THE METAPHYSICS OF EXPERIENCE

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by

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THE METAPHYSICS OF EXPERIENCE

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> 'Hold fast to that which has neither substance nor existence. Listen only to the voice which is soundless. Look only on that which is invisible alike to the inner and the outer sense. (*Light on the Path.*)

In an age when we are all apt to worship a new deity in the form of science, some apology would appear to be necessary for considering any aspect of such a subject as metaphysics. Why should we bother about any unknown quantity *x* when we have within the bracket of our mathematical formula symbols indicating all that we know or wish to know about the structure of the universe? Even the word metaphysics itself has an accidental origin, having reference to the writings of Aristotle that came after those dealing with physics. Of course, since his day, the word has taken on wider meanings, and today it is concerned largely with the search for the philosophical principles underlying the physical assumptions of science. In this sense, it deals with the ultimate conceptions that are contained in the special sciences, with the values that we seek to attach to our apprehension and comprehension of 'things in themselves', as Kant described the constituent elements of the real Universe. If we are to grasp reality as a whole we must inevitably consider this totality as a 'Universe of Experience', and thus, in the course of our inquiry, justify both metaphysics and experience, its field of operation. If Theosophy be thought of, not merely as a diagram, or even a communicated teaching, but chiefly as being of the nature of experience, we can see at once that we are dealing with matters of supreme importance in any consideration of life and its meaning.

We are encouraged in our concern with metaphysics in this scientific age by much that is happening in the world of modern physics. What is matter? It may be defined 'as the embodiment of three related physical quantities, mass, momentum, stress' (Eddington, *The Nature of the Physical World*, p. 262). But what are mass, momentum, stress? They are statements containing latencies and their derivatives. 'Electrical force is defined as something which causes motion of electrical charge; an electrical charge is something

which exerts electrical force' (ibid., p. 264). We have here a structure whose various parts are defined in terms of each other. Such a structure does not lend itself to a mechanical theory of the universe; but, like all the special sciences, physics itself is content with a symbolical interpretation of its discoveries. It does not presume to consider ultimate problems. Yet the very fact that it is able to deal with abstractions may suggest that there are originals behind this world of shadows, and may offer grounds for thinking that metaphysics could be vindicated as dispensing with symbols as ends in themselves, moving as it does into a region where conscious experience, considered as at once individual and universal, becomes something more than a generalisation of facts and emerges as what Henri Bergson has called 'integral experience'. Of the nature of such integral experience in the field of the higher mind we have an indication in Mozart's account of musical composition, taken from Holmes's *Life and Correspondence of Mozart* (London, 1845, pp. 317–8):

> 'When and how my ideas come I know not, nor can I force them. Those that please me I retain in my memory and am accustomed, as I have been told, to hum them to myself. If I continue in this way, it soon occurs to me how I may turn this or that morsel to account. . . . All this fires my soul, and, provided I am not disturbed, my subject enlarges itself, becomes methodical and defined, and the whole, though it be long, stands almost complete and finished in my mind, so that I can survey it like a fine picture or a beautiful statue at a glance. Nor do I hear in my imagination the parts successively, but I hear them as it were all at once. What a delight this is I cannot express. All this inventing, this producing, takes place in a pleasing, lively dream. But the actual hearing of the whole together is after all the best. And this is perhaps the best gift I have my Divine Master to thank for.'

That there is an antithesis between subject (e.g. Mozart's instantaneity of perception) and object (the recorded composition) is not in doubt, and that would seem to be true of all forms of experience. We can know a thing in different ways, by observation from outside or by entering into it. Modes of cognition are correlated to modes of experience. We can be spectator or participator, or both, so that even a fundamental antithesis is more apparent than real, for no vital

separation is ever revealed. However great our separative instincts in the worlds of knowledge and experience there is the urge to consider a pattern in which the relative aspects of an apparent duality are reconciled in an equally obvious unity. As Henry Thoreau (1817–62) said of art, our business in metaphysics is not so much to imitate nature as to recover that original of which nature itself is an image. With Mr. Aldous Huxley we recognise that knowledge is a function of being. Man as we know him is related to natural and spiritual forces by a specific activity known as experience, which has its source in a reciprocal relationship, an interdependence of inner forces and outer phenomena.

It is a truism that we learn by experience. It is not so clear how that transformation of the phenomena of activity into forms of knowledge is effected. In his continuing oscillation between appearance and reality man has created certain structures of knowledge generally classified as religion, philosophy and science, to the study of which the second Object of the Theosophical Society is devoted.

