

BESHARA

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SPRING 1988

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ROBERT MULLER the United Nations
BRIAN KEEBLE the Poetry of Vernon Watkins

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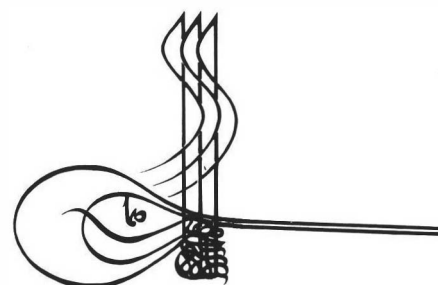
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News



The Holy Trinity Monastery of St Sergius at Zagorsk. Courtesy of Keston College

1000 Years of Christianity in Russia

In 1988, millions of Christians in the USSR and throughout the world will celebrate the thousandth anniversary of the baptism of Grand Prince Vladimir of Kiev – an act symbolic of the beginnings of Christianity in Russia.

Vladimir ('The Saintly') was prince of the medieval Slavic state of Rus to which three modern states – Russia, Ukraine and Byelorussia – trace their history. The story of his conversion is recounted by the monk Nestor of Kiev (late 11th century) in his celebrated Chronicle. He tells how the prince, wishing to choose a religion, invited delegations from the religions of all his neighbouring peoples and how, consequently, representatives from Islam, the Latin Christians, the Jews and a 'Greek Philosopher' travelled to Kiev to state their case.

When they had returned home, Vladimir retired to reflect on all that he had heard, then sent out embassies to inquire how the Muslims and the Christians prayed. Unimpressed by the worship of Islam and the Latin Christians, the embassy eventually visited Constantinople, where they witnessed a service in the great church of the Hagia Sophia.

There, they were overwhelmed by the splendour of the Divine Liturgy, and reported, on their return, that they knew not if they were "*In heaven or on earth, for on earth there is no such splendour or beauty to equal this and we are at a loss how to*

describe it. We know only that God dwells there among men...".

So it was that Vladimir decided to be baptised into the Greek Orthodox church. Shortly afterwards, his choice was verified by a miraculous event. He went to war, and on capturing the Greek town of Chersonese in Crimea, demanded of the Byzantine Emperors' the hand of their sister, Anne, in marriage. Whilst waiting for his bride to arrive, he became blind, but his sight was miraculously restored on his baptism by the bishop of Chersonese. Completely converted, he returned to Kiev with his new wife and commanded that the pagan idols should be destroyed and that the entire population should be baptised in the Dnieper.

This legend, which is clearly based on historical fact (although the date of 888 is only approximate), contains a number of elements which have remained dear to the Russian church to this day; the deliberate choice of Orthodox Christianity, the importance of prayer and the emphasis on the beauty of the liturgy.

Through Rus, Christianity spread to other nations in Eastern Europe, and beyond, as far as the northern territories of the Asian continent. After the fall of Constantinople in 1453, Russia became the last major independent Orthodox State and, regarding Moscow as the 'Third Rome', saw it as

her duty to protect the Christian faith and the Orthodox tradition. The power and influence of the Church grew and in 1589 it was able to declare itself a patriarchate. The 19th and early 20th centuries especially saw a great flowering – both in terms of territorial expansion, with missionaries reaching Siberia, Alaska, California and Japan, and in the development of Russian spirituality through exponents such as Saint Seraphim of Sarov and Saint Tikhon of Zadonsk.

The revolution of 1917 saw the radical separation of Church and State and harsh suppression of religious practices, with the closure of the majority of churches, monasteries and schools. The official teaching in schools condemned the role of the Church in history and encouraged atheism. Interestingly, the emigration of many Russians during this period contributed to an increasing awareness of Russian Orthodox spirituality in the West, including the art of icon painting which, derived originally from Byzantium, has survived as a living tradition in Russia.

The position of the Church began to improve after the second world war, and in 1943 the election of a patriarch was once again allowed. Soviet citizens are guaranteed freedom of conscience under article 52 of the Constitution, but many activities, such as propagating or teaching religion, are still forbidden. The official endorsement of the Millennium celebra-

tions marks a further change of attitude. The policies of *glasnost* and *perestroika* have given impetus to tolerance (the peace-making role of the church is much emphasised) and new legislation, which will substantially improve religious freedoms, is expected this year (1).

Details of the celebrations themselves have only been partially made known. Announcements have indicated that there will be a special *Sabor* (meeting of the Church's national council) in early June at the Holy Trinity Monastery of St Sergius at Zagorsk. This, only the third since the revolution and the first since 1917 which is not concerned with the election of a new Patriarch, will include discussion on foreign relations, peace-making efforts, publishing and the canonisation of saints.

The Sabor will be preceded by a liturgy in the patriarchal cathedral of the Epiphany in Moscow on June 5th. On 10th and 12th June there will be official celebrations, to which foreign guests are invited, in the Cathedral of the Resurrection in the Danilov Monastery in Moscow, and also in Kiev, Leningrad, Vladimir and other cities. Jubilee services and meetings will also be held in all the dioceses and parishes.

The Millenium coincides with what seems to be a religious revival in Russia, which has been quietly happening for the past ten or twenty years and gaining momentum. Many people educated as militant atheists – including large numbers of *intelligentsia* and young people – are turning spontaneously to spirituality, particularly in the form of the Orthodox church. Their feelings are expressed by the writer Tatyana Goricheva, a recent convert, who writes (2), "*I was born in a land from which the traditional values of culture, religion and morality had been deliberately and successfully erased; I was on a journey from nowhere to nowhere.*" The poet Yuri Kublanovsky has recently been quoted (3) as saying, "*Our society is becoming more mature, more intelligent and simply more spiritual by comparison to what it was in the 1960's and 1970's. I can speak of a real religious rebirth which is taking place not at all at the level at which it is often imagined. It is deep-seated; it does not advertise. It is to be found in the potential readiness to sacrifice, in honesty above reproach ... in the*



The Virgin of Vladimir. Known as 'Our Lady of Tenderness', this famous icon was commissioned from an unknown artist in Constantinople by Prince Izyaslov of Kiev around 1132. Now kept in the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow, it has exercised a powerful influence over Russian icon painters and the greatest of them, including Andrei Rublev, have produced their own versions of it.

upbringing of children, in prayers for those who have died for the Fatherland."

The emphasis seems to be on a life of simplicity and sacrifice, and there is a large new entry into the priesthood and the monasteries. Churches and monasteries which have been closed since the 1920's are being re-opened and renovated, and there is an increasing awareness of the great treasury of religious heritage which may still be salvaged.

There have also been sightings of the Virgin Mary throughout Russia – at Grushevo in the Ukraine, in Ternapol, Ozhernaya, Berezhany and Kamenka-Bugskaya. At Medjugorje, in Yugoslavia, the site of some of the most spectacular appearances of the Virgin in recent times, it is reported that she has said that in Russia, God will be more glorified than anywhere else (4). And indeed, despite continuing difficulties in the interfaith dialogue between the Eastern and Western Churches, the Millenium is mentioned in particular in the Pope's encyclical on the Marian year 'Redemptoris Ma-

ter'. This special year in celebration of Mary within the Catholic Church began on June 7th 1987 and ends at the Feast of the Assumption in September 1988, and so encompasses the Millenium celebrations. Pope John Paul refers to "...the Marian light cast upon ecumenism" and calls upon those in the Western church to join in prayer with those celebrating the millenium of the baptism of the Saint Vladimir, affirming that "*In the presence of Mary we feel that we are true brothers and sisters*".

Further, a Papal visit to Russia is one of the Pope's dearest ambitions and it is rumoured that one may occur before the end of 1988.

Jane Clark

(1) *Guardian*, January 1988

(2) *Frontier*, Jan/Feb 1987

(3) *Frontier*, Sept/Oct 1987

(4) *Medjugorje Messenger*, July 1987.

Our thanks to Keston College for much of the information used in this article.

Able, reverent men...

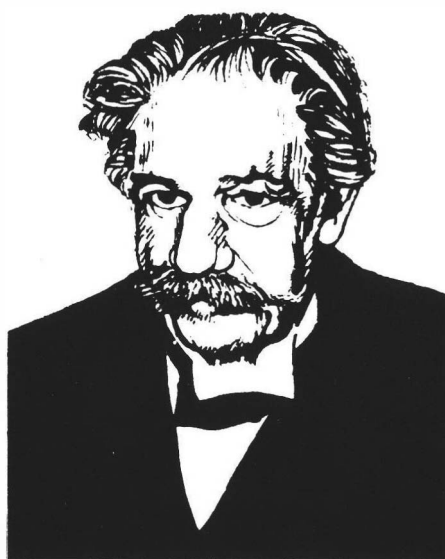
The Gifford Lectures celebrate their centenary

by Martin Notcutt

Eighteen months before his death in 1887, Adam Lord Gifford made provision in his will for the establishment of a series of lectures at each of the four existing Scottish universities – Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen and St Andrews.

Although his endowment was on a scale which raised the Gifford lectures above any others, they did not immediately achieve widespread acknowledgment. However, in time they came to be regarded as amongst the highest honours which could be accorded a scholar. Unlike the Nobel prizes, which highlight a person's achievements within their profession, the Gifford Lectures ask something extra of the person who gives them – that they discourse on the knowledge of God.

Certainly the people who have delivered them include many outstanding figures from a wide range of interests. To name but a few, they include Karl Barth (1937), Niels Bohr (1949), Sir James Fraser (1911), Werner Heisenberg (1955), Dean Inge (1917), Iris Murdoch (1981), Sayyed Hossein Nasr (1981), Steven Runciman (1960), Carl Sagan (1985), Albert Schweitzer (1934), Paul Tillich (1952), Arnold Toynbee (1952)



Albert Schweitzer

and Alfred North Whitehead (1927).

The first person whose Gifford Lectures definitely caught the imagination of a wide public was the American-born psychologist William James, brother of the novelist Henry James. His lectures, delivered in Edinburgh from 1900 to 1902, were published as the book 'The Varieties of Religious Experience', one of the dozen or so classic studies which have emerged from the project.

In his book 'Lord Gifford and His Lectures – a centenary retrospect' (1), Professor Stanley Jaki says, "A distinct pride of the British Isles, the Gifford Lectures seem, after a hundred years, to have assumed a global mission. In a world increasingly bogged down in technological pursuits and at a loss to cope with the problems they create, no academic organ has kept so alive some higher perspectives as have these lectureships".

In the centenary year, the University of Glasgow has invited four speakers of distinction: Donald Cuppit (Dean of Immanuel College, Cambridge) who will deliver one lecture on 'Nature and Culture'; Dr Anthony Kenny (Master of Bal-

liol, Oxford) whose series of three lectures is entitled 'The Kingdom of the Mind – Theology, Poetry and Philosophy'; Dr J M Roberts (Warden of Merton, Oxford) who will give three lectures on 'History as Environment'; and the Most Revd. John Hapgood, Archbishop of York, whose single lecture is called 'Is there reliable knowledge about God?'

At the University of Edinburgh, beginning in April, Alisdair MacIntyre, presently an emigré Professor of Philosophy at Vanderbilt University, Nashville, will present a more traditional series of ten lectures entitled 'Rival versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopaedias, Genealogies and Traditions'.

The lectures are generally presented every second year at St Andrews and Aberdeen and the next series falls in 1989.

Adam Lord Gifford was born in Edinburgh in 1820. He took up advocacy as a career and enjoyed both professional and material success, culminating in appointment as a judge. During his later years, he was much in demand as a speaker among the many groups that met on winter evenings to encourage intellectual pursuits.

His brother said of him "He studied and admired Spinoza, yet always denied that he himself was a Pantheist, marking the distinction thus: 'Spinoza holds that everything is God, I hold that God is everything.' Thus he held that 'force', 'substance', 'being' itself must be God, quoting many a text to show that the Bible agreed with his view, such as "I am..." implying that besides God nothing was."

"He treated man's consciousness of personality and the testimony of his intuitions with little reverence, holding God and God's infinite existence as all in all... The terms of his will, in founding the lectureships in Natural Theology, illustrate this characteristic of his mind."

Indeed, the most striking feature of the Gifford Lectures is the basis on which they were established. The will states that they are intended for "promoting, advancing, teaching and diffusing the study of natural theology" in the widest sense of that term, which he saw as, "The knowledge of God, the Infinite, the All, the First and Only Cause, the One and Sole Existence, the knowledge of His Nature and Attributes, the knowledge of the relations which men and the whole universe bear to Him, the knowledge of the nature and



Niels Bohr

foundations of ethics or morals and of all obligations and duties thence arising."

In keeping with this remarkable intention, Lord Gifford wanted the lectures to be open to all kinds of people: they were to be 'public and popular' and he did not want any restrictions placed upon the speakers. They did not have to take any oath, be of any particular denomination and could even be of any religion or way of thinking. Indeed, they could be so-called sceptics or agnostics or free-thinkers. But he wanted the trustees to seek out "*able, reverent men, true thinkers, sincere lovers of, and earnest inquirers after, truth*".

As he said "*the true and felt knowledge (not merely nominal knowledge) of the relations of man and the universe to Him, and of the true foundations of all ethics and morals... when really felt and acted upon, is the means of man's highest well-being and the security of his upward progress*".



Iris Murdoch

Although the Gifford lectures have become an important institution, it can be asked whether, or to what extent, they have fulfilled the intention of their founder.

The first point is that while they are indeed open to the whole community, in practice they do seem to be primarily an academic event, which might be an expected result of making the universities the executors of the will. But there is another factor – the audience. Gifford found an audience for his own talks in an intellectually vigorous society, though perhaps this could not have been sustained for a long time outside a specialised academic situation. It may be, even, that the potential wider audience is only now



S.H. Nasr

beginning to be found.

Secondly, the lectures have both an open and a directed nature, and even Stanley Jaki, who brings a formidable intellectual apparatus to bear upon the matter, seems to have misread the intention. Focussing on the relatively well defined technical term 'Natural Theology', he feels that Gifford over-estimated what could be achieved. But it should be noted that when Lord Gifford referred to Natural Theology, he extended that by adding "*in the widest sense of that term, in other words, the knowledge of God, the Infinite, the All, the First and Only Cause...*"

It seems that Lord Gifford was, quite simply, committed to understanding himself, all things, from the essential Unity of Being, or, as he might have said, of Substance. In an age dominated by materialism, he wished to induce a wariness of the claims made for the physical sciences, to expose people to some of the consequences of unity, and to arouse the idea "*that if this be a part of metaphysics, if this be only one chapter of metaphysics, these metaphysics can be no empty and barren science, but must be fraught with results and lessons as momentous as they are divine*".

One would suggest that the lectureships have yet to come into their own in meeting the full scope of Lord Gifford's intentions. Just as there may now be emerging an audience for what he intended to be heard, so there will come speakers with the disposition for it.

(1) 'Lord Gifford and his Lectures' by Stanley L. Jaki. Scottish Academic Press, 1986.

The Beshara Trust Seminars

Keith Critchlow
'The Sacred Order'

27th-29th May

Jonathon Porritt
'Dimensions of Deep Ecology'

23rd June at 6pm

Dr Arthur Peacock
'God and the New Biology'
25th June
9.30am-1pm

Reverend Professor Stanley Jaki
'Cosmology and Religion'
5th-7th August

*Seminars can be attended as a residential weekend (£50 incl. full board) or as individual sessions (£5 each)
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Can't we make mankind feel grand?

A View from Somerset Gardens looking towards London Bridge by Canaletto. Courtesy of the Courtauld Institute Galleries, London (Princes Gate Collection).

Peter Yiangou comments on the architectural views of HRH The Prince of Wales

"I see no reason...why wealth should not finance beauty that is in harmony with tradition, today as in the past. People too easily forget that the London of Wren's time was the greatest trading empire the world had ever seen. Yet it was of such splendour that the vista Canaletto painted surpassed ancient Rome and even rivalled that of his own native city of Venice, itself a centre of world trade and one which knew so well how the fruits of commerce should be celebrated in the arts and architecture. We can make choices about the surroundings in which we live and work. Prosperity and beauty need not exclude each other".

From a speech given at the Mansion House in 1987, commenting on the Paternoster Square project adjacent to St Paul's in the City of London

"I think it is time to resurrect the principles by which classical Greece operated – in particular we should

hoist the flag of Polycleitus from the highest tower block. He said, 'Proportion is not a matter of individual taste, but depends upon mathematical laws of harmony, which could only be broken at the expense of beauty'.

"We have been led by the nose for too long down a path which totally ignores the principles of harmony and the well-calculated relationship of the parts to the whole. Rhythm, balance and equilibrium have been missing for too long. We must recall what Ruskin said: 'Architecture is that art which so adorns the edifices raised by man that the sight of them contributes to his mental health, power and pleasure'.

"The exact opposite has been happening for too long – people have been ignored. John Betjeman knew what he was talking about when he wrote that 'Human scale is the size God made the world for mankind's sake, not to frighten or intimidate. Every shape makes him feel human. The highest mountain in the world is such a shape it makes him feel grand,

and the diversity makes him feel his own variety'.

"Can't we try and make mankind feel grand? Can't we raise the spirits by restoring a sense of harmony: by re-establishing human scale in street patterns and heights of buildings: by redesigning those huge areas of what is euphemistically known as 'public space' between tower blocks, which lie derelict, festering and anonymous?

"Can't we restore people's pride; bring back self-confidence: develop the real skills of individual people in this island? This may be a tall order, I realise, but how can any country survive and prosper unless it has an aim and inspiration. Let us make 1987 the start of new renaissance for Britain – from the bottom up."

From a speech given in 1986 at the launch of the Inner City Development Trust – a project founded to encourage self-help and community initiatives, of which HRH The Prince of Wales is the patron.



It is significant that Britain is one of the few countries which has succeeded in maintaining a Monarchy with a purpose. The fact that such a primal institution continues not merely to survive alongside modern forms of government, but complements them by representing areas of human development not readily accessible to consensus politics, validates its place in human society.

True greatness in a monarch is accompanied by the realisation that grandeur belongs to God, that Monarchy is viceregency over part of His creation, that the majesty of their station is as a reminder to the people of their enduring spiritual heritage. The intimate concern of the great monarch is to ensure that the people in his dominion are not oppressed and are in a position to respond to their innate potential.

It is possible to view the public actions of HRH The Prince of Wales from this perspective. The media, in their impatience for a story, have perhaps missed the point, doing themselves and the public a disservice. They have made it seem as though Prince Charles has overstepped the mark, making life difficult for architects and planners by imposing his opinions on them, and that he has become obsessed with cranky 'alternative' views about ecology, society, medicine and religion. Or there is the establishment view that Royalty should be seen and not heard; that it is not their place to go about commenting on serious issues and rocking the boat. To my knowledge, nobody has yet reported on the compelling vision from which these widely reported actions

spring, and which imbue them with quite a different meaning.

Prince Charles has embraced a truly Royal vision, elevated and inspiring. He has identified and understands that life has a purpose, expressed through beauty, and that where this is lacking there is ugliness and despair. He has attacked urban decay because it contradicts and insults the dignity and purpose of humanity. He wants people to 'feel grand again' not out of sentimental self-satisfaction, but because this is their heritage which he is bound to defend. He has criticised architects and planners not for personal motives or fickle dislike of their work, but because they have abrogated their responsibility to the society they are supposed to serve to a degree which history may yet adjudge criminally negligent. Community architecture or conservation, in themselves, are not the point; the point is that dignity of purpose must be restored to the individual before there can be any progress.

It is important for the future of Britain that this vision is not allowed to be distorted and buried in popular prejudice, because it could be in this fair land that the first glimpses of a new vision will be heralded. The coming era is likely to see the dissemination of spiritual truths in all areas of society, following the emergence of a comprehensive vision of life and mankind's place in the universe. We are privileged to have a Prince who has seen this vision, recognised its importance and is compelled to speak out. We applaud his courage, but must also add that he is doing no less than we expect of him.

News in Brief

Global Survival Conference

From 11th-15th April, an unprecedented event took place in Oxford when 100 spiritual leaders drawn from all the major religions met with 100 parliamentarians from over sixty countries to discuss the question of global survival.

Participants included the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Dalai Lama, Mother Theresa of Calcutta, the Vice-President of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, Dr Evgenij Velikhov, scientists Carl Sagan and James Lovelock, and the UN Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar.

Dr Runcie, in the opening speech, said that we are now "*confronted by problems which transcend national and credal boundaries, ...which require no less than a global solution.*" The Dalai Lama, speaking of love and kindness as 'a universal religion' pointed out that, "*When we talk about global crisis or a crisis of humanity, we cannot blame a few politicians, a few fanatics or a few troublemakers. The whole of humanity has a responsibility because this is our business, human business. I call this a sense of universal responsibility.*"

The five days ended with a statement of intent and a commitment to continued dialogue. A full report in Issue 6.

Symposium of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society

More than a hundred people met at Jesus College, Oxford, from 25th-27th March for the fifth symposium on the great 12th century mystic, Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi.



Two speakers at the Symposium, Dom Sylvester Houédard, a Benedictine monk at Prinknash Abbey and Professor Rundgren of the University of Uppsala.

