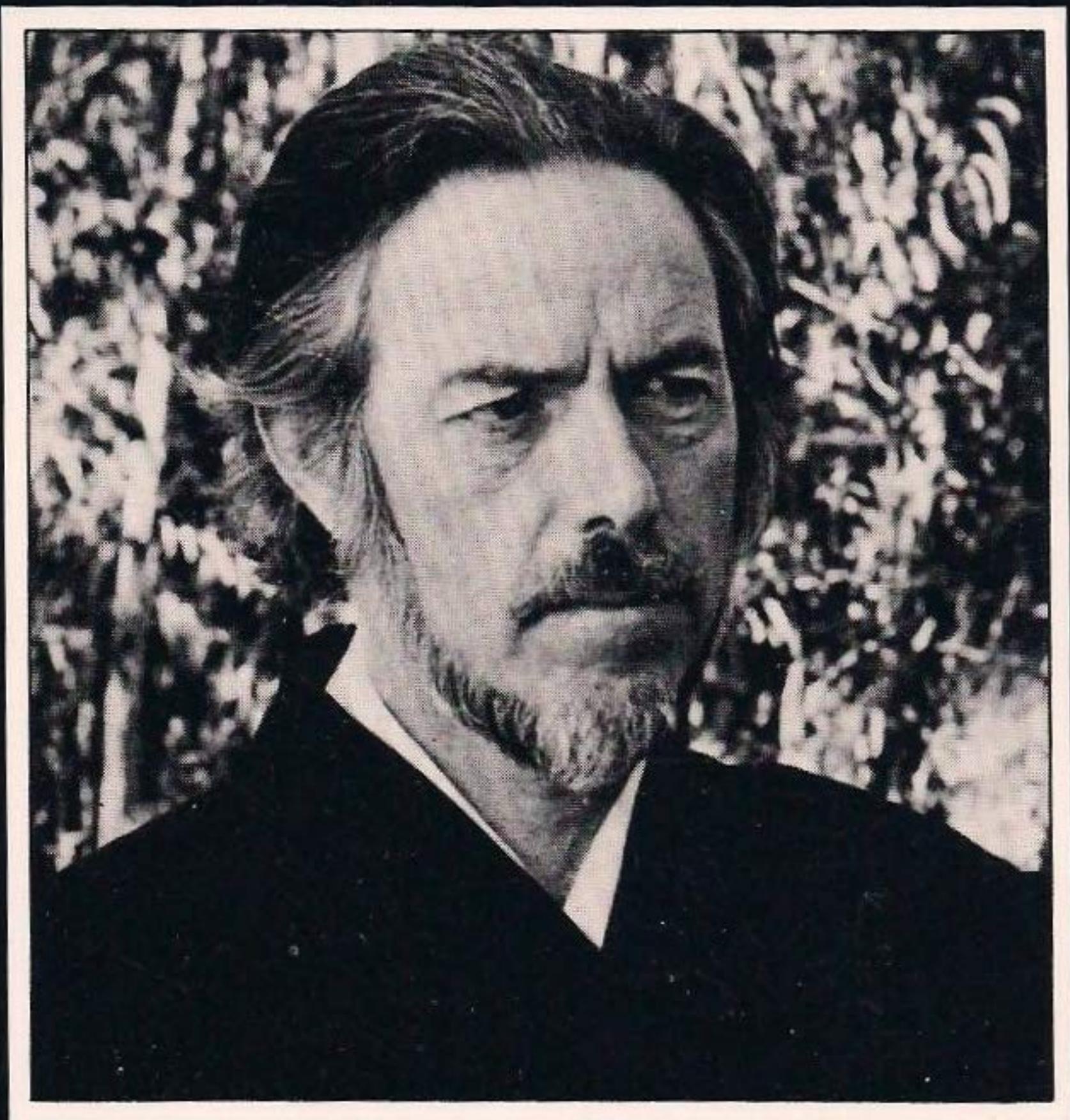
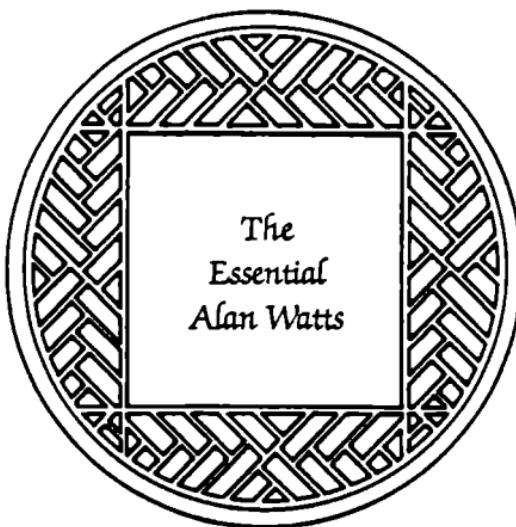


THE  
ESSENTIAL

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*Howard*







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The  
Essential  
Alan Watts

Alan Watts

CELESTIAL ARTS  
BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA



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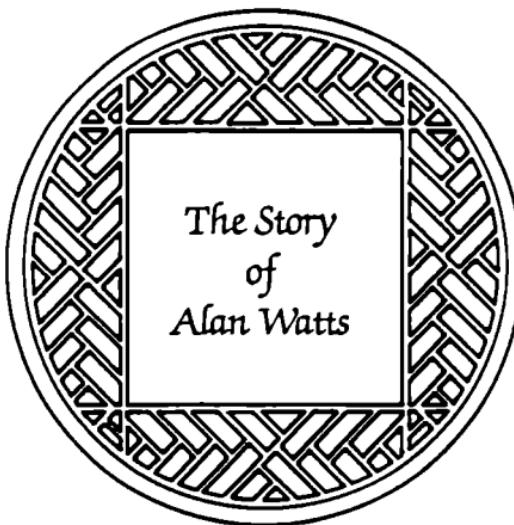
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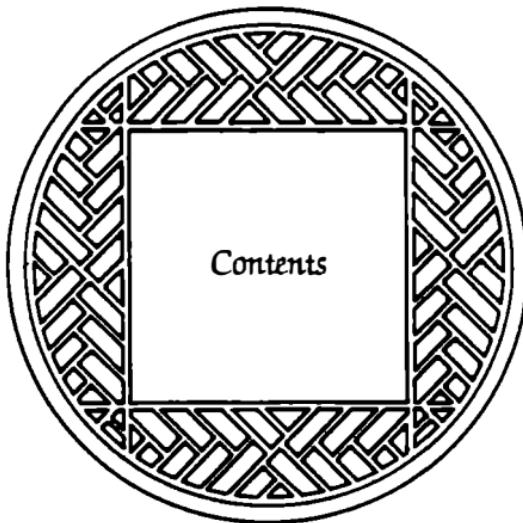


For more than twenty years Alan Watts earned a reputation as one of the foremost interpreters of Eastern philosophies to the West. Beginning at the age of 20, when he wrote *The Spirit of Zen*, he developed an audience of millions who were enriched by his offerings through books, tape recordings, radio, television, and public lectures.

He wrote 25 books in all, each building toward a personal philosophy that he shared, in complete candor and joy, with his readers and listeners throughout the world. His works present a model of individuality and self-expression that can be matched by few contemporaries. His life and work reflect an astonishing adventure: he was editor, Anglican priest, graduate dean, broadcaster, and author-lecturer. He had fascinations for cooking, calligraphy, singing, and dancing. He held fellowships from Harvard University and the Bollingen Foundation and was Episcopal Chaplain at Northwestern University. He became professor and dean of the American

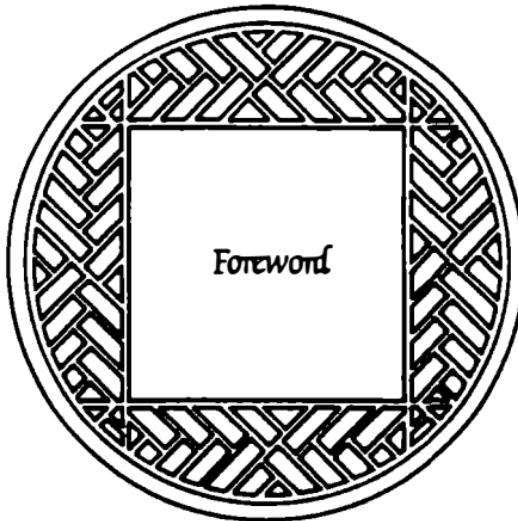
Academy of Asian Studies in San Francisco, made the television series "Eastern Wisdom and Modern Life" for the National Educational Television, and served as visiting consultant to many psychiatric institutes and hospitals. He traveled widely with students in Japan.

Born in England in 1915, Alan Watts attended King's School Canterbury, served on the Council of the World Congress of Faiths (1936-38), and came to the United States in 1938. He held a Master's Degree in Theology from Seabury-Western Theological Seminary and an Honorary D.D. from the University of Vermont in recognition of his work in Comparative Religion. Alan Watts died in 1973.



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In the following chapters the reader will discover a unique perspective of the philosophy of the late Alan Watts, one of the foremost Western interpreters of Eastern thought. The selections included herein are of dual origin in that the first two chapters are essays by Watts, and the following chapters are based upon his spoken word. Starting with "Trickster Guru" and "Speaking Personally" (the essays), this book begins with an autobiographical flavor and continues on to reveal Watts' insights in their final and most concise form.

To anyone familiar with the Eastern tradition of the guru, the "Trickster Guru" will strike a familiar note. Perhaps the most personal article ever written by Alan Watts, "Trickster" examines the myth of the guru from the outside in. Readers, teachers and "gurus" alike will find his treatment most humorous and forgiving. The rascal guru is revealed in due course as an ironically virtuous character. In "Speaking Personally," Watts muses about his own life, and in fact mentions

his then-forthcoming autobiography, referring to it as "Coincidence of Opposites" The title was later changed to *In My Own Way*, a further play on his seminar entitled "Being in the Way."

The chapters "Ego," "Cosmic Drama," "The More It Changes," "Work as Play" and "Time" were derived from The Essential Lectures of Alan Watts, a series of video programs recorded by Watts in 1971, two years before his death. Thus they reflect the culmination of his lifelong inquiry into the basic philosophical questions facing mankind. By the early seventies Watts had gathered a wide following, and he endeavored to present his ideas with the utmost simplicity so that they would be comprehensible to everyone. Watts called this practice "avoiding spookery," which loosely translated meant not using words or mystical concepts which might be unfamiliar, and thus confusing.

The remaining chapters, "The Individual as Man/World," "Oriental 'Omnipotence,'" and "Psychotherapy and Eastern Religion" are public lectures delivered to general and professional audiences. These talks were selected by Watts from hundreds of hours of recordings for publication in various journals and periodicals.

Mark Watts  
June, 1984



# The Trickster Guru

Alan Watts





I have often thought of writing a novel, similar to Thomas Mann's "Confessions of Felix Krüll," which would be the life story of a charlatan making out as a master guru — either initiated in Tibet or appearing as the reincarnation of Nagarjuna, Padmasambhava, or some other great historical sage of the Orient. It would be a romantic and glamorous tale, flavored with the scent of pines in Himalayan valleys, with garden courtyards in obscure parts of Alexandria, with mountain temples in Japan, and with secretive meetings and initiations in country houses adjoining Paris, New York, and Los Angeles. It would also raise some rather unexpected philosophical questions as to the relations between genuine mysticism and stage magic. But I have neither the patience nor the skill to be a novelist, and thus can do no more than sketch the idea for some more gifted author.

The attractions of being a trickster guru are many. There is power and there is wealth, and still more the satisfactions

of being an actor without need for a stage, who turns "real life" into a drama. It is not, furthermore, an illegal undertaking such as selling shares in non-existent corporations, impersonating a doctor, or falsifying checks. There are no recognized and official qualifications for being a guru, though now that some universities are offering courses in meditation and Kundalini Yoga it may soon be necessary to be a member of the U.S. Fraternity of Gurus. But a really fine trickster would get around all that by the one-upmanship of inventing an entirely new discipline outside and beyond all known forms of esoteric teaching.

It must be understood from the start that the trickster guru fills a real need and performs a genuine public service. Millions of people are searching desperately for a true father-Magician,\* especially at a time when the clergy and the psychiatrists are making rather a poor show, and do not seem to have the courage of their convictions or of their fantasies. Perhaps they have lost nerve through too high a valuation of the virtue of honesty — as if a painter felt bound to give his landscapes the fidelity of photographs. To fulfill his compassionate vocation, the trickster guru must above all have nerve. He must also be quite well-read in mystical and occult literature, both that which is historically authentic and sound in scholarship, and that which is somewhat questionable — such as the writings of H.P. Blavatsky, P.D. Ouspensky, and Aleister Crowley. It doesn't do to be caught out on details now known to a wide public.

After such preparatory studies, the first step is to frequent those circles where gurus are especially sought, such as the

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\* And there have also been such effective mother-magicians as Mary Baker Eddy, Helena Blavatsky, Aimee Semple McPherson, Annie Besant, and Alice Bailey.

various cult groups which pursue oriental religions or peculiar forms of psychotherapy, or simply the intellectual and artistic milieux of any great city. Be somewhat quiet and solitary. Never ask questions, but occasionally add a point — quite briefly — to what some speaker has said. Volunteer no information about your personal life, but occasionally indulge in a little absent-minded name-dropping to suggest that you have travelled widely and spent time in Turkestan. Evade close questioning by giving the impression that mere travel is a small matter hardly worth discussing, and that your real interests lie on much deeper levels.

Such behavior will soon provoke people into asking your advice. Don't come right out with it, but suggest that the question is rather deep and ought to be discussed at length in some quiet place. Make an appointment at a congenial restaurant or cafe — not at your home, unless you have an impressive library and no evidence of being tied down with a family. At first, answer nothing, but without direct questioning, draw the person out to enlarge on his problem and listen with your eyes closed — not as if sleeping, but as if attending to the deep inner vibrations of his thoughts. Conclude the interview with a slightly veiled command to perform some rather odd exercise, such as humming a sound and then suddenly stopping. Carefully instruct the person to be aware of the slightest decision to stop before actually stopping, and indicate that the point is to be able to stop without any prior decision. Make a further appointment for a report on progress.

To carry this through, you must work out a whole series of unusual exercises, both psychological and physical. Some must be rather difficult tricks which can actually be accomplished, to give your student the sense of real progress. Others must be virtually impossible — such as to think of

the words *yes* and *no* at the same instant, repeatedly for five minutes, or with a pencil in each hand, to try to hit the opposite hand — which is equally trying to defend itself and hit the other. Don't give all your students the same exercises but, because people love to be types, sort them into groups according to their astrological sun signs or according to your own private classifications, which must be given such odd names as grubers, jongers, milers, and trovers.

A judicious use of hypnosis — avoiding all the common tricks of hand-raising, staring at lights, or saying "Relax, relax, while I count up to ten" will produce pleasant changes of feeling and the impression of attaining higher states of consciousness.

First, describe such a stage quite vividly — say, the sense of walking on air — and then have your students walk around barefooted trying not to make the slightest sound and yet giving their whole weight to the floor. Imply that the floor will soon feel like a cushion, then like water, and finally like air. Indicate a little later that there is reason to believe that something of this kind is the initial stage of levitation.

Next, be sure to have about thirty or forty different stages of progress worked out, giving them numbers, and suggest that there are still some extremely high stages beyond those numbered which can only be understood by those who have reached twenty-eight — so no point in discussing them now. After the walking-on-air gambit, try for instance having them push out hard with their arms as if some overwhelming force were pulling them. Reverse the procedure. This leads quickly to the feeling that one is not doing what one is doing and doing what one is not doing. Tell them to stay in this state while going about everyday business.

After a while let it be known that you have a rather special

and peculiar background — as when some student asks, "Where did you get all this?" Well, you just picked up a thing or two in Turkestan, or "I'm quite a bit older than I look," or say that "Reincarnation is entirely unlike what people suppose it to be." Later, let on that you are in some way connected with an extremely select in-group. Don't brashly claim anything. Your students will soon do that for you, and, when one hits on the fantasy that pleases you most, say, "I see you are just touching stage eighteen."

There are two schools of thought about asking for money for your services. One is to have fees just like a doctor, because people are embarrassed if they do not know just what is expected of them. The other, used by the real high-powered tricksters, is to do everything free with, however, the understanding that each student has been personally selected for his or her innate capacity for the work (call it that), and thus be careful not to admit anyone without first putting them through some sort of hazing. Monetary contributions will soon be offered. Otherwise, charge rather heavily, making it clear that the work is worth infinitely more to oneself and to others than, say, expensive surgery or a new home. Imply that you give most of it away to mysterious beneficiaries.

As soon as you can afford to wangle it, get hold of a country house as an ashram or spiritual retreat, and put students to work on all the menial tasks. Insist on some special diet, but do not follow it yourself. Indeed, you should cultivate small vices, such as smoking, mild boozing, or, if you are very careful, sleeping with the ladies, to suggest that your stage of evolution is so high that such things do not affect you, or that only by such means can you remain in contact with ordinary mundane consciousness.

On the one hand, you yourself must be utterly free from

any form of religious or parapsychological superstition, lest some other trickster should outplay you. On the other hand, you must eventually come to believe in your own hoax, because this will give you ten times more nerve. This can be done through religionizing total skepticism to the point of basic incredulity about everything — even science. After all, this is in line with the Hindu-Buddhist position that the whole universe is an illusion, and you need not worry about whether the Absolute is real or unreal, eternal or non-eternal, because every idea of it that you could form would, in comparison with living it up in the present, be horribly boring. Furthermore, you should convince yourself that the Absolute is precisely the same as illusion, and thus not be in the least ashamed of being greedy or anxious or depressed. Make it clear that we are ultimately God, but that you *know* it. If you are challenged to perform wonders, point out that everything is already a fabulous wonder, and to do something bizarre would be to go against your own most perfect scheme of things. On the other hand, when funny coincidences turn up, look knowing and show no surprise, especially when any student has good fortune or recovers from sickness. It will promptly be attributed to your powers, and you may be astonished to find that your very touch becomes healing, because people really believe in you. When it doesn't work, you should sigh gently about lack of faith, or explain that this particular sickness is a very important working out of Karma which will have to be reckoned with some day, so why not now.

The reputation for supernormal powers is self-reinforcing, and as it builds up you can get more daring, such that you will have the whole power of mass self-deception working for you. But always remember that a good guru plays it cool and maintains a certain aloofness, especially from those

sharpies of the press and TV whose game is to expose just about everyone as a fraud. Always insist, like the finest restaurants, that your clientele is exclusive. The very highest "society" does not deign to be listed in the Social Register.