In his Gifford Lectures on Natural Religion, delivered at Edinburgh in 1901, and published under the title *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, William James summed up the characteristics of the religious life as including beliefs that the visible world is part of a more spiritual universe from which it draws its chief significance; that prayer or inner communication with the God or Law of this higher world is an active process with its due effects, psychological or material. He suggested that these characteristics gave a new zest to life, an assurance of safety, a temper of peace, and an affectionate relationship to others. Here we have an attitude to religion which may be deemed to be strictly pragmatic in the sense that religious truth is thought to be dependent always upon psychological conditions. The question for us is how far we are to adopt a method of judging conceptions, religious or otherwise, merely by their practical consequences. Is this a sufficient criterion of the truth or falsity of an idea? At this point it would seem important to inquire into the precise metaphysical significance of such a religious construction. The doctrine that our only test of religious truth is its practical results may be a half-way house between the religion of dogma and that of experience; but none the less it still keeps religious teaching within the narrow fence of 'rewards and penalties', a sad fate for an effort to present to a limited understanding spiritual truths whose actual

perception and comprehension await a future development of latent faculties. Obviously, we are here in the realm of ultimate values, governed by whatever theory of the universe we may entertain, and wherever such values are to be verified, metaphysical inquiry as to the content and implications of our conscious experience must be pursued. Certainly, we shall not subscribe to a view of religion based upon prudential considerations of a material or even psychological nature. Remember Thomas Carlyle's scathing description of some aspects of religion in his day:

> 'For the most part a wise, prudential feeling, grounded on mere calculation; a matter, as all others now are, of expediency and utility; whereby some smaller *quantum* of earthly enjoyment may be exchanged for a far larger *quantum* of celestial enjoyment. Thus religion, too, is profit, a working for wages; not reverence, but vulgar hope or fear' (quoted by H. P. Blavatsky, "Is Theosophy a Religion", *Lucifer*, November, 1888).

We shall agree that there is more truth in Tennyson's poetic treatment of the feeling aspect of the religious consciousness:

> 'I found Him not in world or sun,
> Or eagle's wing, or insect's eye;
> Nor through the questions men may try,
> The petty cobwebs we have spun:
>
> If e'er when faith had fall'n asleep,
> I heard a voice "believe no more",
> And heard an ever-breaking shore
> That tumbled in the Godless deep;
>
> A warmth within the breast would melt
> The freezing reason's colder part,
> And like a man in wrath the heart
> Stood up and answer'd "I have felt".'
>
> (*In Memoriam*, cxxiv.)

Just because of the intuitive insight belonging to the religious consciousness, we are left with a feeling of dissatisfaction when efforts are made to establish its truth on what are claimed to be rational grounds, including in this term self-regarding emotions.

That there are limitations in any pattern of religious experience must be acknowledged, for the experience has its own independent roots in the hidden depths of the spirit itself. In any apprehension of a reality beyond ourselves, we begin at least to recognise that appearances are deceptive only as we fail to interpret them as being significant elements in an integral conception of reality. It is here that we find the metaphysical basis for the sacramental life in religious experience. We move from ceremonies in the world of appearances to the growing reality in our inmost life of which they are the veil. As Bishop Wedgwood has pointed out, 'Ceremonies are not planned from a standpoint which sees the physical plane as the one reality; but they take into account the superphysical worlds and the working of natural forces in those worlds. Their aim is to lift us up into conscious communion with our Higher Self, and thus to make possible the recovery of the "Lost Word", the "Great Secret" of the Divinity hidden in the human heart' (*The Place of Ceremonies in the Spiritual Life*, 1927). Man, the interpreter of experience, is therefore the reconciler of appearance and reality. As he embodies progressively the Eternal Wisdom, he accepts as a fact in his religious thought, feeling, and activity, the innate possession of divine understanding, and at the same time the unfoldment of this divinity through personal effort and merit, using for this purpose a faculty of 'cognising the channel through which divine knowledge reaches the Ego' (*Buddhi* as the vehicle of *Atma*, in H. P. Blavatsky's definition). Here, in brief, is contained the metaphysics of the religious life and its goal, under whatever form it may be experienced:

> 'When *Buddhi* absorbs our egotism with all its *viharas* Avalokiteshvara becomes manifested to us and Nirvana or *Mukti* is reached' (*The Secret Doctrine*, Introductory).

We come now to another window through which the soul of man, from within its circle of appearances, looks out upon the world of the Real. Plato described the ideal philosopher as 'the spectator of all time and of all existence'. That which the philosopher sees in time and existence is a relationship of causes and effects, the general principles belonging to any department of knowledge. Historically, it may be said that there is no substantial evidence for the view held by many Western philosophers that reflection upon the true nature of existence started with the Ancient Greeks. Indeed, H. P. Blavatsky

goes so far as to say: 'It is difficult to find a single speculation in Western metaphysics which has not been anticipated by Archaic Eastern philosophy. From Kant to Herbert Spencer, it is all a more or less distorted echo of the Dwaita, Adwaita and Vedāntic doctrines generally' (*S.D.*, I, 79 f.n., orig. ed.). Where philosophical systems are not mere conjectures, they recognise, at least in part, that there is no arena other than experience in which we can exercise consciousness and furnish thought with standards of judgment. We must venture into the water before we can hope to swim! It is not necessary to assume that all knowledge is ultimately derivable from that type of experience which reaches us only through the physical senses (Locke, Berkeley, Hume), or that by the exercise of a faculty of reason operating in strict accordance with formulated laws of logic we can attain to a knowledge of truths which owe nothing to experience (Descartes, Spinoza, Leibnitz). We can raise with Kant an ultimate question—What does the experience of the world consist in and what are its implications? His answer was given in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781): 'Percepts without concepts are blind; concepts without percepts are empty', an echo of the doctrine of Self and Not-Self which is of the essence of all schools of Indian philosophy. Or with Hegel, we may conceive of the universe as incomplete unless we think of it in terms of spiritual beings united through their knowledge of each other in a relationship which can only be described as a state of existence far above the limitations of time and space as these appear to man. The unity of the whole expresses itself in the developing life of its parts. From this vantage point (as H. P. Blavatsky remarks, *S.D.*, I, 277) 'the whole order of nature evinces a progressive march towards a higher life. There is a design in the action of the seemingly blindest forces . . . what is called "unconscious Nature" is in reality an aggregate of forces manipulated by semi-intelligent beings (elementals) guided by High Planetary Spirits (Dhyan Chohans), whose collective aggregate forms the manifested *Verbum* of the unmanifested'.