Gaia Comes of Age

Ted Pawloff Assesses a New Scientific Theory

"The Gaia hypothesis is for those who like to walk or simply stand and stare, to wonder about the Earth and the life it bears, and to speculate about the consequences of our own presence here. It is an alternative to that pessimistic view which sees nature as a primitive force to be subdued and conquered. It is also an alternative to that equally depressing picture of the planet as a demented spaceship, forever travelling, driverless and purposeless, around the inner circle of the sun."

GAIA is the answer to a scientific riddle. According to the current scientific model, the Earth has supported life for 3500 million years, but there is no reason why conditions on the planet's surface should be so uniquely favourable to its existence and evolution. On the contrary, there is every reason why it should have been quite the opposite – the Sun's energy output has increased by 25% in that time without any apparent ill-effect; and like its neighbours Mars and Venus, the Earth's surface ought to be subject to enormous temperature variations and a degree of acidity which would make it unsuitable to any but the most primitive life-forms. But in reality surface conditions are near-ideal for supporting living organisms.

Even more extraordinary is the composition of the Earth's atmosphere. It is completely unlike those of its neighbours,

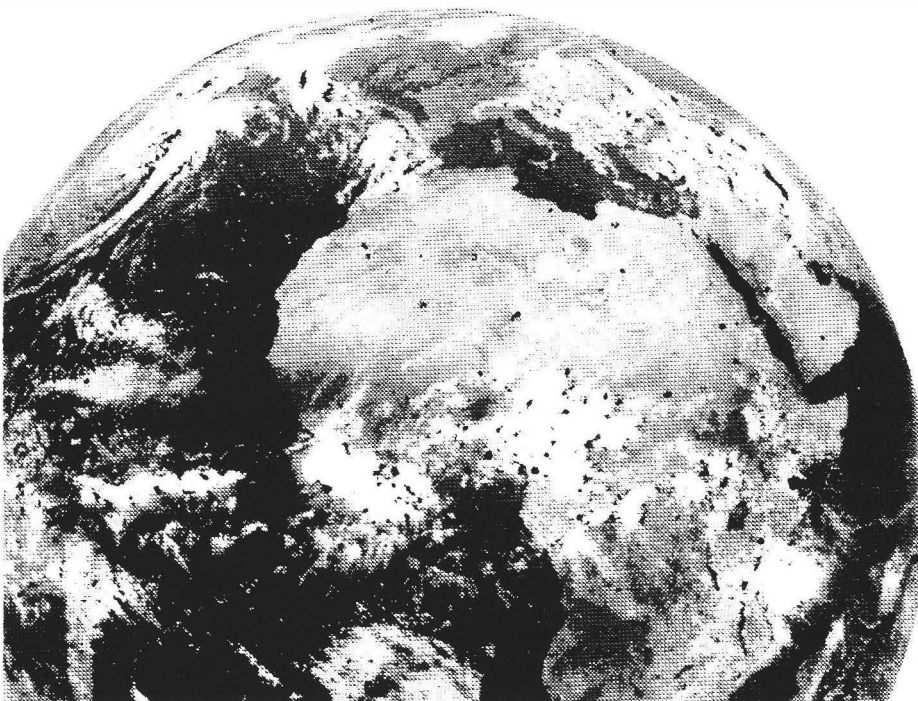
which, consisting overwhelmingly of carbon dioxide, conform to what science would predict. Also, it contains in significant proportion a bewildering variety of highly reactive gases such as oxygen and methane which, according to the laws of physics and chemistry, are highly unstable and so unsustainable over long periods of time. Yet the precarious equilibrium of this composition can be shown to have been maintained for hundreds of millions of years.

Professor Jim Lovelock has proposed an answer to this riddle called the Gaia Hypothesis, which he first published in a best-selling book 'Gaia, A New Look at Life on Earth' (1) in 1979 and which he has subsequently developed and elaborated. His co-worker, Professor Lynn Margulis of Boston University, summarises the hypothesis in a recent paper (2), as follows:

"The Gaia hypothesis posits that these chemical and thermal properties of the Earth's lower atmosphere and surface sediments ARE MAINTAINED BY LIFE. Life has modulated these properties of Earth for hundreds of millions of years"

In other words, it is suggested that the entire range of living matter on Earth might be regarded as an organism – a single living being endowed with the capacity of homeostasis (or self-regulation). To begin with, the Earth was following its own, as it were, geological evolution. At a certain point conditions became suitable for life, providing it with a 'window of opportunity' to establish itself. However, the very processes of geological evolution that had opened this window were bound to close it again. The wonder and marvel is that life itself began to alter the conditions in its own favour, integrating its biotic functions with the geological processes. To give an example: it is life in the guise of miniscule sea-organisms which reduced the carbon dioxide content of the atmosphere, chemically trapping it in the massive limestone deposits of the planetary surface.

Predictably, such a formulation has drawn the fire of much of the scientific establishment; the very name Gaia, proposed by the novelist William Golding from the Greek Goddess of the Earth (who also provides the root of words such as Geology, Geography, etc), has provoked disquiet and opposition. But two recent conferences have served to bring Gaia into the foreground of scientific debate. Last Autumn, 'The Ecologist', the leading international environmental magazine, organised a conference entitled 'Gaia: Theory, Practice and Implications' at the Wadebridge Ecological Centre in Cornwall, to coincide with a meeting of Ecoropa (3). The first part of this covered the basic 'hard' science of the hypothesis, while later parts explored its implications for epistemology, the philosophy of science, theoretical ecology, evolutionary theory and other fields. Then in March, the American Geophysical Union held a conference in San Diego, attended by biologists, geologists, geochemists and climatologists. Here the Gaian idea was taken as a framework for promoting new areas of scientific enquiry into the order



and organisation of life on Earth, and, as New Scientist reported, it marked, "by common consent, the coming of age of Gaia as a subject for respectable scientific enquiry." (4)

What has emerged from these conferences is an appreciation of the many-levelled significance of the 'Gaian' idea. On the one hand, it works as a science – predictions made from the theory have been verified, and have led to the discovery of processes that would otherwise have been ignored. On the other hand, as the visceral reaction on the part of some scientists clearly shows, Gaia is not, and cannot be, 'merely' science in the restricted sense. The intuition, alive with wonder and compassion, of the wholeness of life transforms both scientist and science; for it is this wholeness which gives rise to the law, which Lovelock enunciates, that the more varied and rich an ecosystem, the more stable its homeostasis – and not the other way around as some might think.

In his book, Lovelock describes how his starting point was to devise a method of detecting life on other planets. "I expected to discover somewhere in the scientific literature a comprehensive definition of life as a physical process...but I was surprised to find how little had been written about the nature of life itself." (p3). He himself defines it as, "A common state of matter found at the Earth's surface and throughout its oceans. It is composed of intricate combinations of the common elements...Most forms of life can instantly be recognised without prior experience and are frequently edible. The state of life, however, has so far resisted all attempts at a formal physical definition."

It is from here that his examination of life's history on Earth leads to the view of life as a single planetary phenomenon (5). In other words, the hypothesis is a real step towards a vision of life at the level of its own significance. However 'objectively' scientists may be inclined to study the 'Gaian mechanisms', they will be dealing with a vision where the part has been inextricably rejoined to the whole.

The singular feat of the Gaia Hypothesis is to introduce such a perspective into a branch of science still particularly dominated by a mechanistic and reductionist paradigm. Three aspects stand out.

The first is that it entirely sidesteps the mechanistic versus vitalist controversy. Lovelock, in his book, even appears to be at pains to ensure that his formulation remains acceptable in traditional scientific terms. In the section entitled 'In the Beginning' he takes note of the fact that "indeed, the universe seems to be littered with life's chemicals...It seems almost as if our galaxy were a giant warehouse containing the spare parts needed for life" (p14). Studiously avoiding drawing any conclusions from this (even though facts of this kind form the basis of the view known as the 'Anthropic Principle') he goes on to assume the traditional 'random combination' hypothesis to account for the beginning of life. The point is that it matters little to the substance of the hypothesis which explanation is adopted. The mechanisms are secondary – what is required is that the attention be shifted towards the phenomenon of life as a whole, which is the only perspective from which the mechanisms become intelligible.

The second aspect is that the hypothesis requires an interdisciplinary, even a transdisciplinary, approach which has long been called for, and which is obviously the hallmark of any holistic science of the future. The mere understanding that such an approach is needed is insufficient for bringing it about in practice. It needs a framework, methods and a great deal of pioneering. Gaia fulfils these requirements and has a good chance of making a significant contribution in this regard.

The third aspect is that the hypothesis is open-ended, as much in the questions that it begs as in those that it seeks to resolve. To explore this aspect it is necessary to make a critical examination of some of the assumptions and possible extrapolations of Lovelock's formulation.

The fact is that it is inevitably subject to some of the effects of the scientific reductionism which, in other ways, it subverts. For instance, he says, regarding the capacity for recognition of life, that, "this powerful and effective but unconscious process of recognition no doubt originally evolved as a survival factor." It would be entirely, if not more, consistent with the tenor of the hypothesis to argue that, along with the properties of homeostasis, life exhibits a common and all-pervasive sensitivity to itself.

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makes a rabbit
rabbit-shaped?*

*Why
do new patterns of
behaviour
spread so fast?*

*Why
do societies form
in predictable
patterns?*

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More seriously, he fails to point out that it is only the relatively recent mechanistic, reductionist modes of thought which have inhibited any comprehension of life *per se*, due to their assumption that it would eventually be explained in terms of the laws of physics and chemistry. By contrast, traditional teachings and civilisations have had a great deal to say about it. It is in relation to these that one of the implicit assumptions of the hypothesis becomes apparent – that it deals entirely with the class of phenomena which traditional descriptions regard as subject to the 'vegetative soul', and confines the meaning of the word 'life' to this. Although understandable within its context, this limitation must remain ultimately unsatisfactory and even self-defeating. In the traditional representation the vegetative soul is merely one of a series, and this would seem to indicate that a much wider framework is required to deal adequately with the phenomena Lovelock is trying to come to grips with; this is in any case entirely in accord with his own apparent intention.

In his own terms, Lovelock attempts a treatment of these wider questions. But just as there is a limitation in his treatment of life as not extending to matter, so there is the symmetrical danger of confining intelligence and the capacity for self-reflection to vegetative life. *"So far as is known, we are the only creatures on this planet with the capacity to gather and store information and use it in a complex way. If we are part of Gaia it becomes interesting to ask to what extent is our collective intelligence also part of Gaia? Do we as a species constitute a Gaian nervous system and a brain which can consciously anticipate environmental changes?"* (p147) Far from providing an alternative to the various depressing models of the universe, this one could condemn man to the status of an intelligent amoeba with the job of ensuring that the planetary supply of primaevial sludge does not run out. It is this aspect which furnishes grist to the mill of those Jonathon Porritt described in his Schumacher Lecture as *"post-industrial pagans"*. (6)

In other words, we would have graduated from mechanistic reductionism to biological reductionism. This same tendency is apparent in his treatment of beauty, which Lovelock intuitively asso-

ciates with life and of which he says on page 143, *"It would be dauntingly difficult to test experimentally the notion that the instinct to associate fitness with beauty favours survival, but I think it might be worth a try. I wonder if a positive answer would enable us to rate beauty objectively, rather than through the eye of the beholder. We have seen that the capacity greatly to reduce entropy, or, to put it in the terms of information theory, greatly to reduce the uncertainty of the answers to the questions about life, is itself a measure of life. Let us set beauty as equal to such a measure of life. Then it could follow that beauty is also associated with lowered entropy, reduced uncertainty, and less vagueness... It might even be that the Platonic absolute of beauty does mean something and can be measured against that unattainable state of certainty about the nature of life itself"*.

If, indeed, the Platonic absolute of beauty does mean something, then it is clear that such an essential and universal reality cannot be reached from accidental and particular phenomena. If the Gaia Hypothesis is to reach its full potential and encompass questions like these, then it needs to be inscribed within a vision which starts from such a premise. It would then include Life as an inherent quality of the cosmos with which everything, from quarks upwards, is imbued – an understanding which can be found not only in the traditional sciences, but also, and increasingly, is implicit in some of the new scientific formulations in biology and physics (6). Unless it extends itself to incorporate these ideas – and there are signs that this is beginning to happen (7) – the Gaia Hypothesis, for all its value, may well be condemned to fall between two stools.

(1) *'The Gaia Hypothesis'* Oxford University Press, London, 1979. Re-issued with a new foreword, 1987.

(2) *'Gaia and Biospheres'* by Dorian Sagan and Lynn Margolis, delivered at the Wadebridge Conference.

(3) Ecoropa is an international non-political group concerned with environmental questions.

(4) *New Scientist*, March 17th 1988.

(5) See Issue 4 of Beshara

(6) See, for example, Paul Davies' *'The Cosmic Blueprint'*, Heinemann 1987.

(7) For instance, a delegate at the conference of the American Geophysical Union, Michael Rampino, has suggested that Gaia may be a property of the galaxy as well.



Science, Religion and the Symbolic World

Traditional Science and Modern Science

by Michael Shallis

Extracts from a Seminar given at Beshara Sherborne

"He is a miserable man who knows all things and does not know God. And he is a happy man who knows God, even though he knows nothing else. But he who knows God and all else besides is not made more blessed thereby, for he is blessed through God alone."

St Augustine.

It is part of our human condition that we have choices and that we are free to orient ourselves in any direction we choose. Just as this applies to every aspect of our lives, it can apply to the way in which we explain and understand the nature of reality. One could say that the distinction between the traditional sacred sciences and the science of our present culture is the direction in which they look, which may in turn be determined by the way in which society views reality in more general terms. If you believe that the universe is a manifestation of God, then you will look in nature for 'clues' as to the nature of that reality in a (metaphorically) upward direction and to look downwards would, in a sense, be to look in the wrong direction. But if you believe that the universe is purely a physical set of more or less random interactions, then it is quite appropriate to look into matter to try and understand what is going on.

This is the sort of framework I would

like to propose for contrasting the sacred sciences with contemporary Western science. If we look at the picture presented in the sacred sciences, we find that all cultures – the Chinese, the Islamic, the Judaic-Christian, and so on – have had very much the same general view of creation and the nature of the universe. There are of course differences; the presentation is slightly different or different names are given to things, and whilst the differences are obviously important and can tell us a great deal, I want to look here at what is essential, rather than what is contingent to culture.

One of the main differences between the traditional view and that of our own science is that the traditional sciences recognise a hierarchical structure of the world, of which material manifestation is at a low level of the unfoldment of ideas in the mind of God. In our contemporary science, of course, the material world is all there is. The means by which the sacred sciences present what one might call their 'evidence' is through symbolism and myth. In other words, it is an allegorical language. It is difficult not to use an allegorical language; and in fact, all our scientific theories, even those which relate only to matter, are in allegorical language because it is really very difficult to describe this mysterious world in any other

way. Scientists will tell you that now we know how it *really* is, but that is just another allegorical story.

But whatever sort of science we choose, no-one is going to take much notice of it if it does not correspond to reality, and so the allegory or story must also correspond to sensory experience. And in this talk, I would like to look at the view given by the sacred sciences through the particular allegory of number.

Why do we have numbers? In a sense, numbers are just another manifestation of the primordial ideas in the mind of God that become manifest in what we call the realm of numbers, which is a fairly abstract realm – you can't just go out and find 'threes' in the world. The first number is one; it is unity, completely undifferentiated, containing all possibilities – a property reflected in mathematics, where the number one goes into everything. There is no number which cannot be divided by one, so you can say that it contains everything and that unity does not just mean one thing, it means all things. All creation stories start with unity; it is the source, and the first act of creation is the primal differentiation where one becomes manifest as two – the first division. This is true even in modern, atheistic

creation myths, such as that of the cosmologist Peter Atkins (1) and the situation is reflected at all levels – in the biological realm, for instance, the basis of reproduction is the replication of a single cell which contains within it, potentially, the whole organism.

Now originally the number one was represented by a circle, and this illustrates a general point – that there is a tendency, through time, for symbols to decay and degenerate. We are still surrounded by very powerful primordial symbols but we have also down-graded symbols and we tend to re-enact the great myths in lesser and lesser forms. (In the modern day, one form of a myth appearing in a degraded form is clearly the soap operas). We find that today we use for the number one the symbol which actually symbolises the differentiation, and we have given the symbol for one, the circle, to zero, which is not the same thing at all.

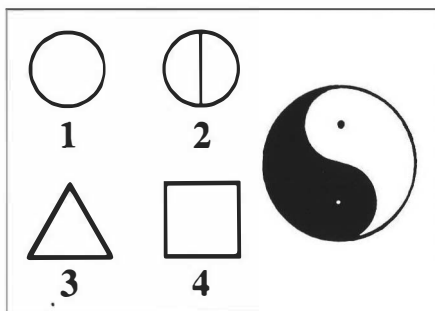
If we draw the numbers in a traditional way, we can see how they indicate, first, the circle of unity and then the division of one into two. This divides into Yin and Yang, light and darkness, active and receptive, all the pairs of opposites. The number two contains every pair of opposites, it is every pair of opposites. If you think about it, everything has its opposite – day and night, young and old, black and white – except unity. The Taoist symbolism is particularly beautiful here, as the movement put into the diagram is itself an implication of the constant changing of the balance of opposites. Yin is constantly changing into Yang and Yang is turning into Yin in every possible combination, so that they are always, in a sense, equally balanced, even though there may be at any one moment a lot of one and less of the other. And since unity contains everything, when we have the first differentiation the opposite sides themselves contain the other – so on the black side we have a white dot, and on the white side a black dot.

At this level of the first differentiation, there is a sense in which nothing has been created except the idea of creation. In many representations of the hierarchical structure of reality you see at the top of the hierarchy God, Unity, all things, and at the first level of creation the first pair of opposites. As the medieval mystics represented it, this is the level of potential form and potential matter; it is not form, but it is the *idea* of form and matter – the form

being the active principle and matter the receptive principle. The material world has been imprinted by active forms; we are like plasticine, clay, in the hands of God.

A nice illustration of this – which also shows how the active always contains the passive within it, and the passive the active – is the seal and the sealing wax. At the moment that you push the seal (the active) into the sealing wax (the passive) in order to make an impression, it becomes passive. It just sits there and the sealing wax, which is the receptive, moves to take up the form.

This happens in all creative processes; the process of creating images, sounds, words, is of the idea (which is the active form or principle) becoming manifest in matter through painting, dance, etc. In fact, it is one of the most remarkable things about our universe that everywhere we look, the same truths are being revealed and enacted before our eyes. Even the act of seeing is one of form being imprinted on matter, with the eye as the receiver and the ray of light as the active form, and the act of seeing being one in which the receiver actually does something, ie. generates a signal to our brains.



The next stage of creation is the unfolding of duality into the number three, which should be represented by a triangle. Three symbolises a further unfolding, unpacking, of what is contained in unity, and it is a number of completion in that it brings the opposites created by two back together again. Wherever you start in a triangle, whichever direction you take, you come back to the place where you started. Three brings in the idea of change, of journey – it even brings in the notion of time, which duality doesn't – and the threefoldness manifesting in all things, at every level of creation, brings in the idea of there being a beginning, a middle and an end. We also have a number of different combinations generated by threeness; the separation, or division into

the idea of spirit, soul and matter – the trinity – which of course is all one. This is why the triangle is not too unlike a circle.

In terms of the hierarchical schema, therefore, we find below the level of duality the realms of spirit, soul and matter, which in turn each contain further ways in which unity can become manifest. The realm of the spirit contains the realms of the archangels, angels and spiritual creatures, within which there will be many further distinctions. Below that is the realm of the soul, which contains the essence of what is going to become manifest later as souls; the essences of the celestial spirit, reason, life and so on. Here we are still in the world of the archetypal essences, of ideas in the mind of God becoming unfolded and therefore becoming created in their own particular realm or sphere; it is the level of Universal Spirit and Universal Soul. The Universal Body completes the trinity and it is only in the latter that we can directly perceive the unfolding into the corporeal world, into the world of bodies in which we seem to live.

There is a sense in which these first three numbers contain the whole creation myth; they are not just for counting things – to count with them is in a way to misuse them. The fourth number, which can be symbolised as a square or as a cross, is the final stage of the unfolding of the primordial unity. I say it is the final stage, and you might say, what about all the rest of the numbers? All the rest of the numbers are, of course, further unfolding, but four is the last of the basic ones. It is the solidity, the manifestation of the corporeal world. Although it is also complete in a sense – as with the triangle, whichever direction you take you come back to the beginning – in another way it is the opposite of a circle and the idea of turning a square into a circle corresponds to the idea of turning the solidity of matter into pure spirit, re-uniting it with Unity. Whereas two is the splitting into opposites, four is the splitting into the opposites of opposites to give the four directions, the four seasons of the year, things that are at right-angles to each other, as far away from each other as they can get.

