the process of being born. Achieving this megasynthesis, this gigantic psycho-biological operation, is the spring and secret of hominisation. There is

ever more complexity, ever more consciousness, having science as its crown (ibid.:274f.). Yet thinking has not completed the evolutionary cycle. More is to come. Where will it all end? In a sort of super-life (*'la survie'*), super-consciousness (*'super-conscience'*), a 'hyper personal' (*'hyper-personnel'*). Over against what he takes to be humankind's obsessive need to depersonalise, Teilhard argues for a hyper personalised God-in-All, the Omega Point, somewhere ahead, in which the Universal and the Personal will simultaneously culminate in each other. That is the theosphere (*'theospère'*), emerging from the noosphere, detaching itself from and soaring beyond earthly existence. It is the ultimate and final great mutation in the process of evolution. He sees that as an affirmation of the Christian belief in a personal God (ibid.:320f.). That great Presence is, he says, that which mystics have always sensed (ibid.:292f.). The universe personifies itself, becomes a focus of personal energies, but does not become a person (ibid.:293). It is the Great Stability (*'le Grand Stable'*), not at the bottom of things, but at the top, the 'Prime Mover ahead' (*'Premier Moteur en avant'*). Thus, the great escape from entropy is achieved. Earth will die, but 'man' will be extrapolated into a beyond. At last, the mind will be detached from matter, and will rest with all its weight on God-Omega (ibid.:316). Yet evil will somehow remain present in all of this, like summits are always accompanied by abysses.

It is time to stop this soaring flight. Teilhard appears to have crossed the border into wishful science fiction with a Christian flavour, and/or a Christian apologetic with a scientific dressing. He asks: '[/]s not the Christian faith destined, is it not preparing, to save and even to take the place of evolution?' (ibid.:326). Certainly, with his separation of mind from matter, his kind of anthropocentrism and his triumphalist Christianity, he has ventured into quagmires that this essay has throughout steadfastly refused to enter. Firstly, from the vantage point of our journey, Matter, Life, Love and Thought appear together from and disappear together into a dim and evanescent Extreme that this pilgrim on the journey cannot approach, but in the awareness of which his heart is filled with a sense of mystery and awe, and of which the stories told by religions may be beautiful and inspiring. Science has a lot of beauty and truth to offer this side of the Horizon; so do religions and art. The discourses of entropy and End may go hand in hand, but there is more than End: there is also Origin. This essay does not see a Great Stability, but a Great Emptiness from which relative continuities and identities flow, and to which they return. Secondly, in the drama of Cosmic unfolding and re-enfolding, the human being may be a bud for the better, from which a beautiful flower and a nutritious fruit may grow for Earth and, who knows, even beyond. To say more would be to say less. And thirdly, looking at the forest of human systems of meaning, observing a gestalt, one may of course appreciate one more than others, may nest in it and return to it every night, but no tree is singled out as the only one containing the fruit of truth; nor does one chop down other trees.

■ in lieu of a conclusion

In an imagined conversation of the sort pictured by Plato in his dialogues, participated in by men and women such as Lao-tzu and Chuang-Tzu, an anonymous Upanishadic visionary and Sankara, Siddhattha and Fa-tsang, Socrates and Plato, Jesus and Rumi, Hadewijch and Mira Bai, Rabe'a a al-Adawiya and Hildegard of Bingen and others, I do not imagine one claiming absolute power and exclusive truth. I imagine – and let that be the last word of this envisagement – such women and men to be clothed with quiet dignity and inner authority, conversing amicably and lightly in gentle voices, not triumphantly but selflessly, and between and in their words a noble, shared silence ...