As time goes on, allow it more and more to be understood that you are in constant touch with other centers of work. Disappear from time to time by taking trips abroad, and come back looking more mysterious than ever. You can easily find someone in India or Syria to do duty as your colleague, and take a small and select group of students on a journey which includes a brief interview with this Personage. He can talk any kind of nonsense, while you do the "translating." When travelling with students, avoid any obvious assistance from regular agencies, and let it appear that your secret fraternity has arranged everything in advance.

Now a trickster guru is certainly an illusionist, but one might ask "What else is art?" If the universe is nothing but a vast Rorschach blot upon which we project our collective measures and interpretations, and if past and future has no real existence, an illusionist is simply a creative artist who changes the collective interpretation of life, and even improves on it. Reality is mostly what a people or a culture conceives it to be. Money, worthless in itself, depends entirely on collective faith for its value. The past is held against you only because others believe in it, and the future seems important only because we have conned ourselves into the notion that surviving for a long time, with painstaking care, is preferable to surviving for a short time with no responsibility and lots of thrills. It is really a matter of changing fashion.

Perhaps, then, a trickster may be one who actually liberates people from their more masochistic participations in the collective illusion, on the homeopathic principle of "The hair

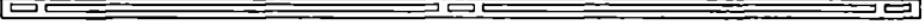
of the dog that bit you." Even genuine gurus set their disciples impossible psychological exercises to demonstrate the unreality of the ego, and it could be argued that they too, are unwitting tricksters, raised as they have been in cultures without disillusioning benefits of "scientific knowledge," which, as ecologists note, isn't working out too well. Perhaps it all boils down to the ancient belief that God himself is a trickster, eternally fooling himself by the power of *maya* into the sensation that he is a human being, a cat, or an insect, since no art can be accomplished which does not set itself certain rules and limitations. A fully infinite and boundless God would have no limitations, and thus no way of manifesting power or love. Omnipotence must therefore include the power of self-restriction — to the point of forgetting that it is restricting itself and thus making limitations seem real. It could be that genuine students and gurus are on the side of being fooled, whereas the phony gurus are the foolers — and one must make one's choice.

I am proposing this problem as a kind of Zen *koan*, like "Beyond positive and negative, what is reality?" How will you avoid being either a fool or a fooler? How will you get rid of the ego-illusion without either trying or not trying? If you need God's grace to be saved, how will you get the grace to get grace? Who will answer these questions if yourself is itself an illusion? Man's extremity is God's opportunity.

**The cock crows in the evening;  
At midnight, the brilliant sun.**







# Speaking Personally

Alan Watts





Because this is a personal journal I think I may be allowed to discuss a personal subject, in the strict sense of that word. The question is, "Who is Alan Watts — *really*?" All of us can ask that same question about ourselves, and find it enormously interesting. Likewise, we are vastly intrigued in asking it about other people, often in the hope that it will be revealed that they are, after all, just as much cowardly, arrant, and lecherous rascals as we deem ourselves to be. It is thus that so much autobiography is entitled "The Confessions," as of St. Augustine or Rousseau, or the "Apologia," as in the case of Cardinal Newman. It was always a good formula for a best-seller to write the biography of some person renowned for his virtue, and show, as the result of scholarly research, that he was a sexual pervert, a glutton, or an alcoholic. For "the evil that men do lives after them; the good is oft interred with their bones."

I am somewhat puzzled as to why our so-called vices should be thought more real than our equally so-called virtues. Perhaps it is simply because they are hidden. But as one having considerable experience as a counsellor and father-confessor, I find that aspect of things somewhat boring; and I have concluded that, by and large, my own vices are pretty much the same as everyone else's.

Indeed, I ceased to act as an official minister of religion just because playing the role gave people the impression that I was, or should be, unusually righteous.

But in that case, how could I (or anyone else) honestly lead a congregation in a general confession of sins in which we all informed the Almighty (as if he didn't already know) each one of us was a miserable sinner?

Almost everyone who reads this is already aware that the real self of each one of us is ultimately the Self of each one of the universe, the ever-mysterious Brahman which can never be made, nor needs to be made, an object of knowledge. So the question I have posed here — "Who is Alan Watts, really?" — is of a more superficial order. Namely, it is, "What is my true character or personality? Is the role that I play or the image that I present, for example, 'true' to the underlying character?"

Now this question brings up, in turn, two further intriguing questions. The first has to do with the order *image*, and the second with the word *true*.

So for the first, today people are immensely concerned about Their Image. It is well-known, for example, that politicians and other prominent persons have images composed for them by experts in public relations. (My wife used to work in this profession, and she knows all about it.)

Psychotherapy, on the other hand, as it is now generally

conducted, is largely concerned with the discovery or uncovering of one's *real* character, so that one can accept it and be *true* to it. In other words, the psychotherapists want people to be consistent.

For this there are two reasons. One is that we have been reading novels, and novelists are always berated by the critics when the characters of whom they write are not consistent. The deeper reason, however, is that the behavior of consistent characters is predictable, and predictable people are more easily controllable than surprising people.

Now I am a surprising person, at least to myself. (Even the great Zen master Bodhidharma, when asked by the Chinese Emperor "Who are you?" answered "I don't know.") For if I really knew who I am, through and through, I think I would be bored. To the extent that a future is fully known, it is already past.

Thus, I am not really interested in being a consistent character at all. It is much more amusing (that is, in touch with the Muses) to be paradoxical, or to be coincidence of opposites. It seems to me, then, that I am a sort of Joker, not in the sense of a funny-man or leg-puller, but in the sense of the card in the pack that plays wild, and so assumes many roles.

On the one hand, I am a shameless egotist. I like to talk, entertain, and hold the center of the stage; and I can congratulate myself that I have succeeded in doing just this to a very satisfactory extent.

On the other hand, I realize quite clearly that the ego-personality named Alan Watts is an illusion, a social institution (as are all egos), and a fabrication of words and symbols without the slightest substantial reality; that it will be utterly forgotten in 500 years (if humanity lasts that long) and that

my physical organism will all too soon be transformed into dust and ashes.

Nevertheless I know too that this me, this temporary pattern, this process, is a function or a doing or a particular wiggle of the whole energy of the universe in the same way as the sun, the galaxy, or, shall we be bold to say, Jesus Christ or Gautama the Buddha.

In the same apparently contradictory way I am an unrepentant sensualist. I am an immoderate lover of the opposite sex, of fine food, wine, and spirituous drink, of smoking, of gardens, forests, and oceans, of jewelry and paintings, and of superbly bound and printed books. Yet my desk and library are always cluttered and untidy. And, beyond all these things, I am totally fascinated with the mystical — with the study of religion and metaphysics, with the practice of ritual and meditation, and with trying to get as close as possible to a comprehension of what it is that IS.

Sometimes I seem immoderate in all things, and yet I am a good moderator in the sense that I love to sit on a panel and try to bring out the best in all the other speakers by judicious questioning.

(I don't like TV interviewers who try to destroy their guests — with the exception, perhaps, of William Buckley who is a great artist, whatever one may think of his opinions. My exemplar in this art of "bringing people out" is Henry Murray, the Harvard psychologist, who presided at fascinating luncheon and dinner parties at which he proffered no opinions but simply asked intelligent questions.)

Some years ago, the U.S. Air Force invited me, with three other philosophers and/or theologians, to address the personnel of their Weapons Research Laboratory in Albuquerque

on our basis for personal morals. I began by saying something like this:

"Now, gentlemen, I realize that you are dealing with one of the toughest and most realistic aspects of life, since it is your duty to defend your country to the bitterest end.

"I will not, therefore, detain you with sentimental considerations or concerns of gentle sensitivity. We will get down to the nitty-gritty. My basis for moral behavior, or any kind of behavior, is a total selfishness. I am out for me, just as you are out for the collective ego of your country. Of course, as a strategist, I'm not unsubtle about it. I'm not going to push people around and state bluntly what I want of them. On the contrary, I use camouflage and come on like I'm a very sociable fellow who has other people's best interests at heart, and by such deceptive ingratiation wangle others into doing what I want.

"However, in this enterprise I have to consider two things. What *do* I want, and what is this *self* which I am out for? These are difficult questions to answer, but they really must be answered. For a person who doesn't really know what he wants is a source of confusion both to himself and others. This kind of person fulfills desires which, when attained, are not to his liking, or makes promises for which he subsequently loses enthusiasm.

"It is therefore immensely important to clarify our personal desires, and I might add, equally important to clarify our political objectives, as a nation, and thus their implementation through military strategy. (The implication of this was, of course: Do we really want the responsibility and the headache of *ruling* Southeast Asia, China, India?)

"And then when I consider the nature of this *self* which

I love so much, I find it most difficult to get at. Let us suppose that I love beautiful women, money, caviar, Havana cigars, *pâté de foie gras*, Rolls Royces, and aloes-wood incense.

"I could go on compiling such a list forever, but every single item would formally be considered something *other* than myself. For when I look for myself I can't find it. How then can I love it?"

The point then is, speaking personally, that I can compile a whole catalog of loves, but I don't find the lover. I suppose I could also make a catalog of hates, which might include boiled onions, American bread, fundamentalist preachers, winter in England, physical torture (of myself or others), prisons and "mental" hospitals, racism, and bureaucracy. But if I should hate myself, as some are supposed to do, what on earth am I hating?

So, then, I find The Real Alan Watts amazingly elusive. I can be told who I am by parents, parsons, psychologists, and others. But their opinions differ, and they are just opinions. They cannot feel me from the inside, and thus, for my part, I am most hesitant in forming firm opinions of others.

Thus many things puzzle me. Why, for example, do so many people keep probing each other for their weaknesses? This is particularly so in "spiritual" and psychological circles, and it may be merely because of the pretensions and ambitions of such people to be good, wise, or holy. They therefore keep testing each other out. (This is why it is almost impossible to arrange a harmonious meeting of gurus. It was once tried at the Esalen Institute in California and was not, I am told, a success.)

Although, as the proverb says, you can't please everyone, I firmly believe that I enjoy pleasing people — to provoke

laughter, to see faces light up with comprehension, to be an agent of mental peace, to be creatively mischievous, to unburden others of nasty ideas which they think it their duty to believe, to infuse life with color, imagination, and playfulness, to beguile people into dancing and singing, to help them to cease — at least occasionally — from chattering inside their skulls, and to delight their palates and bellies with good cooking.

Even though I have seven children, five grandchildren, and, by the now well-established American process of staggered polygamy, three wives, I do not consider myself a good family man. I have never liked raising children because I have never been sure how it should be done, and have fathered them mostly to please the ladies. That is not to say that I regret my children's existence, for they become most lovable as they grow up and get mildly rebellious.

I dislike, in other words, being forced to comply with our particular sub-culture's concept of the child and its over-protective attitude to children. My father, now nearly 90, once told me that it took him almost his first ten years to understand anything that adults had in their minds, and that their behaviour struck him as insane. (Refer to my chapter in *The Book "On Being a Genuine Fake."*) However, he turned into an extraordinarily wise and considerate man, and I trust I shall do as well — in my own way.

So then, if I ever get around to writing an autobiography, it will probably be called *A Coincidence of Opposites*, for I am not at all unhappy in having a somewhat inconsistent identity as distinct from a rigidly patterned character. Furthermore, like St. Paul, I will be "all things to all men" because, in the widest sense of the word, I try to talk to people in their own language.

According to circumstance I will play the part of intellectual professor, literary bohemian, college administrator, sober theologian, orientalish guru, philosophical entertainer, aging hippie, or even man of business.

Philosophically, I will "do my thing" from almost any point of departure, any basic premises, you might choose: logical positivism, subjective idealism, scientific naturalism, critical realism, or pragmatism; psychoanalysis, behaviorism, or humanistic psychology; and, theologically, from the varying standpoints of Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Judaism, Islam, or Christianity.

I like to use all these points of departure as views or approaches to the hub of a wheel from differing places on the rim. I try to explain each separate approach to the hub in such a way that it will be clear and unconfused, and that the reader will be able to understand the unity in terms of maximum diversity.

It is the same with the art of life itself, for I agree with Shakespeare that "all the world's a stage" and that "one man in his life plays many parts."

And who or what is that one? I will give you the Zen *koan*:

**When the many are reduced to the one,  
to what shall we reduce the one?**







# Ego

Alan Watts





**I** suppose the most fascinating question in the world is: Who or What, am I? The seer, the knower, the one you are, is the most inaccessible of all experiences, completely mysterious and hidden.

We talk about *our* egos. We use the word *I*. I've always been tremendously interested in what people mean by the word *I* because it comes out in curious ways in speech. For instance, we don't say, "I am a body." We say, "I have a body." Somehow we don't seem to identify ourselves with all of ourselves. I say, "my feet," "my hands," "my teeth," as if they were something outside me. And as far as I can make out, most people feel that they are something about half way between the ears, and a little behind the eyes, inside the head, and from this center the rest of them sort of dangles. And the governing principle in there is what you call the ego. That's me!

But I just can't get rid of the idea that it's a hallucination. That's not what you are at all. And it's a very dangerous

hallucination because it gives you the idea that you are a center of consciousness, energy, and responsibility that stands over, against, and in opposition to everything else. You are the principle inside your own body as if your body were an automobile and you the chauffeur. You feel caught in a trap because your body's something of a mess. It gets sick, tired, hurts, and eventually wears out and dies. You feel caught in the thing because you feel different from it.

Furthermore, you feel the world outside your body is an awful trap, full of stupid people, who are sometimes nice to you but mostly aren't. They're all out for themselves, like you are, and therefore there's one hell of a conflict going on. The rest of it, aside from people, is absolutely dumb — animals, plants, vegetables and rocks. Finally, behind the whole thing there are blazing centers of radioactivity called stars, and out there there's no air, there's no place for a person to live.

We have come to feel ourselves as centers of very, very tender, sensitive, vulnerable consciousness, confronted with a world that doesn't give a damn about us. And therefore, we have to pick a fight with this external world and beat it into submission to our wills. We talk about the conquest of nature; we conquer everything. We talk about the conquest of mountains, the conquest of space, the conquest of cancer, etc., etc. We're at war. And it's because we feel ourselves to be lonely ego principles, trapped in, somehow inextricably bound up with, a world that doesn't go our way unless somehow we can manage to force it to do so.

I feel this sensation of ourselves as an ego is a hallucination. A completely false conception of ourselves as an ego inside a bag of skin. What we really are is, first of all, the whole of our body. Although the body is bounded by a skin (I can differentiate between my outside and my inside) my

body cannot exist except in a certain kind of natural environment. Obviously it requires air, and that air must be near a certain temperature; it requires nutrition, it requires that it be on a certain kind of planet near a certain kind of warm star spinning regularly around it in a harmonious and rhythmical way so that life can go on. That arrangement is just as essential to the existence of my body as to its own internal organs — my heart, my brain, my lungs, and so forth. So there really is no way of separating myself as a physical body from the natural environment in which I live.

Now, that means that I as a body go with my natural environment in the same way exactly as bees go with flowers. Bees look very different from flowers. The flower grows out of the ground, colors and perfumes the air. The bee is independent and buzzes around and flies. But where there are bees, there are flowers, and where there are no flowers, there are no bees. They go together and, in that sense, they make up a single system. Substitute for the word *system* the word *organism*, a single life form, a single individual, bees and flowers, however different they look. Naturally, my feet look very different from my head. Of course, a string is joining them and therefore we say, "Well, it's all one, obviously." They are very different but they're both me. The feet and the head, though different, are like the bees and the flowers — they go with each other.

Therefore, to define myself in a scientific way, to make a clear description of my body, my organism, my behavior, and describe what it's doing, I must also describe the environment, the surroundings in which it is doing it. In other words, it would be meaningless to describe myself as walking if I didn't describe the ground. Because if I didn't describe the ground, my description of walking would simply be of a per-

son swinging his legs in empty space. That wouldn't be walking — I have to describe the ground on which I walk.

What I am is a transaction or an interaction between this organism and its surrounding environment. They go together and constitute what we call in physics, a unified field. And that's what I am from a purely physical, scientific point of view. It may involve many more things than that, but I am an organism/environment.

But that's not what my ego feels like. That's not the average commonsensical conception of *I*. Because *I* is associated with the organism and not with the environment. It is opposing the environment, and it is not associated with all of the organisms. As I said, the ego tends to regard the rest of the organism as the chauffeur does the automobile.

How do we get this false sensation of being an ego? Well, it seems to me that it's made up of two things — and the first thing we have to understand is that, in the course of civilization, we confuse our ideas and words and symbols about the world with the world itself. The General Semantics group, founded by Dr. Alfred Korzybski, have a little song: "Oh, the word is not the thing, the word is not the thing, hi, ho, the derry-o, the word is not the thing." Obviously you can't get wet from the word *water*. The image, the idea, the symbol, the word is not the reality. The ego, what we feel as *I*, consists of the image or idea of ourselves as if seen in a mirror, or as if heard played back on a tape recorder or television.

When I was a little boy I remember I had a friend up the street called Peter, and I admired him very much. Sometimes I came home and imitated Peter's behavior. My mother would say to me, "Alan, that's not you, that's Peter." You see, she was giving me an image of myself. When I did anything terrible she would say, "Alan, it's just not like you to do that." She

was busy building in me an image, an idea of the kind of act I was supposed to put on, the kind of person I was supposed to be.

The word *person* comes from the Latin *persona*, which means that through which (*per*) the sound (*sona*) goes. It referred originally to the masks worn by actors in classical drama, because those masks had megaphonic mouths, so that in the open-air theater they would project the sound. So the *persona*, the person, is the mask, the role you're playing. And all your friends and relations and parents and teachers are busy telling you who you are, what your role in life is; and there are only a certain number of acceptable roles you can play.

First of all then, your sense of *I* is your sense of who you are, whether you're tinker, tailor, soldier, sailor, rich man, poor man, beggarman, thief, whether you're a clown, strong and silent, a clinging vine — we can name dozens of them — you identify yourself with a certain way of acting. It's quite complicated, but nevertheless there's a certain way of acting with which you identify yourself and which constitutes your image.

The image that you have of yourself is a social institution — in the same way as it is, for example, a social institution to divide the day into twenty-four hours, or to divide the foot into twelve inches, or to draw lines of latitude and longitude which are purely imaginary over the surface of the earth. It's very useful to do that because these lines are the means of navigation, but there are no lines of latitude and longitude on or over the earth — they are imaginary. You cannot, for example, use the equator to tie up a package, because it's an abstract, imaginary line. And in just the same way, your image of yourself as an ego is an imaginary concept that is not the organism and furthermore, is not this organism in its in-

separable relationship to its whole physical and natural environment.