If you add up the numbers 1 to 4, you get 10, which takes you, as it were, back to unity, which is why you only need the first four numbers; they symbolise the first

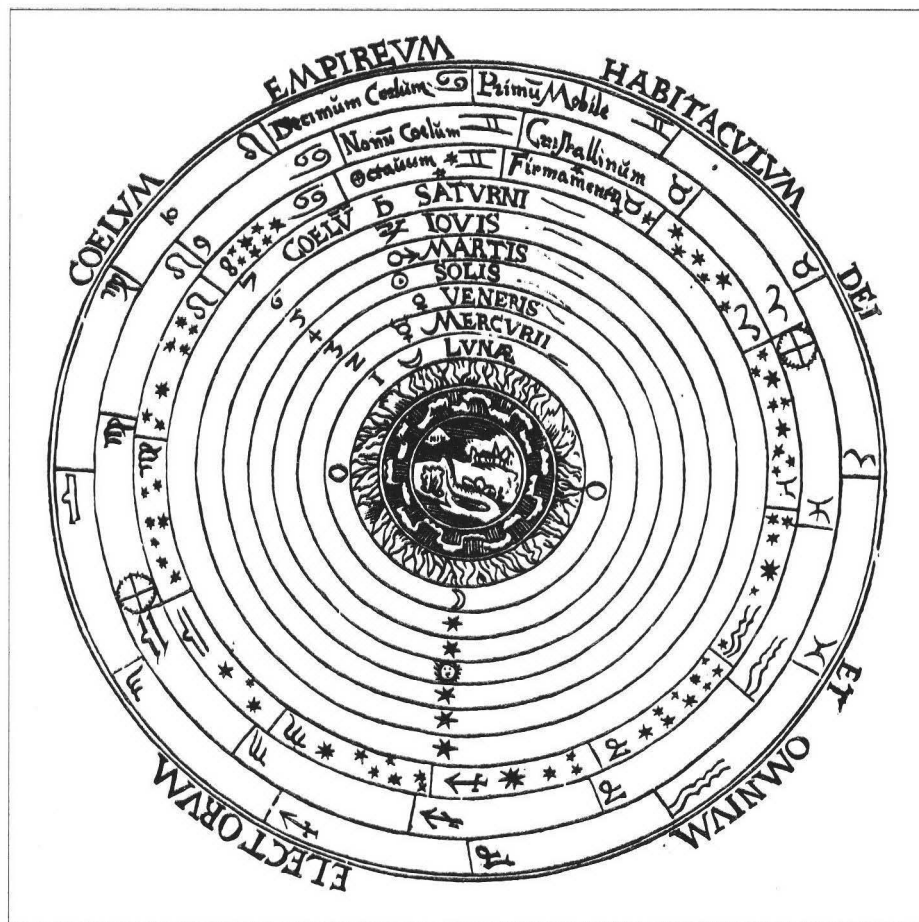
stage of completion. Everything else is a detail – very interesting detail but nevertheless not so important.

So 3 is associated with the soul and 4 with matter, and combined, we find that they symbolise all the combinations of soul and matter in the corporeal world; as $4 + 3$ they manifest as the seven principles which are found in the seven days of the week, the seven planets, etc. and as 4×3 they appear as all the significant ways in which soul and matter can become manifest; the twelve months of the year, the twelve signs of the zodiac, etc. Twelve represents the universal; Christ had twelve disciples because they represent the twelve archetypal types of people, i.e. everybody; the twelve tribes of Israel represent all people, etc.

One of the most powerful aspects of symbols is that they have the power to reveal if you are in a state to receive the revelation; if you are not, they conceal the truth because you are not ready for it. So in numbers, we have a revelation about the nature of the universe, and it is one from which we cannot escape and which we constantly re-generate. It is quite interesting to observe that computers, which are a wonderful example of a totally reductionist technology, operate most efficiently in terms of noughts and ones – going back to the basic duality which contains every pair of opposites – in different combinations to represent an enormously large number of things.

When we come to the corporeal world, the traditional view is that it contains a tenfold structure – ten, as I just explained, containing the fourfold, the threefold, the twofold and unity. The corporeal world has ten spheres and it begins with the idea of the principle of nature; this is what is going to become revealed further in the unpacking of ideas in the mind of God on a corporeal, material plane. The first of the spheres, the outermost of the corporeal world, contains the idea of movement, physical movement, and is itself the primary movement of the corporeal world – from east to west. And indeed, when we look at the outermost reaches of the world, the most distant things *are* moving east to west.

The ninth sphere is the principle of contrary movement, which is north to south. In these two outer-most spheres, we have a duality and a contrary motion



The Geocentric View of the Universe, showing the celestial spheres. from Peter Apian's 'Cosmographia', Antwerp, 1539.

which is the unfolding into fourfoldness and the four points of the compass, the four directions. And this is a very appropriate thing to engulf the corporeal world, which is symbolised by the cross of matter and the square.

These two spheres drive the eighth sphere, which is that of the fixed stars, within which are the spheres of the seven planets: Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, the Sun, Venus, Mercury and the Moon. These are incorruptible, celestial bodies, each of which contains the essence of, and is the manifestation of, a combination of threeness and fourness in their added form.

Now within each realm of the manifest – and indeed, the unmanifest – world, one will find the manifestation of pure spirit, of pure receptivity, of twoness, threeness, etc. So, within the planetary spheres, the Sun is the greatest of the planets and lies at the centre because it symbolises unity. The moon is the symbol of pure receptivity and the other planets are combinations, whilst the earth, which is not included in the planetary spheres, is pure matter. Within other spheres, we find the same

principle; in the domain of the quadrupeds, the lion represents pure spirit and so is regarded as the most perfect four-legged animal; within the realm of birds it is the eagle, in the realm of flowers the rose and the lotus, and so on.

In connection with the spheres of the planets, I would just like to say that here we find the perfection of position which we would expect if the symbolism is correct. As a symbol of unity, the Sun should be central, and in that sense, the Copernican construction of the solar system is correct. But in the traditional view, the sun is also central, being shown always as the middle sphere of the seven planets. And so we can see that it is not its position which is altered by the Copernican revolution, but our perspective on it. This is always the case; if something is central because of its meaning, then we will always find that it is central in its appearance.

Below the sphere of the moon is the innermost region of the material world, which is the realm of corruptible matter. This is encased in a fivefold shell, of which the first realm is the notion of

corruptible elements. One starts to see that each realm begins with an idea which then becomes drawn out; the idea of motion, for instance, becomes not *a* motion, but the idea of all possible motions. So here, the idea itself is expressed in the highest form of the corruptible elements, and the one closest to pure spirit, which is fire. This contains within it the subdivisions of the four elements.

I don't know if you are puzzled by a fivefold structure of elements. Our usual division into four elements is simply another instance of the degeneration of symbols. If we go back to the Far-East, to China, we find that their understanding has always been of five elements. And even if we look back into the Western tradition, as late as the 15th century we find clues that there were five western elements, which were fire, then air, water, earth and that which lies below the earth, metals. It's interesting that the Chinese have water, earth, metal and wood, because they regard air as so much contained in fire that it does not require a separate sphere. But having said all this, the fourfold structure is also not inappropriate, when you think about it.



The 'Diagram of the Supreme Pole' of Chou Tun-I (1017-1073), showing, on the left, 'Yang, motion' and on the right 'Ying, quiescence', with the five elements below.

I would like to go on to look at the glyphs which are used to represent the planetary spheres; this is a bit of astrology, but also a bit of alchemy. Astrology and alchemy are in a way mirror images of each other. As we stand, as man, on earth we can metaphorically look upwards to the spheres of the planets or we can look downwards to the earth and the realm of

metals, and the two sciences of astrology and alchemy are concerned with the transmutation of those symbolic realities so that we can become integrated. Just as we talked yesterday of our science being one which is never pure, never done for its own sake but always for a purpose, this is also true of the sacred sciences. Their purpose is for the perfection of the soul, for the recombination or re-linking of one's individuality to the whole. There is a quote from C. S. Lewis: "*For the wise men of old the cardinal problem had been to conform the soul to reality, but for science the problem is to subdue reality to the wishes of man*" (2).

So the signs for the planets are symbols, and combinations of symbols, which reflect the different ways in which the notion of spirit, soul and matter become manifest in the corporeal world. The two primary symbols are those which represent the active principle, pure spirit, which is the circle of unity, and the semi-circle, which is pure receptivity, the passive principle. The circle of unity points towards the centrality of the spirit; it is the circle with a point in it, which contains the image of the centre from which everything comes and to which everything is directed; the hub of the wheel and the spokes that direct the periphery to the centre. In the realm of the planets this is represented by the Sun, and in the realm of the metals by gold. This is why we value gold; it is incorruptible, perfect and the symbol of unity. All other metals are, as it were, shadows of gold, as all planets are shadows of the Sun.

The semi-circle, when put on its side, becomes the cup which receives the liquid, and this is symbolised by the Moon, which is the lesser of 'the great lights', and the perfect mirror. When we observe the moon, we are seeing pure spirit reflected in the mirror of the moon, and its metal is silver, which is purely reflective and shiny. In fact, we make mirrors from silver and talk about the 'silver' of a mirror, even if it is actually made from something else.

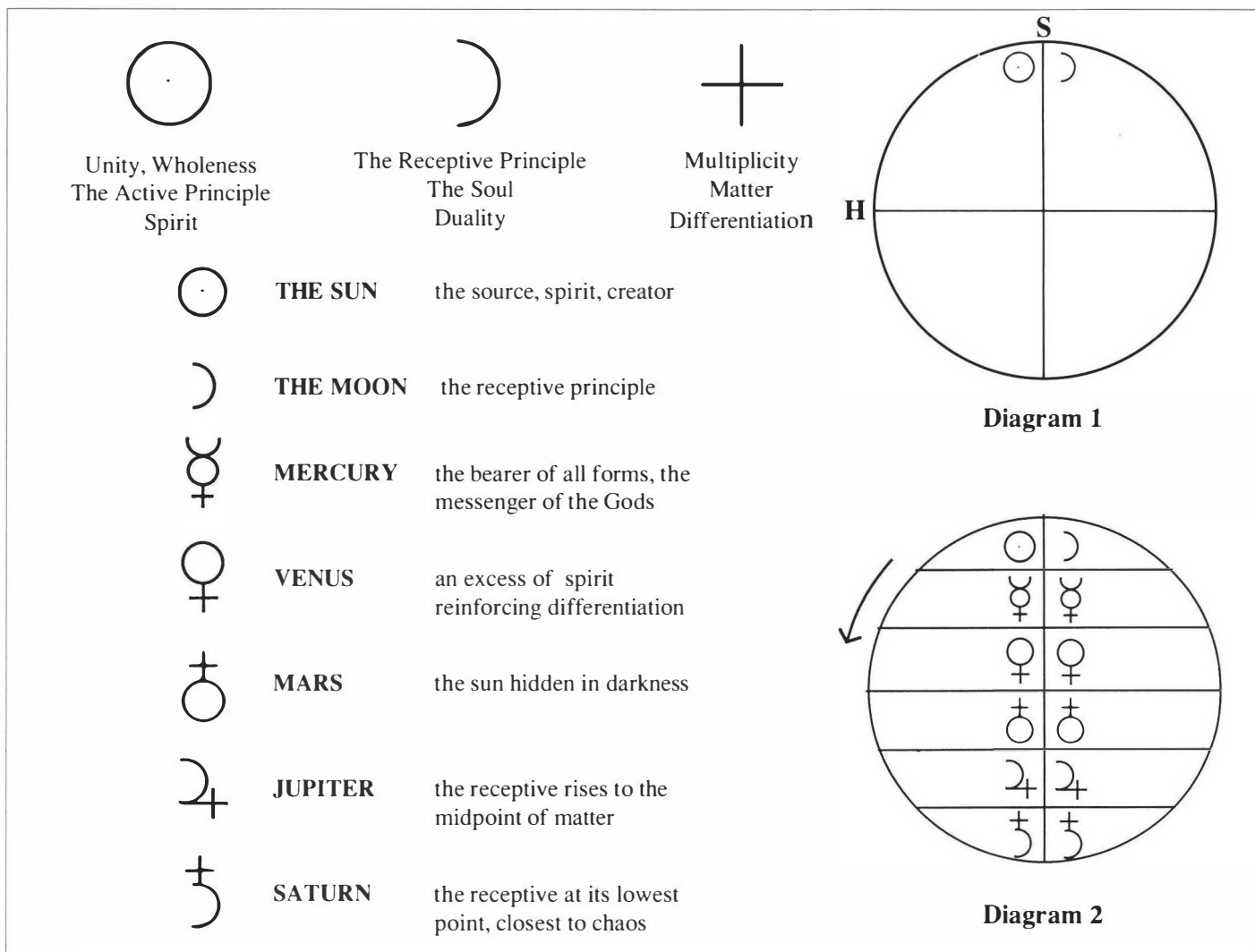
The third symbol is the cross of matter, which contains the four elements and implies the five elements. This is the corporeal, corruptible world in which is implanted, as it were, all the different manifestations of the ideas in the mind of God. It symbolises complete differentiation, the fact that everything which is created as matter is different from every-

thing else – there are no two people who are identical, no two stones which are the same. The symbol for earth is a circle with a cross in it; it is unity completely manifested as matter. This implies a direction for matter to move in, in that as it is contained in the circle of unity there is movement towards the centre.

The other planetary spheres and alchemical metals are formed of combinations of these three basic symbols, and they fall into two groups; active/solar and passive/lunar. Taking the lunar ones first, we find various combinations of the cross of matter and the crescent of the soul, the first being where the crescent of the soul is inferior to matter, buried in the earth, as low as you can get. It is the symbol of the basest metal – lead – and the outermost planet – Saturn. His realm is that of chaos, where matter dominates the soul, and lead is the most unreflective metal, the most dense, the one which sinks to the bottom.

The second lunar symbol illustrates the rise of the soul above matter, but before it can do so, it has to ascend and so it is drawn as the cross of matter with the crescent of the soul in mid-position. This, the emerging or beginning of the ascent of the soul, is the symbol of Jupiter and the metal tin. Tin is a sort of semi-reflective metal, it is silvery in colour but not as reflective as silver. The third position is where the crescent of the soul has risen above matter completely, and when it has done that, it has ascended into heaven and the cross of matter just disappears, to leave the symbol of the moon/silver.

Following the same sort of pattern, the first of the solar symbols is where the active principle, the spirit, has been buried underground and covered over by matter. This is the symbol of Mars and iron. The symbol for Mars which you see nowadays is a degenerate form of the cross of matter above the circle of the spirit. It is the polar opposite of the inverse glyph where the Spirit has risen above the cross of matter. There is no intermediate stage here; it is an all or nothing situation. When the soul rose above the cross of matter, it dissolved it away and left the symbol of the moon. Here, this does not happen, but it appears more like an excess; the active principle re-inforces and spirit bursts out of matter and overwhelms it. It is, of course, the symbol of Venus and copper. With iron, the gold was masked but here the colour of



gold is beginning to shine through. Venus is often seen as the symbol of love, which is this great, joyous bursting through, and its natural companion, Mars, is the polarity of the situation – the lover and the beloved.

And finally there is the very curious planet which contains all three symbols, which is Mercury. Here we find the crescent of receptivity over the circle of the sun or pure spirit, where the centrality of the sun is held between the receptivity of the moon and the materiality of the earth. Therefore, it contains everything; or rather, it is the manifest version of that which contains everything. The metal associated with Mercury is quicksilver, which is interesting because the silver dominates and it is liquid, so it can be moulded by the form of spirit in any possible way, and it is also matter. In the alchemical tradition, mercury is called the mother of gold because, by virtue of containing everything, it transforms. In the astrological tradition, it is the messenger of the Gods, the only one which can speak

in all three realms, because it contains all three realms.

If we draw a symbolic diagram of the earth (Diagram 1), we can look at this from several perspectives. It is the cross of matter contained within the circle of unity; it is the four directions of the material world, but it is also a map of what we see. **H** is the horizon, with the solidity of the earth beneath and the sky above; it is the division between the heavenly and the earthly and this is the way in which astronomers draw their maps. **S** is the division between the solar and the lunar; it denotes a day side, ruled by the sun, and a night side, ruled by the moon.

We can further divide this diagram to take in the realms of the planets, as in Diagram 2, and investigate what this tells us. In the very lowest position, as far below the horizon as one can get, we find chaos, Saturn. This is the furthest from the great lights you can get, just as Saturn is the outermost planet and lead is the heaviest

metal. Immediately above it, we find Jupiter and tin, still below the horizon but this is the expanding principle, shaking free of the constrictions of the realm below. Note that the lunar symbols are at the bottom of the scheme. This is because the prime planet is the Sun and the prime metal gold, and the lunar is therefore the lesser, a further stage of differentiation from Unity.

Above Jupiter we find Mars and iron, where iron is buried beneath the surface of the earth and the sun is below the horizon, sunk into matter. Above that is Venus, where the sun has risen – and also, of course, we see Venus as the morning and evening star; it is only visible just above or below the horizon. Next there is Mercury, which is the principle of that which can bring about the final transformation between the baser states and the state of perfection, exemplified by the Sun. It shows that the soul may rise, but it needs that final system of communication of transfer and transcendence in order to reach perfection.

Each of the planets, each of the metals, has a positive and a negative side, a day side and a night side, a male side and female side, and, just as demonstrated by the Yin/Yang duality, there is within the active side a direction towards negativity and within the receptive side a direction towards the solar. This is demonstrated in the passage of the sun through the sky in its daily motion and its annual motion. The sun moves (on our diagram in an anti-clockwise direction) through all the phases; it transcribes the circle, falling away from its purity into chaos and re-emerging in the lunar realm, as it were, to come back to its rightful position.

This sequence of the hierarchy of the planets and the alchemical metals also gives rise to the sequence of rulership of the zodiacal signs. Leo the Lion is the perfect expression of the solar principle, and the sun on its journey travels through Virgo, Libra, Scorpio, Sagittarius, Capricorn, Aquarius, Pisces, Aries, Taurus, Gemini, Cancer and their rulers (Diagram 3). Whether we look at it from the point of view of the planetary spheres or the alchemical metals, the passage of the Sun, the King, the Spirit, goes through all the realms of corporeal existence, moving through all the combinations of threeness and fourness. This is the primordial myth. In a sense, all these signs have sprung out of the primordial myth of creation and become manifest in their particular realms. In the realm of the corporeal, that includes, contains, the notion of movement and therefore of change and corruptibility. So we see that there is a movement from pure symbol to myths, which are symbols in action.

The Great Myth – which is also the great alchemical myth – is the one I have just outlined; the story of the death and

resurrection of King Gold, which is the passage of the Sun through the realm of metals, or, in the astrological world, the sinking of the Sun into matter and its re-emergence. Pure Spirit, the symbol of Unity in the corporeal world, has to die to be reborn, and this truth is re-enacted constantly at all sorts of different levels. In the agricultural year, for instance, the wheat in its glory, shining in the mid-summer sun, has to be reaped and die away in order to nourish. The seed, a tiny fragment, is kept and buried in the ground, but by mid-winter (symbolically at the bottom of the diagram, at **W**) all seems dead and lost. But at the Spring Equinox (**Sp**) green shoots appear; the seed has been growing underground, but now the shoots are above the horizon and it comes back into its glory.

This great myth is lived out in the vegetable kingdom; it is lived out in a different way in the animal kingdom and at every level of creation; even in our own daily cycles it is reflected in the 'little myths' of our waking and rising, in our eating, etc. We see the same movement in the decline of great civilisations and their resurrection in a new form, in the waxing and waning of our faith; I have recently been doing some work in relation to the Christian myth and it is interesting to see how the symbolic imagery is very very tightly built into the mythic description of the Gospels. The appropriateness of the symbolism speaks through.

In a way, it is easier to see this cycle in the animal, vegetable and mineral worlds, because although they are restricted in their spheres, being only 'little' manifestations, they are nevertheless perfect manifestations. For us, who are the universe, the microcosm, who are given the choice to enact the myth perfectly and completely – but also the choice to mess it up – it takes more unravelling to see it in our daily lives and in our collective lives. And one can see how it becomes necessary for the myth to be demonstrated to us, how necessary it is to have the great spiritual teachers, because we forget and lose touch with our true natures. The truth is there all the time but there are times when it needs to be re-taught to us.

DISCUSSION

Comment

How does the principle of fertilisation fit into the picture? The example that

springs to mind is that of the impregnation of the Virgin Mary with the spirit of God at the time of the Annunciation, which seems to demonstrate that, in the physical world, it is often the coming together of opposites in union which produces birth.

Shallis

It is symbolised, of course, in the relationship of Mars to Venus, who are the celestial lovers, but it is consummated at the mid-summer point, which is the marriage of the King and Queen of heaven, the point where the sun and moon touch. But there is another point of conception which is in Taurus, which in most cultures is the time of fertility rites. But in fact the fertility rites are meant to bring about the marriage of heaven and earth, which happens a little later, at **S** in Diagram 3, giving rise to new birth nine months later.