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Glossary

acosmism	the view stripping the cosmos of value, perhaps even of reality
anthropomorphism	the ascription of human form to another kind of being, e.g. God
apophaticism	literally 'non-speaking'; a manner of speaking about God in which all attributes are negated/eliminated
atheism	the denial of the existence of God
deism	the rational acceptance of the existence of a God as Creator, not directly involved in the world
doxology	a formula in praise of God
dualism	the view that reality or an aspect of reality consists of two independent and irreconcilable principles, e.g. good and evil
entropy	a measure of the increasing disorganisation of the universe
epistemology	a view of the nature of knowledge
esoteric	knowledge available only to insiders
exoteric	knowledge available to all, insiders as well as outsiders
fideism	a view that knowledge depends on revelation and belief
gnostic	mystical, occult knowledge giving access to divine mysteries
henotheism	the focus one god, in the context of a belief in a plurality of gods
hermeneutics	the art and discipline of interpretation
homeostasis	the tendency towards equilibrium between diverse elements
homoversal	common to humankind as one species
hypostasis	underlying substance as distinguished from attributes
irenic-ironic	the combination of the realisation that things are not always what they seem to be, with the adoption of an attitude of tolerance and reconciliation
kataphaticism	highly affirmative speech about God and his attributes
liminal	threshold (experience or situation)
metatheism	openness to the notion that, behind anthropomorphic God, there are unfathomable depths
monism	the view that reality ultimately consists of one single substance only
nihilism	the view that all moral and religious views and principles in the final analysis, amount to or refer to nothing
ontology	a view of the nature of being
panentheism	the view that everything exists within divinity
panpsychism	the view that everything is ensouled
pantheism	the view that nature as a whole is divine
phenomenalism	the view that, although things are not created by our minds, our knowledge and experience of things are always constituted by the human mind

propaedeutic	giving preliminary, introductory instruction
solipsism	the view that the individual self is all that exists or can be known
sophiaphily	the love of wisdom
sublate	raised up, absorbed onto a higher level
syncretism	the facile mixing of various diverse systems of thought or religions
teleological	purpose-oriented rather than cause-oriented
theism	a belief in the existence of one or more gods; the belief in the existence of one, personal, revealed God
theodicy	justification of the existence of God, particularly in view of the reality of evil
theurgy	the art or practice of securing supernatural or divine agency

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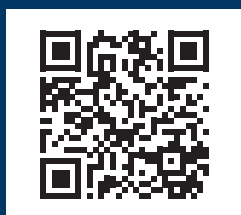
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Signposts to Silence provides a theoretical map of what it terms 'metaphysical mysticism': the search for the furthest, most inclusive horizon, the domain of silence that underlies the religious and metaphysical urge of humankind in its finest forms. Tracing the footsteps of pioneers of this exploration, the investigation also documents a number of historical pilgrimages from a variety of cultural and religious backgrounds. Such mountaineers of the spirit created paths trodden by groups of followers over centuries and in some cases millennia. This is a remarkable and significant book. It is simply written masterfully, covering an astounding transdisciplinary range. The profound meditative and mystical voyage that fundamentally forms the core of the book is highly appealing. Specifically gratifying is the manner in which the author succeeds to substantiate his view of the many-faceted discourses in the fields of philosophy and religious studies. The book is tied to known philosophical and theological premises. Yet, this is done in such a way that these foundational ideas are perused with genuine personalised authenticity. The effect is that the 'renovated' footing here becomes a paradigm in terms of which both acknowledged and reconstructed premises constitute a network for, and introduces 'renewed' discourse relevant to present-day science of religion. The construction of the author's reflexions, unpacked by concepts such as 'Witting', 'Wanting', 'Willing', 'Becoming', 'Can-ing', 'Conditioning', 'Singularising', 'Pluralising' and 'Totalising' is really astonishingly creative and engaging.

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This book is a major contribution to the field of mysticism, one to which scholars in this field will constantly refer. It contributes impressively to a 'universal *intelligentia spiritualis*'. The author transports the reader on a most remarkable journey exploring the 'winding paths of an ancient labyrinth' while discovering humanity's quest to find meaning and clarity within a 'homoversal community' and transcending the various epochs of human history. The peregrinations in the book take us into super-abundance, a wealth, a kaleidoscope, of deep enquiry and vast knowledge. Scholars in the field of science of religion are introduced to several leading figures within the sphere of metaphysical mysticism, who articulate the theoretical issues that are raised in the book. The different perspectives reflected upon and the extended conversations engaged in, witness to a plethora of information and in-depth scholarship and insight second to none.

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