

THE CONCEPT OF SELF IN EASTERN THOUGHT AND HUMANISTIC PSYCHOLOGY

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*'We are all prisoners of our minds. This realisation is the first step on the journey of
freedom.'*

Ram Dass

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Introduction

The title suggest a king's feast of ideas and information and although this goes beyond the present possibilities of time and length I have used it because I hope to offer some fresh royal snacks of real interest rather than a beggar's banquet of warmed-up left-overs. In more precise terms, I will look at the concept of self in the contexts of Tibetan Buddhism and transpersonal psychology.

Firstly, I will discuss why studies in this area have not been much pursued in the past and why they are developing now. One of the purposes of this section is to remind us of some of the habitual patterns of interpretation that we carry with us all the time and impose upon whatever situations arise for us. This awareness is particularly important when we come to look at non-western systems of understanding and belief. We might experience them as being threatening, as undermining the sense of naturalness we try to feel about how we are.

Alternatively, we might see them as a proof of the superiority of our own way of life as we watch the non-western cultures crumble before the cloning influence of western materialism. On the other hand, we might see in them a wondrous, mystical emergency exit from the tedium and narrowness of our daily concerns. We each must be aware of the biases and judgements, conscious or habitual, subtle or gross that we bring with us so that we may develop a truer insight into what seems 'foreign'.

The first section will be suggestive rather than dogmatic. If we define our terms too precisely their exactness will become a rigidity, a fixedness of form and thus with these square pegs we would be forever searching for square holes to slot them into - and thereby ignoring all the other possibilities.

Description is always selective; it reflects the standpoint and the perspective of the viewer. This must be accepted and borne in mind throughout - for if it is forgotten then the description will become prescriptive, riddled with implicit value judgements and a simplistic sense of necessary causation. Thus rather than trying to define 'the self' at the outset I wish to present the Tibetan Buddhist views and these of transpersonal psychology in their own vocabularies and then conclude with a discussion of some of the implications.

I am looking for a sense of perspective and value rather than an overload of data. The first section, A, is necessarily rather long since without looking at the general context and sharpening our minds to some of the key issues all that follows would be less vivid. My aim throughout is to let the ideas and, hopefully, insights, prove their value by their capacity to stimulate, clarify and suggest. So I have not employed many quotations nor referred to many scholars' work - for we are dealing with the human condition in which there are no objective facts only subjective experiences, which are more or less valid and meaningful according to the individual's situation. At least that is my position. Of course, the Buddhist section is based on the teaching of the Buddha but I hope my presentation, although written from the 'inside', is analytical and exploratory rather than dogmatic. The Buddhist section is the longest

since as a well-developed system with many methods and views it provides many different angles on its key points whereas humanistic psychology and especially the transpersonal area is very new, full of adolescent energy, a set of attitudes and a few interpretive guidelines.

I have learnt much while researching and writing this dissertation and if it stimulates others and suggests areas of examination and experience then I am well satisfied. A brief glimpse with fresh eyes will tell us much more than prolonged staring with the bloodshot vision of one drunk on habitual patterns of interpretation.

Section 1: Factors influencing interpretation and understanding

*I am a part of all that I have met;
Yet all experience is an arch where through
Gleams that untravell'd world, whose margin fades
For ever and for ever when I move.*

Alfred, Lord Tennyson: 'Ulysses'

Personal factors

Given the views expressed in the introduction, I should perhaps say a little about my own orientation and values. Firstly, I approached this project with enthusiasm for the ideas interest and excite me. For twelve years I have studied and tried to practice many of the teachings of Tibetan Buddhism but I have found it often very difficult to separate the 'universal' aspects from those which were of rather more cultural importance. This was particularly true since for eight years I lived in India with a Tibetan spiritual master and participated fully in his lifestyle. I felt rather cut off from the pattern of my previous development, and while on the one hand this seemed like a creative step, a kind of rebirth, I found myself only as it were half-born for somehow I seemed to be acting like a Tibetan, even thinking like a Tibetan, yet feeling like a western person. And so I experienced confusion and lack of fulfilment created by this inner contradiction. Interpreting it as my own lack of spiritual capacity and renunciation, I decided to return to Europe and see what kind of life I could develop there.

It seemed at first as if I was returning to a Britain much changed from the one I had left in the early seventies. There was an air of hopelessness, of narrowing of vision, concentrating on the increasingly difficult nitty-gritty of making ends meet. This seemed a far cry from the creativity and joyful experimentation of the sixties when eastern religion and transcendental visions made a strong impact on many people's lives.

Yet during the year and a half that I have been back in Britain, I have become aware of other currents of growth and human development. These have a much lower profile than the cults of the sixties, not because they are short of enthusiasts but rather because, unlike their predecessors, instead of being just fascinating ideas and stimulating visions that seduce by their very foreignness, they are grounded in a pragmatic sense of daily life and work to enrich its meaning rather than to embellish its form.

By this, I refer to the whole range of styles in the human potential movement (or rather attitude) which has arrived here from America and which includes gestalt, transactional analysis, psychodrama, rebirthing etc., etc. And the really exciting thing about the present period is that these humanistic endeavours have helped a significant number of people to feel O.K. about themselves; to be in touch with their feelings; to have come to terms with their past and be in a position to make clear, responsible decisions about their futures - in a word to feel centred, grounded.

It is these centred people who are in a position actually to implement the ideas and practices of transpersonal psychology, to reach beyond the narrow vision of ego-reality to a wider and deeper experience of the conscious self. Indeed the state or experience of being centred is the basis for all spiritual growth.

In the east, in the simple, rural communities where people lived among the well-known faces of friends and relations with strong unitary themes in the culture there was little alienation and uncertainty as we know it in the west today. Of course, there were personality clashes, inter-generation squabbles etc. but in general, there was a sense of value in what was around them and in the tasks they performed - there was a rhythm to life, a harmony with the seasons and a warmth and supportiveness in the culture, and so the people were centred.

This realisation has been wonderful for me for it has allowed me a new perspective on the difficulties I had while attempting to follow a traditional Tibetan spiritual path. The error was neither with the path nor with myself in an absolute way, but rather that the path started with the assumption of mature ego state and that I did not have. I have come to see the exercises of humanistic psychology as a necessary preliminary for western people who wish to develop beyond the ego states. One has to start with a relative balance if one wishes ultimate integration. Just as an aeroplane needs round, firm tyres to accelerate down the runway in order to takeoff so does the ego¹ need to feel secure and confident before it can relinquish its attempts at total control and give the spirit a chance to fly.

So these are some of the attitudes and enthusiasm I bring to this project and I hope that they will enliven the presentation yet still permit it to be considered an accurate and factual account of the themes considered.

Intellectual and cultural factors

The interpenetration of social and personal existence is so profound that many of the messages we have internalised in the course of the socialisation process have become the very skeleton and sinews of our self-identity so that awareness that they are not 'natural' truths is hard to come by. Either one must engage in rigorous introspection or embark on a clear and open-eyed examination of the values and attitudes held by different cultures for the relativizing effect it can have on one's deeply held convictions. It might therefore help to look at some of the factors in western cultural attitudes.

The Christian view is that God created heaven and earth and every creature on the face of the earth and yet exalted man and gave him dominion over the other creatures. Only man has a soul and thus a chance of heaven, a state of being where he is permanently conscious of his creator.

After Darwin, man's superiority came to depend not on his divine appointment but to his place at the forefront of the evolutionary movement, which had given him qualities of body, voice, and mind that clearly separated him from the next most

'advanced' creatures. Being at the cutting edge of evolutionary development meant that the purpose of life was no longer given as in the Christian view, it was no longer a return to source, a matter of finding a more perfect position in an already established world order. Rather it meant that man had to make himself, he was not made in the image of any God but had to best create and validate his own self-image. Yet given the multifarious forms of social existence how could anyone of these be a model or indicator of the right way?

The approach would have to be a relative one in which what is right for me, may not be right for you. Yet how does the individual know what is right for himself, since his thoughts and feelings are in constant flux. He can either adopt fixed concepts which he can present as an identity yet which he rarely inhabits existentially or he can try to develop a sense of being present for whatever experience arises. The former, more formal position is the most prevalent in the west at the present time with individuals quite prepared to make statements like, 'I am a gardener', or 'I am a stamp-collector' as a presentation of identity. In answer to the sense of alienation that this sense of self as formal presentation often gives rise to, the existentialist stress on being, on fully lived experience, developed from a set of ideas into the practical techniques for authentic being developed in existential and gestalt psychotherapies. In all these forms man is apart, special, of supreme significance in creation.

The Buddhist view is quite the contrary, as we shall see later. Suffice it to point out here that in that view, all beings, be they frogs, gods or men, have the same basic buddhanature or potential for absolute enlightenment as the truth and reality of their being. To use Christian terminology they all have the same 'soul' or chance of salvation - and it is not salvation in the 'presence of god' but as god, as buddha, as the creator and substance of the creation. Or to use Darwin's language, it is not a case of man being more evolved than a frog but that both are in need of being more 'in-volved', more connected with their own real situation, the natural identity of buddhahood rather than with the relative identity of these temporary modes of manifestation. Thus, we can see that with so many contending versions we should be aware that habitual judgements and patterns of thought do not predispose us to find truth and certainty in the mere reflection of our own thought processes.

I have discovered no neutral ground that one can somehow enter and in so doing find oneself free of bias, both conscious and unconscious. If such a position did exist it would be an absolute and so by definition not particularly concerned with making bias-free judgements regarding the truth as it occurs in the relative plane. The absolute, as we shall see, can only include the relative in a non-judgemental way. Like a good mother, it has equal time, space and attention for all its offspring. Otherwise the absolute would be divided by its own likes and dislikes — the old theological error of creating god in the image of man.

Academic responses to these factors

Scientific accuracy as an unattainable ideal

Various kinds of comparative studies have evolved in attempts to make sense of the variety and contradiction which modern man finds in his world. Some of these have attempted to go beyond description-based analysis to the search for meta-theories,

general formulae of total heuristic capacity - much like the search in nuclear physics for a unified field theory. And indeed, we might add like the search for the Holy Grail, for the stress is on exploring the variety of cultural and philosophical forms, to sift out the significant and create a true image of the truth. This is like the many knights who went in search of the grail imagining it to lie within the realm of their ordinary experience and were frustrated not by its being well hidden but by their own narrowness of vision, seeing the barrier to be only without rather than in a much needed internal purification and reorientation.

Total theories whether in religion, the natural, or the social sciences all require an intuitive leap, a relaxation of intellectual analysis and system building in order to provide a space in which the unitary nature of whatever is being considered is given a chance to express itself. How can a whole, a gestalt be created by a unilinear process of adding A to B to C etc.? All that can be created by these methods is an aggregate, a compound, which lacks the inner harmony to transcend being just the sum of its parts. Once again I suggest that these ideas be recollected when we later examine the Buddhist and transpersonal visions of totality and wholeness.

Let us then look briefly at some of the recent western attempts to work towards less ethnocentric, more comparative orientations. Here we will see the 'neutral ground' referred to above, reappearing in the form of the objectivity of the scientific process — as if by being critical all the way down the line one could keep cutting the ground of bias from under one's feet and defy the laws of gravity by dancing in the sky. To examine is to judge and to judge is to have opinions and to be ready to take sides. The critical process fulfils itself not in the establishing of external, verifiable truths but in the self-aware, sensitive and honest attitudes of those who apply it properly. The facts established by scientific experimentation tend to be abstract - that is to say that their expression is freed of all the ordinary contexts of manifestation.

The ideal language for this is mathematics and a simple example should clarify my point. That $2 + 2 = 4$ is an established fact; it is precise, accurate, and true. Yet if we try to apply it in the real world we are faced with the uniqueness of each natural form so that if we say 2 apples + 2 apples = 4 apples the fact that no two apples are identical undermines the precision of the mathematical formula - in a sense it becomes meaningless since we can find no 'standard apple'. Even articles manufactured by an accurately repeatable process such as screws or nails are only produced to certain specified standards - they are never truly identical. The same sort of analysis can be applied to the repeatable scientific experiments - it is repeatable only within the context of certain specifiable approximations. Thus, the chemicals used are pure i.e. about 99.9% pure; the temperature is, say, 100 degrees centigrade, i.e. within a few thousandths of a degree either way.

Science looks from the outside, sets up parameters, defines limits, provides a concept and a model of whatever is being discussed, and then actual situations are held up against the model to see if they fit. If the model is well established it becomes a means of testing ideas presented by individuals, thus a mathematics teacher can correct his students work. And for a new model the criteria for acceptability is to produce standard effects - to have a constant heuristic value so that it helps us 'know where we are'. Thus, analytic meaning is imposed upon the actual forms of sense experience, which are seen as the products of laws rather than

as being of value in their own right as they are for us in our ordinary experience, which is more unitary. Reality, the actuality of finite, discrete events has a way of frustrating the most precisely fashioned theory or method. Constructed systems can only ever approximate to the truth since they have to start with axiomatic conditions, that 'given that this is the case ...'

Well, given that this is the case, there should be no feeling that the formulations of the social sciences are inherently imprecise in contrast to the accuracy of the natural sciences. In terms of perfection, a miss is as good as a mile and by accepting the inherent approximating of all conceptual theorising, there is no need to disparage the inaccuracy of styles of enquiry that renounce the farce of total objectivity. So we will now look briefly at the patterns of some recent forms of multicultural enquiry.

Cross-cultural attitudes in the Arts and Social Sciences

Comparative philosophy that breaks free of European ethnocentrism is a very new field of enquiry for various reasons. Greek and Roman philosophers are generally seen as the main sources of the western intellectual tradition while the white European feelings of innate superiority over other races made enquiry into their views seem a waste of time. Especially in Britain in this century, the concentration on logical and linguistic analysis and the virtual demise of metaphysics as a respectable area of enquiry has given little encouragement to the study of what are held to be the 'naive' views of the nations and races that are held to be in the 'pre-philosophy' stages. These intellectual tendencies are just a rehash of the intolerant 'blinkered tolerance' and ignorant self conceit that fuels the racist orientation of the west which has caused so much harm everywhere in the world.