To philosophise in this sense, as Henri Bergson reminds us, 'is to invert the habitual direction of thought'. H. P. Blavatsky's 'progressive march' is Bergson's 'reality', a reality 'that is external and yet given immediately to the mind. This reality is mobility'. He goes on to say: 'The inherent difficulties of metaphysics, the antinomies which it gives rise to, arise from our professing to reconstruct

reality—which is tendency and consequently mobility—with percepts and concepts whose function it is to make it stationary' (*An Introduction to Metaphysics*, pp. 56, 77). As we are reminded, however, by Shri Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gītā*—that ancient textbook of the metaphysics of experience—it is only 'the disciplined self' able to pursue a course among sense objects 'with senses free from attraction and repulsion' which is able to solve the mystery of action and non-action, of the changing and the changeless. That is why it has been said that the chief aim of philosophy is to put an end to pain. But that can only be achieved when we see that philosophy, no less than religion, is for ever seeking to evaluate the permanent elements in our experience. That search is the concern of metaphysics, which is engaged in discerning the process by which the universal acquired particularity, and the particular is merged into the universal. For this reason, among others, Plato has a closer affinity perhaps to the student of esotericism than any of his successors. In his view, philosophy is 'a way of life', a discipline for character no less than for the intelligence disturbed by conflicting perceptions, each carrying its own apparent authority. For in the process of this inquiry into the nature of reality, the searcher is as important as the search, and his own nature must have some congruity with the Reality to which he aspires. Innate divinity must find a true ground for its disposition in manifest inclination and temperament. In this connection, Prof. G. C. Field has drawn attention to two main elements in Plato's teaching (*The Philosophy of Plato*, O.U.P., 1939). There is needed a sense of our own insignificance and the unimportance of our personal needs and desires. At the same time, in this humility there must be a sense of dedication—'by the conduct of our own lives we are taking part in a great enterprise, in which the soul throughout the whole universe is engaged. And we must keep alive the feeling of this in everything that we do' (ibid., p. 158). Here is the essence of philosophical experience as seen by this father of European wisdom. In it is a 'katharsis', a sacrificial purgation and purification, in the language of the *Phaedo*, a kind of dying to the affections of the mortal so that what Plato calls a sufficient prayer may be fulfilled, and we are 'born again in beauty inwardly'. To this end, we must be delivered from the 'cave' of error and confusion. This can only come about by a recognition of those elements in our conscious development which most contribute to the apprehension of the Real.

For Plato, the process of reaching the principle of unified experience which we may call the spirit in man, is by an act of recollection. That principle is implanted already in our 'inward parts' and we have only to recognise it as the kinship of our true nature with the supreme reality. Behind the shadows of earth we are to see the eternal spiritual realities, and to determine our life by their light. To succeed in this task we must first be convinced that 'truth is beautiful and enduring' (*Laws*, 664), and that 'the noblest of all studies is the study of what man should be and what he should pursue' (*Gorgias*, 487). In this sentence is implied a discussion of the nature and meaning of a moral discipline. The enduring Truth, the highest Good, are to be the supreme object both of the knowledge and the striving of the just soul—'just' in so far as it understands the ends for which the good life exists for the community no less than for the individual. In all this, much depends upon the attitude of the seeker, and here comes in the question of the interpretation of that type of conscious experience which leads us to try and find a meaning in the whole evolutionary process. We know from an examination of our own field of consciousness, with its generally acknowledged aspects of Will, Knowing and Feeling, that there is always some capacity in consciousness which affects our immediate consciousness pleasurably or otherwise, and that this reaction produces a growth or retardation in the original content. In action and reaction at the level of sense perception or conception, there is bound to be some rudimentary or advanced unity of consciousness if only for the reason that we are affected and respond (and this applies to all living organisms) in the totality of our being, however much we may divide and sub-divide for purposes of analysis. In other words, what determines the nature of our experience, whether it is to be pleasant or disagreeable, fruitful or negative, are our distinctive qualities or traits, and those are determined by our position in the space-time structure of our particular universe, where we stand in the evolutionary process, and what are the determining factors in our past, present and future. This is the content of the philosophical doctrine of *Dharma*, defined by Annie Besant as 'the inner nature of a thing at any given stage of evolution, and the law of the next stage of its unfolding', than which there is no higher religion, according to the motto of the Theosophical Society.