The image that you have of yourself is simply a caricature! A caricature is an excellent example: When we make a caricature of Adolf Hitler, we pull down the hair and put a comb under his nose instead of a mustache. In the same way, our image of ourselves is a caricature of ourselves because it does not include almost all the important things about ourselves: it does not include all the goings-on inside the physical organism. Oh, we get belly-rumbles: occasionally we're aware of our breathing; occasionally we're aware that it hurts somewhere. But for the most part we're totally unconscious of everything going on inside us. We're unconscious of our brains and how they work. We're unconscious of our relationships to the external world, many of our relationships to other people are completely unconscious. We depend on telephone operators, electricians supplying our electricity, on all kinds of service that we never even think about. We don't think about air pressure. We don't think about the chemical composition of the air we breathe, we don't think about cosmic rays, gamma rays, X rays, the output of the sun. All these things are absolutely essential to our life but they are not included in the ego image.

So the ego image is very incomplete. In fact, it's an illusion. But we say, "Now, look, it can't be that way, because I feel *I*, I mean, it's not just an image of myself I have: I have a solid feeling behind the word *I*, when I think *I*, I feel there's something there." What is that? Interesting question. Because if your brain is your ego, you have very little in the way of direct sensation of your brain. In fact, operations can be performed on the brain with only surface anesthesia — there's

no feeling in the brain itself. Therefore, the brain cannot be the sensation of ego.

When your eyes are functioning well you don't see your eyes. If your eyes are imperfect you see spots in front of them. That means there are some lesions in the retina or wherever, and because your eyes aren't working properly, you feel them. In the same way, you don't hear your ears. If you have a ringing in your ears it means there's something wrong with your ears. Therefore, if you do feel yourself, there must be something wrong with you. Whatever you have, the sensation of *I* is like spots in front of your eyes — it means something's wrong with your functioning. That's why you feel you're there, why you feel you as being different from, somehow cut off from, all that you really are, which is everything you're experiencing. The real you is the totality of everything you're aware of and a great deal more besides.

But what is this thing that we feel in ourselves when we say, "That is the concrete, material me!" Well, I'll tell you what it is. When you were a little child in school, you were picking your nose and looking out the window or flicking spit balls or something, suddenly the teacher rapped the desk, "Pay attention!" Now, how did you pay attention? Well, you stared at the teacher, and you wrinkled your brow, because that's how you look when you pay attention. And when the teacher sees all the pupils in the class staring and frowning, then the teacher is consoled and feels the class is paying attention. But the class is doing nothing of the kind. The class is pretending to pay attention.

You're reading a book; there's some difficult book you have to read because it's required. You're bored to death with it, and you think, "Well, I've really got to concentrate on this

book." You glare at it, you try to force your mind to follow its argument, and then you discover you're not really reading the book — you're thinking about how you ought to read it. What do you do if I say to you, "Look, take a hard look at me, take a real hard look." Now what are you doing? What's the difference between a hard look and a soft look? Why, with your hard look, you are straining the muscles around your eyes, and you're starting to stare. If you stare at a distant image far away from you, you'll make it fuzzy. If you want to see it clearly you must close your eyes, imagine black for awhile, and then lazily and easily open them and you'll see the image. The light will come to you. And what do you do if I say, "Now, listen carefully, listen very carefully to what I'm saying." You'll find you're beginning to strain yourself around the ears.

I remember in school there was a boy who couldn't read. He sat next to me in school, and he wanted to convince the teacher that he really was trying to read. He would say, "Rruuunnn, Sssppooottt, rruuunnn." He was using all his muscles. What have they got to do with reading? What does straining your muscles to hear have to do with hearing? Straining your muscles to see, what's that got to do with seeing? Nothing.

Supposing someone says, "OK now, you've got to use your will, you've got to exercise strong will." That's the ego, isn't it? What do you do when you exercise your will? You grit your teeth, you clench your fists. You pull your stomach in, or hold your breath, or contract your rectal muscles. But all these activities have absolutely nothing to do with the efficient functioning of your nervous system. Just as staring at images makes them fuzzy, listening hard with all this muscular tension distracts you from what you're actually hearing; gritting

your teeth has nothing to do with courage, all this is a total distraction. And yet we do it all the time: we have a chronic sensation of muscular strain, the object of which is an attempt to make our nervous system, our brains, our sensitivity function properly — and it doesn't work.

It's like taking off in a jet plane. You're going zooming down the runway and you think, "This plane has gone too far down the runway and it isn't up in the air yet," so you start pulling at your seatbelt to help the thing up. It doesn't have any effect on the plane. And so, in exactly the same way, all these muscular strains we do and have been taught to do all our lives long, to look as if we're paying attention, to look as if we're trying, all this is futile.

But the chronic sensation of strain is the sensation to which we are referring as *I*.

So our ego is what? An illusion married to a futility. It's the image of ourselves, which is incorrect, false, and only a caricature, married to, combined with, a futile muscular effort to will our effectiveness.

Wouldn't it be much better if we had a sensation of ourselves that was in accord with the facts? The facts, the reality of our existence, is that we are both the natural environment, which ultimately is the whole universe, and the organism playing together. Why don't we feel that way? Why, obviously because this other feeling gets in the way of it. This socially induced feeling which comes about as a result of a kind of hypnotism exercised upon us throughout the whole educational process has given us a hallucinatory feeling of who we are, and therefore we act like madmen. We don't respect our environment; we destroy it. But you know, exploiting and destroying your environment, polluting the water and the air and everything, is just like destroying your own

body. The environment is your body. But we act in this crazy way because we've got a crazy conception of who we are. We're raving mad.

"Well," you ask, "how do I get rid of it?" And my answer to that is, that's the wrong question. How does what get rid of it? You can't get rid of your hallucination of being an ego by an activity of the ego. Sorry, but it can't be done. You can't lift yourself up by your own bootstraps. You can't put out fire with fire. And if you try to get rid of your ego with your ego, you'll just get into a vicious circle. You'll be like somebody who worries because they worry, and then worries because they worry because they worry, and you'll go round and round and get crazier than ever.

The first thing to understand when you say, "What can I do about getting rid of this false ego?" is that the answer is "Nothing," because you're asking the wrong question. You're asking, "How can I, thinking of myself as an ego, get rid of thinking of myself as an ego?" Well, obviously you can't. Now, you say, "Well then, it's hopeless." It isn't hopeless. You haven't got the message, that's all.

If you find out that your ego feeling, your will and all that jazz, cannot get rid of that hallucination, you've found out something very important. In finding out that you can't do anything about it, you have found out that you don't exist. That is to say, you as an ego, you don't exist — so obviously you can't do anything about it. So you find you can't really control your thoughts, your feelings, your emotions, all the processes going on inside you and outside you that are happenings. There's nothing you can do about it.

So then, what follows? Well, there's only one thing that follows: You watch what's going on. You see, feel, this whole thing happening and then suddenly you find, to your amaze-

ment, that you can perfectly well get up, walk over to the table, pick up a glass of milk and drink it. There's nothing standing in your way of doing that. You can still act, you can still move, you can still go on in a rational way, but you've suddenly discovered that you're not what you thought you were. You're not this ego, pushing and shoving things inside a bag of skin.

You feel yourself now in a new way as the whole world, which includes your body and everything that you experience, going along. It's intelligent. Trust it.





The Individual  
as  
Man/World

Alan Watts





There is a colossal disparity between the way in which most individuals experience their own existence, and the way in which the individual is described in such sciences as biology, ecology, and physiology. The nub of the difference is this: the way the individual is described in these sciences is not as a freely moving entity within an environment, but as a process of behavior which *is* the environment also. If you will accurately describe what any individual organism is doing, you will take but a few steps before you are also describing what the environment is doing. To put it more simply, we can do without such expressions as "what the individual is doing" or "what the environment is doing," as if the individual was one thing and the doing another, the environment one thing and its doing another. If we reduce the whole business simply to the process of doing, then the doing, which was called the behavior of the individual, is found to be at the same time the doing which was called the

behavior of the environment. In other words, it is quite impossible to describe the movement of my arm except in relation to the rest of my body and to the background against which you perceive it. The relations in which you perceive this movement are the absolutely necessary condition for your perceiving at all. More and more, a "field theory" of man's behavior becomes necessary for the sciences.

Yet this is at complete variance with the way in which we are trained *by our culture* to experience our own existence. We do not, generally speaking, experience ourselves as the behavior of the field, but rather as a center of energy and consciousness which sometimes manages to control its environment, but at other times feels completely dominated by the environment. Thus there is a somewhat hostile relationship between the human organism and its social and natural environment, which is expressed in such phrases as "man's conquest of nature," or "man's conquest of space," and other such antagonistic figures of speech.

It would obviously be to the advantage of mankind if the way in which we feel our existence could correspond to the way in which existence is scientifically described. For what we feel has far more influence upon our actions than what we think. Scientists of all kinds are warning us most urgently that we are using our technology disastrously, eating up all the natural resources of the earth, creating incredibly beautiful but wholly non-nutritious vegetables by altering the biochemical balances of the soil, spawning unbelievable amounts of detergent froth which will eventually engulf cities, overpopulating ourselves because of the success of medicine, and thus winning our war against nature in such a way as to defeat ourselves completely. All this advice falls on deaf ears, because it falls on the ears of organisms convinced that war against

nature is their proper way of life. They have to be unconvinced, and can be, to some extent, by intellectual propaganda, scientific description, and clear thought. But this moves relatively few people to action. Most are moved only if their feelings are profoundly affected. We need to *feel* this view of our individual identity as including its environment, and this must obviously concern scientists who are trying to find ways of controlling human feelings.

This problem has an important historical background. It is curious how the ancient philosophical debates of the Western world keep coming up again and again in new forms. Any question of the definition of the individual always becomes involved with the old argument between nominalism and realism. I do not wish to insult the intelligence of this learned audience, but, just to refresh your memories, the realistic philosophy of the Middle Ages and of the Greeks was not what today we call realism. It was the belief that behind all specific manifestations of life such as men, trees, dogs, there lies an archetypal, or ideal, form of Man, of Tree, of Dog, so that every particular man is an instance of that archetypal form, and that behind all men is something which can be called Man with a capital M, or the "substance" of man, of "human nature."

The nominalists argued that this was a mere abstraction, and that to regard Man (capital M) as possessing any effective existence was to be deluded by concepts. There are only specific, individual men. This idea is carried on in one of the most remarkable forms of modern nominalism, General Semantics, which argues that such abstractions as "The United States," "Britain," or "Russia," are so much journalistic gobbledegook.

Most people working in the sciences tend to be nominalists.

But if you carry nominalism to its logical conclusion, you are involved in awkward problems. Not only would there be no such thing as Man, Mankind, or Human Nature, but it would also follow that there are no individual men, because the individual man is an abstraction, and what really exists is only an enormous amalgamation of particular molecules. If you pursue this further and inquire about the individual entities composing the molecules, there is an interminable array of nuclear and sub-nuclear realities, and if *these* in turn are to be regarded as the only realities, then the reality which we call a man is simply the association of discontinuous particles. This is the *reductio ad absurdum* of nominalism carried too far. The nominalist and realist viewpoints are actually *limits* — to borrow a term from mathematics. I have often thought that all philosophical debates are ultimately between the partisans of structure and the partisans of "goo." The academic world puts a heavy emphasis on structure: "Let's be definite, let's have rigor and precision, even though we are studying poetry." But the poets will reply: "We are for goo, and you people are all dry bones, rattling in the wind. What you need is essential juices, and therefore more goo is necessary to liven you up." But when we want to know what goo is, and examine it carefully, we eventually turn up with a structure, the molecular or atomic composition of goo! On the other hand, when we try to examine the structure itself to study the substance of its bones, we inevitably come up with something gooey. When the microscope focus is clear, you have structure. But when you reach beyond the focus and what confronts you is vague and amorphous, you have goo because you cannot attain clarity. Structure and goo are essential limits of human thought; similarly, the nominalist-structural and the realist-gooey will always be essential limits in our thinking.

We must be aware that today, the particular academic and scientific fashion leans heavily in the direction of structure and nominalism.

To take a specific example, we all know that in modern medicine nominalism and structuralism hold the field. When you go through a process of examination by specialists working upon you from different points of view, they will treat you as a non-person, from the very moment you enter. You are immediately put in a wheelchair — a symbol of the fact that you are now an object. You will be looked at piecemeal, X rays will be taken of various organs, and special tests will be made of their functioning. If anything is wrong, you will use his equivalents of wrenches, screwdrivers and blowtorches to make certain mechanical alterations in your organism, and it is hoped you will get along fairly well with these repairs!

But the opposite, minority school of medicine will say: "This is all very well, and the services of the surgeon are sometimes greatly welcomed, but man must be considered as a whole. He has complicated metabolic and endocrine balances, and if you interfere with him seriously at one point, you will affect him unpredictably at many others, for man is an organic whole." Such are accused of being woolly-minded, old-fashioned doctors, mostly from Europe, with a kind of nature-cure background, who will use diet, complicated fasts, and massage. The poor layman doesn't know whether to deliver himself over to these old-fashioned naturalistic doctors or to Mr. Sawbones with his very up-to-date qualifications.

Fortunately, precise science is coming to the rescue of our man-as-a-whole. More recent studies are showing just how diseases formerly regarded as specific entities, or afflictions of a particular organ or area, are actually brought about by responses of the central nervous system, acting as an in-

tegrated whole. We are beginning to see how man, as a complex of organs, is not an *addition* of parts, like an automobile. His various organs are not to be treated as if they were assembled together, but by seeing the physical body as a unified or integrated pattern of behavior — which is just what we mean when we talk about an entity or thing. What happens when we have the feeling that we understand something, when we say, "Oh, I see"? If a child asks, "Why are the leaves green?" and you answer, "Because of the chlorophyll," and the child says, "Oh!" that is *pseudo*-understanding. But when the child has a jigsaw puzzle and sees how it all fits together, then the "Oh!" has a different meaning from the "Oh!" following the chlorophyll explanation. To understand anything is to be able to fit various parts into a system which is an integrated whole, so that they "make sense."

As organic diseases are fitted into a whole, and problems of crime or psychosis in individual behavior are fitted in with a pattern of social behavior that makes sense, that is consistent with those kinds of behaviors, we say "Aha! — now I see!"

Fascinating work is being done in studying the ways in which the individual as a system of behavior is related to his biological and social environments, showing how his behavior may be explained in terms of those environments. One of the people who has done very important work in this sphere is our distinguished colleague, B.F. Skinner. I cite his work because it brings out these ideas in a marvellously clear, crucial, and provocative way, and because it is evidence for conclusions which he himself does not seem to have realized. One of his most important statements is in his book, *Science and Human Behavior*:<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>New York: Macmillan, 1953, pp. 447-448.

The hypothesis that man is not free is essential to the application of scientific method to the study of human behavior. The free inner man who is held responsible for the behavior of the external biological organism is only a prescientific substitute for the kinds of causes which are discovered in the course of a scientific analysis.

He is talking, of course, about the chauffeur inside the body, or what Wittgenstein called the little man inside the head: this is for him a prescientific substitute for the kinds of causes for behavior which are discovered in the course of scientific analysis. He continues:

All these alternative causes lie *outside* the individual. The biological substratum itself is determined by prior events in a genetic process. Other important events are found in the nonsocial environment and in the culture of the individual in the broadest possible sense. These are the things which *make\** the individual behave as he does. For them he is not responsible and for them it is useless to praise or blame him. It does not matter that the individual may take it upon himself to control the variables of which his own behavior is a function or, in a broader sense, to engage in the design of his own culture. He does this only because he is the product of a culture which *generates\** self-control or cultural design as a mode of behavior. The environment determines the individual even when he alters the environment.

[\*Emphasis mine — A.W.W.]

I am not going to quarrel with this finding. I am not a clinical or experimental psychologist and am therefore unqualified to criticize Skinner's evidence. Let's take it for Gospel, simply for the sake of argument.

But there is a rather heavy emphasis upon the individual being the puppet. "All these alternative causes," i.e., the kinds of causes discovered in the course of scientific behavior, "lie outside the individual," i.e., outside this wall of flesh and bag of skin. The individual is therefore passive. This is psychology in terms of Newtonian physics. The individual is a billiard ball upon which other balls impinge, and his seemingly active behavior is only a passive response. Skinner admits the individual does and can alter the environment, but when he does so, he is *being made* to do so. This is put forth in such a way as to make the individual appear passive and the things *really* controlling his behavior outside him.

But the reciprocal relationship between the knower and the known, common to all the sciences, is set aside here although he mentions it elsewhere.

A laboratory for the study of behavior contains many devices for controlling the environment and for recording and analyzing the behavior of organisms. With the help of these devices and their associated techniques, we change the behavior of an organism in various ways, with considerable precision. But note that the organism changes our behavior in quite as precise a fashion. Our apparatus was designed by the organism we study, for it was the organism which led us to choose a particular manipulandum, particular categories of stimulation, particular modes of reinforcement, and so on, and to record particular aspects of its behavior. Measures which were successful were for that reason reinforcing and have been retained, while others have been, as we say, extinguished. The verbal behavior with which we analyze our data has been shaped in a similar way: order and consistency emerged to reinforce certain practices which

were adopted, while other practices suffered extinction and were abandoned. (All scientific techniques, as well as scientific knowledge itself, are generated in this way. A cyclotron is "designed" by the particles it is to control, and a theory is written by the particles it is to explain, as the behavior of these particles shapes the nonverbal and verbal behavior of the scientist.)<sup>2</sup>

In one of his essays, he has a cartoon of one mouse saying to another, "Boy, have I got that guy up there fixed! Every time I press this bar, he gives me some food!"

Although Skinner seems in general to be stressing heavily the point of view that the individual is the puppet in the field in which he is involved, he is nevertheless stating here the opposite point, that the individual organism, mouse, or guinea pig, in the experiment is nevertheless determining the environment even when, as in a laboratory, the environment of a rat running in a barn is not designed to control the rat, but the more it is so designed, the more the rat is involved in and shaping its environment. He writes elsewhere that what he has been saying

does not mean that anyone in possession of the methods and results of science can step outside the stream of history and take the evolution of government into his own hands. Science is not free, either. It cannot interfere with the course of events; it is simply part of that course. It would be quite inconsistent if we were to exempt the scientist from the account which science gives of human behavior in general.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>"The Design of Cultures," *Daedalus*, Summer 1961, p. 543.

<sup>3</sup>*Science and Human Behavior*, p. 446.

Now we might well object: "Look, Professor Skinner, you say we are completely conditioned behavior-systems. We cannot change anything. At the same time, you are calling upon us to embark upon the most radical program of controlling human behavior. How can you write *Walden II*, a utopia? Are you not a monstrosity of inconsistency by calling for responsible human action and at the same time saying that we have no freedom?" But is this actually a contradiction? He is saying two things, both of which can be valid, but he does not provide a framework in which the opposed points of view can make sense. Similarly, the physicist says light can be considered as a wave or as a particle system. These sound mutually exclusive to the non-physicist. In the same way, the advocacy of a planned development of human resources and potentials, coupled with the idea that the individual is not a self-controlling, skin-encapsulated ego, needs some further concept to help it along. The following passage clinches the problem.