- C The thing about the myth of the Virgin Birth is that it symbolises the complete non-separation of spirit and matter, because Mary is known as *materia prima*, incorruptible, of both gold and silver.
- S Yes, there is a sense in which it is the incorruptible moon which gives birth to the Sun, and so we can say that the passage of the pure receptivity, *materia prima*, gives rise to, gives birth to, without any interference from anywhere else, spirit. This is the notion of the Virgin Birth which is found culturally world-wide.
- C Another point is that, although you drew unity as a circle, within that circle there is a triplicity, because the moment you have consciousness, you already have triplicity. Although consciousness is saying 'I' to itself, and this is a singularity, for that singularity to be established a triple action is required.
- S It is because there is a giver, a receiver and a transmitter.
- C Yes indeed. This is why Ibn 'Arabi, with whom I think you are familiar through his 'Mystical Astrology' (3), calls the Virgin Birth the symbol of God's act of creation. At the point of

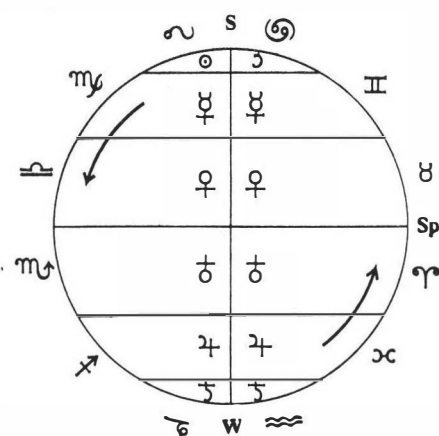


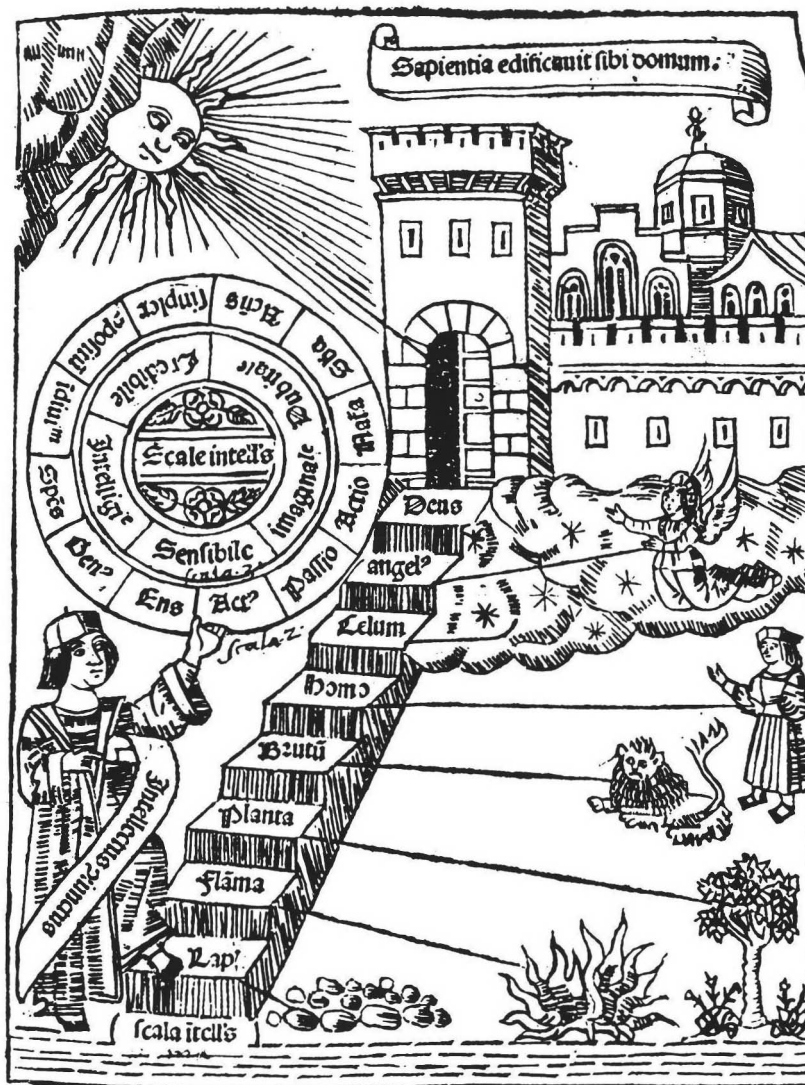
Diagram 3

the first epiphany, which you call the circle of oneness, is the symbol of the Virgin and the Annunciation, which is the announcement and the blowing of the breath into that which is most suitable for it.

- C Does the moon, which is represented by a crescent, also contain the idea of growth?
- S Yes of course, because the moon also goes on the same journey. At the top, it is full; it is a total, complete, perfect reflection of the Sun, but then it has to die away, fall below the horizon and die to nothing to re-emerge. It goes round the same cycle as the Sun, but it is a reflective cycle.
- C What place does modern empirical science have within this structure. For example, we now know that there are more than seven planets and I am interested to know how modern astrology takes these into account. Could you re-draw Diagram 2 including them, for instance?

- S It is actually very difficult to re-draw it, but the whole question of these new planets is an extremely interesting one. If we look at the glyphs assigned to them by modern astronomers, we find that the symbolism is so powerful that these completely materialistic, non-symbolic thinking, hard-nosed scientists have created – and employ – the right names and the right symbols. As you would expect, the three planets – Uranus, Neptune and Pluto – can be seen as a reflection of, or a continuation of, the scheme we have just outlined. There is one solar, one lunar and one combining all three basic symbols. Uranus, the first to be discovered, is the circle of the spirit surmounted by the cross of matter; it is sometimes drawn as a crescent but incorrectly so. Its meaning is matter confined within the square; ie. it is not just matter, but hardened matter, matter under constraint, tense and taut, dominating the solar principle.

It is actually quite a powerful symbol. There is a tendency for astrologers to bandy around the new planets as if they are all lightness and breeze. No doubt there is this aspect to them, but there is also the fact that they



The Celestial Ladder, from Raymond Lull's 'De Nova Logica', 1512. Showing the subtle appreciation of the different levels of experience in the medieval Christian tradition. The ladder of consciousness is set out in stones, plants and stars as well as angels, men and animals.

are further away from the Sun than Saturn and are heavier than lead, and so they will appear on our Diagram below **W**. They are great spiritual messengers, but with some very heavy aspects to them, and it is almost as if, as we have gone away from any sense of the spiritual, we have to discover tougher and tougher disciplines to hammer the message home.

The second new planet is Neptune, which is associated with Pisces and assigned the properties of the Martyr. Its symbol is the crescent moon which has been spiked on the cross of matter, like the spear in the side of Christ. Here, then, is the spirit being dominated by an even tighter constraint of matter, and this is under the lunar principle.

Pluto, the third planet, is the spirit contained in a cup, a receptive cup, rather like the notion of the Philosophers Stone and the chalice in al-

chemy, over the cross of matter. It is a mercurial symbol.

The correspondence between the names and glyphs given to these things and their natures is really extraordinary. As I said, they lie below Saturn, unseen, below the realm of the visible sphere of the planets, and so one could say that they are underworld planets. The metals which correspond to them – Uranium, Neptunium and Plutonium – similarly, must lie at the bottom of the world, and be underworld metals. And indeed, if we look at their atomic weights, we find that Uranium is the heaviest of all the natural elements; it has a number of 92 out of 92 chemical



Uranus



Neptune



Pluto

elements. The ones below it, the heavier ones, don't exist in nature because they decay too quickly. We produce them in nuclear reactions and they appear, but because they are so dense, the world is too ephemeral for them and they fall out of the bottom of it. Uranium just about hangs in there, but it is unstable; as we saw, it is matter contained, explosive. In fact, there is only one thing that can contain these metals and that is lead, which, again, fits in perfectly with the symbolism.

Similarly, with astrology, the correspondence between the symbolism and the reality is striking. When William Herschel first identified Uranus, it was found that people had in fact been seeing it for about 100 years, but had not realised it was a planet. Whereas Pluto and Neptune cannot be seen by the naked eye, Uranus just hangs in there, like Uranium.

C One thing that occurs to me is that one gets a lot of confusing and contradictory results in nuclear physics and the lower you go, the more confused it gets. This seems to correspond to chaos.

S Yes indeed, it becomes more and more unworldly, very strange and other-worldly. All of which reminds me of a wonderful article written a few years ago called 'Black Alchemy' which was an analysis of nuclear physics as the transmutation of base metals into something baser!

And this leads to an important point. We were just talking about mysticism and the new physics, and there is a danger that this other-worldliness can be mistaken for the spirituality of the shining light. In fact, it is not, it is a kind of dark spirituality, and it is necessary that we come out of it. We can use such things, maybe we have to use them in order to come out of the state we are in, but we will come out of it because that is the direction of the myth.

C In terms of the myth you were talking about, the bottom-most point must contain the seed or we wouldn't be down there; there wouldn't be any point in being down there.

S Yes, but if I may return to my first point, the difference between the sacred sciences and modern science is the direction in which they look. In the sacred sciences, the direction is quite clear, it is upwards; their aim is to bring about a transcendence, to move us from being base metals to being pure gold. Our science has turned its direction round and looked into the earth, and the danger of that is forgetting that there is anything else. It is alright to look down providing you know that it is to die and be re-born, but if you forget that you get stuck down there. Although, as I just said, the myth tells us that we must come out of it eventually.

C Looking at the diagrams you have drawn, they remind me strongly of the 'Wheel of Life' of the Buddhists and Hindus, who say that the point of our existence is not to endlessly track the cycle, but to jump out of it. This seems to me to refer to the possibility for us, as human beings, to live our lives in awareness of the primal unity; to know that in the process of devolution you have described there is never any real separation.

S Yes, of course, these diagrams are only a reflection of that unity in the world of corruptible bodies. We have to live it out because we are corruptible bodies, but at the same time we are pure spirit. This is the extraordinary thing about being human; we have these two tasks. Or rather, there is only one task, but it is achieved through the existence of being a corruptible body as well. Our lives are a combination of acting out, as it were, these great myths in order to complete the cycle of unity which is our vertical dimension and our goal.

C There is another point about number which perhaps you will agree is interesting. Any number from here to infinity is both a unique expression and at the same time it is the counting of one. If you look at it like that, then it always draws you back to the apex of your diagram.

S Yes indeed. And further, the circle has a point at its centre because the point is

one and it is also zero, showing that the circle with the point is both nothing and everything. It is unity and infinity, and the periphery of the circle round the point is like the infinite manifestation of the point. And so, the point, as you have just expressed it, is one and any number is the circle, which is just an expression of one and directed towards it.

If I may make a final comment before we finish: it seems to me that the importance of understanding symbolism and myth, and of understanding how these are expressions of primordial and fundamental truths about the nature of reality – truths that "*to deny them would be to lie*" as Donald MacKay said, – is that there is not a conflict between the reality that we see in this way, or the reality that we see through spiritual teaching, and the discoveries of science. There may be a conflict of perspective and intention, but not between fundamental truths. It is not possible that there could be. There is a sense in which science is a revelation, and many scientists work as scientists because they see it as a way of revealing nature and the beauty of God. My criticism of it is that as a collective enterprise it is misdirected, not in what it reveals, but in its understanding of what it reveals. If one approaches it from a spiritual perspective and from an appreciation that what is manifest in physical reality in the material world is always a mirror for something else, for something higher – just as we are mirrors to the cosmos and a stone is a mirror of stoneness which is an idea in the mind of God – then there is nothing wrong with digging deeper and deeper into physical manifestations because it will always be revelatory – and in fact, what will be revealed is more and more, an infinite number of further differentiations and manifestations.

- (1) See, for instance, his book 'The Creation', Freeman, 1981
- (2) 'The Abolition of Man' by C.S. Lewis. Fount, 1943
- (3) 'Mystical Astrology according to Ibn 'Arabi' by Titus Burckhart. Beshara Publications, London, 1977.

The United Nations

Edited Extract from a Speech given on its 40th Anniversary in 1985

by Robert Muller



I have been in the UN for 37 years. I have seen it grow, and therefore I would like to take this as my subject. In the first place, what are the major characteristics that this world system, namely the UN and the specialised agencies, have acquired since 1945? I'm speaking now in evolutionary terms. I am not going to speak about the Arab/Israeli conflict or things of this sort, but instead look at the evolution of the human species on this planet, of which these matters are nothing more than local and temporary accidents which, sooner or later, in one way or another, will be resolved – even if they take a long time.

The first characteristic which the UN has acquired is what I would call a 'geographic universality'. This is a phenomenon which is very important for our evolution. You have for the first time a place, an organisation, where every territorial unit, every culture, every system of government – all that has emerged from thousands of years of history and from a longer evolution before – has been brought together in a political organisation. You have in the organisation of the UN all the dreams, the values, the visions, all the ways which have ever been devised by the human species through the thousands of years of its history, coming together for the first time. We should not underestimate the fact that it is all there: the Chinese cultures, the African cultures, the western cultures, the eastern philosophies, Greek law – all this has coalesced for the first time in a political organisation.

The second major characteristic, again from an evolutionary point of view, which the organisation has acquired during these 40 years is a 'substantive universality'. In other words, for the first time in human history there is a kind of real universal university, a place where every subject conceivable has been brought forth by one or several governments. Now, when

crises are faced by the human species, people rush to the UN; as in the environmental crisis, the population crisis, the energy crisis and the nuclear crisis, which we desperately must solve. Certainly there is a place in one of the 32 specialised agencies or world programmes, or in the UN itself, where you can find a memory bank, an analysis, data where one can reach some conclusions as to how a particular problem fares with humanity. This is something absolutely unprecedented – I'm speaking only of unprecedented things, things that are so fundamental that they will determine our evolution and not that which one reads in newspapers. You cannot stop evolution. Evolution will continue and it is these factors that will come very powerfully to the fore.

Under substantive universalism you have something which goes from the infinitely large to the infinitely small – from astro-physics, to our planetary systems, to the sun, to the biosphere; from the ozone-sphere, to the lithosphere, to the seas and oceans, down to the flora and fauna of the planet, to the atom and micro-biology and inside the crust of the earth. In other words, there is not one single layer of our place in the universe for which we do not have international cooperation.

Secondly, since 1945, we have been developing the same substantive knowledge of our human species itself. Until 1951 we didn't even know how many people lived

on this planet – the only ones who ever tried to do it were the Romans and this is how Jesus was almost caught in Bethlehem. For the first time in modern history, again through the UN, you have the human species taking stock of itself – of children: of the handicapped; through the generations, looking at the levels of living, health, education, down to individual human rights; taking stock of the fate of the individual and the whole pyramid of what humanity means on this particular planet.

The third characteristic is that once we detected that the world population was getting out of hand, the UN, beyond being a memory bank, an observation tower of what was happening on this planet, began to act as a sort of global brain. We helped the children of poor countries not to die. They survived, but nobody told the mothers to have less children because nobody knew the problem. Out of statistical ignorance we created a population explosion and it took us until about 1960, ten years after the first world population figure of two and a half billion people, to detect that something was going wrong. We did so only after statisticians looked into fertility and mortality rates. The warning was given. World conferences were convened on population, on the environment, on energy etc, and as a result the human species began to react.

The brain is now beginning to function. It functions on the nuclear scares of this planet, it functions on the environment and in many cases the environment has improved. We are beginning to have a global brain that gives certain warnings and these warnings are beginning to be heard by governments. They are not insensitive to these things. How long it will take them to take heed is another matter. But at least there is a beginning of an understanding that they will have a global responsibility.

The fourth characteristic that the UN has acquired, even more recently, concerns the fact that now we know our planetary home, the human species and its aspirations (even though there is still a big debate about these aspirations), we are moving into a period in which this planet will be devoted to finding harmony in life. People sometimes ask me what are the new crises which will break out in the next 15 years and I say none, because they have already all broken out. The problem in the years before the year 2000 is to make progress towards the solution of these crises – to find the proper harmony between the human species and its planetary home.

We must manage this planet well for the ultimate fulfilment of the numbers of people who will live on it, constantly renewed through births and deaths; and find harmonies between the components of the human species itself. In other words, we must discover harmony between the nations, which is what the UN charter says – to seek to harmonise the actions of nations, to find harmony between the races, harmony between males and females, harmony between cultures, harmony between religions (where there remains so much fanaticism and hatred). We must find understanding between the immense number of groups that have emerged from history and expressed, in a great variety of ways, common human desires. All languages on this earth say the same thing. We are all basically constructed in the same way as perceptive units of this planet, but through history we have found many strange expressions of it. We have to find what we have in common and enable the diversities to work harmoniously together in order to achieve a society which will bring happiness to all during their lives. We need harmony with the past and harmony with the future to leave a better planet to our children and grandchildren. We need harmony in the individual, in the totality and – what is not yet being discussed in the UN – harmony with the heavens. I will return to this a little later on.

There is a fifth element which is important, especially for governments but also for private groups. It is the fact that as all this advances, you should never forget that every great subject that is brought to the UN has a certain time dimension. Certain things go suddenly very fast,



United Nations Security Council.

Showing the commemorative meeting on 29/4/85 to celebrate the 40th anniversary. Courtesy of the United Nations, Photo 165801.

much faster than we expected. We in the UN in 1945 thought that de-colonisation would cause a big problem, that it would take between 100 and 150 years. It was settled in 40 years. Today we might think that disarmament might take 500 years and it might be settled in 100 years. The equality of men and women was very fast in making progress; the question of human rights is making slow progress. Certain things are easier to achieve, others are difficult to achieve and others are not even discussed, for example the question of democracy or the question of how this planet as a whole should be governed. This is not being discussed, but it will also have to be discussed. Of course, when you look at the various countries they have preference for one or for the other: for the poor countries it is development, for the rich countries it is environment, for Western countries it is human rights. Every country has a different perception of what is important to it because they all have different histories and different levels of understanding and they are playing this role in the UN.

What is the end result of all that has now been attempted and only very partially achieved? What, in terms of our presence in the universe, of our presence on this planet, has been achieved now that we know that it is one planet, one globe, one

human family?

First, I think that where we have done a tremendous job of understanding is that we have now reached the necessary physical consciousness of our place in the universe, from the infinitely large to the infinitely small. We have to tip our hats to the rationalists and the scientists and technicians and engineers who have been able to extend our eyes, our ears, our brains through computers, our arms through machines and our legs through modern forms of transport, so that we have become a new species that has been able to comprehend the universe in which it lives. The outer reaches still escape us and the infinitely small also has no real limit to investigation, but for all practical purposes we have now a tremendous image of our physical place in the universe and on this planet. This is an enormous advance in our evolution.

Secondly, we do not have as yet, but we are beginning to acquire, a mental consciousness of our place in the universe. When it comes to putting the universe together and how we shall behave towards it – how we should dissect it, how we should re-compose it, how we should re-organise this planet, how we should behave in totality, in groups and as individuals – this we are only beginning to understand.

We should always remember that we are only at the very beginning, in the kin-

dergarten, in our comprehension of how this is all going to work out. This is why our society on this planet at this moment is still pretty chaotic. You can have all sorts of values about how this planet should be organised or how we should behave. The developers will want to continue developing; the people who produce atomic energy will continue to want to produce atomic energy. They say they are right, the environmentalists say they are wrong. It is a period in history where the wrongs and the rights have never been so numerous on a planetary scale. We are in the process of formulating an ethic that concerns the relationship between the human species and this planet, and I believe we will at one point achieve the same understanding of this as we have achieved for our physical place in the universe.

There is then a third consciousness which in my opinion is only beginning to come to the fore in very, very small glimpses. It is almost non-existent, but it is going to be the next important phase. It is that the mere utilisation of our senses – what we see, what we hear, what we perceive, what we touch, the comparison between all this, the mere intellectual understandings through our brains – is not sufficient to bring about the fulfillment of the human species, of what that means and how it should interrelate and how I should interrelate to it. There is one consciousness which needs to be added which in my life I have considered always very fundamental. I don't know what one can call it. The most popular word for it is love.

It is the fundamental decision of the human person and of humanity to love your life, your relationship with this planet and with humanity. I can tell you very frankly that I would not have been able to survive for 37 years in the UN if I had not, at one point at least in my career, abandoned the exclusive use of knowledge and intelligence and transcended it by a decision to love what I was doing. In other words, I adopted an almost poetic, emotional attitude towards my work. I loved my work in the same way my father loved to make hats; and I love this planet and I love humanity. With this love, this type of attitude which permits you to forgive so much when things are going wrong, you maintain yourself in a positive attitude which is the fundamental ingredient of life.

I think life wants to live – nobody wants to die, humanity doesn't want to die and individuals don't want to die. The best strength to keep well and to keep alive and to keep humanity on an ascending path is to love what we are doing, to love this particular planet on which we are living, to love this human family and love what each of us does for its success in the universe. As Danté said, "*it is love that holds the universe together*". This is our human way of being on the positive side of evolution. This is very fundamental. All you have to do to see how the cosmos is operated is to see the relationship between a mother and a child. A mother, of course, observes her child all the time. It's an extreme intelligence which is used to observe the child, but the mother doesn't consider this to be a matter of intelligence. It is something that goes way beyond – it is the total devotion, the total donation, the total givingness of the individual, of the person, in order that the child may survive and progress.

This is a cosmic function, and if we do not translate this, if we do not begin to love this planet and humanity as a mother loves a child, then we have not understood what the whole cosmos is expecting of us. The cosmos is expecting us to succeed and therefore it is time that, in addition to our physical consciousness and our mental consciousness, we must also acquire a sentimental consciousness of our place in the universe. This is the understanding of the poet. I read yesterday a few pages of Pablo Neruda – what this man says about the water, what this man says about the deserts, what this man says about the skies, it's all there; but this is an outflow of the heart, not an outflow of his intelligence. It is infinitely more beautiful than what any scientist could ever write, and it is necessary to translate the knowledge of the scientist into a higher dimension.