Comparative religion developed as an offshoot of imperialist culture, as a part of the 'white man's burden' that was borne by those who advanced with a gun in one hand and a Bible in the other. In order to both rule and convert the natives it was necessary to find out about their belief systems and so we find informative notes on the subject by both missionaries and administrators appearing in scholarly journals such as those of the Royal Asiatic Society. Up until the middle of this century, the tone of such writings tended to be rather patronising. Although lip-service was paid to the notion of shared humanity, on the basis of evolution, religion, or philosophical view, there was the definite feeling that the 'natives' were 'other', either simple like the 'childlike' African or too clever by half, like the 'wily' oriental..

Social anthropology does provide certain models for cross-cultural studies of belief systems, most notably the structuralist model that suggests that there is a deep level of potentiality in the psyche, common for all humans, and which undergoes a variety of determinable set transformations to produce all the multiplicity of human belief, speech and action. However most anthropologists have avoided the psychological implications of this and have continued to look on the social structure as a system *sui generis* where, in the Durkheimian sense, social facts are things with their own causes in the social process. So for the study of human nature in the wider sense the heuristic power of structuralism remains as yet a potentiality.

Some further consideration of this point follows shortly, but I would just like to mention that it is in France that we find the great syncretic thinkers of the present

time. In particular, we should be aware of the work of Jacques Lacan who has attempted a dynamic integration of the Marxist and Freudian views. He does this as a continuation of the mainstream European intellectual concern with the question of freewill versus determinism. Although both Freud and Marx have had their supporters in Britain, the more formal attitudes of behaviourism in all its modes have been more popular here.

The transpersonal psychology that we will look at in Section 3 has developed in the hothouse creativity of California. This American state has one of the largest and most active Buddhist communities in the world with teachers from Japan, China, Korea, Tibet, Vietnam etc., etc. Many other religions and cults have centres there and it is home to immigrants from all over the world as well as having a population that is increasingly bilingual with English and Spanish. Moreover, it was in California that the first institutes devoted entirely to human potential and humanistic psychology developed, such as Esalen and those in Mill Valley. Movements do not arise out of a vacuum; there is always a causal context, a pattern of ideas, attitudes, activities that create a warm, womb-like infrastructure that sustains the gestation of the new patterns. And of course, the new patterns reflect many of these formative influences both explicitly and implicitly.

Structural transformation as a universal process

The task of understanding a different culture involves a delicate balance between giving empathetic attention to all the details and significances of the cultural forms and attitudes as they function in that society and at the same time keeping a perspective so that a meaning can be extrapolated that has significance for one's own culture. This is the essential methodological issue in social anthropology and many styles have arisen between extremes of making empty platitudes about universals and minute, self-absorbed descriptions of ethnographic particulars.

The most exciting resolution of this dilemma to date is the application of structuralist theories. As Clifford Geertz says in 'The Interpretation of Cultures',

"Man is to be defined neither by his innate capacities alone, as the Enlightenment sought to do, nor by his actual behaviours alone, as much of contemporary social science seeks to do, but rather by the link between them, by the way in which the first is transformed into the second, his generic potentialities focussed into his specific performances."

The key point here is that the observable events of real life are not simple expressions of, but rather transformations wrought upon whatever underlying unities may characterise the human race as a whole. To use a rough analogy with generative linguistics, universal or generic categories cannot be discovered at the level of surface structure.

Of course one might wonder whether these universal categories will demand a neutral, value-free universal language for expression – and not the English that is the medium for most of the conceptual, analytic research in this area — 90% of which is carried out by western, Caucasian intellectuals (carrying all the programming that these terms might imply). So there is a need for self-awareness, for a capacity to

perceive what one is bringing with one to this study, from the grossest level of social habit to the subtlest level of unconscious attitudes.

Any concept of self worth considering must have something to say about man in and for the world, and about man in and for himself. That is it must have both sociological and psychological dimensions. All the systems that have arisen through the ages in different cultures can be fitted into a basic classification of objective or subjective orientations.

That is to say, whether they support the idea that real, determinable facts exist in their own right and can be proved to anyone intelligent or faithful enough, or whether they support the idea that the world and oneself exist as experience, as interpretation, with the interpreter as the master of what is occurring. The Buddhist and Hindu systems fall into the latter category. Moreover, Buddhist analysis sets out quite clearly the manner in which experience arises for the subject and how it might best be handled. It links the experience of being oneself to that of being in the world in a dynamic, holistic manner as shall be seen later. At this stage I would merely like to suggest that the Buddhist system is perhaps the earliest version of structuralism since it satisfies the criteria set out by Robert A. Paul in 'The Tibetan Symbolic World' for a synthetic theory which can bring together all that is necessary for the system to be heuristic on all levels. He says on page 4,

A synthetic theory must therefore be generative, dynamic, and structural, in that it must propose a concrete repertory of basic elements which, by a set of specifiable operations, can, through their combination and permutation, produce the set of phenomena which are in fact discovered in the real historical world.

There has been much discussion by Levi-Strauss in Anthropology, and Chomsky in Linguistics, and by their supporters and detractors whether the 'deep structures', the generative level, is a potentiality, a process, or a content. Certainly however, it is not a mere subtle model of the outer manifestation.

In the structuralist program, cultures have to be reduced to a kind of 'lowest common denominator', not as an end in itself but in order to discover what it is upon which the transformations are being performed. These are the elementary structures, which in Levi-Strauss's view are certain precise logical relationships, and in his book 'Structural Anthropology', he suggests that these fundamental elements carry discrete values, which relate in certain patterns. In fact, it is really just the old mechanistic paradigm of layers or strata of manifestation dressed-up in new clothes – clothes that become the fashionable basis of an intellectual fad. For the system depends on putting aside the question of whether these fundamental elements are indeed fundamental and then treating them as belonging to the same set or dimension of reality as their surface level productions.

I will quote Robert A. Paul further here for as a structuralist himself he sets out that position quite clearly and indirectly exposes some of its limitations. On page 6 of 'The Tibetan Symbolic World', he draws an analogy with the field of chemistry, and he says:

To say that the world is entirely composed of combinations of one hundred or so elements does not in anyway deny the infinite multiplicity of all the things in the world, nor does it produce a set of bloodless generalisations. This is because the manifest, diverse phenomena of the world have been reduced to a lowest common denominator, which then becomes the basis for a set of lawful and regular rules of transformation that indeed are capable of generating everything in the world, and of actually producing new things.

There are two phases or moments in the process of moving between the surface manifestations (the things) and the deep structural units (the elements). The first is the phase of moving from the complex things to the simple elements, by undoing, through analysis, the “things” to discover the elements. The second is the description of the processes of transformation through which the simple elements may be operated upon to produce the complex things.

In themselves, lowest common denominators are, by their very nature, quite uninformative. But, as one pole of a dynamic system, they are essential to a powerful and elegant comprehension of the multiplicity of phenomena. If in Geertz’s formulation the study of anthropology investigates man’s “generic potentialities focussed into his specific performances”, then it is essential that we do not shrink from making statements about just what those generic potentialities might be.

It is, then, my position that for man, as for the rest of nature, the tabula is far from rasa, and that, on the contrary, there are non-trivial aspects of human nature which it is essential to take into account in any discussion of either particular people or particular groups of people. These peculiarities of human nature will inform any cultural product in the same way the particular notes of a scale inform all the possible melodies composed using that scale.

This is really very interesting for it seems then that some sort of basic, even absolute, human nature is being implied by the level of the ‘elements’. Yet this most fundamental level consists of the lowest common denominators, which are, ‘*by their very nature, uninformative*’. That is to say, they do not exist in a form that is directly meaningful to the person who is trying to understand them - indeed all his efforts to understand them are their own transformations. Rational man experiences the root of his existence as always something one-step away. And so he is incomplete. The parallel with the Freudian ego / id dichotomy is evident. The ego or rational, conscious self is at once fascinated by the sense of other dimensions of the self hovering around it, and terribly threatened by them. For it cannot pull them into its own terrain, neither deep structure nor unconscious, and so must live with the sense of uncertainty and incompleteness. The mountain will not come to Mohammed and this Mohammed is much too arrogant to take any step that might further diminish his sense of his own importance, let alone consider the possibility that he might be just the manifestation of something else.

As we will see most of the Buddhist systems of analysis agree that there is a generative level of ‘elements’ (The five aggregates, five elements etc. – See *later*). Yet they insist that this level is both resolvable into, and is an expression of, a yet

deeper (or more pervasive) level. This is the dimension of openness, emptiness, sunyata – and it is the penetration of this level that grants beings freedom from the processes of becoming; the transformations that create the realm of subject / object duality. This open dimension of being is both the basis for and the actuality of free-will, personal autonomy, individual responsibility. Only by locating oneself at the centre or root of the process of manifestation can one be truly integrated with it and responsible for it. This is the purpose of non-conceptual meditation, to integrate content with process and process with nature.

These ideas will be developed later but it is important to mention them here since structuralism believes in a basic content or substance at the level of 'deep structure' or generic potentiality. Reification is not transcended - the metaphor remains mechanistic and dualistic with 'entities' at both ends of the process. This is important since I detect a strong but rather implicit structuralist influence in many of the recent writings on transpersonal psychology, particularly those of Ken Wilber.

So I hope that these ideas will be borne in mind while reading the later discussions for they indicate how difficult it is to transcend mechanistic paradigms when the enquiry is located solely in pseudo-objective intellectual analysis. Where, for example, it is considered "*essential that we do not shrink from **making statements about just what those generic potentialities might be***". (My emphasis). This, it seems to me, is a barrier that can only be crossed by introspection of one form or another.

Section 2: The notion of self in Tibetan Buddhism

*As skylarks hunt for their prey,
I am captured by their stillness.
I experience neither thirst nor hunger,
But skylarks captivate my memory.
Whistling arrows on the battlefield remind me of my general's bravery:
Should I run away or should I stay?
Buddhism neither tells me the false nor the true:
It allows me to discover myself.
Shakyamuni was so silent:
Should I complain against him?*

Chogyam Trungpa

General Comments

The purpose of this section is to both describe and explore the views of self that are found in Tibetan Buddhism.

I shall look at some of the key ideas in each of the main sections of that Buddhist tradition and try to indicate their implications for a notion of human nature. But the Buddhist perspective does not place man at the pinnacle of evolution and human nature is examined as a structure of limitations rather than as a wonderful achievement. The Tibetan tradition is vast with many, many subsystems and permutations and there is no space to do more than fly above the clouds and take snaps of the peaks that protrude. My account is, I believe, accurate, if unconventional from the Tibetan standpoint. I have included very few quotations because in such a short work where a lot of the information is rather new, quotations would not prove or establish anything. My presentation must stand by the internal logic of its discussion and the bibliography lists texts against which it may be compared.

I see quotations as being used in two main ways. The first is as stepping-stones across the waters of uncertainty and myriad possibility in which the author leap-frogs to a safe and proven 'conclusion' over the backs of experts whose views he has conveniently arranged in just the right order and at just the right height (pardon the mixed metaphor). The second is a kind of 'survival of the fittest' in which the author takes the role of 'neutral' referee in a boxing match of views while secretly loading the gloves of the preferred expert. The contestants are goaded on until a 'knockout' occurs, and since the 'best man' has won, the author takes his own initial conclusions as proven.

I have tried not to use such methods here since my aim is to explore and suggest rather than to define, to stress the existential / experiential over the analytic / interpretive. Meaning and value can only exist in the mind as lived experience and the signs and symbols of the written word can only hope to suggest and stimulate

never to define or prescribe. It is for this reason that I have eschewed the use of diagrams for although they help to show the patterns of relation between concepts, the level of comprehension they engender is much too facile since all the subtle ramifications are ignored. It is all nouns and no adjectives, mistaking the simplicity of the skeleton for the dynamic complexity of the living body.

Brief historical background

According to traditional accounts, Buddhism was introduced into Tibet during the reign of Srong-bTsan sGam-Po who died in 649 A.D. However, Tibet only became a Buddhist country in the reign of Khri-Srong-Deu-brTsan (756 - 97) who invited many monks, scholars and yogis from India and built the first monastery in Tibet. This was a very creative time for the Buddhist teachings in India during which they reached their fullest development, and due to the tremendous interest in these teachings that arose in Tibet most of the Indian traditions, both oral and written, were faithfully translated and followed there too. During the Islamic conquest of Northern India in the twelfth century, the Buddhist monastic universities were destroyed, and the Buddhist culture of almost 2,000 years standing ended. The Tibetan people were very aware of their special position as the sole guardians of the living tradition of the entirety of the Buddha's teachings (as they saw it).

Classification of the Buddha's Teachings

There are three principal divisions of the Buddhist teachings, the Hinayana, the Mahayana, and the Vajrayana. *Yana* means vehicle, something that one enters as a means to get from here to there - so these three divisions refer to styles of understanding and practicing. The Buddhist view is that since sentient beings find themselves in a variety of situations with a wide range of ability and self-confidence the Buddha thought it necessary to teach many different methods so that each person could find something suitable and pertinent. Utilizing the freedom and clarity of his own enlightened state the Buddha was like a master chef preparing a vast à la carte menu with enough variety and flavour to stimulate the most jaded palate and create new energy and hope. The more traditional simile used to explain this, is that he is like a great physician who can prepare prescriptions according to whatever symptoms occur. He is certainly not seen as a dogmatist who has only one cure and who writes his prescription before seeing the patient. It is an open-ended system where those who have gained true realisation are able to adapt and extend the teachings according to the needs of the present context, whatever that may be.