Just as biographers and critics look for external influences to account for the traits and achievements of the men they study, so science ultimately explains behavior in terms of "causes" or conditions which lie beyond the individual himself. As more and more causal relations are demonstrated, a practical corollary becomes difficult to resist: it should be possible to produce behavior according to plan simply by arranging the proper conditions.<sup>4</sup>

There is a contradiction which necessarily arises in a

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<sup>4</sup>"Freedom and the Control of Men." *The American Scholar*, Vol. 25, No. 1, Winter 1955-56, p. 47.

psychology with a language system which incorporates into present scientific knowledge an outmoded conception of the individual — the individual as something bounded by skin, and which is pushed around by an environment which is not the individual. Skinner is naturally aware that his emphasis on our passive relationship to conditioning causes is rather unpalatable.

The conception of the individual which emerges from a scientific analysis is distasteful to most of those who have been strongly affected by democratic philosophies . . . it has always been the unfortunate task of science to dispossess cherished beliefs regarding the place of man in the universe. It is easy to understand why men so frequently flatter themselves — why they characterize the world in ways which reinforce them by providing escape from the consequences of criticism or other forms of punishment. But although flattery temporarily strengthens behavior, it is questionable whether it has any ultimate survival value. If science does not confirm the assumptions of freedom, initiative, and responsibility in the behavior of the individual, these assumptions will not ultimately be effective either as motivating devices or as goals in the design of culture. We may not give them up easily, and we may, in fact, find it difficult to control ourselves or others until alternative principles have been developed.<sup>5</sup>

There the book ends, and there is no suggestion as to what those principles might be, even though they are implied in his conclusions.

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<sup>5</sup>*Science and Human Behavior*, p. 449.

When an individual conspicuously manipulates the variables of which the behavior of *another\** individual is a function, we say that the first individual controls the second, but we do not ask who or what controls the first. When a government conspicuously controls its citizens, we consider this fact without identifying the events which control the government. When the individual is strengthened as a measure of counter-control, we may, as in democratic philosophies, think of him as a starting point. [\*My emphasis — A.W.W.]

Isn't this political nominalism?

Actually, however, we are not justified in assigning to *anyone or anything* the role of prime mover. Although it is necessary that science confine itself to selected segments in a continuous series of events, it is *to the whole series* that any interpretation must eventually apply.<sup>6</sup> [My emphases — A.W.W.]

Suppose, then, it becomes possible for us to have a new sense of the individual, that we all become conscious of ourselves as organism-environment fields, vividly aware of the fact that when we move, it is not simply my self moving inside my skin, exercising energy upon my limbs, but also that in some marvelous way the physical continuum in which I move is also moving me. The very fact that I am here in this room at all is because you are here. It was a common concurrence, a whole concatenation of circumstances which go together, each reciprocally related to all. Would such an awareness be significant? Would it add to our knowledge?

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<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.* pp. 448-449.

Would it change anything, make any difference? Seriously, I think it would because it makes an enormous difference whenever what had seemed to be partial and disintegrated fits into a larger integrated pattern. It will of course be impossible finally to answer the question, "Why does that satisfy us?" because to answer this question exhaustively I would have to be able to chew my own teeth to pieces. In the pursuit of scientific knowledge, always watch out for that snag. You will never get to the irreducible explanation of anything because you will never be able to explain why you want to explain, and so on. The system will gobble itself up. The Godel theory has roughly to do with the idea that you cannot have any system which will define its own axioms. An axiom in one system of logic must be defined in terms of another system, etc., etc. You never get to something which is completely self-explanatory. That of course is the limit of control, and the reason why all systems of control have ultimately to be based on an act of faith.

The problem confronting all sciences of human behavior is that we have the evidence (we are *staring* at it) to give us an entirely different conception of the individual than that which we ordinarily feel and which influences our common sense: a conception of the individual not, on the one hand, as an ego locked in the skin, nor, on the other, as a mere passive part of the machine, but as a reciprocal interaction between everything inside the skin and everything outside it, neither one being prior to the other, but equals, like the front and back of a coin.



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The  
Drama of  
It All

Alan Watts





I want you to think of the curious sensation of *nothing* that lies behind ourselves. Think of the blank space behind the eyes, about the silence out of which all sound comes, and about empty space, out of which all the stars appear. I liken this curious emptiness behind everything to God, an imageless, non-idolatrous God of which we can have no conception at all. Basically, when you really get down to it, that emptiness is yourself.

Now it sounds very odd in our civilization to say, "Therefore, I am God," or for that matter, "You are God." But this is exactly what Jesus Christ felt. And he was crucified for it, because in his culture God was conceived as the royal monarch of the universe, and anybody who got up and said, "Well, I am God," was blasphemous. He was subversive. He was claiming to be, if not the boss himself, at least the boss's son, and that was a put-down for everybody else. But Jesus had to say it that way because, in his culture, they did not have, as the Hindus

have, the idea that everybody, not only human beings, but animals and plants, all sentient beings whatsoever, are God in disguise.

Now, let me try to explain this a little more clearly. I cannot help thinking of myself as identical with, continuous with, one with the whole energy that expresses itself as this universe. If the universe is made up of stars, a star is a center from which energy flows. In other words there's the middle, and all the rays come out from it. And so I feel that, as the image of the whole thing, all energy is a center from which rays come out and, therefore, each one of us is an expression of what is basically the whole thing.

In the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic religions we think of God not only as a monarch but as the maker of the world, and, as a result of that, we look upon the world as an artifact, a sort of machine, created by a great engineer. There's a different conception in India, where the world is not seen as an artifact, but as a drama. And therefore God is not the maker and architect of the universe but the actor of it, and is playing all the parts at once, and this connects up with the idea of each one of us as persons, because a person is a mask, from the Latin *persona*, the mask worn by the actors in Greco-Roman drama. So this is an entirely different conception of the world, and as I think I shall be able to show you, it makes an amazing amount of sense.

So we start with the premise that you are God, and you don't know how you grow your body, how you make your nervous system work, how you manage to emerge in this environment of nature. All this is unknown to you, the you that is not you, the you that is not the ego. This is God — that is to say, not the cosmic boss, but the fundamental ground

of being, the reality that always was, is, and will be, that lies at the basis of reality. That's you.

Now, let's go into a more mythological kind of imagery. Suppose you're God. Suppose you have all time, eternity, and all power at your disposal. What would you do? I believe you would say to yourself after awhile, "Man, get lost." It's like asking another question which amounts to supposing you were given the power to dream any dream you wanted to dream every night. Naturally, you could dream any span of time — you could dream seventy-five years of time in one night, a hundred years of time in one night, a thousand years of time in one night — and it could be anything you wanted — because you make up your mind before you go to sleep. "Tonight I'm going to dream of so-and-so" Naturally, you would start out by fulfilling all your wishes. You would have all the pleasures you could imagine, the most marvelous meals, the most entrancing love affairs, the most romantic journeys; you could listen to music such as no mortal has heard, and see landscapes beyond your wildest dreams.

And for several nights, oh, maybe for a whole month of nights, you would go on that way, having a wonderful time. But then, after a while, you would begin to think, "Well, I've seen quite a bit, let's spice it up, let's have a little adventure." And you would dream of yourself being threatened by all sorts of dangers. You would rescue princesses from dragons, you would perhaps engage in notable battles, you would be a hero. And then as time went on, you would dare yourself to do more and more outrageous things, and at some point in the game you would say, "Tonight I am going to dream in such a way that I don't know that I'm dreaming," and by so doing you would take the experience of the drama for complete real-

ity. What a shock when you woke up! You could really scare yourself!

And then on successive nights you might dare yourself to experience even more extraordinary things just for the contrast when you woke up. You could, for example, dream yourself in situations of extreme poverty, disease, agony. You could, as it were, live the essence of suffering to its most intense point, and then, suddenly, wake up and find it was after all nothing but a dream and everything's perfectly OK.

Well, how do you know that's not what you're doing already. You, reading, sitting there with all your problems, with all your whole complicated life situations, it may just be the very dream you decided to get into. If you don't like it, what fun it'll be when you wake up!

This is the essence of drama. In drama, all the people who see it know it's only a play. The proscenium arch, the cinema screen tells us, "Well, this is an illusion, it is not for real." In other words, they are going to act their parts so convincingly that they're going to have us sitting on the edge of our seats in anxiety, they're going to make us laugh, they're going to make us cry, they're going to make us feel horror. And all the time, in the back of our minds we have what Germans call *hintergedanken* which is a thought way, way, way in the back of our minds, that we're hardly aware of but really know all the time. In the theater, we have a *hintergedanken* that it's only a play. But the mastery of the actors is going to almost convince us that it's real.

And, so, imagine a situation in which you have the best of all possible actors, namely God, and the best of all possible audiences ready to be taken in and convinced that it's real, namely God, and that you are all many, many masks

which the basic consciousness, the basic mind of the universe, is assuming. To use a verse from G.K. Chesterton:

*But now a great thing in the street  
Seems any human nod  
Where shift in strange democracy  
The million masks of God.*

It is like the mask of Vishnu, the preserver of the universe, a multiple mask which illustrates the fact that the one who looks out of my eyes and out of everyone's eyes is the same center. So, when I look at another human being, and I look straight into their eyes, I don't like doing that, there's something embarrassing about looking into someone's eyes too closely. Don't look at me that closely because I might give myself away! You might find out who I really am! And what do you suppose that would be? Do you suppose that another person who looks deeply into your eyes will read all the things you're ashamed of, all your faults, all the things you are guilty of? Or is there some deeper secret than that?

The eyes are our most sensitive organ, and when you look and look and look into another person's eyes you are looking at the most beautiful jewels in the universe. And if you look down beyond that surface beauty, it's the most beautiful jewel in the universe, because that's the universe looking at you. We are the eyes of the cosmos. So that in a way, when you look deeply into somebody's eyes, you're looking deep into yourself, and the other person is looking deeply into the same self, which many-eyed, as the mask of Vishnu is many-faced, is looking out everywhere, one energy playing myriads of different parts. Why?

It's perfectly obvious, because if you were God, and you knew everything and were in control of everything, you would be bored to death. It would be like making love to a plastic woman. Everything would be completely predictable, completely known, completely clear, no mystery, no surprise whatever.

Look at it another way. The object of our technology is to control the world, to have a superelectronic pushbutton universe, where we can get anything we want, fulfill any desires simply by pushing a button. You're Aladdin with the lamp, you rub it, the jinni comes and says, "Salaam, I'm your humble servant, what do you wish? Anything you want."

And after a while, just as in those dreams I described you would decide one day to forget that you were dreaming, you would say to the jinni of the lamp, "I would like a surprise." Or God, in the Court of Heaven, might turn to his vizier, and say, "Oh, Commander of the Faithful, we are bored." And the vizier of the Court would reply, "Oh King, live forever, surely out of the infinitude of your wisdom you can discover some way of not being bored." And the King would reply, "Oh vizier, give us a surprise." That's the whole basis of the story of the Arabian Nights. Here was a very powerful sultan who was bored. And therefore he challenged Scheherazade to tell him a new story every night so that the telling of the tales, getting involved in adventures, would never, never end.

Isn't that the reason why we go to the theater, why we go to the movies, because we want to get out of ourselves? We want a surprise; and a surprise means that you have to other yourself. That is to say, there has to enter into your experience some element that is not under your control.

So if our technology were to succeed completely, and everything were to be under our control, we should even-

tually say, "We need a new button." With all these control buttons, we always have to have a button labeled SURPRISE, and just so it doesn't become too dangerous, we'll put a time limit on it — surprise for 15 minutes, for an hour, for a day, for a month, a year, a lifetime. Then, in the end, when the surprise circuit is finished, we'll be back in control and we'll all know where we are. And we'll heave a sigh of relief, but, after a while, we'll press the button labeled SURPRISE once more.

You will notice a curious rhythm to what I have been explaining, and this rhythm corresponds to the Hindu idea of the course of time and the way evolution works, an idea drastically different from ours. First of all, Hindus think of time as circular, as going round — look at your watch, it goes round. But Westerners tend to think of time in a straight line, a one-way street, and we got that idea from Hebrew religion, and from St. Augustine.

There is a time of creation, then a course of history which leads up to final, eschatological catastrophe, the end of the world, and after that, the judgment, in which all things will be put to right, all questions answered, and justice dealt out to everyone according to his merits. And that'll be that! Thereafter the universe will be, in a way, static; there will be the eternally saved and the eternally damned.

Now, many people may not believe that today, but that has been a dominating belief throughout the course of Western history, and it has had a tremendously powerful influence on our culture. But the Hindus think half of the world is going round and round for always, in a rhythm. They calculate the rounds in periods that in Sanskrit are called *kalpas*, and each *kalpa* lasts for 4,320,000 years. And so a *kalpa* is the period or *manvantara* during which the world as we know

it is manifested. And it is followed by a period, also a *kalpa* long, 4,320,000 years, which is called *pralaya*, and this means when the world is not manifested anymore.

And these are the days and nights of Brahma, the godhead. During the *manvantara* when the world is manifested, Brahma is asleep, dreaming that he is all of us and everything that's going on, and during the *pralaya*, which is his day, he's awake, and knows himself, or itself (because it's beyond sex), for who and what he/she/it is. And then, once again, presses the button — surprise! As in the course of our dreaming, we would very naturally dream the most pleasant and rapturous dreams first and then get more adventurous, and experience and explore the more venturesome dimensions of experience, in the same way, the Hindus think of a *kalpa* of the manifested universe *manvantara* as divided into four periods. These four periods are of different lengths. The first is the longest, and the last is the shortest. They are named in accordance with the throws in the Hindu game of dice. There are four throws and the throw of four is always the best throw, like the six in our game, the throw of one, the worst throw.

Now, therefore, the first throw is called *krita* and the epoch, the long, long period for which this throw lasts, is called a *yuga*. So we will translate *yuga* as an "epoch," and we will translate *kalpa* as an "eon." Now the word *krita* means "done," as when we say, "well done," and that is a period of the world's existence that we call the Golden Age when every thing is perfect, done to perfection. When it comes to an end, we get *treta-yuga* that means "the throw of three," and in this period of manifestation there's an element of the uncertain, an element of insecurity, an element of adventure in things. It's like a three-legged stool is not as secure as a four-legged one — you're a little more liable to be thrown off balance.

That lasts for a very long time, too, but then we get next what is called *dvapara-yuga*. In this period, the good and the bad, the pleasurable and the painful, are equally balanced. But, finally, there comes *kali-yuga*. *Kali* means "the worst throw" and this lasts for the shortest time. This is the period of manifestation in which the unpleasurable, painful, diabolical principle finally takes over — but it has the shortest innings.

And at the end of the *kali-yuga*, the great destroyer of the worlds, God manifested as the destructive principle Shiva, does a dance called the *tandava*, and he appears, blue-bodied with ten arms, with lightning and fire appearing from every pore in his skin, and does a dance in which the universe is finally destroyed. The moment of cosmic death is the waking up of Brahma, the creator, for as Shiva turns round and walks off the stage, seen from behind, he is Brahma, the creator, the beginning of it all again. And Vishnu is the preserver, that is to say, the going on of it all, the whole state of the godhead being manifested as many, many faces. So, you see, this is a philosophy of the role of evil in life which is rational and merciful.

If we think God is playing with the world, has created it for his pleasure, and has created all these other beings and they go through the most horrible torments — terminal cancer children being burned with napalm, concentration camps, the Inquisition, the horrors that human beings go through — how is that possibly justifiable? We try by saying, "Well, some God must have created it; if a God didn't create it, there's nobody in charge and there's no rationality to the whole thing. It's just a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury signifying nothing. It's a ridiculous system and the only out is suicide."

But suppose it's the kind of thing I've described to you, sup-

posing it isn't that God is pleasing himself with all these victims, showing off his justice by either rewarding them or punishing them — supposing it's quite different from that. Suppose that God is the one playing all the parts, that God is the child being burned to death with napalm. There is no victim except the victor. All the different roles which are being experienced, all the different feelings which are being felt, are being felt by the one who originally desires, decides, wills to go into that very situation.

Curiously enough, there is something parallel to this in Christianity. There's a passage in St. Paul's Epistle to the Philippians in which he says a very curious thing: "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who being in the form of God, did not think identity with God a thing to be clung to, but humbled himself and made himself of no reputation, and was found in fashion as a man and became obedient to death, even the death of the cross." Here you have exactly the same idea, the idea of God becoming human, suffering all that human beings can suffer, even death. And St. Paul is saying, "Let this mind be in you," that is to say, let the same kind of consciousness be in you that was in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ knew he was God.

Wake up and find out eventually who you really are. In our culture, of course, they'll say you're crazy or you're blasphemous, and they'll either put you in jail or in the nut house (which is the same thing). But if you wake up in India and tell your friends and relations, "My goodness, I've just discovered that I'm God," they'll laugh and say, "Oh, congratulations, at last you found out."







# The More Things Change

Alan Watts





I am going to relate three fantasies, all of which have something in common that will be evident to you at the end. The first fantasy is about reproduction. We use the word reproduction in two principal ways: We talk about the biological reproduction of a species, and we also speak of reproduction in terms of a painting, a photograph, a recording, a movie, or a videotape. Now what is reproduction in the latter all about? Well, hundreds of years ago, kings of Europe formed feudal alliances by marrying the princesses of far-off states. Before entering into a marriage contract they would have painters send portraits of the lady in question to see if his majesty approved of her. On one such occasion Henry the Eighth of England was badly cheated in this procedure by a too flattering portrait of Anne of Cleves.

Therefore, there developed a kind of moral code among artists in the European tradition beginning with the marvelous work of the Renaissance, and later the Flemish painters.

Finally, with the *art officiale* of the nineteenth century, we got what we now call photographic realism.

At that time they said, "Isn't there some more scientific way of doing this?" And so they discovered the camera. First there were those brownish daguerrotypes. People said, "Well, that is pretty, it really looks like grandpa, doesn't it?" "But," they said, "something, several things are missing; it isn't colored for one thing." So they tinted them.

And then they said, "Why, it's real lifelike, but you know, there are some people whose whole style of life, whose whole personality is in the way they move, and if you just take a static shot like that the personality isn't there." So they invented a way of making the images move — movies. I remember when the first movies came out they were all moving in a jerky way. They smoothed it out and everyone said, "Now that's real lifelike."