The knowledge of this 'total being' is reached by a discipline of what Plato calls 'the irrational nature', culminating in a dialectic

which reveals the true character of the good. When we think of a righteous man, he is in the Platonic view one who is able to maintain harmony and due subordination between the various functions of the soul. He embodies the principle of justice, the Platonic equivalent of *Dharma*. The path of action is mysterious because we are ignorant of our true nature and find ourselves unable or unwilling to relate it to the small scale of our individual experience. We suffer evils but they are not peculiar to us as individuals; we experience good, but it is only good as it is shared with others. To understand ourselves in the light of the Eternal Wisdom, and to observe the significance of our varied experience as disclosed by the sense of our interdependence with all living things is to illuminate the whole field of that knowledge which shall make us free. In the words of the *Vishnu Purana* (I, xix, 9): 'The wise ones embrace all within their love and devote themselves to the good of all equally, for they know well that the Lord is in, and indeed is, all beings'.

Turning now to the field of methodical knowledge which we call science, as soon as we begin to think about the world of our perceptions in any systematic way, and of our part in its growth, we are inevitably forced to entertain such ideas as Substance, Cause, Number, Form, Force, Development, and so on. The efforts of the special sciences are directed towards the classification of facts, the establishment of their proper sequence and relative significance, and the formation of a judgment based upon the facts. But underlying these special tasks there is the fundamental postulate of the Uniformity of Nature, and in arriving at such an assumption we use generalisations, and have to ask ourselves what mode of constructive activity is involved in the building up of our experience of relating objects or ideas as parts of a larger whole, as for instance the facts of geology and biology as aspects of the evolutionary process in its physical aspect, or of the ideas of Reincarnation and Karma as phases in the life of the soul when immersed in the world of appearances. We are living in an era of the most formidable applications of science to the history of mankind. So powerful has been the impact of scientific theory and practice upon the contemporary scene that many have been led to believe that no bounds can or should be placed upon scientific method or technological advance. We are concerned here with the attempt at completeness and systematic order involved in any extension of scientific knowledge, rather than with the applica-

tions of that knowledge to our social experience, and we have to ask ourselves if there be any limitation to the scientific account of things. When we find that modern science views matter as infinitely attenuated and elusive, and describes it as a 'hump in Space-Time', or 'a mush of electricity', or a 'wave of probability undulating into nothingness', we cannot help wondering if these are anything but projections of the consciousness of the perceivers, or where science ends and metaphysics begins. If the formulating of experience be thought of as commencing with the sciences and their descriptions and objective systematisations, in the end we are driven to an inner world of conscious activity. For example, it has been pointed out more than once that while we know that oxygen and hydrogen unite under certain conditions to give something qualitatively different from either of these gases, namely water, we have nothing to show why it is that water results. The conditions of the combination may be known but we are left guessing how the result should be as it is. A simple illustration, but profound in its significance as pointing to the hypothetical nature of scientific interpretations of natural phenomena whenever interpretation succeeds description. As A. N. Whitehead has conceded: 'Scientific thinking is a *way* of thinking rather than a description of ultimate reality.' When we say that primitive amœbæ give rise 'in the natural course of events' to higher organisms, we are involved in a highly speculative construction of a thought-model of microscopic masses of protoplasm possessing latent experience in the form of a promise and potency of a mammal which would have the capacity to theorise about it all! But to say that science presents us with unsolved problems is not to detract from its many achievements in organising a knowledge of the world and of ourselves who live in it. Although the word 'scientist' was coined in the year 1840, the need of an experimental method in its modern form began to be argued in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. But it was the Franciscan Friar Roger Bacon in the thirteenth century who dreamed of 'an enlarged and renovated catholicism which should bind together and incorporate all that was best and noblest in Hebrew, Greek and Arabic tradition' (*Roger Bacon*, J. H. Bridges, M.B., F.R.C.P., 1914), and who laid the philosophical foundations of science by his conviction that men must search freely for themselves and take nothing on trust. Bacon was condemned to silence, and freedom of thought thus hindered for centuries. In the course of the

centuries since experimental science has dominated human thought by its quantitative conceptions, the number and complexity of the observed facts have increased enormously. With this extension, however, there has been evident a tendency towards discovering links and identities between phenomena hitherto regarded as separate, and all the developed sciences are disposed to adopt mathematical methods of study, a unifying experience in precision. The spectroscope brought sun, stars and planets into one chemical system, and there is seen a similarity in the structure of all the known universe. The phenomena of light, heat, electricity and magnetism have been reduced to types of wave motion and brought under a single scheme of thought, expressed in differential equations. On the always vexed question of the gulf between animate and inanimate we have the fact that modern matter is indistinguishable from energy, and that the physical atom is inferred from disturbances taking place in its locality. These things give substance to the hypothesis that most, if not all, of the phenomena we observe may be merely symbols of a reality which underlies them. Logically, therefore, the distinction between the living and assumed non-living world disappears, and we are left with a sense of mobility, of changing states, a metaphysical conception (as Bergson puts it) of 'a living and therefore still moving eternity, in which our own particular duration would be included as the vibrations are in light; an eternity which would be the concentration of all duration, as materiality is its dispersion. Between these two extreme limits intuition moves, and this movement is the very essence of metaphysics'. We are reminded of H. P. Blavatsky's dictum on the phrase 'unconscious Nature':

> 'Nature taken in its abstract sense *cannot* be "unconscious", as it is the emanation from, and thus an aspect (on the manifested plane) of the Absolute Consciousness. Where is that daring man who would presume to deny to vegetation and even to minerals *a consciousness of their own?* All he can say is that the consciousness is beyond his comprehension.' (*S.D.*, I, 277 f.n.)