Buddha is a title, not a personal name. It means *awake, aware* and it is given to one who has awoken from the sleep or delusion of false identity, one who has come to a true understanding of who and what they are. In the west, people are most familiar with the Buddha Shakyamuni who is known from historical accounts to have lived in North India just over 2,500 years ago. But he is not the only Buddha, being in fact the fourth of the 1,000 Buddhas who will appear in our present aeon, the Bhadrakalpa. And in the fullness of time all sentient beings will one day become, or realise themselves to be, Buddhas.

The teachings of this Buddha Shakyamuni are known in the west as 'Buddhism' and for a western person this term would probably indicate the system of thought and

practice founded and created by the Buddha. Such understanding would be false for in all the eastern countries the words used to stand for these teachings indicate reality itself. This is because it is believed that Buddhas do not just get and then give helpful insights into life, or human nature, or even reality, but that they actually enter reality, attain a state of natural perfection which they then reflect spontaneously in their teaching and way of being. So from now on, I will not use the term Buddhism but rather the Sanskrit word *dharma*, which indicates both reality and the teachings which aid one to realise it.

At the start of this section, I mentioned the Hinayana, Mahayana and Vajrayana systems and I will now consider these in detail, exploring the different visions of the human predicament they present. However, it should be borne in mind that the principle that operates here is 'if the cap fits, wear it.' That is to say, these systems are not mutually exclusive dogmas but rather, to continue the analogy used above, they are sections of one menu - and the customer is perfectly entitled to order whatever combinations are necessary to satisfy his particular hunger. During the course of time, certain selections of this menu became established as generally efficacious and sometimes they were then served, with no great sensitivity, as the one true tradition of the teaching requiring unswerving obedience. That is just the aberration of institutionalism, which develops in any enduring social system. It is a distorting cancer and should not be mistaken for the living body, which is dynamic, generous and adaptable.

In considering the views of each level, it may appear that a lot of contradictory notions are being stated, with each one being presented as if that is how things really are, but it must be remembered that these are fingers pointing at the moon and not the moon itself. The finger points, and so seems to be saying something definite, yet to cling to that would be just another form of delusion.

Buddha Shakyamuni gave an example to show that neither the path nor the method is to be confused with the result. He said that it is wonderful and most useful to find a boat that can carry you across a river - but then to get so attached to the boat that you try to carry it with you once you are across, is just stupid. The goal is to be a Buddha, one who is truly present, awake, at the centre of creativity. It is not to be a 'Buddhist', a replica of the forms that someone else has created. So to read what follows with the idea of discovering what Buddhists really believe would not be very helpful. The dharma is not a system of revealed truth that has to be believed in. It is not a system of metaphysical speculation. Rather it starts with the concrete experience of being in a human body and proceeds from there in steps that carry their own self-validating existential proof.

The Hinayana System

Gautama, the prince of the Shakya clan who was to become Buddha Shakyamuni, was raised in luxury in a special royal enclosure. At his birth, a local sage had predicted that he would become either a great king or a great saint and his father, wishing him to follow the former course had raised him in courtly splendour protected from all knowledge of the horrors and difficulties of life.

However, one day when he was twenty-eight years old the prince went out riding and saw four things that changed his view of the world completely. He saw a sick person, a feeble old man, a corpse and an ascetic, and he realised that he too had a body that was vulnerable to sickness, death and decay. So he left the palace and practiced rigorous asceticism for six years in the hope of finding something lasting, but to no avail. Finally, he accepted some nourishing food, sat in meditation, and penetrated the veils of illusion. After gaining enlightenment, he taught at the request of others.

His teaching and the rest of his life illustrate the principle of the 'middle way' neither indulgence or asceticism, not following a path or view for its own sake but only in so much as it helps to reveal one's true nature. Thus, one avoids the extremes of dogmatic formalised positions on the one hand and fickle egoistic self-indulgence on the other. After Gautama abandoned asceticism as unhelpful and accepted an offering of good food, his companions abandoned him saying that he had gone soft - but he stuck to what he felt was suitable for himself.

One of the examples he used a great deal to show the most helpful approach to meditation and to life in general was that of tuning a guitar. If the strings are too tight or too loose the the sound is awful, false, but if the string as at just the right tension for its own qualities of thickness, length etc. then the sound will be rich and pleasing. Moreover, each guitar has to be tuned according to its total individual situation. The middle way is to be centred, in touch with oneself, lost in neither outer distractions nor inner dreams.

The very first teaching the Buddha gave was that concerning what has subsequently been called 'The Four Noble Truths' but such a fancy name can detract from the direct simplicity of his statement. These four truths are those of suffering, the cause of suffering, the cessation of suffering and the path to the cessation of suffering.

The First Truth

This is the fact of suffering: that existence is painful and full of frustrations. We suffer from birth, old age, sickness, and death. We do not get what we want and we do get what we don't want. We are separated from whomever or whatever is dear to us, and we are joined to people and things we don't like. This is not a metaphysical proposition but is something that is proved to us again and again in our experience of daily life. If we look honestly rather than looking 'on the bright side' we become aware of a sense of frustration and insecurity, that things are never quite right, that whatever perfection and happiness is attained is always endangered by some new occurrence.

The Buddha indicated these general kinds of suffering and left it up to individuals to look at their own lives to see if suffering, dissatisfaction was a fact for them. For the exercise is an existential one, there has to be participation, a willingness to be honest with oneself. The Buddha was not trying to get people to 'believe' in suffering but just to look at their own lives and see what their experience was. Of course, the power of habitual interpretation is very strong and there is a great tendency to compromise with 'Yes but' responses such as 'Yes I may be poor, but at least

I've got my health.' Fair enough, if an individual did not wish to examine their life the Buddha was not threatening damnation or torment. A person can only work with what is real for them, to try to force them to accept something by threats or bribes is to falsify the whole experience. The Buddha presented it as the truth of his own experience) he spoke from the reality of his own existence. Birth in the Buddhist hells is the result of unskilful action not of lack of dogmatic faith. Moral Christians or Marxists would not create the causes of experiencing these hells while Buddhists who did not control their angry impulses *would* create the cause of birth there. And the same principle applies with the birth in the divine realms – good actions not faith are the cause.

The Second Truth

The cause of suffering, which is craving, is the second truth. The individual craves existence, craves non-existence and has an endless stream of desires, wants, and needs. The Buddha explained that this craving arises from a false self-identity, from a vision of oneself that is mechanistic and incomplete. Because there is a fundamental disharmony between the individual and the world he finds himself in, because these two seemingly separate domains must interact to effect mutual alteration, the individual can never feel secure; can never really know himself or herself when that self is going to be constantly re-written in the light of the events that occur.

'No man is an island', wrote John Donne, *'Ask not for whom the bell tolls, it tolls for thee'*. The Buddha would have approved of these sentiments for suffering lies exactly in the tension between feeling oneself to be someone individual and yet having to constantly readjust the definition of who one is. The fact of impermanence and change coupled with the interdependence of all manifestation means that we cannot stand apart as discrete entities. Whatever happens in the world affects us and indeed sooner or later will happen to us. Like the shell of a snail, we carry the accretions of past experience as the rigidity of our present sense of self, of finite, unique being.

The craving for existence operates through the sense of self which we experience and which appropriates the five 'aggregates' or psychophysical groupings called *skandhas* in Sanskrit. These are form, feeling, perception, classification and consciousness. Form refers to our bodies and to all external appearance. By feeling is understood the sensations of pleasure, displeasure, and of neutral value along with their concomitant attitudes of liking, disliking and being indifferent. Perception is an awareness of the several aspects present in any situation-and the capacity to respond appropriately. Thus with perception one remembers that the play one is going to see starts at 8 p.m., knows that the traffic will be busy, and works out a good time to leave by. Classification takes present experience and incorporates it into the conceptual systems evolved in the past, thus expanding one's repertoire of appropriate responses. Consciousness is the subject's capacity to use concepts to interpret all the varieties of sense data presented to it.

These five aspects function together as our on-going experience of being someone in particular. The reason why we want to be someone, why we appropriate these

occurrences and use them to constitute a self-identity is because of the craving for existence which arises in the mind when there is ignorance of its own true nature.

In the Hinayana system to which these Four Noble Truths belong, there is not much examination of the nature of ignorance or of where it came from. The Buddha gave the example of a man who had been struck by a poisoned arrow. The principal concern is to remove the arrow - and this would hardly be aided by intellectual discussions of whether it came from the east or the west. Ignorance is of interest here only as the cause of craving which is the cause of suffering. The presentation is simple and pragmatic, setting out the process of cause and effect so that it becomes possible to be aware of the process in one's own life and thus avoid participating in it. So I will now give a short discussion of the process of karmic cause and effect.

Due to living in unilinear time as spatially defined individuals, we lack a panoramic vision and then find that decisions and actions that we make to attain particular goals create other consequences as well. Karma refers both to the causal action and to the unexpected consequence. Acceptance of this idea extends the concept of the self beyond the discrete form of our personality in this life. Thus if I murder someone I may be punished by the law or I may escape detection but unless I have truly repented performing the action, the energy of the process of killing will not be dispersed but will remain in my psyche as a causal potential ready to create disturbing situations at an appropriate moment. That moment will generally occur in a later life, for the psyche that holds this karmic imprint is itself a process of becoming, a continuity of moment-of-perception rather than a pattern-of-content. The physical form of the individual is considered a pattern-of-content, since it exists for the individual as a flow of experiences - pain, pleasure, hunger, tiredness, etc., all of which find their meaning solely as mental events. So in this Hinayana view there is a stream of consciousness that is intoxicated by its own content - and that content comprises all the experiences that occur throughout the succession of lives. Liberation is awakening to the nature of this causal process so that we can be aware of the programmed response arising within oneself and learn to avoid following them.

One might say that karma is the dynamic mode of ignorance. Being unaware of how things really are, one operates on false assumptions and thus acts inappropriately in the sense that although one wishes to create happiness all too often one creates sorrow. Then, faced with the existential situation of human life, one tries to make the best of it — that is, instead of trying to alter the causal processes one attempts to rearrange the contents. For the Buddhist this is because the loss of true knowledge creates a false position, that of being a reified individual in a world of objects, involved in patterns of interaction that constantly undermine one's sense of self-identity. So then one feels oneself to be someone, and one has a sense of personal continuity which is reinforced by having a name, e.g. John Smith, that endures in time - and yet the content of the category labelled 'me', 'I', or 'John Smith' is constantly changing. The ego, this sense 'of self', is thus destined to neurosis and paranoia, since it cannot appropriate for itself anything that is unique, unchanging and fully satisfying. The category of individual self-existence as a true entity is imposed upon the flux of becoming. How can the ego be 'being' when its content, its actuality? is a ceaseless flow of becoming? - a becoming that is certainly not self created or self directed in the moment-but is largely circumstantial as the interface of subject and object, both of which are manifesting in karmically determined modes.

For an action to be fully karmic four factors must be present. There must be an object; an intention; an action; and satisfaction with the completion of the action. For example, for the full karmic effect of murder I must first identify someone to kill; develop an intention to kill him; kill the person; and finally be glad that the person is now dead. If any of the stages are missing, the power of the karma is greatly diminished - thus repentance is very important in Buddhist practice. Karma actually means action, activity. It is the intentionality that charges the act with its power to have not just immediate causes, but long-term consequences as well.

Now one may feel that consequences that manifest in future lives are rather suppositional and so I think it might be helpful to give an example from anthropology of a process where actions taken to fulfil some immediate need also produce unexpected consequences since the underlying process is the same. Thus to quote Hocart, *“A community wants something: it shapes its actions so as to achieve that something, and the result of its action is to alter its organisation. It is not indeed government that man wants, for how can he conceive of a government except by experience of it? It is life he wants, and in the effort to live he does one thing after another till he eventually finds himself governed”*. (Page 299) From the Buddhist point of view, this last could be paraphrased as, *“it is free individual existence he wants, and in the effort to be free and independent he does one thing after another till he eventually finds himself compelled by karmic impulses”*. The search for happiness has resulted in conflict and sorrow.

The Third Truth

The cessation of suffering is the third noble truth. This states that absolute freedom is possible for every sentient being for the ignorance and craving that have instigated all the dualistic situations of suffering really can come to an end. Since they arise due to causes if these causes are removed there will be non-attachment, release, nirvana — this is not a negative state but the full awakening of an awareness of reality unobscured by the deluded activity of thoughts and emotions. In the Hinayana system, it is presented as a goal to be aimed for; it is a release from the torment of present existence (samsara) with its impermanence and unreliability into the peace and security of an unending calm. The metaphor is dualistic: we want to go from samsara to nirvana, from suffering to happiness, from here to there – as if somehow we remain the same though the situation changes. Samsara is all that is compounded, it is the processes of subject-object interaction whereas nirvana is un compounded, simplicity, peace.

The Fourth Truth

The path to the cessation of suffering is the fourth noble truth. It comprises the eightfold path, which can be summarised as the development of morality, meditation and wisdom. Morality consists of following the rules taught by the Buddha and collected in the vinaya or ethical code literature. The basic view here is that the world is a dangerous place, full of temptation and the only way out of it is to put on the blinkers of renunciation and avoid any possibility of distraction, like a horse being guided through the city streets. Individual judgement is not to be trusted since individuality itself is suspect. So all personal pride must be abandoned and total trust placed in the teaching of the Buddha - for he alone has reached the other side. He

stands as a mediator between the binary structure of samsara / nirvana, bondage / freedom.

The meditation appropriate to this system is a method of quiescence, of calming the thoughts and emotions that usually flood the mind. By naming and labelling the contents of the mind as they arise a calming distance is gained, as if one were climbing out of a river, seating oneself on the bank, and then calmly observing the flow.