But after awhile they said, "But there's another thing missing which is sound; a whole lot of the personality is in the voice, so can't we have them talking at the same time that they move?" And someone invented the talkies; eventually they added color to them, and everyone said, "Wow, now we're really getting somewhere!" Then to make it even more real they put them in a three-dimensional process which required that you wear special spectacles to see.

But then people said, "Why is it that every time we want to see one of these things we have to go down to the center of town? Can't we have it all at home?" And so television was introduced; they started out with black and white and looking, as Robert Benchley once described the cuts in French newspapers, as if they had been made on bread.

They improved it, colored it, and that's where we are now.

Not quite. Because somebody has developed a thing that we shall all be seeing soon — the hologram — a television image produced by laser beams in which you see a three-dimensional figure out in the air in front of you. Soon we'll all say, "Now, isn't that marvelous!" But, of course, when you go up to it and put your hand on it, your hand goes right through it. You can't touch it. And, you see, that is the trouble with television — you look at whatever you're seeing behind a screen; but it's intangible, it doesn't smell, and it won't relate to you.

So there are future problems to be solved in the techniques of electronic reproduction — and they'll do it. They'll manage a way in which the electronic emission source can solidify and make the air vibrate so that you can touch the figure. You won't be able to push your hand through it because the air will be going faster than your hand. Imagine that! If there's a beautiful dancer on television, you'll actually be able to go up and embrace her. But she won't know you're there, she won't respond to you. And you'll say, "Well, that's not very lifelike," just as people once said, "If the photograph doesn't move it's not very lifelike, if it doesn't talk it's not very lifelike." They'll next say if the tangible, three-dimensional reproduction doesn't respond, it's not very lifelike, so they'll have to figure out a technique for doing that.

Will our technology be able to develop such a technique? Of course they will! Sitting in your home you will watch the scene on a kind of stage, not a screen, and there will be a TV camera observing you. That TV camera will report back everything you do into a computer and the computer will manage each bit of information going into the image that you're looking at, and will immediately decide what is the

appropriate response to your approach to the image — and won't that be great! She may slap you in the face, or she may kiss you. You never know.

But eventually you'll say, "This is still not really the kind of reproduction I wanted. What I want is to be able to identify with one of the characters in the scene." We want not only to *watch* the drama that is being performed on the stage but actually to *get into* it. We will want to be wired in with electrodes on our brains that will actually allow us to feel the emotions of the people acting on the stage. Eventually we will get absolutely perfect reproductions and be able to see that image so vividly that we shall become it.

And so the question arises — could that be where we are already? Are we a reproduction which over the centuries of evolution has worked out to be a replica of something else that was going on and we are where we always were?

The second fantasy presents the idea that every living being thinks it's human, and that means a plant, a worm, a virus, a bacterium, a fruit fly, a hippopotamus, a giraffe, a rabbit. All beings whatever they feel out from, as we feel out from our bodies, feel that they're in the center. That is to say, wherever you look, you turn your head around and you feel you're the center of the world, you feel you're the center of the universe. Also, a rabbit or a fruit fly feels that it is the center. And it has around it a company of associates who look like it and therefore this creature knows that these are the right people, just as we know when we look at human beings they're the right people, they are one of us. Only, of course, we have to make distinctions because you never really know that you are you and are really in the right place unless you can compare and contrast yourself with some other people who are after all not quite in the right place and some

other people who are very much in the wrong place. Through having this succession of comparisons, you know that you're OK.

Other animals and insects have exactly the same understanding of this arrangement. "Well," you say, "insects and things like fishes, they don't have any culture; what do you mean fishes are entitled to consider themselves in the same way as humans?" Let me present the argument from the fishes' point of view. Fishes think, "Human beings are a mess; look at what they do; they can't exist without cluttering themselves and carrying around all kinds of things outside their bodies; they have to have houses and automobiles and books and records and television and hi-fi equipment and stuff, endless stuff, and they litter the earth with rubbish."

Consider a dolphin's point of view (he isn't really a fish but a mammal) of the human race. Dolphins spend most of their time playing; they don't work because the grocery is right there in the ocean, whatever they need. A dolphin will catch up with a ship and get on the wake, putting its tail at an exact angle of  $26^\circ$ , and be carried along. The dolphin will make circles around the ship just for fun, playing all its life in the water. We know that a dolphin's brain is as big if not bigger than ours, that it is incredibly intelligent, and that it has a language which we can't decipher. The person who knows most about dolphins, Dr. John Lilly, is a friend of mine and he said he came to the conclusion that dolphins were too smart to tell us their language. So he abandoned this project. He said he would no longer keep such a highly civilized being in the concentration camp of a zoo, and that it should go back to the ocean. The point is, that every being, not only dolphins, but every organism that has any sensitivity in it whatsoever, considers itself to be the center of the universe.

Now this idea has its problems. There is a Zen poem which says, "The morning glory which blooms for an hour differs not at heart from a giant pine that lives for a thousand years." In other words, an hour is a long life to a morning glory, and a thousand years is a long life to a pine. And our four score and ten years or, as the insurance companies' actuarial tables put it, somewhere between 65 and 70 years as an average human life, seems about the right length of life. There are people who want to go on and on, who are impressed with immortality and have their bodies frozen in case there should develop in the future some technique by which they could be revived.

But I really don't agree with that idea because nature has mercifully arranged the principle of *forgettery* as well as the principle of memory. If you always and always remembered everything, you would be like a piece of paper which has been painted over and over until there was no space left and you wouldn't be able to distinguish between one thing and another. Or like a bunch of people screaming and making more and more noise until you can hear nobody. And in the same way one's memories become screams. Nature mercifully arranges for the whole thing to be erased so you can begin again.

It doesn't matter in what form you begin, whether you begin again as a human being, or as a fruit fly, or a beetle, or a bird, for it feels the same way that you feel now. So we're really all in the same place, we all have above us things much higher than ourselves, and we all have below us things that we feel are much lower than we. There are things out there on the left and things out there on the right, and things in front and things behind. You're the middle, you're the middle everywhere, always.

My third fantasy. It seems to me that nobody has really seriously asked the questions. "How do the stars begin?" "Why?" "How out of space do these enormous radioactive centers arise?" I'm going to solve this problem by using the analogy of the egg and chicken and say, "The chicken is one egg's way of becoming other eggs." And if you understand my second fantasy you know how that could be true. Now, let's suppose that a planet is one star's way of becoming another star. Stars, when they explode, send a lot of goo out into space and some of this goo solidifies into balls which get into orbit and spin round the star. And in one chance in a thousand, maybe, one of those balls will evolve like the planet Earth and slowly upon it will arise what some people might call a disease, the bacteria of intelligent life. And with them comes a notion, these things that we call alive, that they ought to go on. They have fixed ideas in their heads that they should keep on doing whatever it is they're doing and they should always be doing it better. They divide themselves into different species and these species compete with each other in order to, as it were, flex their muscles and get better and better at whatever it is they are. And they go on doing this until one species really establishes itself as top species on the particular planet just as we human beings, *Homo sapiens*, have established ourselves as top species on Earth, whatever top means.

Then, when we have a little leisure and don't have to spend all our time finding food to put into our mouths, we start asking questions. We look around at each other and everything and say, "What is this? What is going on here?" Some people say, "That's a stupid question to ask. Why don't you just go on doing your work. Go hunting, go farming, go do your business." But we persist. "No, there are higher things." And

thereby create a special class of people who in India are called Brahmins, among us philosophers, scientists, theologians, thinkers. And because they go into the question of why we are here they are allowed to stop farming, to stop hunting, to stop mining, to stop scrubbing floors, and they go to very special places called universities where they can sit around and think about what is going on. They do what is called philosophy, which means they try to say what it means. What does the word *be* mean, what does the word *exist* mean? What do we mean when we say *we're here*? They find they can't discuss that very far because the word stops meaning anything, it sort of becomes a noise.

They say, "Now, we're not really getting to the point, what we've got to do is instead of thinking all the time, theorizing and talking words about what's going on, we've got to investigate it experimentally. We've somehow got to look into this stuff that we call reality, the material world, and find out what it is." So they start chopping it up. They dissect flowers, they chop up seeds and look into the middle of them. They find something there and then they have to get a magnifying glass to examine that and break it down into smaller and smaller pieces and reason they must eventually come to some particle called an atom. In Greek, *atomos*, or atom, means non-cuttable, what you can't split any further. So they come down to the *atomos*, that than which there is no whicher — they thought! But then they found they could split the atom, they could find the electron, the positron, the meson, etc., etc., etc., forever.

Eventually they determined that every *atomos* of matter contains immense energy and that such energy could be released. The trouble with intellectual people is that anything that can be done must be done. And in the necessary course

of the development of nature they found out how to blow the Earth to pieces and turn it into a star

So that may be how stars originate. They have planets like chickens have eggs, and the eggs burst and turn into chickens. And planets burst through the agency of intelligent life and turn into stars which throw out other mudballs, some of which stand a reasonable chance of giving rise to new intelligent life, about as reasonable a chance as any male spermatozoan stands when it enters the female womb of becoming a baby — one in a million.

Now you may think this is a rather unpleasant fantasy. You may feel that things are going the wrong way, the wrong direction. If the whole point of life, this tender biological substance with all its tubes and filaments and nerves which are so very sensitive, if all this is to end up in fire, into an absolute blaze of light, won't that be a shame? Is that the way it all ends?

Many people say they want to see the light, they want to be enlightened, they want to dissolve into the light of God. Then when they've succeeded in doing just that (all over again) the process goes on, and the exploding Earth/star blows out those mudballs, and planets are created and once again you're a baby, you're a child, the flowers are brilliantly colored, the stars are gorgeous, the smell of the earth, the sound of the rain, everything is marvelous once again. And once again you see the other, the man, the woman that you love as if it had never happened before, it all starts over again.

And as it goes on it gets more and more intense, the problems get more and more problematic, you find you are wrestling with something you can't control. You've got to control it, but you absolutely can't control it. Like all the problems of the world at the present time, the whole scene is completely out of hand. We feel we are going to our doom because once

again we are going towards the birth of a star which is the most creative thing there is.

Now think about these for awhile, these three fantasies which all have a cyclic quality. And to them I want to add a note about biological reproduction. When I think back to my grandfather whom I knew fairly well, when I was a little boy, he was something extraordinarily impressive. He looked like King Edward VII. He was a very, very elegant man with a little goatee beard. He didn't have sideburns as I do, and he had shorter hair — a very elegant fellow, dressed beautifully. And I thought he was the very image of God. Here I am the same age as he was when I first knew him, and I have five grandchildren, and I am no longer impressed by grandfathers! I'm one of them too! And this is the same idea of the cycle that we are almost perpetually in the same place as the French proverb says, *Plus ca change, plus c'est la même chose* — The more it changes, the more it's the same.

That means then that existence, the feeling of being, is a sort of spectrum just as light is a spectrum, at one end red and at the other end violet, and you have these extremes in order to have color at all, in order to know light. So you see, likewise we have to have the experience that there is somebody else, something else going on altogether out of our control in order to have the experience of being me. And so in order to feel good, to feel that life is worthwhile, that existence is worth going on with, in order to bring out that feeling just as the red brings out the violet, there has to be in the back of our minds, maybe very far away, the comprehension that there is something that could happen, that absolutely must not happen, that is the horrors, that is the screaming-meemies-at-the-end-of-the-line.

We have to know that's there, as just before he died the

British novelist Arnold Bennett said, "I feel somehow that everything is absolutely wrong." And so the possibility, even the imagination, that there could be such an experience in the back of our heads is the background which gives intensity to the sense that we call feeling good, feeling that it's all right.

So if you understand that you are, really and truly, always in the same place, just as every creature thinks it's a human being and just as every being turns out to be a reproduction by some interesting technology, whether it's electronic or biological makes very little difference, then you understand the nature of life. And just as planets may be stars' ways of becoming other stars, you're always in the same place. And what is that place? You can ask yourself very, very — I won't say seriously because it really isn't serious, it's sincere — ask yourself very sincerely, if that is so, if the place in which you are now is the place where everything and everybody else really is.

Only there's an arrangement to pretend that you ought to be somewhere else, so the place where you are is the place where you are always pretending you ought to be somewhere else. This is the nature of life, this is the pulse. *I ought to be somewhere else.* If you discover that that's the trick you're playing on yourself, you become serene and you don't entirely give up the game because you've seen through it. You say, "Hmm, it really might be fun to go on playing."



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# Work As Play

Alan Watts





The Tibetans use a wooden cylinder mounted on an axis for saying prayers. They sit comfortably and spin it around with little effort and their prayers are said for them by this prayer wheel and they relax for the few minutes it takes. Westerners think this is a superstition, a meaningless heathen ritual. It doesn't require any great effort; it's nothing like work or duty; and there's no expression of humility or unworthiness. Any child would enjoy doing it. It's curious; it's fascinating.

I happen to like archery — not for killing things, but as a sport. What I like most of all is to set an arrow free like a bird. It climbs high into the sky, then suddenly turns and drops.

What is it that fascinates us about that? We are delighted by it because it's not useful. It doesn't really achieve anything that we would call purposive work. It is simply what we call play. But in our culture we make an extremely rigid division

between work and play. You are supposed to work in order to earn enough money to give you sufficient leisure time for something entirely different called *having fun* or play.

This is a most ridiculous division. Everything that we do, however tough it is, however strenuous, can be turned into the same kind of play as shooting an arrow into the sky or spinning a prayer wheel. Let's, for example, take the situation that I ran into a little while ago: I was in the New York subway at 59th Street near Columbus Circle, and I wanted to get my shoes shined. (Actually, I don't wear shoes except on the East Coast. There one dresses respectfully. On the West Coast I wear Indian moccasins because it's the only comfortable shoe I can wear.) I found a place to get my shoes shined and there was a man who was making shoe-shining a real art. He used his cloth to beat out a rhythm. He had just the same fascination in shining shoes as one has in spinning a prayer wheel or shooting an arrow. Imagine if you were a bus driver. A bus driver is ordinarily considered a totally harassed person. He's got to watch out for all the laws, all the competing traffic, the people coming on board giving their fares, and he has to make change. And if he has it in his head that this is work, it will be hell. But let's suppose he has a different thing in his head. Suppose he has the idea that moving this enormous conveyance through complicated traffic is a very, very subtle game; he has the very same feeling about it that you might have if you were playing the guitar or dancing. And so he goes through that traffic avoiding this and avoiding that and taking fares, and he makes a music of the whole thing. Well, he's not going to be tired out at the end of the day. He's going to be full of energy when he gets through with his job.

Suppose you're condemned to be a housewife, which is

the most lowly of all occupations, and you have to clean up. There are only four fundamental philosophical questions. The first is "Who started it?" The second is "Are we going to make it?" The third is "Where are we going to put it?" And the fourth is "Who's going to clean up?" And this, the cleaning up, is the lowliest of all occupations, the housewife who washes the dishes and the garbage collector who takes away the stuff. Supposing the housewife about to clean up approaches washing dishes in an entirely different spirit. And don't think I'm some sort of male chauvinist who's trying to talk women into the idea of staying in their place. I'm perfectly willing to wash dishes too, because the art of washing dishes is that you only have to wash one at a time. If you're doing it day after day you have in your mind's eye an enormous stack of filthy dishes which you have washed in years past and an enormous stack of filthy dishes which you will wash in future years. But if you bring your mind to the state of reality which is only now, this is where we are, you only have to wash one dish. It's the only dish you'll ever have to wash. You ignore all the rest, because in reality there is no past and there is no future. There is just now. So you wash this one. And instead of thinking "Have I got it really clean as my mother taught?" you turn the cleaning movement into a dance, you swing that plate around, you let the rinsing water run over it, and you put it in the rack — you get a rhythm going.

When I was a little boy and went to school in England I had to learn the piano. They called it playing the piano, but actually they said, "You *must* play." We had, also in England, compulsory games. They used to post notices on the bulletin board in the school that said, "This afternoon everyone will go for a run." And if you didn't go for a run and it was found out, you were flogged! So everybody hated going for a run.

because they were under compulsion to play. It's like the whole game of life we're involved in. It's only a game, but everybody has got to belong.

I remember one day I was out on a run and I was trying to enjoy myself, running on the balls of my feet, dancing along. A fellow came up behind me who was running on his heels. He was jogging, and going clunk-clunk-clunk-clunk-clunk, and I said to him, "What's the matter with you? You're running on your heels and you are jarring your whole body all the way through." He shrugged, stuck to it, and became the champion long-distance runner of the school. But he didn't enjoy it! It was work! All he enjoyed was the suffering that he endured. It made him feel he had really contributed to the human race by suffering so much. He identified his existence and his worth with his suffering. Now really great runners dance when they run. They don't necessarily follow a straight course; they may weave. A great example of this occurred in 1970 in the World Cup Championship of soccer. The winning team from Brazil played soccer in a most extraordinary way: They played it like basketball; they danced. The way we learned soccer in school when I was a boy was very, very formal and orderly, and we didn't really enjoy it. But these fellows were bounding balls off their shoulders, off every muscle, and they had astonishing teamwork, and at the same time they were dancing. The sports writer in *The London Times* said, "They danced their way to victory." So the point is that you can do everything you have to do in this spirit. Don't make a distinction between work and play, and don't imagine for one minute that you've got to be serious about it.

Let's take, for example, the rest of the world rather than ourselves. Think for a moment: What are plants doing? What are plants all about? They serve human beings by being

decorative, but what is it from its own point of view? It's using up air; it's using up energy. It's really not doing anything except being ornamental. And yet here's this whole vegetable world, cactus plants, trees, roses, tulips, and edible vegetables, like cabbages, celery, lettuce — they're all doing this dance. And what's it all about? Why are they doing it? Well, we say, one must live. It's necessary to survive. You know you really must go on. It's your duty. It's your duty to your children. If you bring up your children that way and tell them they should be grateful because you are doing your duty towards them, they will learn to bring up their children in the same way — and everybody will be depressed. There really is no necessity to go on living. It's part of Western philosophy, this drive to survive. We must go on living because some big daddy said to us, "You've got to go on living, see? And you'd better make it or else!" Well, the fear of death is completely absurd. Because if you're dead you've got nothing to worry about! This plant, I'm quite sure, doesn't say to itself, "You ought to go on living." You've got, just as it has, an instinct to survive which is something other than yourself and which you have to obey.

I don't think of my own instincts as *drives*, which is the proper psychological term for them nowadays. I think of my instincts as myself. I don't say, "Excuse me, but I have an unfortunate desire to reproduce myself; would you please accommodate me." I don't say, "Excuse me, but I have to eat: it's absolutely necessary that I eat." I say, "Hooray! I am this desire to make love, and I am this desire to eat." It's not something else that pushes me around; it's me. It doesn't have to go on. If it were to stop, if I were to die, that would be another scene; that would be a different form of the dance.