Years ago I wrote that you never hear the word love in the UN, but now it is beginning to appear. There are more and more seminars about the concept of love. In addition to the brain which we have and our global sensory capacities we are also beginning to acquire, I believe, a global heart.

The last consciousness which is still in the future is the highest of all, which is the spiritual or cosmic consciousness of our place in the universe. We have the relig-

ions to constantly remind the political man that we are part of the universe, that we are part of the heavens. Religions differ because each of them was sure they had found the ultimate truth. Today we need a global spirituality in which religions will find what they have in common, despite their diversities. This is a very important dimension because in addition to our love for our planet I think there is an even greater transcendence needed. It is to consider ourselves as cosmic beings. My body is made of cosmic matter, this earth is cosmic matter, the sun is cosmic matter, when the sun explodes we will return again somewhere in the universe as cosmic matter. So in addition to this physical consciousness of our place in the universe we must remember that we are in the middle of the heavens, that we are in the process of cosmic evolution – that the universe, or cosmos, or God, has produced on this particular planet something which might be unique, but which in any case is different from what you see on other planets, namely life. From these life forms with their given perceptions we learn that our perceptions are sometimes inferior to the perceptions of animals. I certainly don't have the sense of smell of my dog, but we have other perceptions that he hasn't. He never looks at the stars, he is not curious about the stars. He is not curious. When he has eaten he's happy, he sleeps. But we now know, and we want to know more about, our universe; and from now on we must understand that we have a cosmic responsibility.

I always feel that as individuals we have two tendencies. We are heavy beings, but we are also very light. For all practical purposes we are heavy – we are submitted to the law of attraction so we are always earthbound. But at the same time we have each of us within ourselves a light being, a being that wants to see the universe, wants to go back to this cosmic matter. We call it God, meditation, prayer. This remembrance of our cosmic origins which we have in our internal functioning gives us the answers to our behaviour towards this matter and to this particular planet. In a dialogue with God, or in a meditation with your self, you just speak to your cosmic being, and this cosmic being looking at you and at this planet from the universal point of view will give you the answer. It never fails to give you answer the right as to how you should behave.

So this is more or less where we stand in an evolutionary way in the UN. Let me make a few final remarks about the future. As the world stands at present it looks like utter chaos and this, of course, is also produced and contributed to by people who want to sell their values. They are unhappy if their values are not universally adopted. Everybody contributes in a certain manner to the chaos. This should not be something to discourage us, because in every transformation – personal, physical, chemical – you have, always, local chaos. There is no transformation that is totally smooth. If you transform, you change the disposition of matter, of various groups, of various entities, of values. So it is quite normal that in a period of fundamental transformation there should be chaos.

Let us not close our eyes and ears and do nothing just because there is chaos. On the contrary, let us consider these contradictions in the UN as the way of proceeding. It cannot be otherwise. There has to be friction first. There has to be the statement of the purpose of all these cultures as they come together, and if suddenly you don't like a new way, don't quit. You will lose if you quit. You have to continue until finally from all these comparisons you find what is the right behaviour for this planet in a real worldwide sense.

We are in the middle of evolution at work. This is not a static society – this society has undergone incredible changes since 1945, incredible to the point that it is amazing that we're still alive, that we have had no world war. One conclusion is that all groups – nations, entities, religions, whatever you have – if they want to survive, will have to be cognisant of what is going on. If you are not cognisant of the magnitude of change that is going on on this planet, if you fanatically stick to things which belong to the past, and if capitalism and communism stick fanatically to the past, they will disappear. You cannot stop evolution and the new evolution is our right relationship to this planet.

ROBERT MULLER is a former Assistant Secretary-General of the U.N. Office of Economic Matters. This address was first given at the World Goodwill Seminar in New York in 1985, and first printed as a World Goodwill Occasional Paper: October 1987.

Further information on WORLD GOODWILL can be obtained from Suite 54, Whitehall Court, London SW1A 2EF.

Time's Glass Breaks

The Metaphysics of Vision in the Poetry of Vernon Watkins

by Brian Keeble

TALIESIN AND THE SPRING OF VISION

*"I tread the sand at the sea's edge,
sand of the hour-glass,
And the sand receives my footprint,
singing:*

*'You are my nearest, you who have
travelled the farthest,
And you are my constant, who have en-
dured all vicissitudes
In the cradle of sea, Fate's hands, and
the spinning waters.
The measure of past grief is the meas-
ure of present joy.
Your tears, which have dried to
Chance, now spring from a secret.
Here time's glass breaks, and the world
is transfigured in music'."*

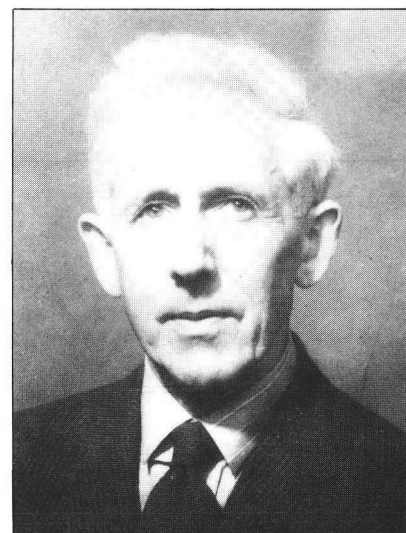
*So sang the grains of sand, and while
they whirled to a pattern
Taliesin took refuge under the un-
fledged rock.
He could not see in the cave, but
groped with his hand,
And the rock he touched was the socket
of all men's eyes,
And he touched the spring of vision. He
had the mind of a fish
That moment. He knew the glitter of
scale and fin.
He touched the pin of pivotal space,
and he saw
One sandgrain balance the ages'
cumulus cloud.*

*Earth's shadow hung. Taliesin said:
"The penumbra of history is terrible.
Life changes, breaks, scatters. There is
no sheet-anchor.
Time reigns; yet the kingdom of love is
every moment,
Whose citizens do not age in each
other's eyes.*

*In a time of darkness the pattern of life
is restored
By men who make all transience seem
an illusion
Through inward acts, acts correspond-
ing to music.
Their works of love leave words that do
not end in the heart."*

*He still held rock. Then three drops fell
on his fingers,
And Future and Past converged in a
lightning flash:
"It was we who instructed
Shakespeare, who fell upon Dante's
eyes,
Who opened to Blake the Minute Par-
ticulars. We are the soul's rebirth."*

*Taliesin answered: "I have encoun-
tered the irreducible diamond
In the rock. Yet now it is over. Omnis-
cience is not for man.
Christen me, therefore, that my acts in
the dark may be just,
And adapt my partial vision to the limi-
tation of time."*



"I am not a nature poet, nor a descriptive poet."

"I am entirely concerned with meta-physical truth."

Vernon Watkins

The poetry of Vernon Watkins will not reveal itself on purely literary terms for it demands a type of knowledge and sympathy capable of acknowledging that the multiplicity and transience of the natural world are underwritten by an eternal unity of essence. At all times this essential unity is the focal point and moment of orientation of the poet's elaborate poetic vision. It might be said that the specific aim of his poetry is to show the many and variegated ways in which time is interfused with the eternal, and how both the human and natural worlds are themselves the expression of, and are shot through with, the divine, the sacred.

For Watkins art is the principle of all creation, so that man has the possibility of recapitulating within himself, essentially, all wisdom and all truth. Through his praise of the joyousness of the Creation and through his exultation at the sacrament of life, the poet returns what is human and what is created to its true source in the Eternal.

From the beginning we must be alert to the fact that Watkins does not share in that rejection of the qualitative dimension of nature that has become the norm for the post-Cartesian world. This impoverishment of reality that reduces all things exclusively to their material dimension, in the terms of Watkins' poetry, must be 'conquered' if we are to understand his constantly implied assertion that the natural world is not the ultimately real. This is

not to say that the objects of the natural world are so many 'subjective' phantoms: it is to question the ontological significance of appearances. Watkins' imaginative vision pre-supposes that there are many levels of reality or degrees of being, each removed from ultimate Reality. The diversity of the appearances of nature – consistently symbolised in the poetry as the spectrum or 'music' of colours – forms the extreme reflexive limit of that Reality which is never comprehended directly or wholly in man's natural experience.

Watkins, in his symbolism of Light, Stream, Fire, Fountain and Music implicitly claims the act of poetic imagination as the means by which man is able to perceive the interpenetration of all levels of reality so that the qualitative essences of things may be expressed in a language that uses the world of nature as its immediate source of reference. Thus while all transience is an *illusion*, nonetheless it has being in a moment of time, and so, as a manifestation of the Divine Essence, is never lost to the order of the Eternal. This symbolism is implicitly present in nearly all of the poems from first to last. The late sonnet 'Candle Constant', for instance, perfectly concentrates the theme into an expressive unit:

*This man perceived that time could
never catch*

*The candle, where it flickered
and declined.*

*Each flying thought a second thought
would snatch,*

*Leaving the outline of the first behind;
A certain aura from a blown-out match
Was lost, then re-established
in the mind.*

*What, then, was constant? Still, beyond
all doubt,*

*All flames were gathered where
the last burnt out.*

*True for him also, certain notes
would stay,*

*The meaning of their own
supreme desire*

*Established perfect where
they died away.*

*Such music, not unlike that
constant fire,*

*Made Earth, as though a fountain
were to play,*

*Fresh for a thousand seasons,
night and day.*

Here, the 'permanence' of the Eternal is glimpsed through the fluid web of multiple impressions registered by the discursive mind. The continuity of each separate apprehension remains paradoxical since, considered analytically, they are subject to the dying and renewal of each moment of time. The relation between perceived and perceiver, at that level of cognition, can thus never be immutable. Watkins is employing here the law of analogy that sees reflected in the *most* transient of objects the very archetype of Beauty itself. The motif of flux embodying 'constancy' the poet had earlier explored in *The Replica* where the Waterfall, as a symbol of ontological renewal, creates

*a perpetual music, and gives light
In always fading from the measuring
mind.*

In 'Candle Constant', however, the symbol of renewal is only tacitly expressed. The act of poetic vision itself is the intuitive agent of that immanent and inexhaustible spirit of being 'established perfect' in the seeming continuity of those individual, fleeting impressions. Only in the cognitive act of imagination is the consubstantiality of 'candle light' and archetypal Fire ('all flames') guaranteed, for there it is the constant witness of every perception despite all igneous flames having been extinguished.

The recurrent symbol of Fire in relation to the notion of intuitive perception is important, being central to Watkins' imaginative 'topology' where, as traditionally, it is indicative of the one substance that is alike the soul's intelligence and the Intellect of Divine origin that is Cosmic activity. The poet's 'constant fire' is none other than the immediate 'fiery Breath of the Total Presence within us' (Coomaraswamy). Watkins' ability to visualise what from the viewpoint of common experience is paradoxical but to the intuitive perception becomes transparently clear stems directly from the 'revolution of sensibility' he underwent as a young man. The change was irreversible and he found himself unable ever again to write from the perspective of temporal duration. On the evidence of the poems themselves, the intrinsic characteristic of altered sensibility was an unequivocal acknowledgement of the transient nature of all knowledge derived from sensory experience alone.

Vernon Watkins was born in the mining town of Maesteg, in Wales in 1906. He began writing poetry at the age of eight. The writing of poetry was to absorb him almost totally for he wrote no substantial work of prose. He was, however, a prolific translator of poetry from many languages. After a term at Oxford he rejected the academic world and began a lifelong working career as a bank clerk at Lloyds Bank in Swansea. As a poet he was encouraged by Yeats, published by T.S. Eliot, and his close friendship with Dylan Thomas, who thought him the greater poet, is well known. He died in Seattle, as Visiting Professor of Poetry, in 1968. His 'Collected Poems' was published by Golgonooza Press in 1987.

Watkins envisaged every terrestrial effect as the mirror of a celestial cause. That is the paradigmatic formula he strived to realise in poetic terms. There is a cosmological principle involved in his belief that nothing of the generated world is created in vain. The principle reveals the absurdity of any notion that the Infinite Essence, in the process of its manifestation from essence to substance, could give rise to anything superfluous. From a cosmological perspective the Spirit's progressive exteriorisation of Itself is a 'descent' from the principal perfection into individuation and limitation. Since created nature is the extreme limit of this process the material world represents the objective reflection of the Essence, and as such its Unity is the immediate symbol of the Divine Principle. That which explains Plato's view of the world as the fairest of creations also explains the profound reverence accorded to the 'minute particulars' in Watkins' vision. If, in their negative aspect, appearances are 'illusory', then in their positive aspect they are divine 'art'. Clearly, there can be no separate source of ontological manifestation to create what is 'other than' an expression of the Spirit. As Traherne, whom Watkins often echoes, put it, "*Since there cannot be two Gods the utmost endeavour of Almighty Power is the Image of God*".

For Watkins, the natural law of renewal at the level of created nature becomes, at the level of intuitive perception, the mirror-image of Eternity itself. Thus the poem conveys a sense of the beauty of nature as the magical 'play' of Cosmic Power, all the more tellingly perhaps for its being informed by his belief in the power of art itself to hold sway over the soul as mediator of the Eternal. If man did not already possess in his incorruptible soul that for which he continually thirsts – a faculty of transmundane origin that permits him, in moments of visionary perception, to see beyond the limits of individualised consciousness – then the degeneracy, loss and suffering that is so indissolubly a part of 'time's wrong' could never be redeemed.

The partiality of our sensuous involvement in generated existence – our inability at the level of common awareness to do other than direct our thoughts towards that which is by its very nature 'inconstant' – forms the ground, in Watkins'

vision, of the interplay between the eternal and the actual worlds. In his view the specific function of the poetic vocation is to effect a redemption of this incomplete mode of perception. The subtle all-pervasive presence of this theme is woven into the imaginative fabric of a great many poems. One such is 'Poets, In Whom Truth Lives' where it becomes the polarising core of a sustained lyricism of exceptional delicacy, illustrated here by these, the first and last two stanzas.

*Poets, in whom truth lives
Until you say you know,
Gone are the birds; the leaves
Drop, drift away, and snow
Surrounds you where you sing,
A silent ring.*

* * *

*The abounding river stops.
Time in a flash grows less
True than these glittering drops
Caught on a thread of glass
Two frosty branches bear
In trance-like air.*

*Stoop; for the hollow ground
Integrity yet keeps
True as a viol's sound
Though the musician sleeps.
Though the musician sleeps.
Strong is your trust; then wait:
Your King comes late.*

Here, moreover, we find a further extension to a belief of Watkins' poetic faith that the craft of poetry, in giving the measure to ecstatic vision, establishes the true imaginative locus that permits a *presentiment* of the cosmic correspondence relating the archetypal essences to their embodiment in the corporeal world. The motifs that most elaborate this aspect of the poet's faith are those of Light and Time whose symbolic ramifications directly impinge upon the metaphysics of his poetic vision.

Although simply to equate Watkins' symbol of Light with Divine Intelligence is to do less than justice to its contextual variety as expressed in the poems themselves (the appearances of the motifs of 'music', 'white', 'lightning' and 'fountain', for instance, represent various modes of the actualisation of the primal essence of Light prior to any differentiation), such an equation provides a definition which satisfies the basic metaphysi-

cal significance underlying its imaginative application. Just how consistent in this respect Watkins' use of the Light symbol is we can discover by turning first to its earliest use in *Prime Colours* where it appears in conjunction with the Fountain motif. Here, Light, being in its origin and potentiality free ('innocent') of any determination emanates (jets forth) from the primal source, and, like the waters (the inexhaustible potentiality of cosmic possibility) of the Fountain break from a single transparent column into the multiplicity of the colours of the spectrum. The variegated nature of these qualitative essences, by their very hue, manifest ('replicate' in the terms of Watkins' poetic language) the beauty of the Divine Love in the aspects of its Creation. There is a symbolic resonance here that recalls those traditional doctrines positing the Creation Itself as a primordial act of the Divine Mercy that wanted its Perfection to be known. The immediately relevant lines of the poem 'Prime Colours' form the poem's final stanza:

*Born of that mud, innocent
light he sees,
The cornerstone in
crumbling masonries.
His washed eyes, marvelling,
resurrect the mountain
Where love's five colours leap into
light's fountain.*

With that of Light, the motif of Time and Eternity had, from first to last, a consuming interest for Watkins. It is, with the light symbolism, of cardinal importance to the metaphysics of his imaginative vision. Its repeated appearance in the poetry is best understood in terms of the realisation that non-spatial, non-temporal intuition remains the condition for any interpretation of the terrestrial world. The natural consequence of such a realisation is that for those '*on whom time's burden falls*' the Real is perpetually 'absent' or hidden. Just as we grasp the *operation* rather than the essential nature of retinal perception by reference to its objects, so we cannot grasp Reality itself, but only its properties, in the discursive knowledge of any *thing* in its existential nature. For reflected in all created things, as the poet wrote in 'The Replica', is the "*image of our life*" – that world known to the senses which "*lives by being consumed*" and

whose

*countless changes
Accumulate to nothing but itself.*

But when the organ of perception, that 'greatest light' of intuitive vision, transcending all reference to accidents and properties having an anticipated future or remembered past, perceives the 'interval of glory', then all division, particularity and mutability is conquered. Then, as the poet put it in 'Great Nights Returning' the soul knows the fire that first composed it, the informing essence of the Eternal Mercy for the productions of Time. Here is the theme as it appears at the close of 'The Replica':

*Yet to man alone,
Moving in time, birth gives a timeless
movement,
To taste the secret of the honeycomb
And pluck from night that blessing
which outweighs
All calamities and griefs of time.
There shines the one scene worthy
of his tears,
For in that dark the greatest
light was born
Which, if man sees, then time
is overthrown,
And afterwards all acts are qualified
By knowledge of that interval of glory:
Music from heaven, the
incomparable gift
Of God to man, in every infant's eyes
That vision which is ichor to the soul
Transmitted there by lightning majesty,
The replica, reborn, of Christian love.*

Clearly, this 'incomparable gift' is man's theomorphic nature so that Eternity is not 'distant' from us though in common experience we are 'far' from It. What needs to be shattered is the illusory continuity created by the unending series of transient projections which our psycho-physical existence throws upon the screen of the Self. When 'time's glass breaks' a new reality is not suddenly substituted for the familiar one, but the 'breaking' reveals the transparency of phenomena itself to its luminous source beyond the formal and particular nature of its reflective surface. By the terms of the absolutely Real the temporal world is but a passing image of the Eternal Now.

This piece is extracted from a longer study.

Letters to the Editor

Dear Sir:

In the review of the book 'Beyond Therapy' by Alison Yiangou in Issue 4 of BESHARA, concerning the compatibility of psychotherapy and a true spiritual tradition, there is a sentence which, taken at face value, implies that the 'ego' is necessarily an obstacle to spirituality, as follows: "... as most psychotherapies seek to satisfy and strengthen that which is the very obstacle to true spirituality – the 'ego' – then the only sense in which one can speak of an influence is where the validity of psychotherapy itself begins to be effaced in the light of knowledge or experience gained from the tradition".

It would be a pity to lose in misapprehension a valid point made in this review, that that which is lower cannot encompass that which is higher, but that which is higher does encompass and inform all within itself. The view that 'ego' is the "very obstacle to true spirituality" is fraught with difficulty, because it implies that it is a thing in itself and is therefore in need of removal. Attendant upon this view are all the ramifications of how to go about this, which serve only to embroider the realms of sleep in ignoring the *raison d'être* of spirituality, that is, Reality as It is, Itself.

The most complete understanding of the situation is pointed to in Bulent Rauf's address on Humility, an extract from which appeared in the same issue. There, he says that, "Again, one must be reminded that 'passing away' does not mean complete obliteration of the 'I' but simply the relegation of it to its true value, its relative existence in immanence, but also its transmutation into relegation to the Oneness and Its Ipseity as Its own I, as we see in the phrase 'I was a hidden treasure and I loved to be known'". One of the implications here seems to be that 'I'ness is ishmuseity, neither absent from immanental or transcendent expression, nor identified with one or the other, but in a 'place' of complete active dependence, of 'no-otherness'. In this manner, the identity can be restored to the Singular and Indivisible that It is.

Dee MacDonald.

Alison Yiangou replies:

Firstly may I thank Mrs MacDonald for drawing attention to this very important point. Due to the limitations of space in writing a short review I was confining my use of the term 'ego' to the way it is commonly used in the majority of psycho-analytic theories, namely, referring to the individuated sense of self as author of one's identity and agent of one's actions. It is the ego as thus understood which the therapeutic process commonly attempts to reinforce, and this is an obstacle to spirituality; not in the sense that it is a thing in itself, but rather that it is a concept which so completely pervades and dominates the person's knowledge of himself that it veils him from his true identity.

However, from the standpoint of knowing the creature to be no other than Reality, which is the standpoint of the great spiritual traditions, then the 'I' of the person assumes its true value of being a uniquely individuated expression of the one and only 'I'. The ego cannot be known in this way unless there is complete admission and submission to the fact of an ultimate and all-encompassing unity, for otherwise – and herein lies the danger to which I was trying to drawing attention – there results only more and more subtle self-deception.

It would have profound consequences for psychotherapy if it were to regard the ego from the point of view of its reality rather than its veil. Suffice it to say that were this the case, then Mr Claxton's book may never have needed to be written.