From every point of view, therefore, experience is leading to metaphysical conclusions so far as scientific thought is concerned. The quality of life itself consists largely in a certain unity of action. In evolutionary theory it is realised that Darwin gave no real answer to the question of what caused the variations by means of which

living species change, new species arise, and man himself becomes an end product. It is a truism of the biological sciences that function anticipates organisation, but the complete order of creation would seem to require another element of a psychological nature. External conditions as the sole factor in variation is no longer a tenable hypothesis, though they may be seen as secondary causes. There is needed an acknowledgment of an inner law of growth. As *The Secret Doctrine* (II, 649) points out:

> 'Mere variability of type, apart from the supervisory presence of a quasi-intelligent impulse, is powerless to account for the stupendous complexities and marvels of the human body, for instance . . . the differentiating "causes" known to Modern Science only come into operation *after the physicalisation of the primeval root-types out of the astral.*'

And then H.P.B. in a foot-note mentions Nazeli's 'principle of perfectibility', von de Baer's 'striving towards the purpose', Braun's 'divine breath as the inward impulse in the evolutionary history of nature', Prof. Owen's 'tendency to perfectibility' and similar phrases as all indicating 'veiled manifestations of the universal guiding *Fohat*, rich with the Divine and *Dhyan-Chohanic* thought'. Metaphysically we may say that the final cause, the immediate cause and the original impulse are one. We assemble the chain of causation immediately we enter into manifestation; but the significance of the evolutionary process may only be evaluated when the final goal is reached. If we are to evaluate the human stage in this long journey we have to view it from the *Asekha* level, the summation and resolution of the 'pairs of opposites' that characterise the play of consciousness in our common humanity. The metaphysical meaning of each kingdom of nature is to be discovered, relatively speaking, in its successor. If we may quote the famous poem *Omar Khayam:*

> 'Yea, the first morning of Creation wrote
> What the Last Dawn of Reckoning shall read.'

Because we do not fully understand this law of growth, we feel a sense of inadequacy in face of undoubted evil. Perhaps we are too easily influenced by some of the assumptions of modern science in its more materialistic form, such as that physical matter is the only form of reality, that the mechanical is the only kind of law and that

evolution is an automatically determined process and life an incidental product. The newer view that matter is a modification of Space-Time, that there is a continuity of physical processes, not separate incidents, and that all is causally related in a flowing reality—this conception will aid us in recognising that the idea of reality in face of a world of appearances is the idea of perfect harmony, and that if contradictions occur in the limited experience of our lives they are commensurate with the degree of our proximity to or remoteness from our realisation of the One Self in ourselves and in the world.

We need a new Science of Man; but not one such as that envisaged by a speaker at the 1949 Convocation of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, who recognised with apparent enjoyment 'our approaching scientific ability to control men's thoughts with precision!' No wonder Sir Winston Churchill, who was present at the time, remarked in reply that he would 'be very content to be dead before that happens!' We shall have to revise our notions of the body-mind relationship. Without going into the various theories which endeavour to account for the interaction between mind and body it will suffice here to say with the German psychologist Driesch that 'organic processes involve some undefined factor which cannot be described in terms of physics or chemistry' (*The Crisis in Psychology*, Princeton Lectures, 1925). There are always difficulties in a dualistic view of evolution, and that fact applies to both the life-matter problem and the body-mind relationship. When we have rung all the changes on psycho-physical parallelism, with its invariable accompaniment of mental by bodily events under the aegis of some benevolent Deity, or on the epiphenomenal theory of mind which thinks of it as a by-product of the operation of material processes, or on the doctrine of emergence which suggests that a new 'entity' arises over and above the sum of two or more constituents, we are still left with the feeling that life is more dynamic and spontaneous than is suggested by examination separately of its differing elements. Experience bears out a metaphysical interpretation of our dilemma. Bernard Bosanquet has pointed out that our tendency to assign an exclusive automatism to the physical in contrast to design for the purely physical series of being breaks down when we see that 'adjustments of quite the same character that would be made by reflection can be made under automatic habit', if only for the reason that 'variation according to the stimulus can itself pass into adaptation'. And, as he further

suggests, there is a meaning in any material system in so far as 'a complete reaction, involving the nature of the system as a whole, follows upon a simple stimulus' (*The Principle of Individuality and Value*, Gifford Lectures, 1912). In all these somewhat challenging circumstances we do well to accept the Theosophical explanation of differing levels of consciousness working through appropriate bodies of matter of varying densities and, so far as the physical body and mind relationship itself is concerned, to acknowledge the force of the explanation given by Annie Besant:

> 'It is by means of the etheric double that the life-force, Prāna, runs along the nerves of the body and thus enables them to act as the carriers of motor force and of sensitiveness to external impacts. The powers of thought, of movement, and of feeling are not resident in physical or etheric nerve-substance; they are activities of the Ego working in his inner bodies, and the expression of them on the physical plane is rendered possible by the life-breath as it runs along the nerve-threads and round the nerve-cells; for Prāna, the life-breath, is the active energy of the Self, as Shri Shankarāchārya has taught us. The function of the etheric double is to serve as the physical medium for this energy, and hence it is often spoken of in our literature as the "vehicle of Praña".' (*Man and his Bodies*, 3rd ed., 1905.)

On the vexed question of abnormal physical phenomena for which dualistic theories afford such a favourite philosophical ground, we may rest assured that the evidence for these experiences will always prove inadequate unless the general nature of Theosophical teachings be accepted as a reasonable hypothesis for all the many manifestations of consciousness whether these be thought of as normal or abnormal. To understand the principles of natural law and experience (the metaphysics of Nature), H.P.B. invited the readers of her first work to keep in mind what she described as the fundamental propositions of the Esoteric philosophy. Among these are (*a*) that there is no such thing as miracle; everything that happens is the result of eternal and immutable law; (*b*) that Nature is triune: an objective nature, an energising nature, vital principle of the first, and a spiritual nature, source of all forces and indestructible; (*c*) that man also is triune; (*d*) that magic in its true sense and as a science is a knowledge of the way by which the omniscience and omnipotence of the spirit

and its control over nature's forces may be acquired by the individual while still in the body; as an Art, magic is the application of this knowledge in practice; (*e*) that arcane knowledge misapplied is sorcery and where beneficently used is Wisdom; (*f*) all things, past, present and future, have their record upon the 'astral light', and the Adept can read the record; (*g*) that races of men differ in spiritual gifts, among some seership naturally prevails, among others, mediumship (*Isis Unveiled*, II, 586–7, 1877). We may be forgiven for recalling these propositions, which adumbrate the fundamentals of *The Secret Doctrine* (I, Proem), and which in their personal application cover most of the issues raised in physical research, as in the many schools of more conventional psychological theory and practice, including the picture of the human personality offered by the three main trends of analytical psychology. Common to all psycho-analytical theories is the emphasis on the unconscious factors in the human *psyche*, just as in psychical research the term 'subliminal self' has come to mean that part of a human being which is neither material body nor conscious mind. The thrust of psychic energy is held by Freud to direct itself chiefly through sexual channels, by Adler as flowing from all the power instincts and coloured by them, and in the case of Jung there is a reference to racial experience and a conception of archetypal trends that has some correspondence with the *élan vital* of Bergson. From a metaphysical point of view, the concern with these conceptions arises from their implications in relation to an interpretation of our total experience. It may be that the modern fashionable interest in psychological theories of the 'unconscious' and the 'subliminal' is due to the fact that we are living in an Age of Anxiety in which we accept as an axiom that exact experimental science has nothing to do with virtue or philanthropy in their deepest sense and, as a consequence, we have tended to visualise a human being as the product of forces outside his control. As has been remarked wittily by an American writer: 'The dominance of the unconscious motive has made it useless for us even to attempt to follow the ancient injunction, Know Thyself—at least without the aid of experts hired to know ourselves for us!'. (J. W. Krutch, *The Measure of Man*, 1956.) The danger is that these partial views of man and his nature drive us into a dogma of exculpation which determines that we are incapable of choice or of any autonomous activity. Personality is thought of not as a continuing entity but as a series of psychological states consisting of

responses to stimuli conditioned by the nature of past reactions. On this basis we can dispense with the notion of consciousness. This is far removed from Sir Julian Huxley's view that 'mind is not a pale epiphenomenon, not a mere 'ghost in the machine', to use Prof. Ryle's phrase, but an *operative* part of life's mechanism. . . . For a biologist, much the easiest way is to think of mind and matter as two aspects of a single underlying reality—shall we call it world substance?' And he goes on to say: 'The miracle of mind is that it can transmute quantity into quality' (*Evolution in Action*, quoted by J. W. Krutch, ibid.). It is this subject of quality or value that is of supreme importance in any discussion of the metaphysics of experience. Its significance lies in the fact that it leads to a hypothesis that the universe may possess a value greater than any that we can formulate at our present stage of evolution, and contains an element of perfectibility, evidenced by our feeling of dissatisfaction with things as they are. Our very lack of integrated experience compels us sooner or later to find a transcendental order which explains the world of appearances. In this bold expedition into the unknown it is the whole spiritual nature of man that counts, and of the explorers it may be said: 'They shall adore those who do not hear; they shall burn lamps before those who do not see' (Dmitri Merejkovski, *The Forerunner*, Eng. trans., 1902), for they know that one day all shall hear and all shall see.