If I'm in pain, people say don't scream, don't cry. But scream-

ing or crying is a perfectly natural reaction to pain. When a baby is first born they cut the umbilical cord and someone smacks it on the bottom and the baby cries. That's the first thing in the world. There is in Zen Buddhism a *koan* that says when the Buddha was born he suddenly stood up and announced, "Above the heavens and below the heavens, I alone am the world-honored one." Well, everybody would say that's an extremely proud thing to say. So they give this to students of Buddhism as a problem: How could it be that the Buddha as a little baby was so proud as to make this pompous statement when he was born? And if you understand the problem correctly, you cry like a newborn baby. Because that is the perfectly natural response to the painful event of being born into this world. But thereafter we say, "Baby, don't you cry! Shut up!" And therefore we stamp out in human beings their natural release from the problem of pain. If you're in pain, cry. And if you can't do that, then pain is your problem. But if you can cry, if you can let go in that way, pain is no problem. And if you get the shudders at death, the idea of death, the idea of not being here anymore, just get those shudders and dig them. Isn't it curious? You really get the shivers of delight!

So all these emotions that we have, the emotions of uptightness, dread, shivers, horrors, can be interpreted in other ways. But we interpret them in a negative way so long as we are under the sense that you absolutely must go on living. Now, you see, living is something spontaneous. In Chinese the word for nature is *ch'i lan*, which means that which happens of itself, not under any control of an outside entity. And they feel that all the world is happening of itself; it's spontaneous. And you stop this spontaneous flowering of nature cold if you tell it it must do it. It's like saying to someone,

"You must love me." Well it's ridiculous. If I were to ask my wife, "Darling, do you really love me?" and, she says, "I'm trying my best to do so," that not the answer I want. I want her to say, "I can't help loving you. I love you so much I could eat you." And that's what the plant feels in growing. It doesn't feel it must grow; it's not under orders. It does this spontaneously so that when you try to command this spontaneous process, you stop it.

There is a belief in India that if you think of a monkey while you're taking medicine it won't work. Next time you take your vitamins or pills try not to think of a monkey. You will completely tie up the spontaneous process, and it won't work. So all the things that we say to our children — "You must have a bowel movement every day after breakfast": "Try, darling, to go to sleep": "Stop pouting and take that look off your face": "Oh, you're blushing" — they all make you feel guilty. All those things are attempts to say this one thing. "Darling little child, you are required to do what will be acceptable only if you do it voluntarily." On this account, everybody is completely mixed up because we are trying to force genuine behavior. We all admire artists; we say they're unselfconscious, they're so natural, they seem to dance or paint or talk or play the piano so effortlessly. Of course, a lot of work has gone into it, but if you are a great artist your periods of practice will not be effective unless they are a pleasure for you. You have to come to the point where going over it again and again is a dance.

One of my friends is a great Hindu musician who has the most extraordinary technique of playing an instrument called the sarod. It's like an extremely sophisticated Hindu guitar. His name is Ali Akbar Khan and he is generally acknowledged to be the leading master of Northern Indian music. He once

told me that the comprehension of music is in understanding one note. He can sit for hours and hours working on only one note at a time. He gets into that note and listens. He really listens, gets into the sound. It simply doesn't matter that it takes a long time, that he has to do this for many hours, because he's completely absorbed in listening to the sound he is now making. He's going with that vibration, as when you chant as they do in yoga, "OM." You can chant for hours and be absolutely fascinated by the vibration in the same way as I am fascinated shooting an arrow into the sky.

This is the real secret of life — to be completely engaged with what you are doing in the here and now. And instead of calling it work, realize it is play.

In Hindu philosophy the whole creation is regarded as the *Vishnu Lila*, the Play of Vishnu. *Lila* means dance or play. Also, in Hindu philosophy, they call the world an illusion; and in Latin the root of the word illusion is *ludere*, to play. All that is going on, the spinning of the prayer wheel, the pattern in which the flower grows, is just the living. And if you take it seriously and say, "Are you doing anything useful?" Useful for what? Useful for going on? But if you have to be useful for going on, going on becomes a drag, survival becomes a sweat, and it's not worth it. And if you teach this to your children, they'll imitate you. They'll treat survival as an ordeal which they have to undergo. They have to keep going on and they'll teach their children to do it, and the whole continuation of the human race will be a drag which is in fact what it has become. And this is the reason we have invented the atomic bomb and are preparing to commit suicide. We think we must *happen*, and, to the degree to which we think we must happen, we hate it, and are going to bring it to an end.

So I sincerely suggest that (I'm talking with you; I'm not preaching) as G.K. Chesterton once said, "The angels fly because they take themselves lightly. How much more so than he-she who is Lord of the Angels? The whole world is three for a penny, three for a pound, it's love that makes the world go round." Or in the words of Dante:

*That my own wings were not to flutter  
Were not for such a flight  
Except that smiting through the mind of me  
There came fulfillment in a flash of light.  
That my volition now and my desires  
Were moved like wheel-revolving evenly  
By love that moves the sun in starry sky.*

*Thither my own wings could not carry me,  
But that a flash my understanding clove,  
Whence its desire came to it suddenly.*

*High fantasy lost power and here broke off;  
Yet, as a wheel moves smoothly, free from jars,  
My will and my desire were turned by love,*

*The love that moves the sun and the other stars.*

End of Canto XXXIII Paradise



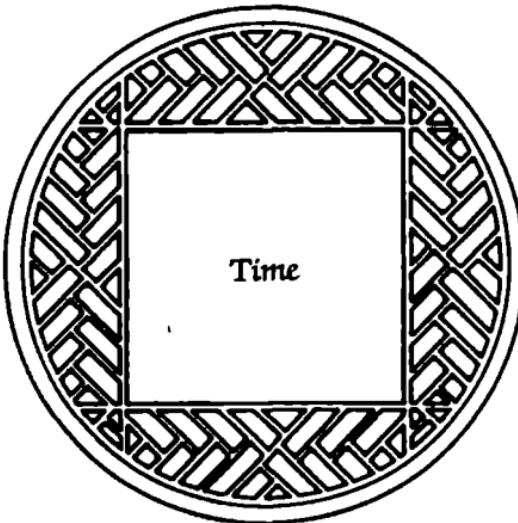
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# Time

Alan Watts





## T ime. What is time?

St. Augustine of Hippo when asked, "What is time?" said, "I know what it is, but when you ask me I don't." Yet it is absolutely fundamental to our life: "Time is money." "I don't have enough time." "Time flies." "Time drags."

I think we should question what time is, because of our ordinary common sense we think of it as a one-way motion from the past through the present and on into the future. That carries with it the impression that life moves from the past to the future in such a way that what happens now and what will happen is always the result of what has happened in the past. In other words, we seem to be driven along.

Once it was fashionable in psychology for people to speak of man's instincts, the instinct for survival, an instinct to make love, and so on. But nowadays that word has become unfashionable and psychologists tend instead to use the word *drive*, and to speak of the need for food as a drive, the need

for survival or for sex as drives. That's a very significant word because it's brought out by people who feel driven. Personally, if I feel hungry I don't feel driven; if I feel lusty I don't feel driven; I don't say, "Oh, excuse me but I have to eat," or, "Excuse me but I need to fulfill my sexual urges." I say, "Hooray!" I identify myself with my drives. They are me, and I don't take a passive attitude towards them and apologize for them. So the whole idea of our being driven is connected with the idea of causality, of life moving under the power of the past. That is so ingrained in our common sense that it's very difficult to get rid of it. But I want to turn it round completely and say the past is the result of the present.

From one point of view that is very obvious. For example, let us suppose that this universe started with a big bang as some cosmologists believe. Now when that bang happened, it was the present, wasn't it? And so the universe began in what we will call a *now* moment, then it goes on doing its stuff. When any event that we now call past came into being, it came into being in the present and out of the present. That's one way of seeing it.

But before we get further involved in this, I want to draw your attention to a fallacy in the very commonsense idea of causality — events are caused by previous events from which they flow or necessarily result. To understand the fallacy of that idea, we have to begin by asking, "What do you mean by an event?" Let's take the event of a human being coming into the world. Now when does that event begin? Does it occur at the moment of parturition when the baby actually comes out of its mother? Or does the baby begin at the moment of conception? Or does a baby begin when it is a gleam in its father's eye? Or does a baby begin when the spermatozoa are generated in the father or the ova in the mother? Or could

you say a baby begins when its father is born or when its mother is born? All these things can be thought of as beginnings, but we decide for purposes of legal registration that a life begins at the moment of parturition. And that is a purely arbitrary decision; it has validity only because we all agree about it.

Let me show you the same phenomenon in the dimension of space instead of the dimension of time. Let's ask, "How big is the sun?" Are we going to define the sun as limited by the extent of its fire? That's one possible definition. But we could equally well define the sphere of the sun by the extent of its light. And each of these would be reasonable choices. We have arbitrarily agreed to define the sun by the limit of its visible fire. But you see in these analogies that how big a thing is or how long an event is, is simply a matter of definition.

Therefore, when by the simple definition for purposes of discussion we have divided events into certain periods – the First World War began in 1914 and it ended in 1918 (actually, all those things which led up to the First World War started long before 1914, and the repercussions of that war continued long after 1918) – we sort of forget we do it. We have a puzzle, "How do events lead to each other?"

In reality there are no separate events. Life moves along like water, it's all connected as the source of the river is connected to the mouth and the ocean. All the events or things going on are like whirlpools in a stream. Today you see a whirlpool and tomorrow you see a whirlpool in the same place, but it isn't the same whirlpool because the water is changing every second.

What is happening is not really what we should call a whirlpool, but rather a whirlpooling. It is an activity, not a

*thing*. And indeed every so-called thing can be called an event. We can call a house, *housing*, a mat, *matting*, and we could equally call a cat, a *catting*. So we could say, "The *catting* sat on the *matting*." And we could thereby have a world in which there were no things but only events. To give another illustration: A flame is something we say, "There is a flame on the candle." But it would be more correct to say, "There is a flaming on the candle," because a flame is a stream of hot gas.

Let's take another amusing example. *Fist* is a noun and *fist* looks like a thing, but what happens to the *fist* when I open my hand. I was *fisting*, now I'm *handing*, handing it to you. So every kind of so-called thing can be spoken of as an event and because events flow into each other, the *fisting* flows into the *handing*, we cannot say exactly where one ends and the other begins.

So, therefore, we do not need the idea of causality to explain how a prior event influences the following event. Consider it this way: Suppose I'm looking through a narrow slit in a fence, and a snake goes by. I've never seen a snake before, so it is mysterious. Through the fence I see first the snake's head, then I see a long trailing body, and then finally the tail. Then the snake turns around and goes back. Then I see first the head, and then after an interval the tail. Now if I call the head one event and the tail another, it will seem to me that the event *head* is the cause of the event *tail*. And the tail is the effect. But if I look at the whole snake I will see a head-tail snake and it would be simply absurd to say that the head of the snake is the cause of the tail, as if the snake came into being as a head first and then a tail. The snake comes into being out of its egg as a head-tail snake. And in exactly the same way all events are really one event. We are looking,

when we talk about different events, at different sections or parts of one continuous happening.

Therefore, the idea of separate events, which have to be linked by a mysterious process called cause and effect, is completely unnecessary. But having thought that way, we think of present events as being caused by past events, and tend to regard ourselves as the *puppets* of the past, driven along by something that is always behind us.

It's very simple to overcome this impression. You begin with an experiment in meditation — approach the world through your ears. If you shut your eyes and make contact with reality purely with your ears, you will realize that the sounds you are hearing are all coming out of silence. It's curious isn't it because you hear all the realities, the sounds suddenly coming out of nothing. You don't see any reason for them to begin, they just appear and then they echo away through the corridors of the mind which we call memory.

Now if you open your eyes, it's a little harder to see this because unlike sound, the eyes sound static or rather, they see static. Everything looks still to your eyes, but you must understand that the world you are looking at is vibrating. All material things are vibrating and they are vibrating on your ears. In other words, the present world that you see is a vibration coming out of space just as the sound comes out of silence. It is coming out of nothing straight at you and echoing away into the past.

So the course of time is really very much like the course of a ship in the ocean. The ship leaves a wake behind it, and the wake fades out and tells us where the ship has been in just the same way as the past and our memory of the past tell us what we have done. But as we go back into the past,

and we go back and back to prehistory and we use all kinds of instruments and scientific methods for detecting what happened. we eventually reach a point where all record of the past fades away in just the same way as the wake of a ship.

Now the important thing to remember in this illustration is that the wake doesn't drive the ship anymore than the tail wags the dog. The power, the source of the wake, is always in the ship itself, which represents the present. You can't insist that the wake drives the ship. You can plot the course of the ship on graph paper and calculate a trend by seeing over what number of squares the ship has been doing its wiggling, and make predictions as to where it will go next. This would give you a trend as to where the ship is going and you might say, "Because we can plot the trend from the pattern which the ship has followed, we can tell where it is going and, therefore, we are inclined to think that where it has been will determine where it will go." But that is not actually the case. Where it has been is determined not by where it will go but where it is going. To put that more accurately, where it has been does not determine where it is going; where it is going determines where it has been.

If you insist that your present is the result of your past, you are like a person driving your car looking always in the rearview mirror. You are not, as it were, open to the future. you are always looking back over your shoulder to find out what you ought to do. And this is something absolutely characteristic of us and this is why human beings find it difficult to learn and difficult to adapt themselves to new situations. Because we are always looking for precedents, for authority from the past for what we are supposed to do now, that gives us the impression the past is all-important and is the determinative factor in our behavior.

It isn't anything of the kind. The life, the creation, comes out of you now. In other words, don't look for the creation back here at the beginning of where the wake fades out. Don't look for the creation of the universe at some very far-distant point in time behind us. The creation of the universe is now in this present instant. This is where it all begins! And it trails away from here and eventually vanishes.

Now of course we have a method of passing the buck in all matters of responsibility by saying, "Well, the past is responsible for me." For instance, when dealing with a difficult child, we are apt to say, "Well, bang him about, beat him up, and maybe he'll change." But then we say, "No, that's not fair to the child to beat him up, because it was his parents' fault; they didn't bring him up properly." And so then we say, "Well, punish the parents." But the parents say, "Well, excuse me, but our parents were neurotic, too, and they brought us up badly so we couldn't help what we did." And since the grandparents are dead we can't get at them, and if we could we would pass the whole blame back to Adam and Eve. We would say, "No, the serpent tempted me and I did eat." Then it was the serpent's fault!

When God asked Eve, "Didst thou eat the fruit of the tree whereof I told thee thou shouldst not eat?" she said, "Oh, but the serpent tempted me and I did eat." And God looked at the serpent, and the serpent didn't make any excuse. He probably winked — because the serpent, being an angel, was wise to know where the present begins.

So you see, if you insist on being moved, being determined by the past, that's your game. But the fact of the matter is *it all starts right now*. But we like to establish a connectivity with the past because that gives other people the impression that we're sane. People ask, for example, why you do some-

thing. Now that's a ridiculous question. A child finds out that to irritate its parents it can always put the word *why* after any answer to a question. "Why does the sun shine?" and he gets an astronomical explanation. "Well, why does nuclear heat generate in star bodies?" "Oh, because it reaches a critical mass." "Well, why does it reach a critical mass?" And you can go on and on and on asking why until papa says, "Oh, shut up and suck your lollipop."

The question "why," because it can be asked interminably, never leads to any interesting answers. If you ask me then *why* am I proposing this, I could say, "Well, I'm making a living this way, or I have a message I want to get across to you." But that's not the reason. I am talking for the same reason that birds sing and the stars shine. I dig it. Why do I dig it? I could go on answering all sorts of questions about human motivation and psychology, but they wouldn't explain a thing, because explaining things by the past is really a refusal to explain them at all. All you're doing is postponing the explanation. You're putting it back and back and back and that explains nothing.

What does explain things is the present. Why do you do it now? Now this is a slight cheat because that doesn't explain it either, because what happens now, just as the sound comes out of silence, all this comes out of nowhere. All life suddenly emerges out of space — Bang! Right now!

And to ask again why does it happen is an unprofitable question because the interesting thing is not why but what. What happens? Not, why does it happen? I can say, "Well, I am doing this now because I did that then," and so I am producing for you a continuous line of thought, but actually I am doing it backwards. I'm doing it always from now and

connecting up what I do now with what I did so that you can see a consistent story.

Now another interesting thing about this is that I can show you how the present changes the past. Let's take for example the order of words. Now words are strung out in a line just like we think events in time are strung out in a line and I can change a past word by a future word. If I say (taking a line from the poet Thomas Hood), "They went and told the sexton, and the sexton tolled the bell." You don't know what the first *told* means until you get the sexton; you don't know what the second *tolled* means until you get the word bell. And so the later event changes the meaning of the former. Or you can say for example, "The bark of the tree," and the word *bark* has a certain meaning. Then I say "The bark of the dog" and the later word has changed the meaning of the former one.

And so, in this way, when we write history we find that writing history is really an art. The historian keeps putting a fresh interpretation on past events and in that sense he is changing it. He is changing their meaning just like we were changing the meaning of a former word by a later word by saying, "They went and told the sexton and the sexton tolled the bell."

In this way you can experience a curious liberation from what the Hindus and the Buddhists call *karma*. The word *karma* in Sanskrit actually means doing, action. *Karma* comes from the root *kri* which simply means *to do*. When something happens to me, an accident or an illness, a Buddhist or a Hindu will say, "Well, it was your *karma*." In other words, you had done something in the past and you reap the unfortunate consequence in a later time. Now that's not the real

meaning of karma. Karma does not mean cause and effect. It simply means doing. In other words, you are doing what is happening to you. And that, of course, depends upon how you define the word *you*. For example, consider breathing; am I doing it or is it happening to me? I am growing my hair; am I doing it or is it happening to me? You can look at it either way. I am being sick, or I am being destroyed in an accident — if I define myself as the whole field of events, the organism-environment field which is the real me, then all the things that happen to me may be called my doing. And that is the real sense of karma.

But when we speak about freedom from karma, freedom from being the puppet of the past, that simply involves a change in our thinking. It involves getting rid of the habit of thought whereby we define ourselves as the result of what has gone before. We instead get into the more plausible, more reasonable habit of thought in which we don't define ourselves in terms of what we've done before but in terms of what we're doing now. And that is liberation from the ridiculous situation of being a dog wagged by its tail.





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# Oriental “Omnipotence”

Alan Watts





Since the latter part of the nineteenth century there has been an enormous growth of Western interest in the philosophical and spiritual traditions of Asia. Today this interest seems to be widening in such a way as to amount to a major "cultural invasion," so that it is possible for so serious a historian as Arnold Toynbee to speak of the future growth of religion in terms of a fusion of Christianity and Buddhism.