The wisdom that results is that of understanding that what one had taken to be the self is simply a combination of elements, the five aggregates referred to above. By allowing the mind to relax its impetuous appropriation of these elements, they are seen to be part of the constant flux of point-instants of experience. This, in the Hinayana view is the resolution of the problem of self-identity in a world of change - there is no self requiring an identity. There is just an awareness that has renounced all connection with the flux, Nirvana, peace, is the separating of the mind from the flow of becoming that is samsara.

The Mahayana View

Mahayana means 'great vehicle' in contrast to the Hinayana or 'lesser vehicle', which we have just considered. This vehicle, or means to develop, is considered great because of its stress on altruism, on compassion. Since all beings suffer due to the same causal patterns, it would be unworthy merely to enter a state of calm and peace just by oneself alone. The similarity of our situations, the 'human condition, makes it almost obligatory to think of benefiting all other beings. There is also the perspective that since one has been undergoing life after countless life in samsara one must at one time or another have been the child of every other being. And since children are so greatly benefited by their parents we have each accumulated debts of gratitude to all beings, which should be paid off.

This is perhaps a suitable place to enter some consideration of cosmology although space limits any systematic treatment. The dimension of repeated existences, which is known as samsara, is seen as a continuum and is often represented as a circle – not with implication of wholeness but rather as a vicious circle that seems to have no exit. Within it are six 'realms' or modes of experience, those of the gods, the demi-gods, the humans, the animals, the hungry spirits, and the hell-beings. The world is considered to be flat and circular with a double ring of iron mountains at the edge to hold everything in. At the centre is a huge mountain called Mt Meru which reaches up beyond the sun. The hell-beings and hungry spirits live below the earth, the animals and humans live on it and the demi-gods and gods live on the slopes of Mt Meru, with the highest gods residing on levels above its peak.

None of these six modes of existence are absolutes; their experience is caused by past actions and the experience lasts only for a period of time and then the next karmic impulses arising in the mind create the experience of one of the other modes. This process will continue endlessly if the individual makes no attempt to confront the causal processes, which reside in himself alone, and put a stop to them.

Thus, there is no sense of positive evolution in the Darwinian sense. One is a human being primarily because the impulse of one's own karma has caused one to be born here. The copulating parents provided the physical opportunity to enter the human dimension but the mind of the person to be born had to be host to the manifesting of karmic traits that would make it appropriate. The particular forces that engender the human vision are pride and desire. In an interesting pre-Freudian perspective on what is now called the Oedipus complex, it is held that if the consciousness that is coming from a previous existence sees the copulating couple and feels desire for the woman and aversion towards the man and is drawn by desire into the womb then it will take birth in a male body. And if the consciousness experienced desire for the male and aversion for the female then on entering the womb it would take a female body.

The Hinayana system has a sense of this process but the presentation it gives is formal rather than dynamic. In the Mahayana, the individual is encouraged to identify with all forms of conscious life. Trees, plants, etc. are not considered to have conscious life. By developing a warm, open heart and the compassionate intention to help all beings to attain liberation before one fully enters it oneself one broadens one's vision so that the focus is not I but us. Thus, the individual's importance lies in his capacity to participate with others to the fullest extent, to be able to sacrifice his own self-interest for a greater good. The individual identity has become transformed into a feeling of oneness with all sentient creatures. Self-fulfilment is seen to lie in the service of others. In fact, the ideal is to develop one's compassionate vision to the point where the ordinary sense of self, the ego, can no longer cope - so much energy is being channelled into the welfare of others that there is insufficient to sustain the ego's sense of personal identity and importance. The self is then experienced in a very dynamic way as a flow of energy from a centre-less centre out to a limitless other that is made 'not-other' by the warmth and generosity of that energy.

The understanding of the centre-less centre is the wisdom that operates together with the compassion mentioned above as the two wings needed to fly to liberation away from the suffering of false identity. The Mahayana view accepts the causal schema of the Hinayana that ignorance of one's true nature leads to neurotic grasping for false, fixed ego identities, which, being superimposed on the flux of manifestation, can only lead to suffering. Such an ego is a house made of sand but while the Hinayana was content to analyse it down into its component particles, the five aggregates, etc. etc., the Mahayana analysis is concerned to explode this atomistic vision.

For if basic building blocks exist, then whatever arises will be a construct, devoid of true nature, and nirvana or liberation will be just an attempt to hide away from such a jumble of bits and pieces. In contrast, the Mahayana explains that no such finite particles can exist. If there is an atom, others must exist in proximity to it in order to create compounds. If other atoms surround any one atom then it must be presenting itself in various spatial dimensions — so it must have a top and bottom, front and back at two sides - at the very least. None of these faces can touch internally and so this discrete atom has aspects, which can be separated and divided - and so it is not discrete.

And this simple analysis can be carried on ad infinitum and this the Mahayanist philosophers took as a definite proof of the ultimate non-materiality of things. Due to the patterning of appearances, there is the impression of things actually existing, but on examination nothing can actually be found to be existing as such for each 'entity' is composed of endless chains of dependent arisings. 'Dependent arisings' may seem an odd term but it indicates that nothing that appears, outside or inside, form or thought or whatever, is autonomous. Manifestations mutually influence each other and since they are not discrete they have no individual self-nature to make them entities, thus they are mere appearances or arisings.

This absence of inherent self-nature in any arising is known as sunyata, emptiness, voidness, no-thing-ness, and it provides the basis for all the dynamic systems of Buddhist thought.

As long as we have the sense of being 'someone', we have a mental slot that demands to be filled. We can fill it immediately by saying, 'I am me' but that really doesn't take one very far except to suggest that there is a feeling of 'me-ness' that seems to self-justificatory. But if we look at what this 'I' or sense of 'me-ness' consists of in experience, it seems to be the capacity of this concept to keep changing its form and content and yet be quite sincere that it is actually the same thing - just as a chameleon is always a chameleon no matter what colour it appears as. Now if we see a chameleon that is yellow suddenly turn green we might feel confused yet still be sure that it is the same animal because its shape and size are the same - and the colour change was occurring on that fixed basis. But the sense of true ego existence summed up in the feeling of 'I', 'me' is rather different.

As individuals, we have body, speech and mind, nothing else, and all of these are incorporated within 'I'. Our bodies ceaselessly change - breathing, digestion, blood circulation, hair growth, skin regeneration etc. etc. - the body is a process of becoming, starting as a fertilised ovum and ending as a disintegrated corpse. Thus, it is hardly a stable peg on which to hang the sense of clear individual identity. I *am* this body - fair enough as a concept, but the content is ungraspable. The same applies to speech and to mind. Words arise in response to situations, they express our capacity for interaction, but no particular word holds a total meaning in itself, nor can any word sum us up, be us, no matter how wonderful it might be, for we must speak a variety of words, and indeed their capacity to convey meaning lies in their differences. The mind too is a stream; it is a flow of thoughts, memories, and emotions offering nothing solid or appropriate-able.

Thus, the existential fact, the actuality of our condition as body speech and mind is dynamic and ungraspable. Yet we are deluded by habitual reliance on reificatory concepts that reassure us that somehow we exist as something special, individual, unique. The Mahayana utilizes many techniques of logical scrutiny to undermine the belief in a self-existing self or personal identity. In the end we are brought to a point of hollowness, emptiness, nothing. This is not a deadening experience but a liberating one, for, as with the folk tale of the Emperor's new clothes, what has been stripped away was not anything of real value but only a pretence. And with the moment of raw nakedness one can actually see, perhaps for the first time, what is really there. Thus, the Mahayana approach is to move from the descriptive and judgemental to the analytic and heuristic.

In the Mahayana, compassion and wisdom complement each other as the key techniques for revealing the nature of the self. Developing compassion undermines the sense of the 'special-ness' of being 'me'. It works on the basis of a common basic nature, which is Buddha nature rather than human nature. Fulfilment is seen as arising from reaching that common level, rather than by developing the personal idiosyncrasies so necessary to an ego-based personality.

This does not mean that the goal is to become a Buddha 'clone', for the essential quality of this common Buddha-nature is its spaciousness, its emptiness, its indeterminacy. It is a state of being, a total state, free of divisions and so beyond the limits of conceptual analysis. It is like a circle you cannot find any angle to help you enter it from 'outside'.

Compassion is both the path to realise this state and one of the main qualities of the result where it arises as an open generosity, the free gift of all one's energy and understanding to others for all time. For one is then free of the sense of a self, of being someone somewhere with things to be added and things to be subtracted in a vain struggle for satisfaction.

Thus, we see in the Mahayana vision a more open, tolerant view. The world is no longer seen as dangerous, full of temptations with nirvana as a place of rest attained by total renunciation. Rather the world is seen as the place of growth, truly the 'school of life' - but not as an accidental process. Whatever situations occur should be used as opportunities to develop one's personal qualities of compassion and insight into emptiness.

Thus an enemy who harms one is seen as the best of friends for he has provided an opportunity to go beyond the habitual response of revenge or anger - his harmful intention allows us to see the wrong tendencies that are hidden in our own minds and so become able to deal with them. Emotions like anger are regarded as not 'wrong' in themselves but wrong because of their power to compel one into karma-producing situations - for they operate in a sharply polarised field of subject and object. In the above section on Hinayana, when describing karma I described how four factors are necessary to make an action fully 'karmic': object, intention, action and satisfaction. The Mahayana analysis of emptiness undermines the whole belief in truly existing objects and by holding to the wisdom of this insight one can be freed from karmic production altogether and so break free of the cycle of rebirth in samsara. But emotional responses have habitually been cued in by the perception of real objects and if these emotions are indulged, their power will inhibit the realisation of wisdom.

So here, the sense of self is moving from that of someone trapped in the world and longing to get out of it to an increasing recognition of potential qualities, which, if developed, will provide a skilful means to exist in any dimension of being in a creative, caring, open way. Hinayana is grounded in fear, Mahayana in hope, with individual paranoia shifting to hope for all that lives. It is movement toward a larger vision of life.

The Vajrayana Vision

The hopefulness of Mahayana provides a basis for the playfulness of Vajrayana. Vajra means indestructible, unchanging, true, and it represents the open, indeterminate quality of the buddhanature referred to above. In the Mahayana sunyata, emptiness is proven by analysis, it is something that is believed in and towards which one orients oneself. However, in Vajrayana it is the basic realisation upon which all the other methods depend. Every meditation commences with the recognition of emptiness as one's own true state, *'My nature is void, empty'*. This means that I am, on the deepest level of my being, open and indeterminate; a pure sensation of awareness devoid of my content.

This voidness, this absence of concrete identity permits the greatest freedom of manifestation. Because I am basically nothing in particular, I can manifest as, or become, anything. This is the playfulness of Vajrayana, its offering of many different identities for the meditator to experiment with – not in order to find the 'right' one but in order to accept the natural freedom from determinacy. The solidity of the ordinary self is now seen to be a false understanding for there is a direct realisation that what one is, the totality of body, speech and mind, is not the product of historical causes acting on material particles but rather the natural outflow of our own true being, the Buddha nature itself.

It is not possible to write precisely and objectively about what can only be a subjective experience. Indeed the view of Vajrayana is that all claims to objectivity are false since all experience, 'external' or 'internal', is but the reflection of the mind. And it is stated to be so, with the confidence of the actual experiences of meditators who have realised it. This distinguishes it very clearly from the western systems of idealism such as Berkley's which remain analytical and interpretive.

It is all very well to intellectualise about a 'total subjectivity' but when confronted by suffering and distress can one claim these as one's own projections and dissolve them at will? Without the power to do this, such idealism is mere theorising. The crux of the matter is the nature of the subject, for if it is just another reification, a new mega-category that consumes all the rest but cannot digest and integrate them, then one is just exchanging one form of dogmatic stagnation for another, without any space to discover a radically new perspective.

In fact, the Vajrayana position goes beyond subject / object polarity for the recognition of the underlying emptiness of no-thing-ness of all experience is not a momentary event that has to be maintained by act of volition. Rather it is a continuous state of being, a fresh, uncontrived standpoint that reflects the way things are rather than the way we might like them to be. It does this by being aware of a deeper, more fundamental dimension than the ego. The ego claims its territory among manifestation, but what is the ground of this manifestation, of all the outer and inner events of our existence? As we saw above, the Mahayana approach was to analyse all manifestations, to see their interdependence and lack of autonomous self-nature. That lack of self they called *sunyata* or emptiness.

Here in the vajrayana, the same term is used but the emptiness is no longer the somewhat distant conclusion of a process of analysis. Rather it is the dynamic

experience of openness, the direct realisation that 'I' refers to an indefinable, indeterminate state of being and not to a fixed, entitative ego.

This is the vajra state, open, indestructible, and immovable. It is open because it has no content of its own, it has nothing to protect, no pattern that is uniquely itself - and so it can be very generous towards manifestation, hosting whatever occurs with perfect style and ease. It is indestructible because it is unborn, never having become anything in particular. And so it is invulnerable, because it does not stand in relation to anything else and contain nothing within it that might change. It is immovable because it is always centred - for it is the centre of everything, the basis from which everything arises. The strength of this vajra state is the strength on non-reliance - not resting on self or other. It is being that is empty of being something and not an identity built on acquired characteristics. There is no ground, no basic premise or substance such as God, no particular dogmas or beliefs - only the power and truth of one's own experience. It is learning to 'be' in a raw, fresh, naked way - trusting the strength and purity of one's basic experience, the breed of life that needs no jam to make it palatable.

It is a question of being rather than of figuring out what to be, how to be, for there is no formal structure to provide the answer. The Buddha is not daddy who is one day going to pat you on the shoulder and say '*Well done, you made it, you've understood*'. That is not necessary, for the taste of the truth gives satisfaction and self-validation. This is known as *Mahamudra*, the great seal, for one's own experience, one's own state of being proves itself, stamps its own seal of perfection on itself and seeks no praise or approval from others. It is the ultimate self-fulfilment in a state of absence of ego self-consciousness.