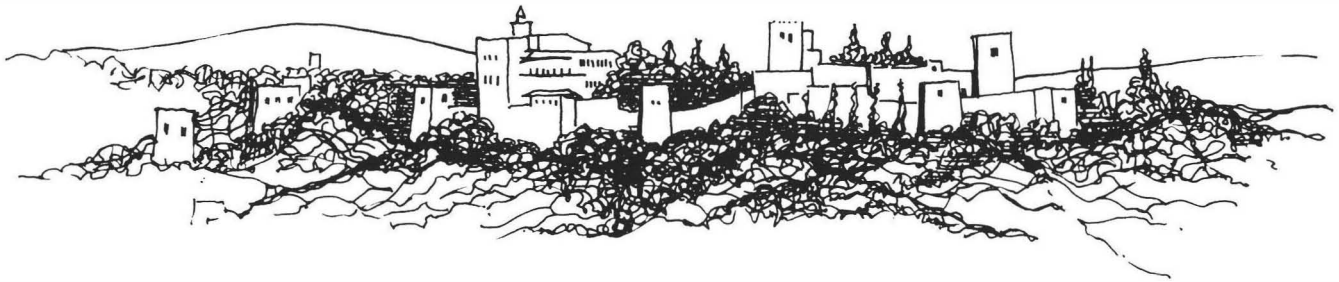
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BOOKS

Sufis of Andalusia



Peter Young introduces Dr R.W.J. Austin's translation of Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi's work, which has just been re-issued.

Any piece of writing illuminates in two directions: it may be read at once for the light it sheds on the subject matter, and also, since it flows from the author's hand, for the knowledge it confers of him. Those who have had the benefit of a study of the Shaikh's work will know that the writing can perform this combination since it is of man, and man is of God: Man himself is his Author's book and may be read, for those who can read, for the light he sheds on his origin. Alternatively, perhaps, he can be read simply for the benefits he confers, as one might read a novel with no thought of its author. But to combine between the two directions would be to see how the author is detailed in his book and how the book illuminates the qualities of authorship. It can be that in this combination no essential difference is perceived between author and book. This is particularly the case in the writings of a great saint such as Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi. As the saint is paradigmatic of his origin, his books are exemplar of the paradigm that is himself.

Two works, the 'Ruh al-Quds' and the 'Durrat al Fakhirah', contain biographical sketches of some of the sheikhs and saints whom Ibn 'Arabi met during his early life in Andalusia, and these have been limpidly translated by Dr R.W.J. Austin in this collection entitled 'Sufis of Andalusia'. Originally published by George Allen Unwin, its return to commercial bookshelves through Beshara Publications is, by those with a regard for Ibn 'Arabi, welcomed as one would welcome a sailor home from sea, long overdue.

The opening sketch presages well the rest of the book:

□ " (Al-Uryani) knew, immediately he met me, the spiritual need that had brought me to see him.

"He asked me, 'Are you firmly resolved to follow God's way?'. I replied, 'The servant may resolve, but it is God Who decides the issue'. Then he said to me, 'If you will shut out the world from you, sever all ties and take the Bounteous alone as your companion, He will speak to you without the need for any intermediary'. I then pursued this course until I had succeeded".

The ultimate 'success' of Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi, also mentioned in Dr Austin's invaluable introductory biography, is that he attained his own reality of Seal of Mohammedian Sainthood. This rank does not imply the termination of the line of Mohammedian Saints, as the corresponding rank of Seal of Prophets does. Rather, sainthood being an interior quality, it is sealed in an interior way by the Seal being an interior summary of the realities of past, present and future saints in the Mohammedian line. Hence is derived another title proper to the Seal of Sainthood, that of 'Contemplator of Ranks'.

His qualifications for writing this collection are therefore immaculate, for the ranks that these saints occupy are known to him in knowing himself. His description of the various saints is the detailing of

his own interior, just as he himself is the summary detailing of his origin. That 'Sufis of Andalusia' is partly autobiographical is precisely the same point, even though in some of the sketches the young Ibn 'Arabi describes himself as "a new-comer to the way at the time" and in one instance he is corrected on a point of dispute with a Shaikh by al-Khidr himself! His part is sometimes to observe, at other times complementing a viewpoint with its correlative and very often alluding to a mystery.

□ "One day, when I went to see this Shaikh, he said to me, 'Be concerned with your own soul, my son'. I replied that when I had visited my Shaikh Ahmad he had told me to concern myself with God: so I asked him to which one of them I should give heed. He said, 'My son, I am concerned with my soul, while he is concerned with his Lord. Each of us guides you in accordance with his own spiritual state. May God bless Ibn 'Abbas, and make me to reach his eminence'. Such was his impartiality.

"He was always very open and frank with me, which only served to increase my respect for him. I surprised him in that I maintained this formal attitude towards him while he was so open with me. When he would return to the demeanour of servanthood I, for my part, would then be open with him. The reason for this is a wondrous mystery which you will understand, my friend, if you ponder upon it, if God will".

There is many an encounter with dogmatic theologians, doctors of law and pretentious people who are dealt with according to their state, sometimes severely, sometimes mildly, but always for the sake of truth which, if they have the humility to accept, liberates them from their oppressed and oppressing condition.

□ "A certain judge, one 'Abd al-Wahhab al-Azdi, a jurist from Alexandria, talked with me one day in the Sanctuary at Mecca. The Devil has instilled into him the belief that the times were completely lacking in spiritual degrees (of attainment) and that all claims to this effect were fabrications and superstition. I therefore asked him how many lands belonged to the Muslims, to which he replied that they were very many. Then I asked him how many of these lands he himself had visited, to which he replied that he had been in six or seven of them. Then I asked him how many people, in his opinion, lived in these lands, to which he replied that they were very many. Then I further asked him which were in the majority, the ones he himself had seen or those he had not seen, to which he replied that the majority were, without doubt, those he had not seen. Then I laughed and said, 'How smitten and stupid is one who thinks he has seen many when he has only seen a few and judges them many by the few, elevating such a judgement to the status of an expert opinion. Surely any thinking believer would admit that there might be one he hasn't seen even from the few he thinks he has seen, and that that one might be blessed with spiritual attainment. How then is it possible to doubt the ignorance of one who admits he has only seen a few countries and even fewer people, and yet holds such a belief? God causes such a one to perceive only the deficiencies of this world and none of the good, so that, judging by what he has seen, he is wretched in the sight of God.'"

This book is a rich vein of ore, containing many treasures in potential, which even the unwary reader may discover. How much more is there for the reader who is prepared to dig for himself, or having read the lines, then to read between them?

Sufis of Andalusia was reissued in paperback by Beshara Publications in January 1988, price £7.50.



From 'Abu Ya'Qub Yusuf B. Yakhlaf al-Kumi'

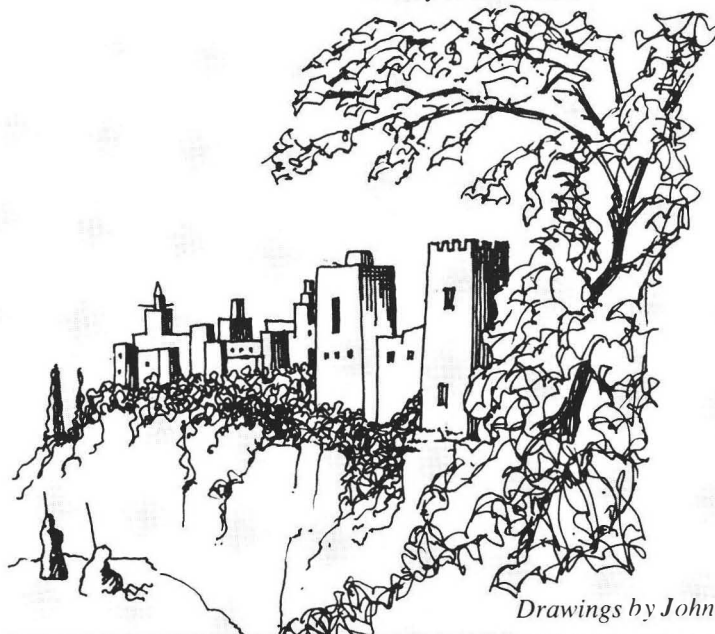
After the prayer, the Shaikh suggested that we all return to the town. He mounted his horse and set off, while I ran alongside holding onto his stirrup. Along the way he talked to me of the virtues and miracles of Abu Madyan. As for myself, I was so absorbed by what he was telling me, looking up at him all the time, that I was completely oblivious to my surroundings. Suddenly he looked at me and smiled, and spurring his horse, made me run more quickly to keep up with him. Then he stopped and said to me, "Look and see what you have left behind you!" When I looked back I saw that all the way was waist-high with thorn bushes and the whole ground was covered with thorns. Then he told me to look at my feet and my clothes, I looked and found not a single trace of thorns. Then he said, "This is the result of the spiritual grace engendered by our talking of Abu Madyan; so persevere on the Way, my boy, and you will surely find salvation." Then he spurred his horse and left me behind. I learnt much from him.

From 'Nunah Fatimah Bint Ibn al-Muthanna'

She lived in Seville. When I met her, she was in her nineties and only ate the scraps left by people at their doors. Although she was so old and ate so little, I was almost ashamed to look at her face when I sat with her, it was so rosy and soft. Her own special chapter of the Quran was 'The Opening'. She once said to me, "I was given 'The Opening' and I can wield its power in any matter I wish".

I, together with two of my companions, built a hut of reeds for her to live in. She used to say, "Of those who come to see me, I admire none more than Ibn Al-'Arabi". On being asked the reason for this she replied, "The rest of you come to me with part of yourselves, leaving the other part of you occupied with your other concerns, while Ibn al-'Arabi is a consolation to me, for he comes with all of himself. When he rises up it is with all of himself and when he sits it is with his whole self, leaving nothing of himself elsewhere. That is how it should be on the Way."

Although God offered to her His Kingdoms, she refused, saying, "You are all, all else is inauspicious for me". Her devotion to God was profound. Looking at her in a purely superficial way one might have thought she was a simpleton, to which she would have said that he who knows not his Lord is the real simpleton. She was indeed a mercy to the world.



Drawings by John Brass

The Ghost in the Atom

ed. P.C.W. Davies and J.R. Brown

Cambridge University Press 1986, reprinted 1987

P/back £6.50

Reviewed by Michael Cohen

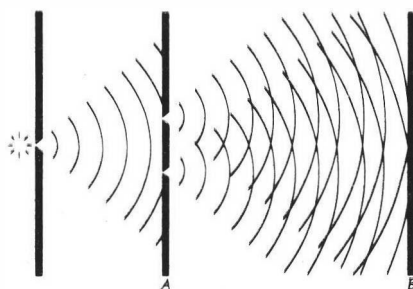
It is well-known that the twentieth century development of quantum physics, so triumphantly successful in its predictions of the behaviour of matter and energy, and so essential to modern technology, has led also to startling philosophical conclusions, seemingly opposed to any common-sense notion of reality.

In the last decades this has led to an entire academic industry of philosophers examining the issues involved, although most physicists have been content to pursue their researches without regard to wider implications. However, renewed attention has arisen on all sides as a result of seminal experiments on the phenomenon of 'non-locality' by the physicist Alain Aspect in 1980. The enormous interest caused by these results stimulated a number of semi-popular expositions, and in 1982 the BBC producer J.R. Brown collaborated with the physicist and science writer, Professor Paul Davies, to produce a Radio 3 documentary on Aspect's experiments and their implications, in which Davies interviewed a number of physicists holding differing views on the question. This book is taken from that programme and includes near-complete transcripts of the interviews, preceded by a chapter written by Professor Davies which introduces the subject for the general reader.

In forty pages Davies sets the scene with remarkable clarity. He explains how the present conceptual problems originated in the attempted interpretation of certain classical experiments in the interference of light. For example, in Young's two-slit experiment of 1801, a beam of light is passed through two slits in a screen and finally reaches a second screen where it forms an image. An alternating pattern of light and dark stripes is observed on the second screen. The nineteenth-century explanation of this result was that light consists of waves in the 'luminiferous

aether' and the pattern on the screen is formed by light waves from the two slits interfering with each other.

In about 1900, experimental results of Planck and others revealed this picture to be inadequate, and in 1905 Albert Einstein proposed the alternative theory that light consists of particles. His view was confirmed by later work and the particles of light became known as photons. But



Young's Slit Experiment.

Electrons or photons from the source pass through two near-by apertures in screen A and travel on to strike screen B, where their rate of arrival is monitored. The observed pattern of varying intensity indicates a wave interference phenomenon.

adopting this 'particle' view made it impossible to explain Young's experiment, especially when it was observed that the interference pattern was formed even when the light beam was so dim that only one photon at a time met the first screen. How could the photons in the light beam, moving randomly so each had an equal chance of passing through either slit, conspire with one another to produce the interference pattern?

The accommodation of these difficulties led to the formulation of quantum mechanics when Niels Bohr was led to abandon the idea that a subatomic particle has a definite spatial position and other physical attributes (mass, charge, momentum etc.) prior to any act of observa-

tion. The classical (and common-sense) view of a physical system – that it consists of particles and fields with physical attributes having precise values – is replaced in quantum mechanics by a 'wave-function' which (roughly) represents the system as having many values for each physical attribute. It is only at the moment of observation that one of these values is 'chosen' so that just one of the possibilities represented by the wave-function is actualised. Furthermore, an accurate observation of one attribute may preclude observation of another – a principle embodied in Heisenberg's famous Uncertainty Principle.

Davies goes on to explain the main schools of thought as to how quantum mechanics should be interpreted. The view still held by the majority of physicists is the so-called *Copenhagen interpretation* of Niels Bohr. According to Bohr, quantum mechanics is merely a set of rules for relating experimental observations, and any notion that an observation is a passive description of a situation external to the observer must be abandoned. What we have prior to observation is the wave function; ie. a nexus of possibilities. For Bohr, it is not possible even to talk of the existence of an attribute until it has been measured by an observer. This interpretation clearly gives the act of observation or measurement a central position. But any measuring system is itself a physical system, and so is subject to the laws of quantum mechanics. This leads to difficulties – the so-called 'quantum measurement problem' – which have not yet been resolved satisfactorily, even for followers of Bohr.

In addition, many physicists have recoiled from abandoning the classical view of an external world of well-behaved particles. Chief among these was Albert Einstein. He did not want to discard quantum mechanics – he was one of its original architects – but he regarded it as an incomplete theory, believing that underlying the wave-function description of nature there is a deeper level of description that is deterministic and observer-independent. Such a theory has become known as a *hidden-variables* theory, the hidden variables being the hypothesised deeper level of description, not directly observable, in terms of which the physical system can be objectively described. Einstein himself

did not produce such a theory, but for some years continued a fierce debate with Bohr in an attempt to show the Copenhagen interpretation to be inconsistent.

Davies gives an account of this celebrated dispute and then proceeds to describe recent developments. In 1965 J.S. Bell elaborated some of Einstein's ideas and proposed an experimental test to clarify the interpretation of quantum mechanics. The test exploits the fact that an observation made on a particle can, under certain circumstances, give information about a distant particle. Subsequently a number of experiments were performed, most successfully by Alain Aspect's group at Orsay in 1980-82.

The results show that any hidden-variables interpretation of quantum mechanics must allow for the possibility that an event can influence instantaneously another event far away in space – a feature known as *non-locality*. Non-locality contradicts the common-sense view, desired by Einstein and central to physics for centuries, that an event should only be able to influence the near-by region. It also appears to be counter to the special theory of relativity, a corner-stone of modern science, which dictates that any effect cannot be transmitted through space at a speed faster than that of light.

Before Aspect's results, hidden-variables theories had been developed by several workers, notably Louis de Broglie and David Bohm, and they do indeed encompass non-locality. They are also rather complex, and for this reason there has been renewed interest in a third version of quantum mechanics – the *many universes interpretation*, introduced by Hugh Everett in 1957. In this, *all* the possibilities contained in the wave-function occur, but in different universes. Thus in Young's experiment, at the moment a particle meets the slits, the universe splits into two copies of itself, each containing a copy of the observer. In one universe the photon passes through one slit, and in the second universe through the other slit.

Everett's idea appealed to an influential minority of physicists, who saw in it a simple way of recovering the notion of an external world. It also gives meaning to the wave-function of the entire universe, a necessary concept in cosmology which is problematic in other interpretations because the entire universe must necessarily contain the observer. Not surprisingly,

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perhaps, many others have found Everett's ideas to be so bizarre as to be beyond comment.

The first of the interviews is with Alain Aspect, in which he gives details about his experiment. The remaining interviewees are all theoreticians. John Bell gives the background to his work and expresses his dissatisfaction with all present attempts to make quantum mechanics secure. The eminent American physicist O. Wheeler explains his temporary flirtation with the many-universes interpretation and his recent interest in the quantum measurement problem. The late Sir Rudolf Peierls champions the Copenhagen interpretation unreservedly. David Deutsch explains his version of the many-universes view, and suggests a possible future experimental test.⁽¹⁾ John Taylor describes the *ensemble interpretation*, in which quantum mechanics is regarded purely statistically. Finally, David Bohm and his co-worker Basil Hiley explain their reasons for holding to a hidden-variables interpretation.

Each contributor is questioned incisively by Davies and the resulting diversity of views gives a better picture of the current ferment in the foundations of physics than would be received from many a straightforward exposition. Particularly noteworthy is the humility expressed by several of the contributors (notably Wheeler and Bell) in emphasising how open and unresolved the situation is.

Certain themes recur throughout the interviews. In several, Davies adopts the viewpoint of a hard-nosed physicist and asks whether there is any real meaning to the different interpretations, considering that they have the same experimental implications. Can we not regard quantum mechanics (and by implication, science in general) merely as a model for relating the results of experimental observations, and not look further? Bell, Deutsch and Bohm all give essentially the same reply — that as physicists they are driven by a desire to understand the world, which they wish to regard as objective. Furthermore, if science were conceived merely as the construction of algorithms for connecting observations, then the exercise of creative imagination by which new theories are discovered would be stifled. Their motivation, in short, is philosophical as much as practical.

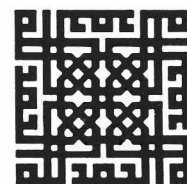
One's final impression is that the similarities between the various interpretations are more important than the apparent differences. They all imply that the tangible world of appearances has no self-standing, independent existence. In the Copenhagen interpretation this follows from the active 'creating' function of observation, and in the various realist interpretations by the proposition of a latent underlying reality. The feature of non-locality serves to further emphasise these implications. The interpretations differ in the various positions they assign to the conscious observer, but here again the difference seems not essential but rather one of viewpoint. The interpretation that seeks most completely to put the observer on the sidelines is that of the many-universes, and it is perhaps striking to consider Deutsch's experiment in that light. Also pertinent is Peierl's suggestion at the end of his interview that the many-universes can be reconciled with the Copenhagen interpretation by regarding the universes as a 'dictionary of possibilities'.

As is well-known, the holistic implications of quantum mechanics have led many to consider connections with the great mystical traditions, a thread that begins with Schrodinger's interest in Indian mysticism. It would seem that the reconciliation of the different viewpoints should result from taking seriously the standpoint of traditional metaphysics, which regards existence as many-layered, each layer being a different degree of description of a principal, all-inclusive Unity, in which the observer and the observed find their identity, and which is all that exists. (2) It is the great merit of the present book to expose the need for such a synthesis, and to draw our attention to the fact that after sixty years it has scarcely begun.

(1) In what I confess I found the maddest part of the book, he suggests the construction of an electronic superbrain which will split in two universes, then merge with itself again, then tell us about its observations!

(2) See 'To Suggest a Vernacular' by Bulent Rauf, Issue 1 of BESHARA.

A follow-up radio programme on the subject of cosmology — concerning superstring theory — took place earlier this year and will appear as a book entitled 'Superstring Theory' (2 Volumes) in June, also published by Cambridge University Press.



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The Spiritual Hunger of the Modern Child

J. G. Bennett, Mario Montessori and others

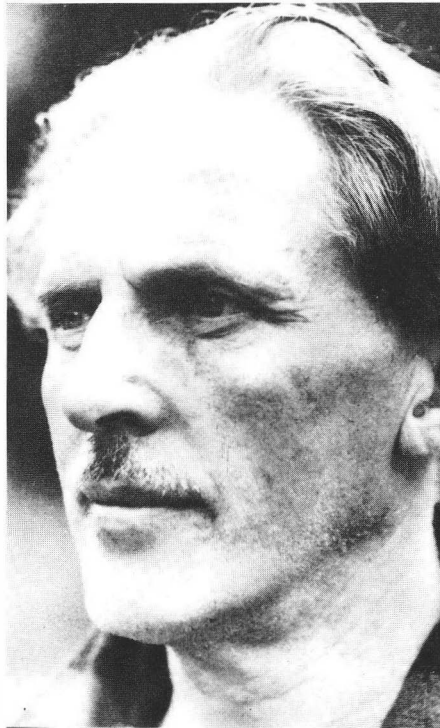
Claymont Communications, 1984. p/back, 220pp, £6.95

Reviewed by Cecilia Twinch

The *Spiritual Hunger of the Modern Child* comprises a series of ten lectures originally delivered in London in 1961 under the auspices of the Institute for the Comparative Study of History, Philosophy and the Sciences. There are contributions from a wide variety of speakers, including Dr Mario Montessori, son of the famous educationalist Maria Montessori; Rev. Adam Bittleson on Dr Rudolf Steiner and the child; and representatives from the Catholic, Jewish, Quaker and Buddhist faiths. There are also four pieces by Mr John Bennett, who introduced the series, gave the final summing up and delivered two further lectures – one on Gurdjieff's approach and one on Subud.