For the student of Theosophy experience of the outer and inner truths of existence conducts him to an allegiance to the integrating principle of the universe. In that pledge he submits his personality to a de-conditioning process by subscribing in due time to the three declared Objects of the Theosophical Society and so enters upon the task of removing from his conscious or unconscious experience those elements in his relationships with his fellows, in his cultural life, and in his approach to Nature and her laws, which make for separateness. Henceforth, there is for him the supreme task of furnishing, in co-operation with his colleagues and under the aegis of the true Founders of the Society, 'a needed universal religious philosophy, one impregnable to scientific assault, because itself the finality of absolute science, and a religion that is indeed worthy of the name, since it includes the relations of man physical to man psychical, and of the two to all that is above and below them' (Mahatma K. H. to A. P. Sinnett, 1880). This is not the work of a day, but of centuries of

growth, and one in which, as we have been told, 'the whole nature of man must be used wisely'. The greater Oneness that is sought will not be found unless we experience the unity of our own nature, and our intimate kinship with all living things. We must discard the idea of evolution to which Immanuel Kant called attention when he said that in many minds it was 'merely a very long ladder created by man for the purpose of placing himself on its highest rung!' Remembering that there are more than 25,000 different kinds of native land and fresh-water animals in Britain, and probably more than one million species of animals in the whole world, not to mention the immense variety of life in other kingdoms of nature, we should do well to formulate a good case for conserving and protecting the variety of nature. The scientific grounds for so doing were put succinctly by Dr. Charles Elton, F.R.S., Reader in Animal Ecology, Oxford University: 'Because it is a right relation between man and living things, because it gives opportunity for richer experience, and because it tends to promote ecological stability.' This does not (he adds) exclude a fourth point of view—an attempt to harmonise divergent attitudes. 'Unless one merely thinks man was intended to be an all-conquering and sterilising power in the world, there must be some general basis for understanding what it is best to do. This means looking for some wise principle of co-existence between man and nature' (*The Listener*, B.B.C., March/April, 1957). If we are aiming at a certain perfection of the soul in a life that has some degree of completeness, we cannot entertain the idea of priorities in the field of altruism, as some have supposed. The advance to an enlightened brotherhood must be on all fronts, and we have to extend a friendly hand to those who may be working in another sphere of benevolence. The grand strategy of Theosophical effort demands that we perpetually broaden our views and deepen our sympathies. While remaining an optimist with regard to consummations, the world's sorrow in all nature's kingdoms must find an echo in the heart of the disciple, and our circle of compassion must ever be extending its circumference. The area of experience with which Theosophical studies concern themselves are those which involve consciousness rather than mere patterns of reactive behaviour on the one hand, or, on the other, those impersonal forces which are thought by science to determine those forms. Hence the importance from our point of view of value judgments arising from our organised ex-

perience in the life of Theosophy. We believe that human beings are capable of insight and action beyond the normal capacities of the average individual, and, because we so affirm, we enter upon a conscious evolution where there is no break in the continuity from atom to highest divinity. Even though we feel that the Play of Life is already written by an Unknown Author, we may also realise that we all have our individual parts to learn, and in the learning, our own interpretation of the various characters is of infinite importance in bringing the Play to a satisfactory conclusion. Or, to vary the metaphor, we are very much in the position of judges who make new law in the very act of interpreting the old. Values, therefore, are the very texture of understanding ourselves and the world in which we live, and is not understanding the veritable soul of experience? This much at least we may say, until such time as the spiritual experience of one of the Great Initiations polarises our mental and causal vehicles, and the help we have received from our adjustments in the fields of 'trial and error' has given place to self-evident truths that are the fruit of an ever-growing vision of Reality. Try as we may, we cannot rid ourselves of the burden of existence. If there is to be freedom we shall find it in doing the work of the world in a disinterested spirit, remembering that transfiguration is the very law of our being. The sense of separateness is indefatigable in its illusory quality. That is why we are bidden by all philosophy worthy of the name to have regard to the fact that there are 'divine originals' of the imperfect shadows amidst which we move. We go towards reality not by choosing between matter and spirit considered as unlike in every respect, but rather by seeing in things material a formal likeness to spiritual prototypes of which the physical senses give no direct report. In terms of human experience this is to realise that the command to love our neighbour (in any of Nature's kingdoms) as ourselves is given because in reality our neighbour *is* ourselves. 'Remember', says *Light on the Path*, 'that the sin and shame of the world are your sin and shame; for you are a part of it. . . . And before you can attain knowledge you must have passed through all places, foul and clean alike.' As we grow in the knowledge of the Real, our responsibilities increase, and, it is to be hoped, our inveterate tendency to self-righteousness and self-complacency diminishes! Our judgments of value therefore must have in them nothing of self-interest, however disguised. They have to be based upon a perception which is pure in its essence. In a sense we

have to cultivate the imagination of the artist in his own particular field of activity. 'The pure artist who works for the love of his work is sometimes more firmly planted on the right road than the Occultist who fancies he has removed his interest from self, but who has in reality only enlarged the limits of experience and desire' (*Light on the Path*). The artist's true home is in the creative imagination which uncovers the reality masked by visible things. He does not so much enlarge the limits of experience as deepen them, urged on by a sense of the unity of familiar things, the shapes and fashions of which disclose to his inspired insight unseen forces at work. For William Blake, poet and artist, this transcendent state of conscious experience was 'eternity', and his vision was possessed by a deep certainty:

> 'To see a World in a Grain of Sand
> And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,
> Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
> And Eternity in an hour.'
> (*Auguries of Innocence.*)

We are reminded of H.P.B.'s dictum that it is the intellectual plus the spiritual that raises man, and that 'it is the Adept's purity, his equal love to all, his working with Nature, with Karma, with his "inner God", that gives him his power'.