Because of the nature of our existence, we do not really exist as finite egos; and only because of our non-existence or no-thing-ness, can the *world* exist. Of course, in saying things like this, we have to keep defining our terms or the multiple values and usages of English words will set us drowning in a sea of contradictions. The truth (or premise or postulate) which underlies these views is that of emptiness, of the indeterminate nature of the entities which we imagine to be the 'things' referred to by the language we speak. In particular it refers to the lack of a self-existing 'I' as an individual entity. The most basic of all dualistic categories is that of self and other, this and that, here and there. On the basis of this, all other oppositions such as good and bad, hot and cold, old and new occur - and this is the system by which meaning is created in the world we live in.

However, there is another dimension of polarity possible: that of non-dual / dual in which the otherwise basic polarity of self / other is regarded as a unity when set against non-duality, totality. This gives us nothing (i.e. the totality of nothing-in-particular) / everything (all the forms of manifestation, the dualistic domain in which things are defined by their relations to other things), and as with all binary structures the seemingly opposite and contradictory poles are in fact organically united, like Siamese twins.

This position goes beyond that of the Hinayana desire to escape the complexity of being in-the-world for it states that quiescence, the emptiness of nirvana is inextricably joined to the complexity of samsara.

Liberation is then not a matter of fleeing from the world but of coming to terms with it, placing it in a new perspective of spaciousness where it is experienced not as a material *fait accompli* but as a dynamic self-display of that spaciousness. This display is real in the sense that it is experienced and yet it is illusory in as much as it has no autonomous self-nature. This is summed up by saying that reality is unborn and unceasing — appearances ceaselessly manifest and yet are devoid of self-existence. Moreover, when we examine the mind by meditative introspection we find that it cannot be located anywhere since the medium by which one could come to any conclusions regarding its size, colour, position, etc., is the flow of thoughts that are its own creation. That would be like asking a baby to describe the womb — while in it there is no differentiation and when out of it and able to speak the process of differentiation has severed the total experience leaving at best a few vague memories.

The Hinayana and Mahayana are known as the ‘causal’ vehicles since they focus on present limitations and faults and provide explanations and methods as to how these might be overcome and transformed as the cause of gaining Buddhahood, or awakening one’s true potential. The Vajrayana is described as the ‘result’ vehicle because it stresses that since Buddhahood is the realisation of the buddhanature, this must be actually present, though ignored, in all beings. To use the traditional example of iron pyrites, this ‘fools’ gold’ looks like gold and yet no matter what one does to it one cannot turn it into gold. True gold may not look like gold when mixed with other substances yet can easily be made pure by heating, i.e. the process lets the gold that was always there manifest in its true form.

Remember that all conditioned things are impermanent, whatever has been created by causal process will one day decline and fade; only natural elements endure. What value would there be in struggling to create a Buddha state by good deeds and meditation if it were to be subject to decay at the exhaustion of the causes? Indeed such a process could only be an artificial one of trying to copy a ‘Buddha prototype’, of trying to gain that ‘effect’. No, that would be worthless, for the enlightened state is a state of being not a posture or pretence. Enlightenment is the activation or the realisation of that which has been dormant in each being since the first moment of ignorance created samsara. It is the reclaiming of the inalienable inheritance of freedom, understanding and spontaneous creativity.

The style of the Vajrayana is to believe in the truth of one’s buddhanature and then ‘act into it’ so as to use the pretence of role playing as a means to awaken the dynamic suppleness of freedom from the intoxication of ego’s narrow view. Hence, the practitioners of this method visualise themselves as various deities in order to develop a feeling of non-ego, sacredness, and personal value free of the limits of one particular identity. To make this clearer I will touch briefly on the processes of ignorance and enlightenment in the Vajrayana.

The basic natural condition is self-existing and unchanging. It is both infinite openness (the ‘unborn’) and constant display (the ‘unceasing’). This dimension is beyond finite time and location yet at a certain moment there is a sense of surprise, a question mark, what? Now instead of this dissolving in the flow of arising there is a sense of it being displaced by another feeling, not yet even a thought, ‘this’.

Thus, there is the beginning of time and spatial location (the proximity to the previous impression) and a sense of an experiencer. 'This' carries with it the sense of 'that', the other and so experience enters duality. This stage is known as co-emergent ignorance since it has both the sense of being cut-off, in that there is a feeling of being a discrete 'this', and also the sense of being both aware of and somehow related to 'that'. 'That' is all that is not 'this' and there proceeds a dynamic interaction in which by exploring 'that', 'this' or 'I' becomes more aware of itself. In more modern language we might say that the ego defines itself in the process of interaction. This stage is known as the ignorance of classification.

Then due to perceiving a world full of things, attitudes develop towards them that lead to actions and so beings conduct their lives immersed in the details of their individual perception. Helping friends, harming enemies, being ambitious for the sake of family and country — one acts in order to achieve social and individual goals while quite unaware of the causal process of karmic accumulation discussed before. Thus, beings prepare the way for future lives by setting up patterns of interpretation and response - and this is known as the 'ignorance of not recognising the fact of karmic causation'. This is the process by which beings find themselves trapped as reified subjects in a world of both tempting and dangerous objects.

The Vajrayana approach to getting out of these limiting misconceptions is to focus on direct experience of sunyata, emptiness, to really feel the open spaciousness that is the absence of the sense of discrete personal identity, ego, I, me. This experience is not death but rather the somewhat startling revelation that the manifestation occurs out of relaxed openness and not from tight, directed, effort as seems to be the case when one identifies with ego.

In meditation practice the experience of space gives birth to the mandala, the sacred dimension of shining clarity in which one is oneself the central deity. This process has three stages, which in a sense mirror and purify the three stages of ignorance mentioned above. The spontaneous wholeness, the completeness of the space is called the *absorption of reality itself*. This gives rise to a vast display of rainbow-coloured light which fills the space. This is the *absorption of total manifestation*. And then the lights merge in the form of a letter, the seed syllable which is the precise cause of the particular mandala that will arise from it. This letter is ambiguous in the sense that it links nothing and something. This stage is known as *the causal absorption*. These three stages also parallel the actual mode of enlightenment, which is the attainment of the Three Bodies. These are dharmakaya, 'the body of reality'; sambhogakaya, 'the body of enjoyment or use'; and nirmanakaya, 'the body of manifestation'. 'Body' translates the Sanskrit word *kaya* and its use is now standard practice but it might be more helpful to see it in terms of mode or dimension of being. I will use the Sanskrit words from now on.

The mind, which in ordinary beings is the seat of the thoughts and emotions that trap them in samsara, is realised to be dharmakaya when the neurotic reliance on these thoughts and feelings as the arbiters of self-identity is abandoned. By relaxing, letting go, experiencing these inner arisings dissolving in their own place, there is the *realisation* of the open space of one's being. Instead of defining oneself as this or that, there is an inexpressible feeling of the infinity of being, beyond time, location, and any other limitation.

The speech by which one passed judgement and maintained the particular patterns of subject / object interaction that one found pleasing and necessary to one's sense of self-identity becomes integrated in the flow of creativity. Sound by its very nature is ungraspable, dancing along as it does. So what before was the means to maintain interaction from a fixed ego situation now becomes a spontaneous expression of the richness of the infinite spaciousness of being. This is known as sambhogakaya.

The body, dull support of birth, old age, sickness and death, the means by which one worked in order to satisfy the senses, becomes an altruistic offering constantly at the disposal of others. It is no longer seen as an impermanent mass of blood, puss and bones. Now it is experienced as the sacred effulgence of the natural state, it is an unborn body of light and this is known as nirmanakaya.

Body, speech and mind are thus fully merged in emptiness, and cleansed of all reificatory tendencies they are open, shining, light and spontaneous.

The basic natural condition which was obscured by ignorance, has now, by the path of the tantric practice of the vajrayana, been transformed into the result of the three bodies of the Buddha – a state of shining clarity and awareness from which there is no danger of straying. Tantra means continuity and this path stresses that samsara and nirvana are the two modes of one nature; they have a common ground which is a continuity between them. By reaching that basic ground one realises the nirvana aspect of samsaric experience and so transforms one's experience of it.

Thus, we can see that the Vajrayana vision is one of working with the present situation in which the individual finds himself. It is a path of transformation in which the limiting vision of ego existence is changed into the open, dynamic vision of realised Buddha nature. The actual process of transformation is a withdrawal from sensual experience by focussing attention on the inner life. One might here compare ordinary samsaric existence to the caterpillar stage, the vajrayana process to the chrysalis stage and the resulting enlightenment to the butterfly stage.

There are many, many more things that could be said about the details of the transformation process and the content of the individual meditations but there is no space to explore these here. However, I do hope I have shown something of the style of the Vajrayana and the ways in which it differs from the Hinayana and Mahayana approaches.

The Vajrayana process of transformation makes great use of symbolic forms such as mandalas and the deities who inhabit them, with all their details of their position, form, colour, posture, dress, ornamentation, etc., etc. These symbols serve several functions. They are interim supports to be used while transferring allegiance from the dimension of ordinary, karma-created form of flesh and blood with all the thoughts and emotions that sustain it, to the fresh, open, self-validating dimension of being. Thus 'becoming' a deity gives one the confidence to let go and dissolve the habitual ego self-image, which is the keystone of the whole samsaric edifice.

They also serve as mnemonic devices by which the Buddha's qualities and the various stages of the path can be brought to mind, as each detail of the form of a deity is imbued with some particular significance.

Moreover, they serve as the means by which one can learn to live *in* the world without being *of* it, since at the end of the sitting meditation practice of visualising the deity, either as oneself or as enthroned in front of one, one will attempt to return to the ordinary day-to-day world with a new 'sacred' perspective. Thus all that is seen is to be understood as having the nature of the deity's body, the nirmanakaya, the union of form and emptiness. All that is heard is understood as having the nature of the deity's sound or mantra, the sambhogakaya, the union of sound and emptiness. All that is thought or felt is understood as having the nature of the deity's mind, the dharmakaya, the union of mentation and emptiness.

Human symbolic thought makes possible an area in which ideas may be manipulated independently of the realities of the everyday world. Such symbolism may attempt to mirror perfectly the perceived structure of reality, as is attempted in symbolic logic. But symbolism may also operate on its own, constructing possibilities that cannot occur in the everyday world. Successful symbolic constructs of this sort may then become posited culturally as preferable to the unpalatable daily experience that they transcend.

This of course raises the greatest question of philosophy, 'What is truth?' The Buddhist vision of the Vajrayana avers that it lies beyond thought in a dimension accessible only through direct experience or reliance on symbols. The ordinary mirage² that keeps us running, thirsting for happiness, only to collapse and bite the dust of sorrow. Symbols are seen as the key or doorway to the real, and indeed, they are suffused with the light of truth. They do not deceive because they are manifestly empty and by relying on them, the aspirant learns to glide on rainbows and dance on the clouds.

In the Vajrayana, symbols are particularly connected with the sambhogakaya, which is the transformation of speech. Speech here stands for all kinds of communication, and communication is itself the domain of symbolism, the category that mediates between absolute inner subjectivity and the external world of the senses. Language, or symbolism in general, is the means by which the subject externalises himself and makes himself available to others in the public realm. It is also the means by which he takes in and grasps that which is outside him in the world. So by working on this level the Vajrayana removes the ego blockage to allow a much freer, more spontaneous exchange of energy. This is based on the understanding that inside and outside, subject and object are both sides of the same coin. To connect them in awareness is to dissolve the false separation of dualistic vision.

Thus we have seen how the Hinayana and to a certain extent the Mahayana work on the level of the body, the experience of being right here in the world. At this level, attention is directed to avoiding danger and distraction and to practicing virtuous deeds. Rejecting the bad and adhering to the good one edits one's reality to try to create a pleasant picture. It is thus an active level, a dimension of constant alertness and decision — just like that of the body. We have just looked at the Vajrayana level of communication and transformation, finding new ways to look at what is here, trying to see things in a better light by changing perspective. This is working on the

²i.e. the world, our 'reality' is held to be false and deceptive

level of speech, using signs and symbols to alter the significance of given experiences.

Finally, we must look at the last level of Tibetan Buddhist vision and practice, that of Dzogchen which focuses on the mind and attempts to see things directly with out either avoidance or transformation.

The Spontaneous world of dzogchen

Dzogchen is a Tibetan word, which means 'great perfection', and it is sometimes described as the crown jewel of the Vajrayana teachings yet in an important sense, it transcends them. As we said earlier, *yana* means 'vehicle'; it implies a means of going from here to there or a method of changing something. But the key point of the 'great perfection' teaching is that nothing has to be changed, whatever occurs is naturally perfect and complete, there is no possibility of improving or developing anything.

The view here is that samsara, the realm of duality and suffering, has never really come into existence and so to reject it or transform it is both unnecessary and harmful for by these very attitudes one maintains the notion of separation and problem. Ignorance, or perhaps better 'ignoring', is the basic cause of samsara in the sense that the basic cause of dreaming is falling asleep. When one is awake, one is not dreaming and all the things that occurred in the dream cease to apply. Say for example one was dreaming that one was in a burning house one might try to run away or one might try to imagine that one was somewhere else. This would be like the approaches of the three yantras discussed above. However, if one just wakes up there is nothing to handle, no problem, and that is the way of Dzogchen. By awaking from the sleep of ignorance, one immediately sees what is real and is free of the torment of dreams – for dreams even if they are most pleasant can never really satisfy.

As stated above Dzogchen operates on the level of the mind, that is with understanding rather than activity for its view is that if understanding is not clear then actions, no matter how well intentioned, will be essentially delusive. All the many styles of exposition and methods of practice that have developed in the, at least, two thousand years of this teaching can be subsumed within the *Three Principles of Garab Dorje*, who was the first to present these ideas in the human dimension during the present aeon.