The lectures vary in quality a great deal but several ideas worthy of thought are brought up, especially by John Bennett. Since most of the contributors agree that it is not so much religious instruction that matters as the whole attitude and approach to life of those who care for and educate children, it is clear that this is an area where little advice of immediate practical application can be agreed upon, save the importance of putting spiritual values first.

The subtitle – *"In our relationship with the young, what must we do to preserve the religious potential that is latent in every child?"* – draws out one of the main themes to emerge – that the innate spirituality of the new-born, his closeness to God which is demonstrated in his ability to engender love and a desire to serve, is something to be preserved. Yet, at the same time, the child will not be able to reach his potential as perfect image of God unless he learns how to control and use the instruments at his disposal – the body and the psychological faculties which depend on it – and how to behave in a manner appropriate to this order of existence. This requires education, which as John Bennett says *"...should not be done in such a way as to produce a complete forgetfulness of whence we come, and whither we shall return, and the reason for our presence here."* (p148)



J. G. Bennett
Courtesy of Ben Bennett

For this, there needs to be recognition of the different stages of childhood (generally considered to be three in number, with major transitions occurring at about seven years and around puberty) and the need for all those concerned to respond appropriately to the child's state of development. Where young children are concerned, all contributors agree that religion or spirituality is 'caught not taught' – and that it starts with simple things like developing honesty and sincerity. The inherent quality of trust, in particular, which is so evident in small children needs to be guarded and allowed to develop into a 'faith in' rather than a grafted on 'belief that', and it is even felt that formal religious instruction at this stage can lead to confusion as the child's understanding grows.

Mario Montessori expresses the view, held also by his mother and echoed by others, that, *"Spirituality cannot be*

taught. Spirituality is there, but to keep it, just as to keep the body, you must feed it from birth." (p54) This begs the crucial question: what are the spiritual needs? This is tackled by John Bennett in his introduction, where he points out the need to distinguish not only between spiritual and material needs but also between spiritual and psychic needs, which is much more difficult.

He feels that psychic hunger arises from all kinds of emotional and intellectual demands that satisfy our personal desires and curiosity but these often disregard the needs of others. Spiritual hunger, however, *"starts with this necessity for us to 'belong', to have a place, to feel that we are not isolated, that there is something beyond our psyche which is not a stranger to us, which is not outside of us. And this quality in the spiritual need means that it is a need that cannot be satisfied...except in relation to a Whole, in relation to a reality that is more than ourselves."* (p4)

Following this initial stirring, John Bennett considers the spiritual need to make sense of life – to know who we are, why we are here, why we have a duty to live one way rather than another and why it matters. He connects this spiritual part of our nature with what he calls *"the 'I' of man, with his will and with the freedom that is his most precious attribute."*

One way that these distinctions can be focussed in our dealings with children is illustrated by the presentation of morality. When a child wants to know why he should or should not do something, is he confronted with a morality of rewards and punishments determined by cause and effect, or with a sense of obligation which involves submission to an order beyond personal consequence?

The distinction between the psychic and the spiritual is again emphasized by John Bennett when he talks of love. Whilst acknowledging that the natural bonds of love at a psychic level have their rightful place, he feels that if it goes no further parent and child will find difficulty in adapting to the changes which take place as a child grows up. Spiritual love, on the other hand, is unconditional; it is non-possessive and does not make demands, and its contagion can help the child, whose relationship to the parents mirrors the relationship of the parents to God, to develop the love of God – *"or rather participation in the love with which God loves his creation."*

For those to whom all this may seem a daunting and impossible task, John Bennett offers practical advice when he asserts that this is not something beyond us, but starts with simple things. *"It is more important that parents should provide an environment of trust for their children than that they should provide a condition of psychic stimulation."* and he goes on to say that it is through the child's direct experience of positive qualities expressed by his parents that he comes to a feeling for those qualities in his relationship with God.

And this highlights a point which comes up often in this book – that perhaps *"you should not attempt to teach your children anything about spiritual realities, but devote yourselves to the worship of God."* (Bennett, p159). Far from abdicating responsibility, this attitude, if taken to its logical conclusion, would demonstrate the utmost attention to the spiritual hunger of the child.

It also overrides a certain divergence of

viewpoint amongst the lecturers in the matter of whether it is only necessary for the child to preserve and nourish his innate spiritual awareness, or whether, as some believe, the child brings with him an additional burden which is called by some 'original sin' or 'hereditary defects'. The Roman Catholic, Father Thwaites, believes that *"but for that original sin, the modern child would not know spiritual hunger. His appetite for God would be perpetually and completely satisfied"* and sees formal baptism and repentance as the way of purifying the child.

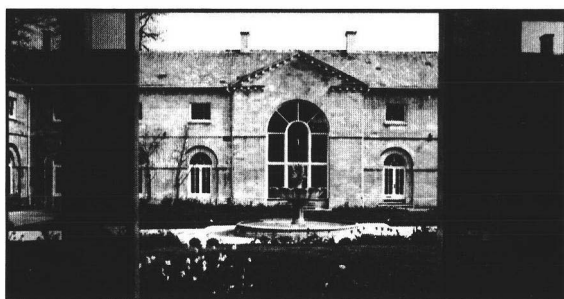
There is a real sense in which this concept of original sin could be misleading. From the esoteric point of view, original sin does not exist; it is only in the exterior that the negative effects of relativity are given credence, necessitating purification. The interior perfection is always present and is the birthright and potential of everyone – and everyone has the choice to claim it or not. Moreover, since man is created in the image of God, his thirsting

and yearning for knowledge, his spiritual hunger, is not merely due to lack but is an expression of God's own love to be known, which is endless.

Bennett speaks of this 'hereditary defect' in all four of his lectures, but as existing only at a psychic level. In his lecture on the Subud approach, he points out that *"this condition cannot be dealt with by the action of another psyche that is also tainted with the same defect; we cannot deal with the egoism of other people when we are also tainted and filled with the same"* and he goes on to affirm that paying attention to God or the Real, is what enables one to transcend all hindrances. *"It is remembrance of that Source that turns me away from my own egoism. As I see it, worship of God is the means by which man can liberate himself from his own egoism because he is putting himself in front of a Value, a Meaning, that is so much greater than himself that his own attachment and obsession with himself becomes ridiculous."* (p159).

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THEATRE

The Mahabharata

Directed by Peter Brook

Performed at the Los Angeles Festival, October 1987

Reviewed by Jane Townes



If it is not in the Mahabharata it is not to be found anywhere in life" according to Indian tradition. This great Hindu epic – the longest and possibly the oldest poem in the world (it is fifteen times the length of the Bible and dates from the 5th or 6th century BC) has been adapted for the stage in a marathon nine and a half hour production by Peter Brook in what has been called one of the theatrical events of the century.

Peter Brook is a former director of the Royal Shakespeare Company at Stratford-upon-Avon, who subsequently directed a stage adaptation of Attar's 'Conference of the Birds' and a film of 'Meetings with Remarkable Men' based on Gurdjieff's book. He and his collaborator, Jean-Claude Carrière, who wrote several of Buñuel's film scripts, were introduced to the Mahabharata by a Sanskrit professor in Paris who recited tales from it to them over a period of five years. After several trips to India, where the epic is still very much alive in daily life, and much reworking of the script with Brook's international theatre group, they arrived at this first known adaptation of the whole story.

'Mahabharata' means, by derivation, 'The Great History of Mankind'. In the opening lines of the play, the narrator is asked by a young boy "What is your poem

about?" He replies: "It is about you... if you listen carefully, at the end you will be someone else". Twelve hours later, this promise is fulfilled as the viewer has been taken through the creation, destruction and redemption of the world and/or man, and nothing seems quite the same.

In form the epic concerns the violent struggle between two groups of cousins over who should rule the kingdom. On the one hand there are the five Pandavi brothers, sons of Gods. The first-born is Yudhishtira, born to be king; he is the son of Dharma, the God beyond whom all thought must stop. Another son is Arjuna, born to conquer; he is the son of Indra, the king of the Gods. The Pandavi's cousins and rivals, the Kauravas, are the hundred sons of their blind uncle and aunt. The first section of the play deals with the fantastic origins of the protagonists and culminates in the famous game of dice when, through trickery, the Pandavis lose their kingdom to the Kauravas. The mother of the Kauravas says to their father: "When one prefers one's own children to the children of others, war is near".

The second section tells of the Pandavi's exile in the forest and the inevitable approach of war. The wise men seek ways to avert the war whilst each side

acquires weapons of ultimate destruction. Both sides ask Krishna to help them, and he offers either himself alone and unarmed, or all his warriors. Arjuna chooses Krishna alone. "Will the war take place in the battlefield or in my heart?" he asks him. Krishna answers, "I don't see the difference".

The final section opens with the great sacred poem, the Bhagavad Gita. Arjuna, facing members of his family who are now his enemies, cannot bring himself to fight against them. Krishna counsels him: "Victory and defeat, pleasure and pain are all the same... Renunciation is not enough... You must not stay without action, for we are here to serve the world".

What follows is the extraordinary chess game of the war, as each side pits their powers, physical, magical, miraculous and spiritual, against the other. The battle ends in devastation, leaving eighteen million dead and the Pandavis almost alone in the world. Finally, come 36 years of peace and then the heroes' ascent to paradise – 'the inconceivable region'.

This journey is not at all hard going. There is much joy and humour in the play, and it is peopled with a cast of mesmeric characters, part Gods, part men, part animals, elementals and spirits. People slip in and out of disguises and no-one is quite what they seem. Even the narrator becomes involved, and at one point is obliged to step in and impregnate two princesses to prevent the race, and his story, dying out.

At the centre of the action, Krishna is the most imponderable of them all. He has been recreated as he appears in the earliest versions of the Mahabharata; sometimes God-like, sometimes all too human, he may or may not be a reincarnation of Vishnu. Brook and Carrière deliberately maintain the ambiguity and thus make clear who he really is. He becomes annoyed, makes mistakes, he cheats, grows tired and is finally killed accidentally. He is also wise; he performs miracles and transforms us all when he reveals his universal form to Arjuna before the battle.

He says: "Everything rests on me like pearls on a thread. I am the earth's scent and the fire's heat. I am appearance and disappearance. I am the trickster's hoax.

I am the radiance of all that shines. All beings fall in the night and all beings are brought back to daylight. I have already defeated all these warriors, but he who thinks he can kill and he who thinks he can be killed are both mistaken. No weapon can pierce the life that informs you, no fire can burn it; no water can drench it; no wind can make it dry. Have no fear and rise up, because I love you".

Peter Brook calls this 'rough and holy theatre'. To have such an epic made so accessible and so compelling is a great gift. He intends it to be a play of shared ritual rather than a spectacle and offers the audience a chance to participate in the great questions of mankind. The sublime passages of the text, often already well-known, are experienced by the spectator as they are by the protagonists. When the ascetic tells the Kauravas' father what death is, or when Dharma questions Yudhishtira on the nature of things, the meanings conveyed are so powerful because the audience discovers them with the heroes. The sense of shared ritual is heightened by seeing the production in

one marathon session (however uncomfortable the seats!). Even the intervals, when the cast members circulate with the audience, become a part of the experience.

The Mahabharata is also a very beautiful production. The stage design, the costumes, the props and music are evocative rather than literal. The cast is international, coming from many different theatrical, cultural and religious backgrounds; the musicians include a Japanese percussionist, a Danish jazz flautist and a Turkish Mevlevi ney player. This diversity seems quite fitting in a play with such a universal theme.

Peter Brook's sense of the theatrical clearly extends to the staging of the production. It was first performed in French in a quarry in Avignon and the first English language version was staged in a boathouse in Zurich, the back wall of which was lowered at the end of the play to reveal the sun rising over the lake. In Los Angeles it was performed in one of the original sound studios in Hollywood (where Mickey Mouse, amongst others, made his first appearance) just off Melrose Avenue, the current 'hip' centre

of L.A. The bill-board outside exhorted passers-by to "Come and meet the most interesting people you will ever meet on Melrose". It seemed an appropriate setting in this city, which has provided the world with many of its dreams and fantasies in modern times, offering it a chance to see how original the forms derived from universal ideas really are, even when they are 2,500 years old.

At the end of the play, Yudhishtira climbs to the 'inconceivable region' and knocks on the gates of paradise. Twice he is tested and twice he rejects the form of paradise presented to him. As the forms recede, he is accepted and the narrator declares, "*This was the final illusion*". The Mahabharata itself is a theatrical illusion in a grand manner, and an illuminating one. Wherever it is next staged in the world, it will be well worth a day's participation.

The Mahabharata is being staged in the UK at Glasgow from 13th April to 17th May 1988

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EXHIBITIONS

Süleyman the Magnificent

The British Museum

13th February to 30th May 1988

Reviewed by Christopher Ryan

Like a great wave, the armies of Süleyman II (1494-1566), twelfth sultan of the House of Osman, poured out from Istanbul. Throughout much of the 16th century the history of three continents was dominated by the momentum of this extraordinary Ottoman empire, the grandeur and eminence of which seemed to be concentrated and reflected in the actions of one man, the 'Grand Turk', Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent.

Aside from a brief interruption when Sultan Bayazid I lost to Tamerlane at the battle of Ankara in 1402, successive generations since had prepared the place for him. Mehmet II (1451-1512), 'the Conqueror', had brought an end to the Byzantine Empire by capturing Constantinople in 1453. Mehmet's grandson, Selim I (1512-1520), known as 'Yavuz' (meaning 'resolute', though often interpreted to 'the Grim') was an uncompromising campaigner who consolidated the Ottoman position in Asia, defeating the Shah of Persia, taking Syria and Egypt, and bringing back to Istanbul the sacred relics of the Prophet Mohammed, the outward symbols of the Caliphate.

Süleyman took over the empire in 1520, and his conquests more than doubled the area of the estates he had inherited. His reign was of one victory after another, defeating the armies of the Persian Shah Tahmasp at Tabriz and Baghdad in the east, and twice besieging Vienna, thus ensuring even to the present day Turkey's position in both Asia and Europe. Rhodes was wrested from the Knights of St. John who after a long and bloody campaign were allowed an honourable retirement (only to return and haunt Süleyman in his old age in the terrible siege of Malta of 1565, his most ignoble defeat).

His navies under Khair-ad-Din Barbarossa made the Mediterranean an Ottoman lake, sweeping the Spaniards off the Barbary Coast to the Straits of Gibraltar and forcing them to develop their interests in the New World; and in the famous Adriatic battle of Prevesa the combined



Portrait of Süleyman. Anon. Venetian woodcut published by Mathio Pagani, Venice, c1550. Cat.No. 4a. Courtesy of the British Museum.

armada of the Emperor Charles I, the Pope and the Doge, under the flag of Admiral Doria, were scattered by the much smaller Turkish fleet.

It was in this atmosphere of expansion and success that the Ottoman civilisation reached a height in its government and its arts, the impetus of which was to carry, in spite of the Empire's later decline, into the present century.

The organisers of 'Süleyman the Magnificent' at the British Museum have chosen well and with good measure. Technically and artistically, the pieces shown here rank among the world's finest. Taken individually, the items of costume, calligraphy, ceramics, weaponry, paintings and furniture, are ample evidence of the refined taste of the Ottomans in their Golden Age. If, however, we allow ourselves to be enticed to deeper investigation into the significance of some of these pieces, placing them in their original set-

tings, the rewards are immeasurably richer.

Take as an example the lamp from the mosque of Sokollu Mehmet Pasha (cat.no.152). Against a background glaze of deepest cobalt glow medallions and blossoms in turquoise, white and red, the perfect and unrepeatable colours of classic Iznik ceramics. Around its neck, in a white so pure it seems self illuminated, is written the 'kelime-i-tevhid': '*la ilaha ilallah, Mohammed rasulillah*' (there is no god but God, Mohammed is the Prophet of God). The character of the calligraphy is strong and certain, yet expansive like the widening neck it ornaments. A wise and honest counsellor to Süleyman in the last years of his reign, Sokollu Pasha, a slave from Bosnia, had risen to become commander of the army and Grand Vizier, holding the empire together during the rule of Süleyman's successor Selim II (who preferred poetry and wine to government). The little mosque in Istanbul which bears his name, built by Mimar Sinan, can be found not far from the old Byzantine Hippodrome. Bulent Rauf wrote of it, "*Perhaps the most beautiful of the smaller mosques, it can be considered a gem in that it synthesises the idea of a mosque as an example, a mean against which all mosques should be measured like a yardstick for measure.*" (1)

Some of the most arresting of the objects arrayed here are the Imperial Tughras, the extraordinary illuminated seals or signatures of the Sultan which headed all his written commands and edicts, all documents announcing gifts and grants, and all official and diplomatic correspondence. Of these cat. no.9, which appears to be an exhortation in prayers and praise to one of Süleyman's Grand Viziers, demands time and our full attention: from the leaf-gold '*invocation*' of God's name descend finely traced scrolls of flower patterns and foliate turns pouring down in gilt and lapis as fine rain scattered by a celestial hand. Wrapped

within this mist, the strident curves and strokes of the calligraphy scribe the Sultan's name in full panoply of titles and epithets, like some great battle galleon declaring itself upon the main, leaving the destinies of men carved in the wake of its decrees below.

A dramatic sketch by Melchior Lorchs (cat.no. 7), carries the spirit of the time and the place. Crossing the Golden Horn from Pera to the old city, one building in particular dominates the marvellous skyline which rises before us. On the highest of the hills of what was once Constantine's New Rome, sits like a great king, majestic and benevolent upon his throne, the mosque of Süleyman – the Süleymaniye by the great architect Sinan – with its attendant complex of schools, library, kitchens for the poor, orphanages and a cemetery containing the mausoleums of the sultan and his equivocal wife Roxelana. From its huge dome, its magnitude restrained only by the four slender pinions of its minarets, the smaller cupolas of its surrounding courts descend as so many repercussions of a single order. It is a fitting symbol of the theme, and an apt reflection in the Ottoman system of the image of the Divine Viceregency, known in Islam as the Caliphate (arabic: khalifa – successor or viceregent), and described thus in Genesis: “so God created Man in His own image” and then “put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it”.

In Turkey to this day Süleyman is known as ‘Kanuni’ – the lawgiver – one aspect among many in which he appears as a harmonic of his namesake, King Solomon. It seems that a strong sense of justice was innate in him, as this extract from a letter to one of his commanders shows:

“Every virtue flows from justice. Whatever is done by an unjust person is an evil act. Don't be deceived by the appearance of the officials on your staff – and never employ in an official post anyone who is greedy for material possessions, because they are the ones who oppress the common people whom God has entrusted to me. In dealing with my soldiers and subjects whom I have placed in your trust, treat the young as your children, the old as your own father, and those your age as your brothers.” (2)

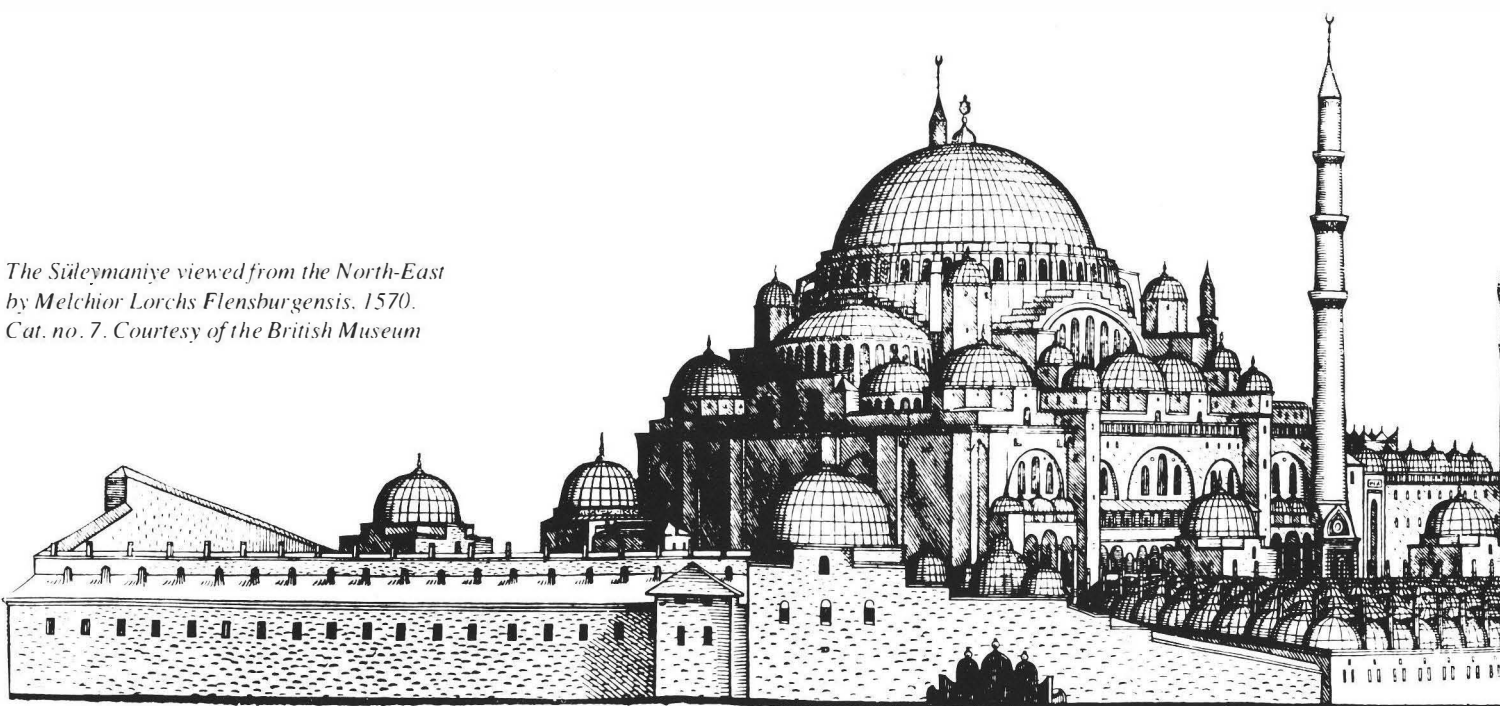
Innate though such a quality may be, it requires a certain kind of education to draw it out and give it the expression it deserves. Such an education was to be found in the schools of the Ottoman Ruling Institution, in which Süleyman would have enjoyed the best of tuition. In what was known as the ‘devshirme’ (the collection) a yearly levy of youths was taken from the non-muslim families of the conquered lands of the empire. At an impressionable age, old enough to be straying beyond the apron strings, but still young enough not to have formed other attach-

ments – usually in their teens – they were taken to Istanbul. Here they were scrutinised, and according to their own character and ability, and irrespective of background or race, they were allotted to the various departments of army and government. The most promising and the most pleasing to the eye were taken into the Imperial Household. It was a rigorous and life-long education to which they had to submit both mind and body, but the best would rise to become generals and grand viziers.