Religionist, philosopher, scientist, artist, the would-be occultist, we all come ultimately to the problem of truth—by what criterion can we test the agreement of our life with reality. The answer will accord with our inner nature and the degree of its development, and with the path which we are treading. But common to all our approaches will be the ineluctable fact of our experience in this and other worlds of consciousness. That experience embraces past and future and distant realms, all brought to a focus in a present moment of perception. We have arrived at the view that experience is an organic whole, in which each part has value only in the light of all the rest. The element of contingency which appears to mar what otherwise we would like to think of as a coherent and intelligible universe, and the intrusion of evil into 'the goodness of Providence', both these formidable difficulties are due, it may be suggested, to our failure to recognise that for any perception of the truth of existence, the whole nature of man has to be engaged in a moment of vision. These problems arise from a faulty sense of perspective. We are apt to see things from an acute

angle instead of 'face to face', and we are left wondering at the distortions that meet our gaze. We are sometimes aware of this deficiency when we inhibit the ordinary flow of thought and feeling, and from the inner resources of our being are able to affirm that we can experience a reality whose source is not in human reason, and that possesses its own spiritual values, even though we may not have invented a mechanism or a formula for their assessment. In that reality is implicit always the possibility of 'the differentiation of the Homogeneous into the Heterogeneous, of the unit into plurality', in which H.P.B., in common with Indian metaphysics, placed the root of Evil, and, we may add, the emergence of the contingent in any evolutionary process. We must regain our oneness with a living universe that we might be partakers of the Divine Nature. As students of the Esoteric Philosophy, we must perforce follow the ideal of pure knowledge by seeing things as they are, not as we presume them to be. We talk much of freedom; but how many of us are even prepared to exercise the power of a distinterested play of consciousness upon our stock notions and habits? We have all suffered what St. Thomas Aquinas calls 'a wounding of nature', and possibly the process of individualisation, in its true sense, has not yet been completed for us and will not be until its fulfilment in the Perfect Man. Meanwhile, we are embarked upon a process of self-realisation which carries a two-fold meaning. 'It means', remarks Dr. J. A. Hadfield, 'that we recognise and realise what we are. It also means the realisation or attainment of the full and complete self which it is our purpose, like that of every organism, to achieve by the pursuit of a great ideal' (*Psychology and Morals*, 1949). That ideal for those who are attracted to the Theosophical philosophy, is the Perfect Man, exemplified for us in those Elder Brothers to whom we are indebted for the re-proclamation of the Eternal Wisdom in the modern world. Here is the ultimate metaphysics of human experience. Long ago, Mohini Chatterjee pointed out that the Esoteric doctrine 'teaches with special emphasis that there must exist at every moment of the history of human evolution a class of men in whom consciousness attains such an expansion in both depth and area as to enable them to solve the problems of being by direct perception and therefore with far more certainty and completeness than the rest of mankind' (London Lodge, *Transactions*, 1895, article, 'The Theosophical Movement'). Our bond of union and brotherhood encompasses both the heights and depths

of the evolutionary process, and the unity of life and nature are derivative from the Light of the Logos. The brotherhood of this holy communion which nothing can mar is the Holy Spirit, 'the veil or the body of the Logos, and hence its flesh and blood', as Swami Subba Rao pointed out in writing of the Brotherhood of Adepts (*A Collection of Esoteric Writings*, Bombay, 1895). By being brought into communion with the spiritual force generated by the Great Brotherhood, the Theosophical Society and its members have the potentiality of a dynamic experience, to participate in the work of that Fraternity for the regeneration of the world.

How can the potential become the actual? The truth of the answer lies in the nature of the soul of man and in the experience of its pilgrimage through the inner and outer worlds of its being. For the influences that might transform the world, not merely bring about changes in it, are all Egoic in their nature and quality. Only at the Egoic level are we able to assess truly all the elements in causation and to find the roots of the service we seek to perform in our personal lives, for only then do we know the rightful ends we are to pursue. Then for us all lesser conflicts and freedoms pass away, and there is no longer any feeling of constraint, for we have entered into a partnership of joyful service, and we realise that Brotherhood is at the heart of all true knowledge. For us, too, as for the neophyte in *The Idyll of the White Lotus*, it will be true that a cry has sounded through the world, and we shall say to all those who journey with us in the great quest:

> 'Life has in it more than the imagination of man can conceive. Seize boldly upon its mystery, and demand, in the obscure places of your own soul, light with which to illumine those dim recesses of individuality to which you have been blinded through a thousand existences.'

Peace to all Beings.

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