The First Principle of Garab Dorje

This is the so-called 'direct introduction' in which the teacher directly introduces the student to the nature of his mind. This is done with words, sounds, symbols, and gestures that induce an open state. The purpose is not that the student remembers them nor develops a conceptual idea of their significance, but that by giving them full attention and entering into the feeling or state which they represent, he or she is able to relax and let go of the ordinary sense of self and all conceptual reliance and obtain a direct experience of the inherent uncontrived true nature. It is movement from interest in the finger pointing at the moon to the direct experience of the moon itself.

The teacher of Dzogchen must have a clear experience himself and then employ the energy of that to help the student let go of habitual involvement in outer and inner events so that his undistracted awareness can perceive its own nature of infinite spaciousness. This spacious **nature** is not an empty space for it has the **quality** of clarity (the capacity to allow images to manifest), and it has also **energy** by which the images interact and develop as the experience of being in the world.

An example often used to illustrate this, is that of the mirror. The mirror itself is not an image but is like a space in which things can occur — its very space allows the variety of images to occur whether it is a face pressed close against it or a whole mountain scene. The mirror not only has space but it also has the capacity to reflect, a clarity which supports the formation of images, and that reflectiveness is not dull and fixed but is shiny and dynamic with an energy that permits images to form, change, interact etc. So the true self or true identity of the individual is the integrated system of nature, quality and energy, and when it is realised it manifests as the three kayas or Bodies discussed in the Vajrayana section (though the Dzogchen explanation of them is slightly different).

The Second Principle of Garab Dorje

This is ‘not remaining in doubt’, for the instant realisation of the natural state although perfect and not in need of any development is still vulnerable to the force of habitual patterns of being. This principle is elaborated in the teachings on how to remain relaxed in the natural state of being and by being satisfied and complete in that way to cease looking for anything else. For countless life times in samsara have produced strong tendencies to feel oneself to be incomplete, inadequate and in need, of something else. Only by relaxing this intoxication with ‘other’ can one directly experience the completeness of one’s own being, the infinite spaciousness whose richness is the actual source of all manifestation. Appearances are recognised as the play of the mind rather than as the product of relative causal processes (with mind here used in the absolute sense as above).

This is the path of self-liberation for by keeping mind in its own place all arisings, outer and inner, all experiences are liberated in their own place. That is to say that when experiences are seen as they actually are they display the clarity behind the energy of their manifestation and the space behind that clarity - unborn and unceasing they are the transparent, translucent ornaments to the perfect contentment of one’s own true nature.

The Third Principle of Garab Dorje

The Third principle of Garab Dorje is ‘continuing in that state’ so that nothing may ever disturb one from total satisfaction again. The practice here is consciously and gradually to engage in all manner of disturbing activities, precisely the causes of distress and wild emotional states so that one’s capacity for inner relaxation and non-involvement may be tested and proved. This process has no end for it is both the proof of the Buddha’s wisdom and the source of the Buddha’s compassion - and it is indeed a Buddha one has become. Having total confidence in one’s own fulfilment, one’s vision is clear. No secondary motives exist to pervert one’s good intentions. Being complete in oneself, one can perform any act to benefit others.

Knowing the body and its sensations to be illusory one is not afraid of 'pain' and 'suffering'. It is by this means that the Buddha can easily manifest in the hell realms to help the beings there without the least sense of pride or self-sacrifice. Autonomous, fulfilled, caring and clear, these are the wonderful qualities of enlightened existence.

The realisation of Buddhahood is not just the end of samsaric suffering (the image in the Hinayana) but it is the beginning of authentic being, complete in itself and fully available for others.

This concludes the discussion of the Tibetan Buddhist views of the self. Much more could have been said about the details; indeed hundreds of thousands of volumes exist in Tibetan, which do just that. Nevertheless, I feel that this is an accurate overview that illustrates the various views and the underlying principles involved. There will be some further discussion in the conclusion when I will bring up certain points for comparison with the approach of transpersonal psychology.

Section 3: Transpersonal psychology

Pooh got up slowly and began to look for himself.

A. A. Milne: 'The House at Pooh Corner'.

Basic Concepts and Background

Transpersonal, trans-personal, across, beyond the personal this gives the feeling of extending the sense of self in a way that includes the personal while going across all its ramifications and beyond it. It is a very apt term for it suggests exactly the area covered by transpersonal psychology, as it exists today.

The belief that human beings have an existence greater than the domain of ego consciousness is not new in the West. In Greek and Roman thought, the notion of divinely controlled fate added a dimension of unpredictability and openness to the individual's view of himself. Then in Christian thought the soul was considered to be an aspect of the individual that was not really his but which belonged to God. The state of the soul was influenced by the individual's thoughts and actions and yet was greater than the personal sense of ego-existence for it continued into infinity. There was, however, a certain ambivalence about the status of the body following the resurrection of Christ. The transfigured Christ was still recognisable as Christ and so there was the concept, expressed in the Book of Revelations, that at the apocalypse the Christian dead would arise from their graves in the forms they had whilst alive and ascend to heaven.

However, these views were dogmatic and religious rather than psychological and experiential. The great explorers of modern psychology working in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were primarily concerned with psychopathology, with madness, neurosis and all the forms of mental instability. This led them to a concern with ego states, with the development of a sense of self, of personal existence and identity strong enough to resist the impulses of other forces in the psyche. Thus, Freud developed his concept of the unconscious, the unknown domain of our deepest urges before which we, the ego, stand as almost passive receivers struggling to cope with the disturbing messages it dispenses. The whole uncertainty of this situation encouraged the development of the severely mechanistic behaviourist schools, which saw mental life as a series of chemical reactions and programmed responses — precise, logical and ultimately knowable.

But there was another strand of thought which took a more generous and hopeful attitude to the unknown realms of the psyche. In his '*Principles of Psychology*' published at the end of the last century William James suggested that, '*Our normal working consciousness is but one special type of consciousness, whilst all about it, parted from it by the flimsiest of screens, there lie potential forms of consciousness entirely different. We may go through life without suspecting their existence, but apply the requisite stimulus and at a touch they are there in all their completeness.*' Thus for James, unlike Freud, the unknown regions can be entered for they become conscious if the right methods are utilised.

Carl Jung also believed in the ultimate 'knowability' of the inner world and he was one of the first to produce a 'map' of these other levels of consciousness. He stressed that these higher levels could only be entered by relaxing the criteria of value and meaning that prevail at the level of ego consciousness and he wrote that, *'All our knowledge consists of the stuff of the psyche which, because it alone is immediate, is superlatively real!'* This left him with a kind of idealism in which the details of life in the world became of less and less interest, he could not achieve a clear methodology for attaining an integrated vision of inner and outer realities and most of his later work is devoted to analysis of inner symbols. Fulfilment in life was to be attained by experience of the inner realms of the psyche, to experience the totality of being as a psychic event in a manner that has little concern for life in the world. Perhaps that is a little harsh for Jung does aspire to a vision of an integrated personality leading a full life yet the anti-transcendental times in which he lived encouraged him to respond by stressing the symbolic, spiritual dimensions.

I think this is an important point for I do not see these concepts developing in an intellectual vacuum as the result of some particular individual's personal creativity. Rather the individual's creativity and heuristic capacity is stimulated and shaped by the cultural climate in which he lives — and the response can be affirmation, a negation or a development of current thinking. Thus, we find that transpersonal psychology in its present form evolved out of the interaction between humanistic psychology and various forms of eastern thought as found in California aided by the earlier insights of people like Assagioli, the founder of psychosynthesis. Assagioli's work provided both a conceptual model and a dynamic methodology for psychotherapy and so it deserves some discussion here.

Psychosynthesis

Psychosynthesis seeks to cause a revelation of the 'higher self' so that it becomes a conscious experience and then to bring about a synthesis between the personal and the higher self. This is a process of transformation (cf. Vajrayana), described by Assagioli as involving, "a drastic transmutation of 'normal' elements of the personality, an awakening of potentialities hitherto dormant, a raising of consciousness to new realms, and functioning along a new inner dimension". He thus spells out the possibility of radical change, that ego defences could be dropped to promote change and growth without danger of being flooded by uncontrollable and destructive impulses from the unconscious.

His map of consciousness depicts it as basically a continuum with the various levels only seemingly separate and thus it forms a model for Ken Wilber's 'spectrum of consciousness' which we will look at later. Assagioli saw the human will as the key energy that could open the door to the as-yet unknown realm. This will has different stages such as deliberation, motivation, decision, and affirmation but its essential function is intentionality, the capacity to determine goals, to see possibilities and direct attention towards them.

His approach was dynamic and he elaborated a seven-stage progression of psychic development from the largely instinctual where the will was passive and obedient up to the fully aware level where the individual will is in communication with the collective psyche.

I will set these out briefly according to Assagioli's presentation in 'Psychosynthesis' since it is interesting to compare them with the Wilber's spectrum which we will touch on briefly later. First is the lower unconscious, which directs the basic psychological activities of the body, such as primitive urges, emotional complexes, phobias, etc. Then comes the middle unconscious where experiences are assimilated before reaching consciousness, followed by the super-consciousness which is the highest realm of the unconscious, the source of intuition, inspiration etc. Then comes the field of consciousness in which feelings, thoughts, and impulses emerge into (and as) the individual's area of awareness. This is followed by the conscious self which is the focal point of pure self-awareness and which leads into the higher self, with an existence separate from the consciousness of the mind and body. Finally, there is the collective unconscious, which encapsulates all the aforementioned stages. Of these, only the ego states are really personal. Only they can provide a clearly defined sense of individual identity.

Assagioli sees this developmental process not as a historical evolution, although each individual's progress contributes towards that, but rather as the limit of possibilities available to the individual in one life. This is an important point for it seems to illustrate an important human need, that of imposing an interpretive structure on experience, setting up limits, patterns, goals. We want to know not only what the possibilities are, but also that these are all the possibilities that exist. And indeed we find that transpersonal psychology, the one discipline concerned with exploring the furthest dimensions and possibilities of human nature, devotes a great deal of its time to charting and defining the newly discovered areas, putting a name on everything and claiming to understand it — much like the colonialist explorers in Africa.

Indeed, we might develop this analogy further since just as the white man ignored the local Africans sense of territorial rights, the transpersonal psychologists explore the areas uncovered by the eastern religions and chop them up and realign them as new domains to suit their own purposes. Not that they have no rights of exploration but perhaps a little more deference toward those who are providing them with research data and the techniques of introspection might help to put their endeavours in perspective. Just as the white man did not discover Africa in an absolute sense so the transpersonal psychologists have not discovered new realms of higher consciousness.

The need to be in control, to be on top of whatever is happening leads to an attempt to define rather than suggest, of being affirmative rather than tentative - that is of trying to be open and closed at the same time, simultaneously beginner and expert.

How sad this is since the open freshness of the beginners' mind with its sense of childlike wonder at the directness of the experience is all too quickly transformed into the professional tedium of recognised fact. And it is exactly this dulling conceptual solidity that has been attacked and transformed into more fluid and dynamic modes by the existentialist methods of humanistic psychotherapies such as Gestalt, although these too have succumbed to reification and formal structures.

Well, this whole process of exploring the psyche is very new in the west and I suppose we should not be too surprised at the excessive enthusiasm of the

'conquerors' and their pride in and attachment to their new domain. As in a marriage where the intoxication of the delightful newness of the other supports fantasies of perfect harmony which soon enough give way to the reality of actually working with the reality of the others existence, here too the psychologists will not be quite so confident of their heuristic expertise when they actually set foot in the jungles and swamps of their new domains. Nevertheless, it is important to recognise the courage involved in taking such risks, especially when mainstream academic psychology has not moved beyond pseudo-scientific behaviourism with its fear or proposing theories without a vast arsenal of facts to support them.

Somehow, there are never enough facts to let them move on to the big issues of the nature of the self and the meaning of life because somehow their 'scientific' perspective on the generation of theoretic insight is wrong. As Guy Claxton points out in 'Wholly Human', *"For 'theories' are not distilled out of 'facts', like brandy from wine; they are the languages which give birth to the facts. Facts are descriptions, and descriptions are collections of concepts and concepts are tacit agreements between people to chop the world up in a certain way. Facts are the world construed, and construing is something done by people"*. (P. 2).

Humanistic psychology

I want to take a brief look at some of the key notions in humanistic psychology before passing on to the transpersonal view. The humanistic trend asserts the value of human life; the tremendous potential people have for growth and for overcoming limitations. It encompasses many styles and techniques yet there are certain common themes such as a concern with existential truth, for what is actually occurring rather than with what we might wish for or with what roles and expectations we are attempting to fulfil. But existential realities are not seen as solid factors, limitations, but rather as a dynamic expression of our state of mind - we experience ourselves, our own inner attitudes. And if these attitudes are changed, the whole picture alters. So changing our condition is a matter of getting in touch with ourselves - and this is presented as a real possibility.

To be human is a workable situation for we have power to change, to take responsibility for ourselves, to make clear decisions about our intentions for, and our actions in, the future. But it is not a case of trying to take a sort of 'external' control of oneself, to see oneself from a distance for that would just be opting out, continuing the state of alienation and limited being. Strength lies not in control but in alert, sensitive and willing participation in the unitary flow of life, that contains ourselves, our world and all the varieties of our experience.

As Carl Rogers states in his classic 'On Becoming a Person',

"the self and personality emerge from experience, rather than experience being translated or twisted to fit preconceived self-structure. It means that one becomes a participant in and an observer of the ongoing process of organismic experience, rather than being in control of it".