Much of this popular interest in Asian spirituality has been focussed upon those aspects of it which have to do with parapsychology, with the development of what are called in Sanskrit *siddhi*, or supernormal powers. By no means all of this interest in *siddhi* is at the unfortunate level of those so-called yogis who give public instruction in Raja or Hatha Yoga in the great metropolitan cities.

The studies and experiments which have been made in this area by such people as Pitirim Sorokin of Harvard, Mircea Eliade, C.G. Jung, Roger Godel, and others less well-known

are of a serious and sober character. Nonetheless, it is an area fraught with misunderstanding, especially as concerns the relationship of parapsychology to the primary purposes of such ways of life as Buddhism, the Vedanta, and Taoism.

One must remember that a great deal of Western interest in Asian philosophy stems from the wide influence exercised by the Theosophical movement in the early part of this century, by the work of H.P. Blavatsky, Annie Besant, Rudolph Steiner, G.R.S. Mead, and many others. Although, at the present time, Theosophy has little of its former prestige, it did much to lay down the general lines of Western interest in Asian spirituality, where this interest was not of a purely academic nature. But in so doing it propagated some serious confusions. For its sources of information about these matters were principally the labors of Western scholars who had, as then, hardly come to grips with the subject, and who had confused communication between East and West with — perhaps inevitably — misleading dictionaries of Sanskrit, Chinese, and Tibetan.

The main misunderstanding which emerged from this early interest had to do with the kind of knowledge which, in Buddhism or the Vedanta, would be called "supreme knowledge," "enlightenment," or "awakening" — or sometimes even "omniscience" (*sarvajnana*). This is the kind of knowledge which the Oriental philosophies hold to be characteristic of the highest form of man, of a Buddha or "awakened one," or of a *jivan-mukta* — one who is liberated from bondage to the conventional world of ordinary perception. Perhaps the chief reason for the misunderstanding was that this type of knowledge was confused with the omniscience and consequent omnipotence attributed to God in Christian theology.

For when we think about omniscience in the context of Christian theology, we tend to think of a knowledge which is infinitely encyclopedic and of power which is infinitely magical or "technological." We think of God as being exhaustively informed about all facts and events whatsoever, and as being in conscious and voluntary control of absolutely everything which happens. Consequently God has a conscious and technical mastery of the world of nature such that he can at any moment alter its normal and expected course by performing miracles. Such miracles are not violations of nature, but actions which proceed, like those of the scientist, from an extraordinary knowledge of its processes.

With such ideas of omniscience in mind, it is easy to see how Western people might credit the "divine men" of Asia with powers like those of the Christian God. To complicate the problem — this is by no means a purely Western misconception. All over the world, men's minds are fascinated by prospects of unusual power. To complicate it still more — there are Hindus and Buddhists who train themselves in disciplines which do, in fact, produce some quite extraordinary psychophysical powers. But this latter fact must not be considered out of context.

We must begin by showing the difference between Western and Eastern ideas of omniscience and omnipotence. A Chinese Buddhist poem says:

*You may wish to ask where the flowers come from,  
But even the God of Spring doesn't know.*

A Westerner would expect that, of all people, the God of Spring would know exactly how flowers are made. But if he

doesn't know, how can he possibly make them? A Buddhist would answer that the question itself is misleading since flowers are grown, not made. Things which are made are either assemblages of formerly separate parts (like houses) or constructed by cutting and shaping from without inwards (like pots of clay or images). But things which are grown formulate their own structure and differentiate their own parts from within outwards.

Thus it would be absurd, in a Buddhist's view, to ask, "Who made the world?" because the world as a whole is not considered as an artifact, a structure made by putting formerly distinct pieces together — pieces which were originally shaped by an external agency from some kind of material. No analogy is felt to exist between natural growth and human manufacture.

If, then, the God of Spring does not make the flowers, how does he produce them? The answer is that he does so in the same way that you and I grow our hair, beat our hearts, structure our bones and nerves, and move our limbs. To us, this seems a very odd statement because we do not ordinarily think of ourselves as actively growing our hair in the same way that we move our limbs. But the difference vanishes when we ask ourselves just *how* we raise a hand, or just *how* we make a mental decision to raise a hand. For we do not know — or, more correctly, we do know but we cannot describe how it is done in words.

To be more exact: the process is so innate and so *simple* that it cannot be conveyed by anything so complicated and cumbersome as human language, which has to describe everything in terms of a linear series of fixed signs. This cumbersome way of making communicable representations

of the world makes the description of certain events as complicated as trying to drink water with a fork. It is not that these actions or events are complicated in themselves: the complexity lies in trying to fit them into the clumsy instrumentality of language, which can deal only with one thing (or "think") at a time.

Now the Western mind identifies what it knows with what it can describe and communicate in some system of symbols, whether linguistic or mathematical — that is, with what it can think about. Knowledge is thus primarily the content of thought, of a system of symbols which make up a very approximate model or representation of reality. In somewhat the same way, a newspaper photograph is a representation of a natural scene in terms of a fine screen of dots. But as the actual scene is not a lot of dots, so the real world is not in fact a lot of things or "thinks."

The Oriental mind uses the term *knowledge* in another sense besides this — in the sense of knowing how to do actions which cannot be explained. In this sense, we know how to breathe and how to walk, and even how to grow hair, because that is just what we do!

This kind of "knowing how" does not apply to voluntary acts alone. Buddhist psychology does not admit our rather rigid distinction between the voluntary and the involuntary. For if voluntary acts are those preceded by a decision or choice, is decision itself voluntary? Were it so, every decision would have to be preceded by a decision to decide, and so on in an infinite regression.

This is not to say that all acts are involuntary. The point is that an act is voluntary or involuntary, not in itself, but according to the point of view from which it is regarded. In itself,

every act is said to be happening *shizen* or *mushin*, that is, spontaneously. This is expressed in the poem:

*The wild geese do not intend to cast their reflection;  
The water has no mind to retain their image*

We are now in a position to see what Buddhism might mean by the *siddhi* or marvelous power of omnipotence. So long as I identify myself with my conscious, intentional, and voluntary mind, I feel that I am in control of relatively few events. But I can realize that this identification is after all a matter of opinion, of social convention, of an acquired way of describing myself to myself. Both Buddhist and Hindu disciplines of spiritual growth (i.e., meditation or yoga), consist primarily in exploring the question, "What am I?"

This leads to the discovery that the accepted way of conceiving myself — as this consciousness, this body, or this particular series of experiences — is simply conventional, just one among many possible ways of describing myself. Then what am I in reality? The answer, from one side, is "no-thing" or "nothing special" (*muji*). But since it is written that "between the All and the Void is only a difference of name," it appears possible to identify myself as all, as the total process of *shizen*, or "things-happening-spontaneously-by-themselves."

In this sense, I feel that "I" am shining the stars and blowing the clouds above my head in just the same way that "I" am growing my hair, breathing, and walking. This is omniscience and omnipotence, but as the God of Spring does not know where the flowers come from, so "I" cannot, or rather, words cannot describe how all this is done.

We are now in a position to discuss the production of psychophysical acts which are out of the ordinary. In the first

place it must be understood that such acts are no more necessarily connected with Buddhist "omniscience" than any ordinary feat of scientific or artistic skill. Qualitatively, telepathy is not different from acquiring the knack of wiggling one's ears or shooting a bow and arrow, and one of the best discussions of this whole problem in a Buddhist setting is Eugen Herrigel's marvelous little book *Zen in the Art of Archery* (Pantheon Books, New York) — in which he relates how he learned to let the bowstring go *shizen*, by itself. It took him five years to learn the knack, five years to overcome the obsession that decisive motions of this nature must be felt as forced choices, and not as happening by themselves.

However, as soon as he learned the feeling of his hand releasing the bowstring by itself, he discovered the clue to an extraordinary and indeed supernormal mastery of the art of archery. Similarly, when one learns the feeling of thoughts and mental impressions coming and going of themselves, one has discovered the clue to a mastery of the mental art which could, if so desired, be applied to experiments in parapsychology.

But such experiments would be a sideline, having no more intrinsic connection with Buddhist wisdom than any other type of scientific or artistic research. To be aware of phenomena on "higher planes of vibration" is, in principle, no different from visiting Australia or the moon. One who is a fool here will also be a fool on the moon, and a fool in the sensible world will likewise be a fool in the suprasensible world, and a very dangerous fool by consequence.

The connection between the *shizen* feeling and the acquisition of supernormal skills is simply that the ordinary, egocentric way of feeling our actions arouses tensions which block and hinder their efficiency. For example, I am late in catching

a train, so I try as hard as possible to hurry. But the effortful tension hinders my freedom and elasticity of movement in such a way that I stumble and fumble. My anxiety not to be late makes me tremble and dither in such a way that I get later and later and thus still more anxious, creating a vicious circle which deprives me of freedom of movement. To act in this way sets up all kinds of unnecessary limitations to the possibilities of human action, but that we do not know what the human organism might achieve if it behaved otherwise.

Just as there is no fixed and necessary reason why man should regard himself as identical with his conscious will or his body, there is likewise no reason other than habit and convention why he should regard his human nature as having rigidly circumscribed possibilities of thought and activity.

But a Western approach to Oriental wisdom based largely on the peculiarly Western urge for the extension of human power will neglect the main thing which this wisdom has to offer, and of which we stand so tremendously in need — and that is deliverance from the egocentric way of feeling the world, from our titanic anxiety to control everything and to obliterate the limits of time and space, from that will-to-power which makes our culture such a menace to life on this planet.



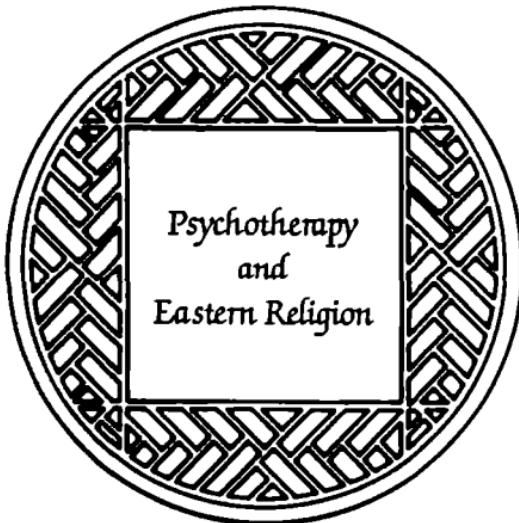




# Psychotherapy and Eastern Religion

Alan Watts





Perhaps I should first explain that I have been involved with psychotherapy for years, and talking to the staffs of psychiatric institutions has been one of the main things I do. Something that has constantly worried me about almost all the schools of psychotherapy is what I'm going to call a lack of metaphysical depth, a certain shallowness which results from having a philosophical unconsciousness which has not been examined. Now, I'm a philosopher, and as a philosopher I am grateful to some of the great pioneers in psychotherapy like Freud, Jung and Adler, for pointing out to us philosophers the unconscious emotional forces which underlie our opinions. In a way, I'm also a theologian, but not a partisan theologian. I don't belong to any particular religion because I don't consider that to be intellectually respectable. We are grateful for their showing us how our unconscious and unexamined emotional tendencies influence the ideas which we hold. It's a very valuable insight. But we,

in our turn, are interested in the unconscious intellectual assumptions which underline psychotherapy.

Psychotherapy is a product of the philosophy of nature of the nineteenth century. From my point of view, that is not an exact science but a mythology which is taken for granted. The philosophy of nature of the nineteenth century has become the common sense of the twentieth century, and is widely accepted in the medical profession, in the psychotherapeutic professions, and in sociology. From the point of view of a physicist or an advanced mathematician or biologist, however, there is a serious question as to whether psychiatry is a genuine science, and even whether medicine is a genuine science. These professions have not caught up with quantum theory and are still holding Newtonian views of the universe, thinking about their subjects in terms of mechanical models. We hear constant reference to "unconscious mental mechanisms." What on earth are we talking about? Psychoanalysis is to a very large degree psychohydraulics — an analogy or model of the behavior of the so-called psyche based on Newton's analysis of the mechanics of water — and so we hear of a basic notion of psychic energy as libido. Now libido means "blind lust," and it operates according to the pleasure principle which comes into conflict with something else called the reality principle. One of the difficulties of the human being is that the whole length of the spinal cord separates the brain from the genitals, and so they're never quite together. . . .

We are looking at the basic models underlying the practice of psychotherapy. There are exceptions to this and you must always understand that I'm going to make exaggerations and outrageous generalizations for purposes of discussion rather than laying down the law. Our practice is based on the world view of nineteenth-century scientific naturalism.

which has as its fundamental assumption that the energy which we express is basically stupid — blind energy, libido — and it's called the unconscious. The assumption of this philosophy of nature was that the psychobiology of human nature was a stupid mechanism, a fluke that had arisen in a mechanical universe, and that if we were to maintain this fluke and its values, it would be necessary for us to enter into a serious fight with nature. Scientific naturalism was in fact against nature, believing nature to be foolish and blind, and therefore in need of being dominated by our intelligence which, paradoxically enough, was the product of this foolishness. But the fluke had happened.

Let's go back into the history of this idea. Western man, whether he was a Jew, a Moslem or a Christian, had always considered the natural universe to be an artifact, something made, and a child in this culture very naturally seems to ask its parents, How was I made? To make something is to create an artifact; you make a table out of wood or a sculpture out of stone. This is the basic mythology underlying our common sense. We are mostly unconscious of the basic images in which we think. That is why I say that we have an intellectual unconscious. We are mostly unconscious of the basic belief systems within which we think and behave. So here is this basic belief system — we are all made. It would be unnatural for a Chinese child to ask, How was I made? He might instead ask, How did I grow? The idea of our being manufactured objects is basic to almost all Western thought. In the course of history, when we got rid of the idea of God as the maker, we were stuck with the idea of the universe as a mechanism.

People today who believe in God don't really believe in God; they believe that they ought to believe in God, and

therefore are somewhat fanatical about it because of their doubt. The strong believer always profoundly doubts what he believes and therefore wants to compel other people to believe, to bolster up his own courage. A person who truly believes in God would never try and thrust the idea on anyone else. just as when you understand mathematics, you are not a fanatical proponent of the idea that two and two are four . . . Nevertheless, we have been stuck with the assumption that the universe is a mechanical construct.

Now, what is the difference between a mechanism and an organism? A mechanism is an arrangement of parts that are put together, gathered, as it were, from separate places and assembled. No organism comes into being that way. An organism starts as a seed, or a cell, a little small . . . I'm at a loss for words, because I won't call it an object, and I won't call it a thing, and I won't even call it an entity. All these words misdescribe what an organism is. Anyway, it starts tiny, and it swells, and as it swells, it becomes more complicated, not by the addition of parts that are screwed on or welded together, but it has this marvelous capacity of growth . . . and that's how we came into being. An organism is incredibly intelligent, and its intelligence surpasses anything we might call mechanical intelligence. In physics, where there are millions of variables, we manage to understand them by statistical methods and then predict what will happen. But in the ordinary situations of life where we are dealing with perhaps several hundred thousand variables, we haven't the ghost of a notion how to handle them.

For example, you can't possibly keep up with the literature that you need to know in the field of psychotherapy. It's endless, and most of it boring. We all become scanning lines, because conscious attention is the brain's radar, and you know

how radar works. It is the propagation of a beam with a bounce factor in it which feeds back to the scope, and you keep scanning the environment for changes. If a rock should come up, if a storm should come up, if another vehicle should come up, the radar picks it up. Our conscious attention is only a minimal part of our total psychic functioning, because the brain as a whole, the nervous system as a whole, regulates and organizes all kinds of psychic and physical functioning without thinking about it. You don't know you beat your heart. You don't know how you make a decision. You don't know how you breathe. You may, if you're a physiologist, have some idea of it, but that doesn't enable you to do it any better than somebody who doesn't know. All this incredibly intricate functioning is carried on unconsciously. Oh, we say, it's by the brain. But what is the brain? Nobody really knows.

One of my great friends is Karl Pribram, who is a professor of neuropsychiatry at Stanford. He has a marvelous understanding of the brain, but he is the first person to admit that he doesn't really understand it at all. He's fascinated, and he shows us most amazing things — how the brain creates the world which it sees. If you want a simple explanation of this, read J.Z. Young's book, *Doubt and Certainty in Science*. He begins with the brains of octopuses, which are very simple brains and fairly easy to understand, and then he goes on to the human brain and shows how we are what we are by creating the kind of world that we think we live in. The brain, the nervous system, evokes the world, but is also something in the world. What an egg-and-hen situation that is! He is stating in very sophisticated language some ancient philosophical problems. When Bishop Berkeley explained that the world is entirely in our minds, he had a very vague idea of the mind. Everybody used to think that the mind was

something like space. It had no form of its own but was able to contain forms, like a mirror which has no color but reflects all colors, like the eye lens which has no color but is able to see all colors. This was a vague idea of the mind. Now the neurologist studying the brain gets a very precise idea of the mind. He can say it has all these neurons, dendrites and what have you, pathways. But in the end, he comes to exactly the same thing. He's saying, The world is what your brain evokes. So we're back where we started, only in a more complicated and a more rigorous way. Nature is assumed to be complex. We say, The world is complicated, not only in its biology, in its geology, in its astronomy, but also in its politics, its economics. Actually the world isn't complicated at all. What is complicated is the attempt to translate the world into linear symbols.

What I'm developing is the idea that *what we are physically is far more intelligent than what we are intellectually*. Behind our minds and our books and our schedules and our laws and our mathematics, there is something far more intelligent than anything we can record. So naturally, when you get into the practice of psychotherapy, you have first of all gone through school, and you've read a lot of textbooks, and you've seen a lot of procedures and heard a lot of explanations. Incidentally, do you know what "explained" means? It means "to lay out flat, to put it on a plain." It's like those slices people take of fetuses, and enlarge them and so on, to see what a fetus really is. You've got it *explained*. But a fetus "laid out flat" is no fetus, just like blood in a test tube is not the same process as blood in the veins — because it's out of context. Blood in the veins is in a certain situation. It is what it is because of its relationship to a vast system. But in a test tube

where it's isolated, it's not the same thing. A thing is also where it is.

Let's begin to realize that we have identified ourselves with a process of mentation or consciousness which is not really ourselves at all. Let's have the humility to see that. We don't trust ourselves because of this, and therefore scientists are sometimes saying today, "Human civilization has come to the point where we've got to take our own evolution in hand. We can no longer leave it to the spontaneous processes of nature." Well, these people are idiots. Like a conference of geneticists which I recently attended: they summoned for advice several philosophers and theologians — that showed they were pretty desperate — and they said, "We have just realized that we're within reach of the power to control human character by genetic manipulation. We want to know what you people think about this. What sort of human character should we produce?" Wowee! There were various views offered, and I said, "Of course you can't know, because you yourself are genetically unregenerate. You yourself are the product of the random selection of nature, and therefore by your own showing, you must be a mess. You, as a mess, cannot decide what should be the proper order of things. The only thing you can do is to insure that there be as many different kinds of human being as possible."