It was in this multi-national framework that the great achievements in art, literature and architecture were set. Süleyman himself was trained as a goldsmith, and was also, as were many of the sultans, an accomplished poet. He actively promoted the arts. His own ‘Divan-i-Muhibbi’ was copied by the best calligraphers in the palace school with illuminations of the highest quality (cat. nos. 30 and 31). His patronage of Mimar Sinan, the unrivalled master of Ottoman architecture and himself a product of the slave system, is the paradigm of effective cooperation between master and man – industrial relations par excellence!

Just as his public life was often one of high drama, so also the tragedy in his private affairs at times reached Shakespearean proportions. His own uxoriousness was matched by a jealous and intriguing wife in Roxelana; his generosity by the greed and corruption of his

The Süleymaniye viewed from the North-East by Melchior Lorchs Flensburgensis. 1570. Cat. no. 7. Courtesy of the British Museum



Vizier Rustem Pasha, who, it is said, was the first in the system to accept a bribe, and thereby initiated the downfall of the Empire: and his selfless endeavour by the ambition of his daughter Mihrimah, Rustem's wife. Those closest to him seemed to conspire against him most. By the most devious means they forced his hand against Ibrahim, his childhood friend, later Grand Vizier and the best man in the Empire. He was framed on a treason charge and executed. Of his seven sons, all but Selim predeceased him. Two were executed, again on false charges of disloyalty and rebellion.

No appreciation of the Ottoman world would be complete without mentioning those people termed in the west 'sufi masters'—those sultans of the spirit who preferred more often than not the humble garb of mendicants' robes to the luxury of cloth of gold, and the seclusion of distant mountain villages to the worldly grandeur of palaces by the Bosphorus. Hazreti Uftade of Bursa and Sha'ban Wali of Kastamonu (3) are from this period. Süleyman himself was sufficiently in awe of these 'Buyuklar', the 'Great Ones', and cognisant of their influence in affairs both spiritual and mundane, to see to the restoration of the tomb of Abdul Qadir Gilani in Baghdad, and that of Mevlana Jelaluddin Rumi in Konya—a fitting corollary perhaps, and appropriate completion in



Dish, c1550-70. Cat.No.139. Courtesy of the British Museum.

trinity, of the action of his father, Selim I, who, fulfilling the prophecy concerning the tomb of Muhyiddin 'Ibn Arabi (that it would be rediscovered "when the SIN (the 'S' of Selim) shall enter the SHIN (the 'Sh' of Damasc-i-Shams")), had a mosque built around it when passing through Damascus on his Egyptian campaign in 1516.

At his investiture, every sultan was girded with the sword of the House of Osman, the symbol of his office, by the head of the Mevlevi dervishes, a direct descendant of Jelaluddin Rumi whilst the sultan's bodyguard, the Janissaries, aligned themselves to Hajji Bektash Wali, counsellor of Orkhan, second sultan of the empire. The Bektashi movement has had a following throughout Anatolia since the 14th century.

Whether our interest is for art's sake, a love of history or simply an indefinable nostalgia for that grandeur and subtlety of expression which seems so little apparent in our present stage of civilisation, Süleyman the Magnificent, the age and the exhibition, serves well to lead us to a vision beyond the ordinary and the mundane; a vision in which society itself, from top to bottom, is seen to be the reflection of the image of the Divine Order; and where Man, in submission to Truth, and according to Beauty, is the preserver and maintainer of all he comes in contact with. It is said that the Caliph is the one who is completely responsible, and in Süleyman this responsibility was demonstrated with surpassing magnificence.

(1) *A Visit to the Ottoman Empire, May 1987.*
(Privately printed.)

(2) *Suleyman the Magnificent Poet.* Talat S. Halman, Istanbul, 1987

3) Both students of Hadji Bayran of Ankara

Charity Link

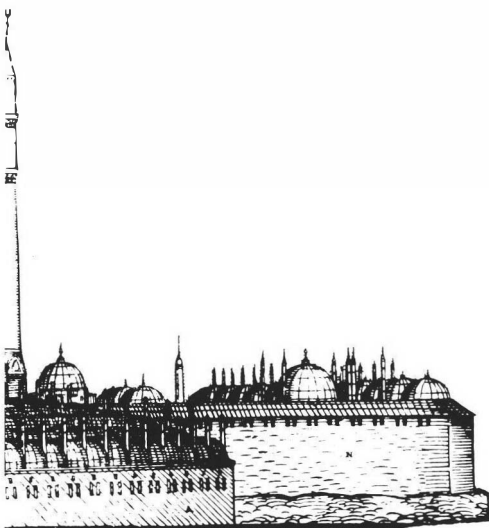
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BESHARA TRUST NEWS

In this first anniversary issue of BESHARA it is interesting to look back over the past year to see how the work of the Beshara Trust has evolved. The year has seen not only change and expansion for the Trust, notably with the addition of a new centre in Australia, but also each of the different Beshara Centres has witnessed a great strengthening of its activities.

The Trust is now responsible for three main centres, in each of which the expression taken by Beshara is necessarily different in form, yet complementary.

The Sherborne centre in Gloucestershire concentrates on introductory courses, and upon dialogue with other approaches and disciplines through lectures and seminars by guest speakers. Since they started in 1986, these latter have proved to be a valuable forum for open debate on such issues as the wider understanding of the results of scientific enquiry, and many eminent speakers have accepted the invitation to visit.

Chisholme House in the Scottish borders is the home of the Beshara School of Intensive Esoteric Education and remains specialised for intensive courses. With increasing numbers of students attending the Introductory six month courses, and with students who have completed long courses returning regularly for periods of study and conversation, it is now full to capacity for much of the year.

In Australia, the centre at Canonach is still in preparation, for although the property has been bought and courses have been planned, there remains a great deal of work to be done before the intended school can be established.

In addition, study groups are being held throughout the U.K. and in a number of other countries, such as America, Holland and Israel. In response to this increasingly international demand, the Beshara Trust has co-opted three new Trustees responsible for activities taking place under the name of Beshara overseas. Christopher Shelley has been co-opted as Trustee for America; John Metcalfe and Michael Tiernan for Australia.

The Trust has recently been asked to provide speakers for several meetings and

conferences. In April, Adam Dupré joined Paul Davies and John Polkinghorne on the platform at a conference on 'The Future of Religion' organised by SAROS, and in May he will be speaking at an Interfaith Festival to be held at Westminster Cathedral Hall under the auspices of Cardinal Hume. Also in May, the Trust will be taking a stand at the Festival of Mind and Body in London and providing a representative for the panel discussion on the Saturday. In August, they have been invited to speak at an Interfaith conference at the Tibetan Buddhist centre at Samye-Ling in Scotland.

The Beshara Trust is currently looking for new premises in the south of England to replace the Sherborne Centre, whose the lease expires in September. As a suitable property may not be easy to find, it is possible that premises will be rented for the next year or so before purchasing.



Sherborne

The line-up for the 1988 Beshara Trust Seminars is an exciting one. In February **Dr John Barrow**, Lecturer in Astronomy at Sussex University and co-author of 'The Cosmological Anthropic Principle' gave a seminar on 'New Ideas in Cosmology', an extract from which will be featured in the next issue of BESHARA. In May **Keith Critchlow** will give a seminar on 'The Sacred Order'; and on 23rd June **Jonathon Porritt**, Director of Friends of the Earth, will give an evening lecture on 'Dimensions of Deep Ecology'.

On 25th June **Dr Arthur Peacock**, Director of the Ian Ramsey Centre in Oxford and author of 'God and the New Biology' will discuss the points of convergence in science and theology; and from 5th-7th August the **Reverend Professor**

Stanley Jaki will give two lectures on 'The Stillbirths and Birth of Science' and 'Cosmology and Religion'. The Reverend Jaki, who won the Templeton Prize in 1987, is a Benedictine Monk and visiting Professor at Seton Hall University, USA. **Robert Muller**, former Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations, has also accepted to give a seminar sometime this year, dates yet to be arranged.



Chisholme

Up until April, three courses were running at Chisholme. In addition to the Introductory and Advanced 6-month courses, 10 days each month were devoted to the reading of Bulent Rauf's translation of the Ibn 'Arabi's *Fusus al-Hikam* together with the commentary by Ismail Hakki Bursevi. Without exception, all who were privileged to attend these readings found that, to quote the Principal of the Beshara School, Peter Young, "*their value is infinitely more than the attention they were able to bring to bear would merit*".

In March Chisholme was honoured to receive as a guest the Panchen Yudol Lama, who is currently staying at the Samye-Ling Centre. During his stay the Panchen Lama, who is traditionally the head of the Tashi Lhumpo Monastery in Tibet, addressed the students on Buddhism and answered questions.

During the summer months, a programme of courses on many levels is planned, including introductory 10-day courses; the Introductory six-month course (which continues to attract students from all over the world: this year, from Britain, America, Australia, Israel and Turkey); a one-month retreat course; and for those who have completed the long courses, readings of the *Fusus* and a further continuous course along similar lines to that run last summer. This further course, which students can join at any point for any length of time, has made it particularly apparent that the process of education which is expressed at Chisholme can have no end.



Canonach

In October last year, this property near Yackandandah in the State of Victoria was bought with the intention of establishing a Beshara School of Intensive Education in Australia. Richard MacEwan will be emigrating with his family in July as the

Trust representative, with special responsibility for supervising the courses there.

The property consists of 62 acres of land and a small farmhouse capable of housing about eight people. The task of setting up the school is a large one, even at the level of providing the physical amenities; an improved water supply will have to be arranged and additional accommodation built from scratch before the first long intensive course can be run.

However, several short introductory courses are planned for the summer and a small seminar programme is planned for July, including Rev. Trevor Moffat on 'Truth and Illusion in Psychoanalysis – its relationship to religious experience' and Jock Clutterbuck, lecturer at the University of Melbourne, on the artist Roger Kemp.

REFLECTIONS ON THE MEANING OF PLACE

Anne-Marie Morrissey

"As one of the Zen Masters had put it, at first the disciple, his mind still entangled in the cosmic mirage, beholds around him objects such as mountains and trees and houses; then with the gaining of partial knowledge, mountains, trees and houses fade from sight; but lastly having arrived at complete understanding, the man, no longer a disciple, again beholds mountains and trees and houses, but this time without the superimposition of illusion."
(1)

For the seeker after truth, certain places can be special. Exoteric religions have always had particular places which have performed an invaluable function for believers, and mystics in all ages have found inspiration through contemplation of natural beauty or the nurturing environment of a cloister or retreat.

Recently I spent some time at Canonach, the site of the Beshara Australia School, and I was struck by a special quality beyond that fleetingly apprehended by the senses in the quiet, the sound of running water, the night sky. A noted esotericist of the 20th century, Frithjof Schuon, states that we love something because it causes us to experience feelings *"that are in conformity with our*

nature and...allow us to be on the surface what we are in depth" (2). In similar vein, the Algerian Shaykh Ahmad Al-Alawi, in an autobiographical fragment, writes after being invited to settle in Tripoli. *"I went for a short walk around the district and found myself very attracted by that neighbourhood as if it corresponded to something in my nature"* (3).

Here sentiment and place are inextricably linked, and the perception of the essential qualities of a place originates in conjunction with the innermost self. It follows that whether we feel at home or estranged, much of the cause can be found within ourselves; feelings of distance from our 'spiritual home' are expressions of an interior state. In his Fusus al-Hikam, Ibn 'Arabi writes that, *"distance and closeness are two qualifying orders, where closeness is related to certainty and application, and distance is related to the lack of this and to deviation"* (4).

So if the perception of the qualities of intimacy and beauty originates in the self, can those qualities be limited to a place? The Divine Promise assures us that the Divine response *"I am present"* is always

The Beshara School of Intensive Esoteric Education

Courses Summer 1988

Ten Day Introductory

30th May – 8th June
16th July – 24th July
27th August – 4th Sept
17th Sept – 25th Sept

One Month Retreat

3rd July – 31st July

Weeks of Fusus al-Hikam Readings

23rd April – 1st May
14th May – 22nd May
18th June – 26th June

The 17th 6-month residential course will start on October 1st 1988.

Application forms and a prospectus, plus information and booking for all courses, may be obtained from:

*The Secretary
The Beshara School of Intensive
Esoteric Education
Chisholme House
Roberton
Nr. Hawick
Roxburghshire TD9 7PH
Scotland
Tel: Borthwick Brae (045 088)
215.*

there (5). The implications of that promise, and the ability to hear the response, have been expressed by many in different ways. A North African Shaykh, Zarruq, referred to this truth when he said, "*We do not care where we are so long as we are numbered amongst the Beloved*". A fellow student on one of the Beshara courses once likened it to, "*walking not through a garden, but with a garden*". This is not just an intellectual apprehension, it is actually perceived in the physical. In other words, the physical becomes an expression of interior certainty.

Some places, for example wilderness areas, require only a receptive appreciation of the beauty and grandeur they represent. Other places rely on human endeavour for the expansion of their qualities. Chisholme was just such a place; the beautiful physical setting becoming, through the efforts of many over the years, also a place of spiritual orientation. Canonach, too, is a beautiful setting, and much effort has been, and will be, put into it. The physical labour, the financial contributions, the emotional commitment will establish its sensible beauty. God willing, the spiritual effort will make it a special place.

Bayazid Bestami once wrote, "*Wherever God is constantly remembered, that is paradise, and all talk carried on there is more worthy than the greatest secret told under the tree in paradise*" (6). One can say that place actually takes its meaning from the Zikr that happens there, and this is the real meaning of 'in', to be 'in God'. For the lover of God, the only 'place' is in the Ipseity, a situation intimated by Asiya, the wife of Pharaoh, in her prayer, "*Near You, a house in Paradise*", thus, as Ibn 'Arabi puts it (6), "...giving priority to Him over the house."

(1) *The Way and the Mountain* by Marco Pallis, published by Peter Owen.

(2) *Esotericism as Principal and as Way*, Frithjof Schuon, Perennial Books.

(3) *A Sufi Saint of the Twentieth Century* by Martin Lings, Allen and Unwin.

(4) *Fusus al-Hikam, Chapter on Job*. Privately printed, Beshara School of Intensive Esoteric Education.

(5) *The Divine Promise* is "Invite Me and I shall answer you".

(6) *Attar's Memoirs of Saints*, trans. Behari Ashraf, Lahore.

(7) *Fusus al-Hikam*, as (4), Chapter on John.

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Details of local groups from Beshara Sherborne

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Dr Michael Cohen obtained a PhD in Mathematics at Newcastle in 1978. He has studied on the courses at the Beshara Schools and currently teaches Mathematics in London.

Brian Keeble has contributed to many journals. He was a founder editor of 'Temenos' and has published a selection of Eric Gill's prose called 'A Holy Tradition of Working'. He is the publisher of Golgonooza Press books and is currently editing a collection of the unpublished essays of Ananda K. Coomaraswamy.

Anne-Marie Morrissey is a child-care trainee instructor in Sydney, Australia. She has attended several courses at Beshara Sherborne and Chisholme. She is secretary for the Australian branch of the Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi Society.

Robert Muller is a distinguished author and worldwide lecturer who recently retired as Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations after a career spanning more than 35 years. He was responsible for organising the fortieth anniversary celebrations for the United Nations and is the Chancellor of the United Nations University for Peace in Costa Rica. Recent publications include 'New Genesis: Shaping a Global Spirituality' (Doubleday 1984) and 'What War Taught Me About Peace' (Doubleday 1985).

Martin Notcutt grew up in South Africa and came to England in 1972. He is a Trustee of the Beshara Trust and currently works as a company analyst.

Ted Pawloff was educated in France, Austria and UK. He is currently Managing Director of the Beshara Press.

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Dr Michael Shallis is an astrophysicist and a lecturer in the Department of External Studies at the University of Oxford. He is the author of several books, including 'Silicon Idol' (Oxford University Press, 1984) and 'On Time' (Pelican, 1983).

Cecilia Twinch (M.A. Cantab) gained a certificate of Education from the Froebel Institute. She has three children and works as a teacher in Ipswich.

Jane Townes is an architect who studied at the Architectural Association. She now lives in Los Angeles.

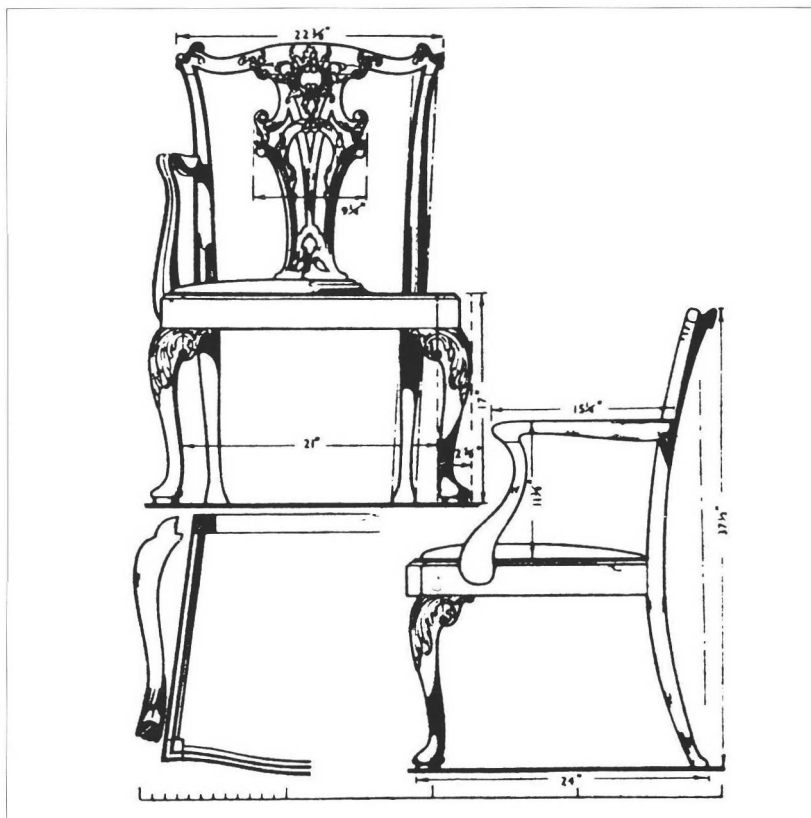
Peter Yiangou studied Architecture in Durban and at the Architectural Association, is a member of the RIBA and now practices in the Cotswolds. He is a Trustee of the Beshara Trust.

Peter Young M.A. (Cantab) is the Principal of the Beshara School at Chisholme House.

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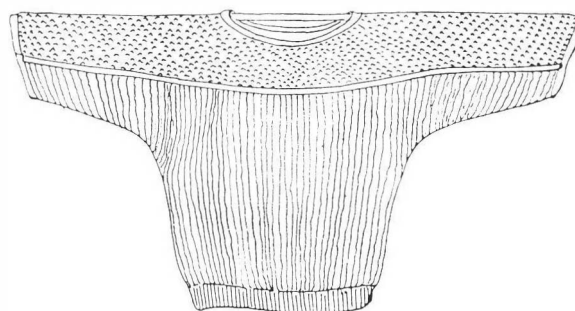
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