Each moment is an organic whole and cannot be understood or defined by projecting and planning from some prior moment. For what I will be in the next moment, and

what I will do, grows out of that moment, and cannot be predicted in advance either by me or by others. Life becomes an adventure that demands intuition, creativity, responsiveness and with this, there develops a real interest in what is going on even when it might be events that are conventionally unpleasant or distressful for one is too close to them for them to cause any harm. The truly unknown and the truly intimate are never dangerous — problems arise in the middle area where we have relative freedom and relative power, with plenty of hopes and interpretations but not enough strength and control to make things always go our 'own' way.

For Rogers, who is much emulated, freedom is the capacity to be spontaneously in harmony with the inevitable pattern of the total situation - for we are part of that whole and to struggle against it is to work against oneself. This non-alienated position gives an interesting angle to the freewill versus determinism question. The fully functioning person, for Rogers, *'wills or chooses to follow the course of action which is the most economical vector in relationship to all the internal and external stimuli, because it is that behaviour which will be most deeply satisfying. But this is the same course of action which from another vantage point may be said to be determined by all the factors in the existential situation... The fully functioning person... not only experiences but utilizes the most absolute freedom when he spontaneously, freely, and voluntarily chooses and wills that which is absolutely determined'*. To be a real person is to be here now, all of oneself right here in this moment. There is no spectrum of consciousness here only authentic and inauthentic states of being. To be fully human is the highest possible goal according to this vision.

Eastern factors

As mentioned in Section 1, California, the birthplace of transpersonal psychology, hosts representatives and centres of all the Asian religions and meditative cultural forms. Buddhism arrived with the Chinese and Japanese coolies who built the railroads and later created their own communities up and down the coast. Other traditions came later particularly in the hippy period of the sixties. If America is the melting pot, California is the chef's residence where he experiments with new combinations of ingredients to produce an ever more dazzling array of dishes, from the ultra materialistic fervour of Silicon Valley to backwoods alternative communes of Humboldt country. The wide range of attitudes and life-styles all within a days drive of each other and united by the interaction induced by modern media has confronted psychologists with rather more heady raw material than that provided for Freud by the staid matrons of Vienna.

This variety has provoked a lot of enquiry into whether there is an underlying human nature common to all these varied beings and which would explain their similarities and differences on all levels. Some of the answers have arisen in the context of therapy and their contribution is more psychological while others have arisen more from study, introspection and speculation and some philosophical.

Transpersonal Psychology of Ken Wilber

I will now give a brief consideration of the overview approach of Ken Wilber. I have chosen to concentrate on the views of Ken Wilber because he is a great

systematiser; he sets his views out clearly and tries to let you see just where he stands and why. He is a bit of a pedagogue and is fond of saying 'must' and 'should' and telling his audience what will happen if they do this, that or the other. Yet that revealing of his own personality and interests is helpful, and in the true manner of humanistic psychology, he includes himself into his presentation.

Wilber has presented two main systems for understanding the nature of the self. The first, expressed in *'The Atman Project'* and *'No Boundary'* gives a map of the development of the psyche from the womb states of the pre-personal through the ego-states of the personal stage to the highest non-egoic transpersonal stage. The second approach, which he presents in *'Up from Eden'*, considers the development of the psyche in a historical frame starting with the earliest hominids of six million years ago at the lowest unconscious level and progressing up to the present ego state of modern man with speculation as to future growth for the whole of mankind. These two basic frameworks of life cycle and evolution are already familiar from the works of Freud, Jung etc. but Wilber's vision goes far beyond theirs. Perhaps this is because his theorising has developed out of wide-ranging intellectual study and intensive meditation practice and not from the practice of psychotherapy.

Wilber sees the human personality as part of a multi-dimensional spectrum of consciousness. Each level of this spectrum is marked by a different and easily recognisable sense of individuality and in *The Atman Project* seventeen such stages or forms are described. There is no place here to go through all of these since their definitions are quite complex and I feel it is more important to look at the general principles underlying his approach to the question of the self.

Therefore, I will concentrate on the ideas expressed in *'No Boundary'* where Wilber sets out the basic process underlying the whole procedure of establishing an identity. *"Something very simple happens when you answer the question, "Who are you?" When you are describing or explaining or even just inwardly feeling your "self", what you are actually doing, whether you know it or not, is drawing a mental line or boundary across the whole field of your experience. Everything on the inside of that boundary you are feeling or calling your "self"; while everything outside that boundary you feel to be "not-self". Your self-identity, in other words, depends entirely upon where you draw that boundary line"*. It is most definitely a person-centred approach for the self is here not a matter of formal definition but of the subjective sense of self-identity.

Moreover, he is suggesting that the sense of self is not just a personal experience but is also a volitional construct — though the process of volition may in this case be unknown and / or unconscious. So it goes beyond the gestalt and general existential view since it suggests that what one is experiencing in 'being here now' is not something inherently authentic but just the full experience of the self-identity that one has decided to create and believe in by the inner definition of the boundary between self and other.

The body / mind split is an early occurrence in the human definition of self as the bodily functions, the bed-wetting, bowel movements and nose-blowing, make the child feel that the body is not quite his. This sense grows through the years and by the time the individual is mature the body is definitely on the other side of the fence.

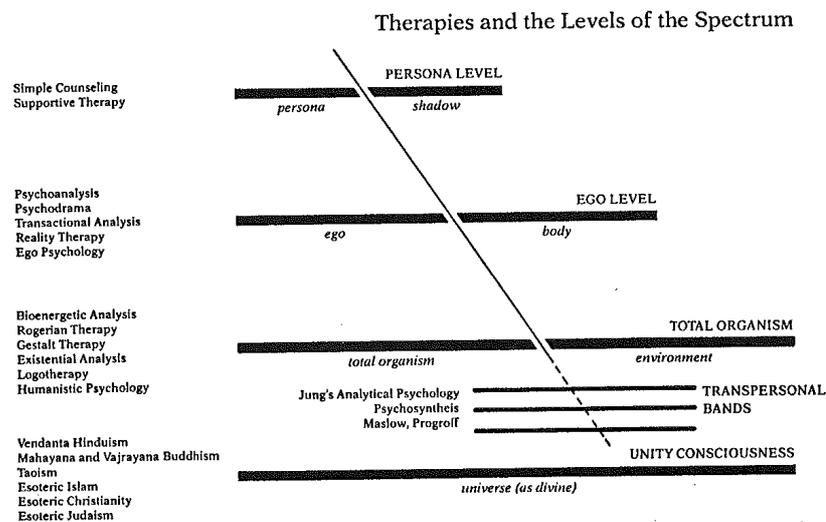
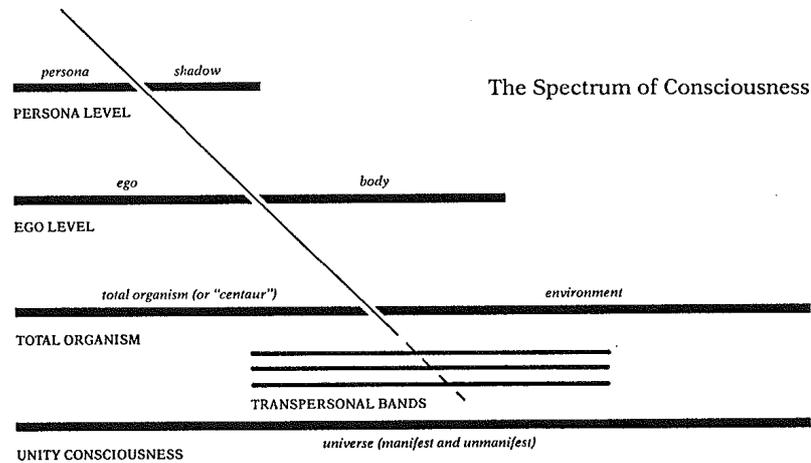
'The body becomes foreign territory, almost (but never quite) as foreign as the external world itself'. Thus, what the individual feels to be his self-identity does not directly encompass the organism-as-a-whole, but only a facet of that organism, namely, his ego. Moreover, there are aspects of the ego that the individual does not want to recognise and so these are shunted across the boundary to the non-self, which further narrows the self-image.

There also can occur the 'transpersonal experiences' where the boundary of the self is expanded to include as valid certain experiences that are usually excluded. These include extra-sensory perception, out-of-body experiences, 'peak' experiences, all of which take the self beyond the boundary of the skin. They differ however from experiences of 'unity' consciousness, the ultimate state of consciousness in which the person's identity is with the 'All', with absolutely everything. Wilber sees these levels of identity not as theoretical postulates but as observable realities that each individual can verify in and for himself.

Wilber points out in 'No Boundary' that a boundary line is a potential battle line and each level of self-image sees different processes of the universe as strangers and thus as potential enemies. Thus, each stage of self-identity has conflicts inherent in it - except for unity consciousness, which is devoid of boundaries and duality and so is at peace with itself.

Although I earlier expressed my dislike for the simplistic effect of diagrams I will reproduce two of Wilber's diagrams here since he makes considerable use of diagrams himself and also because his purpose is to simplify, to strip things down to basic principles and then shuffle these principles around to see if this kaleidoscope has produced any significant patterns. These diagrams illustrate the various levels of consciousness and the kind of therapies that he sees as being most appropriate to each stage. All the therapies and spiritual paths aim to lead individuals to more valid ways of being, to a true vision of themselves or to their true selves. However, Wilber questions whether they are all aimed at the same level of a person's consciousness.

Diagrams from Ken Wilbers 'No Boundary'



Each level in the spectrum of consciousness possesses its own characteristics, symptoms and potentials and so an approach that may be quite helpful at one level can be inappropriate, redundant and even harmful at another. This is because each therapy will interpret the symptoms in terms of its own worldview, which is essentially that of one of the levels that Wilber has defined - and the data, no matter how strange, will be fitted into the established theory rather than the data causing a reappraisal of the theory. Thus, for Wilber there are no total theories but only level-appropriate theories and to apply these theories to the wrong levels only leads to confusion. For example, a Freudian analyst confronted with a person who had E.S.P. experiences and was not sure about them would relate the experiences to childhood events. Thus, the area of causation is already defined by the interpretive system,

which is then essentially closed and has a deadening effect on any events in levels other than its own.

To clarify this I will look briefly at the five stages that Wilber presents in 'No Boundary'. This is a simpler picture of consciousness than that given in the more academic 'Atman Project' but it does provide the basic principles in a clear manner.

The first level is that of the persona, which is a more or less inaccurate and impoverished self-image. Wilber says that, *'It is created when the individual attempts to deny to himself the existence of certain of his own tendencies, such as anger, assertiveness, erotic impulses, joy, hostility, courage, aggression, drive, interest, and so on. But as much as he may try to deny these tendencies, they do not thereby vanish. Since these tendencies are the individual's, all he can do is pretend that they belong to someone else. Anybody else, as a matter of fact, just not him. So he does not succeed in really denying these tendencies, but only in denying ownership of them. He thus comes to actually believe that these tendencies are not-self, alien, outside. He has narrowed his boundaries so as to exclude the unwanted tendencies. These alienated tendencies are therefore projected as the shadow, and the individual is identified only with what is left: a narrowed, impoverished and inaccurate self-image, the person. So the individual who has accepted this boundary has to endure the battle between persona and shadow, the sense of being threatened by the objectified forms of all that one has denied in oneself.'* In order to overcome this and move to the next, the ego level, Wilber recommends Transactional Analysis since it allows one to explore creatively and clearly scenarios of denial that one might be participating in.

The ego level has the body / mind split as its main concern. Here one is prepared to explore and accept the complexity of one's mental life but the body is denied as something inferior, literally 'beneath one'. Thus 'I am my head, but I own my body', with the body becoming an object or projection in just the same way the shadow did. Moreover this loss of the body is only the most visible and sensible sign of the disruption of the total organism. So, the issue here is an integration of the body and the ego that will release all the energy that has been wastefully employed in the maintenance of that boundary, a boundary which Wilber sees as having three levels. *'On a superficial level, we refuse to reclaim the body because we just don't think there's any reason to - it seems a big to—do about nothing. On a deeper level, we fear to reclaim the body because it houses, in a particularly vivid and living form, strong emotions and feelings that are socially taboo. And ultimately, the body is avoided because it is the abode of death'*. Part of the process of integration at this level is the acceptance of the involuntary bodily functions such as heart beat, hair growth, as just as much a part of oneself as the voluntary one's of moving limbs etc.

The resolution of conflict on the ego level permits one to enter what Wilber calls the centaur level in which one is a 'total organism'. Yet here too there is a boundary, that between the total organism and the world around. One's totality is a bit too solid, one's autonomy a bit too static. At this level, one has to contact what Jung called the 'collective unconscious', the level in each individual which contains nothing strictly personal but houses the collective motifs of the entire human race. Thus, one has to recognise within oneself all the gods and goddesses, divinities and demons and heroes and villains that are portrayed outwardly by the world's ancient mythologies.

In this sense to live mythologically is not to enter a fantasy but to accept the reality of the transcendent, to see it alive in one's self, in one's life, in one's work, friends and environments. This is a process of bringing oneself and the world together by making both alive and dynamic with infinite possibilities.

Wilber expresses it thus, *'As (Ananda) Commaraswamy said, "Once upon a time," which begins all fairy tales, is really "Once beyond time," and the tale which follows is of a world which temporarily suspends space and time, where play rules supreme and anything is possible. And inasmuch as the real world is no-boundary, the language and imagery of mythology is really much closer to that reality than is linear logic and abstract thinking... This does not mean that we surrender altogether the conventional world of boundaries and retreat into mythic fantasies (a dangerous state indeed). Rather, it means that we open ourselves to mythological transcendence and bring that awareness into our conventional world, revitalizing existence by connecting it once again to a source much deeper than itself'.*

Relying on the mythological symbolism of what Wilber calls the transpersonal bands (see diagram) the individual's awareness begins to shift to a more universal perspective. That is slowly he begins to see that all the possibilities he is exploring are not just 'adjectives' to his 'noun', not just ornaments to his being as 'total organism' but are in fact signs that his state as 'total organism' is not complete or absolute but is just one of a myriad of relative modes of manifestation. Letting go of this sense of personal centre he experiences a space, an openness in which all the forms that manifest, outer and inner, are equally valid. And thus, he begins to experience unity consciousness, a state free of boundaries. This is a 'pure' consciousness that does not identify with nor depend upon any manifestation. Its identity is its openness. It is transpersonal, beyond the personal, the individual; a state of being which encompasses all others. Nothing is excluded and nothing is relied on. There is no need of a personal base and so there is nothing to defend and nothing to embellish. Unity consciousness is of the timeless moment for in the openness there is no fulcrum point of a 'solid' present on which to balance past and future. It is entirely present now - and obviously there is no way to reach now. There is no way to arrive at that which already is.