We don't know what kinds of human beings we need. At one period, we need people who cooperate and who are good teamworkers. At another period, we need rugged individualists who have their own ideas and go ahead and persuade everybody else to follow them. We're in a teamwork situation right now. Everybody is always looking out of the corner of their eye to see what everybody else is doing. What

is the right way to proceed evolutionarily? We haven't the faintest idea. We all seem to agree that we should survive. I'm not at all sure about this. There are two schools of thought about life. Take the analogy of fire: some people think a good fire is a colossally bright blaze that is a flash, like lightning. Other people say, "Oh, no, no, that's a waste of energy. Cool it. Keep it down to a dull glow which goes on for a long, long time, so that 'this is the way the world ends, not with a bang but a whimper' " What should life be? Suppose you were confronted with a choice: you could spend one night with the most beautiful woman imaginable, or man, and have the most incredible orgiastic experience, and then die. Or, you could be with some rather indifferent, not very exciting companion for a long, long time, so that you would be bored. Which would you choose? We find that very difficult to decide. In the ordinary way, we are not really aware of life because we're using our conscious attention too much. We think we are our opinion of ourselves, our image of ourselves, and therefore feel reduced to linear symbolism, and that's a kind of strung-out, skinny thing. It's starved. It's all skin and bones and no flesh. When you think of yourself as your ego, as your personality, this is an entirely fictitious account of yourself, lacking in richness; if you are identified with that, you feel impoverished, and you have to go to a psychiatrist. You say, I feel frustrated. Of course you do. The psychiatrist also feels frustrated, because, by and large, he has the same opinion of himself: he thinks he's an ego.

Freedom is the only thing that works. If I don't trust you, I can't live with you. I've got to make the gamble, even though it will sometimes be betrayed. I've got to make the gamble of trusting you. I can't go out of my door without a fundamental sense that I can trust my neighbors. So in the same

way, I cannot make a single decision without the fundamental sense of trusting my own brain. If I don't know how my brain works, how the hell do I know if I'm not crazy? I have no way of determining. I may be absolutely nutty as a fruitcake, but nevertheless, I have to trust my brain. The trouble with most people we call crazy is that they can't trust themselves. Clinically, one has somehow or other to get these people to trust themselves again. You can't do that if you're uptight. If you, in the company of a so-called crazy person, feel ill-at-ease, and feel you've got to get this person to conform and do things according to the book, you're going to get nowhere. You've got to be able, yourself, to be as crazy as a crazy person in order to be a therapist.

The therapist must, above all things, have a basic trust in life, in the unconscious. The unconscious shouldn't be a noun. It's a verb, the unconscious aspect of process, of nature. If you don't trust it, you get clutched up in the situation where you can't really do anything. Our technology is basically a mistrust of nature and, clever as it is, it's not going to work in the long run. Our technology is going to destroy us, unless we upend it, and base it on trust in the processes of life.

The basis of what we're going into is what I have called the intellectual unconscious. Nowadays it's customary, especially in psychological circles, to put down intellectual considerations. Such words are used as being "over-cerebral," as being on a "head trip," as dismissing it all as "a lot of talk," but the fact remains that those comments on intellectualization are an expression of a philosophy — and at that, an unexamined one. You will often come across a type who says, "I'm just a practical businessman. I don't give a shit about philosophy. I've got to get things done." And so that fellow is advertising himself as a member of a particular philosophical

school called pragmatism. He doesn't know this, and because he doesn't know it, he's a bad pragmatist. He says, "I want to get things done." Or, he's the sort of person who says, "You can't stop progress." But what is being practical? This is a very, very undecided question, and for a lot of people, their only idea of what is practical is what enables them to survive. Well, this can be thoroughly called into question.

I mean, is it a good idea to survive? Most people have never thought about that at all. Albert Camus, in his book *The Myth of Sisyphus*, starts out by saying, "The only serious philosophical question is whether or not to commit suicide." Now, in your profession, suicide is a major evil. I once went to a conference held by the American Academy of Psychotherapists on the subject of "Failure in Psychotherapy," and various papers were presented. The first paper contained a case study of someone who had been under therapy for five years and then committed suicide. So I said, "This is rather a funny case because, after all, you kept the guy alive for five years, and in the treatment of cancer that would have been counted as a cure. The statistics on cancer treatment always reckon five year's survival as a cure. What's so bad about suicide? After all, we're over-populated, and if someone doesn't want to be around anymore, that's their privilege. All I'm saying is that that assumption is questionable. Furthermore, what are you afraid of about death?"

This is a real hospital hangup. We don't know how to treat dying people. The literature on the psychotherapy of the dying has only just begun to come into existence, and a doctor is in a very tough position because he's supposed to keep you alive, at all costs. The most heroic measures are used to keep people alive, and there they suffer, linked up with all kinds of tubes and kidney machines and various systems — because

at all costs while there is life there is hope, and often while there is life there is pain. The doctor is sort of out of role when he knows in his heart that the patient will not live, and then all kinds of lying starts up. He may tell the patient's relatives that the case is hopeless, but he says to them, "Don't tell the patient." For some reason, knowing that you're going to die is supposed to be bad for you. It's supposed to depress you. It's supposed to perhaps cut down the recuperative forces of nature that are at work in your organism.

But the most important thing for anybody to know is that he's going to die. Oh, we can put it off and say, "Well, we'll think about that later" But we don't realize that the certainty of death is an extremely liberating experience. I've never been a doctor of medicine, but I've been a "doctor of divinity" . . . under rather strange circumstances. I've often been called in when people are dying, because when the doctor gives up, he calls the clergyman, and the clergyman feels in role at this point, although he may be a silly idiot and make all sorts of consolations and tell you about heaven and hell and such things. But that's not the way to work. Dying is a splendid opportunity, and the sooner one can realize fully the certainty of death the better.

The hospital is, by and large, a terrible place, although its intentions are very good. But the last place I would send anyone is to a mental hospital, and if possible, not even to a physical hospital. I had a friend recently who was dying of cancer — he had a brain tumor. And here he was in a Kaiser Hospital, in the most horrible surroundings. You know what hospital rooms are — colorless, healthy, hygenic, awful. And here he was, you know, he could hardly look out of the window even. And I said to him, Harry, listen, I don't know, I haven't talked to your doctor, and I don't know what your

condition really is, so don't take anything I say about your condition as being true, but let's just suppose for the sake of argument that it's hopeless. Suppose you're going to die. You may not be, but suppose it is so. Now you know enough, because you're well-educated in Oriental philosophy, to realize that the best thing that could possibly happen to you is to lose your ego and be liberated. After all, that's what you've been concerned with all your life, the sense of transcending the narrow bounds of self-consciousness and feeling one with the universe, with the eternal energy behind all this, and the only way to get that feeling is to give yourself up. I said, Here's the opportunity. There's no question of holding on to yourself anymore, because it's going to go away, and nothing can stop it, so get with it. Just give up, and get out of this place, and rent yourself a beach cottage and look at the ocean, and stop all this concern to hang on.

Hanging onto oneself is self-strangulation. It's like smother-love. When a mother hangs on to her child too long and doesn't let it be independent because of her concern, or alleged love, the child becomes warped. Well it's the same, you can smother-love yourself. You can hang on. You can be full of anxiety. I know and you know, for many people this is a regular program. They're anxious because they don't have enough money, and they think, If only I could double my income, everything would be okay. And they succeed. They do it. So they have plenty of money. Then the next thing they worry about is their health. They go to a doctor and they get a complete medical examination, and the doctor says, "As far as I can see, you're all right." Well, they think there's something probably wrong, because this person is a born worrier and maybe should go to a psychiatrist. So he looks you over and says, "I can't see anything wrong." Well, then you worry about

politics. Is the revolution coming? Are the tax people going to take away all your money? Will you be robbed? I mean, there are endless contingencies you can worry about.

And finally, death. Am I going to die? Of course. How soon? Does that matter? What are you waiting for? There's a song, you know, which used to go . . . "There's a good time coming, be it ever so far away," and everybody thinks there is one far off divine event to which all creation moves, and maybe that'll turn up between now and your death . . . or even perhaps after death. Everybody's looking for *that thing* somewhere else than now. But if you accept death, a funny thing happens — you discover how good *now* is, and that's really where you're supposed to be. Very often people may get into these states when they're threatened by death, when they've given themselves up for dead, or sometimes, too, in convalescing from a long illness. In those transformed states of consciousness in which we see this, there's a sudden enlightenment about now.

When you see that *the whole point of life is this moment*, most other people seem objects of pity. You're rather sorry for them. Because they are rushing around, madly intent on something. They look insane on the streets. Going somewhere. Wow, it's important to get there. And their noses seem to be longer than usual, sort of prodding into the future, and their eyes staring. They rush about in cars. Looking out of the window I see all these cars streaming down Lake Shore Drive into Chicago.

They're intent on something. What? Well, we have to go to work. Why? Well, to make money. Why? Well, I mean one must live. You *must*? If you say to any spontaneous process — life is a spontaneous process — "You must happen," it's like saying to someone, "You must love me." But we all do that to our children. The basic rule for bringing up a child

— which every child learns — is, "You are required and commanded to do that which will be acceptable only if you do it voluntarily." This is known as the double-bind. So we say to our spouses, "You must love me," and if I don't feel like loving my spouse anymore, I'm made to feel guilty, and when I feel guilty, I feel I have to make an effort to be loving — but nobody wants to be loved on purpose. I don't want to be loved out of somebody's sense of duty. I want them to love me because they can't help loving me. Then I feel it's okay.

Ever so many people are thoroughly confused by being commanded to do that which is only any good if it's natural — and living *is* such a thing. If I say to myself, "I must live," then life is a drag. Or I say, "I must live because I have children and I'm responsible." But then all I do is teach my children to have the same feeling, and they will teach their children to have the same feeling, and life will continue to be a drag for everybody concerned. So life can only not be a drag when you understand it's gravy. That is to say, it happens unnecessarily, not under orders, but for kicks. Then you are free from the oppressive duty to go on living. And so the physician, and especially the psychiatrist, should be the first person to understand this. Jung once made a joke, "Life is a disease with a very bad prognosis. It lingers on for years and invariably ends with death." . . . So, death is most important, but of course, Westerners, particularly, are scared of it. It's the one awful awful that mustn't happen, because, well . . . why are we afraid of it? Some of us say, "It's not death I'm afraid of, it's dying." Well that makes sense, but then medicine doesn't help: medicine prolongs dying. It doesn't really prolong life, I mean, it does sometimes, but for old people particularly, it prolongs dying. Terminal cancer is prolonged dying.

Still, there is something real spooky about death. Even if

you're not religious and you don't believe in an afterlife which might be awful, I mean, who knows? But supposing death is like going to sleep and never waking up. That's quite something to think about. I find thinking about death is one of the most creative things one can do. To go to sleep and never wake up. Fancy that. It won't be like going into the dark forever. It won't be like being buried alive forever. There'll be no problems at all; there's nothing to regret. It will be as if you had never existed at all, and not only you, but everything else as well. It never was there. No further problems. But wait a minute. I seem to remember something like that. That was just the way it was before I was born. And yet, here I am. I exist, and once, I didn't. Nor did anything else, so far as I'm concerned. And I always figure in life that a thing that happened once can always happen again. So I came out of nothing. But we say, "You couldn't have done that, because there's nothing in nothing to produce something, and we believe in the Latin precept, *ex nihilo nihil fit*, which means, 'Out of nothing comes nothing.' " But it's not true. It's a fault in our logic. If you had Chinese logic, you would see it differently. You would see that you have to have nothing in order to have something, because the two go together.

Well, isn't that obvious? Where would the stars be without space? There would be nowhere for them to be . . . and they shine out of space. Physicists are just beginning to realize that it is precisely space which is the creative matrix, the womb of creation. So in the same way, look at your head. What color is it? I can't even find mine. You all have heads, but I don't: I can't see my head. And I also don't feel with my eyes that there is a black blob in the middle of everything I experience. It isn't even fuzzy. It just isn't there, although neurologically speaking, all that I call outside is a state of optic nerves which

are located in the back of the head. So I'm looking at the inside of my head. It's pretty weird. So out of this nothingness comes my sight. Out of space come the stars. So, you can regard death as the origin of life, for how would you know you are alive unless you had once been dead. Think that one over. We think we're alive, don't we? — something we can't quite put our finger on, but we know there is such a thing as reality, as existence. We're here. And everything we know is known by contrast. You know you can see light against a background of darkness, hot as compared with cold, pain compared with pleasure. So we know we're alive. Obviously we must have once been dead. This seems to me very plain.

So, you say. "Well now, wait a minute. When I come back again, if this does happen again, this sense of existence, in what form will I come back? I hope I could be a human being again, or an angel, but perhaps I'll come back as a fruitfly, or a hippopotamus." But be assured it won't make a difference. All beings think they're human. We don't like to admit that because we think we're top species, but that doesn't follow at all. That's just our opinion, and we're very conceited. We say of somebody who is very ill, "Oh, it's too bad. He's just become a vegetable" . . . with the most extraordinary ignorance of vegetables. We think vegetables are unintelligent, unfeeling, but vegetables are highly intelligent organisms, and tests with electroencephalograms show that they feel. Now, if you came back as a vegetable, you would have vegetable consciousness, and you would think that was entirely normal . . . in fact, civilized, the usual thing, the regular thing. You would understand your fellow vegetables and the bees that visited you, and that would be the normal routine. You would think human beings were ridiculous. Human beings, in order to consider themselves civilized, have to accumulate enormous

quantities of rubbish. They have to have clothes, cars, libraries, houses . . . all this junk. Whereas, look at us vegetables — our bodies are our culture, and we're not ashamed of them. Look at the flower. Isn't *that* something? Fish would have the same view. We think sharks are terrible, but they at least stay in the ocean. Human beings go everywhere, into the sky, into the ocean, and all over the earth catching their prey. But the civilized shark stays in the water at least. Look at the dolphins. Why, they are quite probably more intelligent than we. But they decided that our game was stupid. Stay in the water because the groceries are right there, and you can spend most of your time playing. And so that's just what dolphins do. They gambol all over the place, and, for example, they'll follow a human ship and swim circles around it: then they'll set their tail at a twenty-six degree angle and let the bow-wake carry them. No effort, see . . . just keep your tail that way and the ship will take you along. Where to? Who cares?

Everywhere is the place to go, to be at. It's like a king. When a king walks, he is stately. Why? Because he has nowhere to go to. Because he is where it's at. He's the place, wherever he moves. So he walks in a stately way. He doesn't march, he doesn't hurry — he's there. Everybody must learn, then, to walk like a king. You can remember this because, in Sanskrit, your real self is called the *atman*. Making a pun which scholars would deplore, that means the "man where it's at" and where it's at is where you are. But we're all under the illusion that we should be someone and somewhere else. So we're not seated properly. That's why, when you practice yoga, the first thing you have to learn is to sit in such a way that you're really there. So, by acceptance of death, one overcomes the necessity for a future, and that in both senses of the word is a *present*.

You can see this more clearly perhaps if you would imagine what it would be like to regress, as it's called in psychotherapeutic language, to babyhood. And, here you are. You really don't know anything about anything. All you know is what you feel. You've no sense of time. You don't know the difference between who you are and what you see. You're in what Freud called the "oceanic state." You don't know anything. You don't know any language, no words in your head. Now consider what it would be like to stop thinking, stop talking to yourself, and simply be aware. You hear all the sound going on but you don't put names on them. You see all these colors and forms buzzing at you, but you don't call them anything. You just experience.

That's a pretty crazy state of consciousness because there's no past, there's no future, there's no difference between you and what you're aware of. It's all one, or none, or both, or neither — there are no words. You would be in a state which in yoga is called *nirvikalpa samadhi*, a very high consciousness in which illusions vanish — Eternal Now. Incidentally, a very therapeutic state of consciousness. But that is a kind of metaphorical death. It is the death of your self-image, your idea of yourself, your concept of yourself. Literal death, or the immediate prospect thereof, can bring a person into that state of consciousness. This state of consciousness is highly invigorating, because all the energy which you were wasting on worrying is now available for other things. All the energy you were wasting on trying to hold onto yourself is now available for things that can be done, and so people, paradoxically it would seem, are very peped up by the acceptance of death in its various senses. So a hospital, where many people are in one way or another dying, should be a place of immense joy. But we don't allow it to be that, because we

have the fixed idea that people in the hospital are in trouble, and we show them by the way in which we attend and relate to them emotionally: "Yes, you are in trouble." Well then, of course they feel in trouble. They have to play that role.

There is nothing which causes more trouble to people than helping them. There's a famous saying, "Kindly let me help you or you'll drown," said the monkey, putting the fish safely up a tree. The moment you take this attitude of, "You are sick," people learn to eat pity, and thrive on it, and play sick as a profitable role for getting attention, sympathy, care, and to indulge in the masochism of gaining a sense of identity through being in peril, in misfortune. It's like the phrase, "nursing a grievance." I once had a woman come to me who had had a very serious tragedy. Her husband had died of a heart attack and a year later her son was struck by lightning and killed. She was beside herself with grief. Understandably. Well, at the time, I was a clergyman. And I took a look at this woman and I thought, I'm not going to give her any bullshit, she's too intelligent. So I asked her to explore grief. What is it to grieve? Where do you feel grief? What part of your body is it in? What sort of a feeling is it? What images are connected with it? In every way we explored grief. And by God, she got over it. Because eventually, concentrating on it as a sensation, she stopped talking to herself and saying, "Poor little me, I've lost my son, I've lost my husband," and repeating all these words over and over which hypnotize you and perpetuate the feeling of being important because you're in a state of grief. And she became an extremely creative and active person.

So it seems to me that anybody in the hospital professions, the healing professions, must get the hang of this somehow, and stop running desultory institutions. There's no reason why hospitals should be designed the way they are. Hospitals

should be arranged in such a way as to make being sick an interesting experience. One learns a great deal sometimes from being sick. Dying only happens to you once, so it should be a great event. Special sanitariums, not hospitals — "sanatorium" means "a place of sanity" — should be arranged for different methods of dying. How would you like to die? Do you want a very, very marvelous religious ceremony? Do you want to invite all your friends to a champagne party? Do you want to be among flowers? How would you like to die if you really had your choice? Would you like to be drowned in a barrel of wine? You could take an extremely positive attitude to death as the greatest opportunity you'll ever have to experience what it's like to let go of yourself...than which there is no greater bliss.