Thus being in this state of no-boundary is not a matter of removing or transcending boundaries as was necessary with the other levels of consciousness. Rather it is a matter of being open to the fact that boundaries do not exist of themselves, that they are created by the focussing of attention — and that such a focussing is unnecessary since for unity consciousness no particular manifestation is special for here attention is imbedded in openness and does not have the power to reify. These, in brief, are his five stages of consciousness.

One obvious benefit of this map of consciousness is its capacity to identify the forms of therapy and spiritual practice suitable for each level. This is coupled with a clear statement that there is no question of any path being inherently 'better' than any other - what is important is that the individual employs the 'right' one for his own particular situation. There is no universal panacea that can be dispensed by a benevolent physician - that would be just another boundary scenario of expert and client. Right from the first step of working on the persona / shadow split, the individual has to be involved, has to participate since the issue is not one of finding

more things to add on to what you already have, but of recognising that you actually have got much more than you have recognised. And indeed not only that you have *got* more, but that you already *are* more.

One important issue in psychology that Wilber's work has clarified is that of the similarities of many aspects of the pre-personal and the trans-personal. Thus, many therapists have interpreted their client's experiences of warm, safe, almost thought-free states as being reflections of womb experiences. But Wilber has shown that if the person is already well established on the ego-personal level then such experiences are much more likely to indicate entry into the transpersonal bands than they are to suggest a regression into foetal sensations. Thus, similar kinds of experiences can have quite different significances depending upon the circumstances in which they occur. Adult life is not just a reflection or replay of childhood incidents.

There is no space to look at Wilber's presentation of the historical evolution of consciousness in which he traces each form of consciousness from its beginning, through its development, to the point where its successor begins to take over. In '*Up From Eden*' where he discusses this theme Wilber presents eight stages of consciousness in contrast to the five used in '*No-Boundary*' (as described above), and the seventeen in '*The Atman Project*'. That variety of classifications in itself suggests his confidence in his grasp of this subject matter, being able to alter the forms of his presentation in order to develop and clarify his insight. So that although he tends to preach he is an explorer rather than a lawgiver.

Having said that, I would like to express some of my reservations about the way he plays with technical terms and imputes values to standard concepts that are quite his own. Of the eight stages of consciousness in '*Up from Eden*' the first four, nature, body, early mind and advanced mind refer to the development of a mature ego state, the centaur level or total organism of '*No Boundary*'. He describes these in some detail and then on p. 253 he presents 'an outline of the hierarchic evolution of religious experience, which is at the same time an outline of the successive levels of the super-conscious sphere'. I will present this outline in its entirety since I think it indicates the horrors of refusing to develop an accurate vocabulary of technical terms to cover an area one feels confident to discuss in detail. To put Sanskrit words here is as helpful as writing the recipes in French for an English cook book because you think French is the language of haute cuisine.

Nirmanakaya - level 5; shamanistic trance, shakti, psychic capacities. siddhi, kriyas, elemental forces (nature gods and goddesses), emotional-sexual transmutation, body ecstasy, kundalini, and hatha yoga

Samhogakaya - level 6; subtle realm; angelic and archetypal visions; one God / dess, the Creator of all lower realms (levels 5 through 1), the demiurgos or Archetypal Lord; saintly religion of halos of subtle light and sound (nada, mantra) nada and shabd yoga, savikalpa samadhi, saguna Brahman

- Dharmakaya* - level 7; causal realm; unmanifest Void, Empty Ground, the Godhead; unity of soul and God, transcendence of *Dharmakaya* - transcendence of subject-object duality, coalescence of human and divine; the Depth, the Abyss, the Ground of God and soul; I and the Father are One; jnana yoga, nirvikalpa samadhi, nirguna Brahman
- Svabhavikakaya* - level 8; culmination of *Dharmakaya* religion; identity of manifest and unmanifest, or identity of the entire World Process and the Void; perfect and radical transcendence into and as ultimate Consciousness as Such, or absolute Brahman—Atman; sahaja yoga, bhava samadhi

From 'Up from Eden', Ken Wilber. p. 253

What a hotchpotch! Bits and pieces from all over the place put together in pretty patterns - but to what purpose? It is a sort of magpie tendency that comes over many writers when they consider religious themes - creating categories and then stuffing them with anything that seems appropriate. It's a bit like Frazer's *The Golden Bough*²: Magpies like shiny things so they steal jewels and hide them in their nests but there the shiny things become rather dull. It is the same with this kind of writing.

Terms that are most meaningful are ripped out of the situations that gave them their meaning and placed among other ideas that seem to have similar meanings so that there is a lot of suggestiveness, the promise of a lot of real truth. Yet somehow, the context does not permit full utilisation. If chocolates are kept on display in a shop window, they may attract customers but will themselves become inedible and there are many more window-gazers than real shoppers!

If the Buddhist or Hindu ideas seem wonderful then study these directly. But although Wilber does suggest this I feel that his simplified system will create more followers for itself than it will manage to direct to more proven systems.

There is no space to go into the details of Wilber's system. The little I have been able to say has been sketchy and impressionistic yet I hope it has suggested the vastness of Wilber's vision, his ability to bring together many seemingly disparate themes and show common ground and purpose. We have seen how the sense of self can have different contents and areas of reference. Wherever self-identity is achieved by rejecting something in one's experience the tension on this artificial boundary will be a source of disturbance, discontent and suffering. Man cannot be at peace with himself when that self is created by doing injury to his true, actual self. We saw how Wilber presents a progression from a narrow, exclusive self-identity to a total, mature ego that harmonises body and mind. In a sense this is the 'supreme self' since it is strong, clearly defined, and self-confident. The next development towards the 'Supreme Self' tends to undermine these qualities for they dissolve the boundaries of that total organism, placing it on the same level as other manifestations. The self starts to feel lighter to itself, more free, open and playful, not in need of supports and bases - and thus it flies in various symbolic forms, feeling its

wings, using the sky instead of the earth until, like the wind, it stops moving and merges into space itself.

Conclusion

*This above all, to thine own self be true;
And it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man.*

Hamlet, Act I scene 3.

For both the Buddhist and the exponent of transpersonal psychology to be true to oneself is to rely on nothing but oneself and that means not relying on a 'self'. If the self becomes a thing, a reified self-identity it is a construct of appropriation, as consciousness, not being able to experience itself directly, rests on aspects of its own experience and calls them 'me', 'I', 'myself'. Wilber has employed many Buddhist concepts in creating his new system. He has not come to his conclusions about unity consciousness out of his own direct experience but only by believing the writings of sages in far off lands. Unfortunately, as one can see from his bibliographies, he has relied on very poor translations as his principle sources and his enthusiasm often outstrips his accuracy, as might be seen by his treatment of the Three Bodies, which I have also dealt with in the sub-section on Vajrayana. But in terms of his whole system that is perhaps a small point for there are other, more fundamental issues to examine.

For the Buddhists of the Mahayana, Vajrayana and Dzogchen views awareness as *the* state of being is the fundamental truth. It is the ultimate true nature of the self, it is what and how each individual really is, all the time. Whatever occurs is an aspect of this nature which is nothing per se. All the myriad modes of subject and object are its children, and they live their lives without ever leaving the womb. To imagine that one is essentially other than this spaciousness, to create a self-identity out of the unborn and truly integrated appearances is to create suffering and nothing more. The whole of the human condition is an illusion in the sense of being ultimately, unreal, unworthy of belief and reliance. The path to the true nature, the true self is thus a case of shedding falsity rather than of acquiring truth.

The Hinayana path, which specified retreat from the world into a solitary liberation, is seen by the other three Buddhist systems as essentially a bad idea. They explain that the Buddha taught it for those of the lowest spiritual capacity as a means to let them be free of suffering as quickly as possible. But in a sense, it is like entering an eternal deep-freeze – there is no movement, everything is calm, still, with no activity between subject and object to cause suffering. But also, no space for the dynamic being that characterises the other three styles. So although Tibetan Buddhists recognise the Hinayana as part of the Buddha's teaching, it is not encouraged as a main practice, rather only as a tool to clarify issues of suffering, impermanence, karmic causality - all the relative factors that determine our existence as human beings.

The Tibetan Buddhist energy is firmly in what Wilber would call the transpersonal and the key question must be, to what extent does the Buddhist discussion of the process of ignorance resemble Wilber's lower levels in the spectrum of consciousness?

Now although Wilber explicitly employs Buddhist material for the transpersonal area and seems to have modelled his discussion of boundaries on the Buddhist and Hindu concepts of the development of duality he hardly ever employs their terminology and concepts when discussing the pre-personal and personal stages. For these areas, he prefers to use the terminology of western psychology that accepts evolution and genetic inheritance. Wilber indicates that he sees no conflict here. As he says in 'No Boundary' (P. 142), *'Unity consciousness is not a state different or apart from other states, but the condition and true nature of all states The different levels of the spectrum are something like the various waves of the ocean - each wave is certainly different from all the others ... Unity consciousness, however, is not so much a particular wave as it is the water itself. And there is no boundary, no difference, no separation between water and any of the waves. That is, the water is equally present in all waves, in the sense that no wave is wetter than another'*.

Yet I am not sure that it is quite as simple as he makes it out to be. Especially in 'Up from Eden' where he sets out in detail the evolutionary periods connected with each stage of consciousness there does seem to be some underlying contradiction. He talks of the stages of the historical evolution of consciousness as arranged in a 'vertical' hierarchy for *'although they all issue from the Absolute, in the meantime they are intermediate stages of return to that Absolute'...* (P. 8). On page 21 he affirms that *'Beginning approximately fifteen billion years ago, with the so-called Big Bang, evolution had succeeded in moving, in hierarchic order, from simple insentient and lifeless atoms to vegetal life, and beyond vegetation to simple animal forms (protozoan, amphibian, reptilian), and then to higher animal forms (mammalian, with simple mental images and paleosymbols).'*

So it seems that on the one hand we have consciousness evolving out of matter as in the accepted western scientific interpretation and on the other hand we have Wilber also wanting to accept that all the stages of consciousness are actually and at all times modes of the absolute unity consciousness. Now unless he wants to say that matter itself proceeds out of this unity consciousness then there seems to be a gap in the process of evolution. How did these 'insentient and lifeless atoms' evolve into conscious forms. Either they have the seeds of consciousness inherent in them, or their patterning somehow created it or else some deus ex machina implant has fortuitously occurred. It is like trying to have your cake and eat it. Nowhere in his writings does Wilber clarify this important point. Out of a big bang comes insentient matter and evolution proceeds up until the present day — O.K. All the stages of consciousness experienced in the evolutionary process are aspects of a supreme absolute unitary consciousness whose direct non-dual experience is the meaning and goal of history — O.K. But how are these propositions to be brought together? Does the big bang split and fragment the unitary consciousness so that the pieces have to pick themselves up and come together again? If so, then how could the unitary consciousness be the ever-present reality? The whole notion of a spectrum of consciousness is rather linear; it suggests a top and a bottom with an interconnecting continuity.

The Buddhist picture of the self in ignorance and enlightenment is essentially that of an individual situation. It is due to an acceptance of 'I' that the whole split in consciousness occurs and the process is fuelled by the intentionality of karma. There is no question here of social development or of evolution of species. An ego-

grasping consciousness can exist as a frog in one life, a god in the next, and a cannibal in the next. The individual goes alone at death, following the unique pattern he has created by his own action. It is perhaps significant to note that Wilber hardly touches on karma. It seems to me that Wilber has lifted out the Buddhist view of the unbroken totality of consciousness, the mirror in which all appearances manifest, the unborn mother of the unceasing display where ignorance is just a log-jam in the stream of becoming, a pattern that is in its own terms something and yet in terms of the wider situation in which it exists is nothing at all. This is a view that denies that anything has ever commenced, it is an integrated vision the experience of which is inexpressible. As in a dream subject opposes object and together they stand in opposition to emptiness - forming a ceaselessly spinning triangle within the circle of the absolute nature of the self.

Having lifted out this idea, Wilber wants to tack it on to and into a scheme of evolution that is essentially linear. But absolutes are everywhere. Furthermore, they go in every direction at every moment; they contradict evolution because there is nowhere to get to. Wilber knows the words for both systems very well and gaily mixes them together into a heady brew but I for one cannot swallow it without choking.

I would like to draw attention to the fact that although when talking of the individual or person I have employed the male gender when personal pronouns were required, this in no way suggests that male patterns are being set up as stereotypes. Buddhist thinking particularly in the Vajrayana stresses that the role of women in spiritual life and in society must be increased for the good of all. Certainly, Wilber accepts the present male structures are in need of some feminine antidotes.

Well, I hope these pages have said something interesting and have highlighted some areas of contention as well perhaps as giving some new insights. At least I found myself writing things I have never come across elsewhere. In a sense, I wish to draw no conclusions, adopt no positions, for such processes are like drawing a line at a bottom of a page and adding up what you have got. But what is to be 'got' is interest, enthusiasm, a sense of direction and an eagerness to explore. There is no solid self that can be weighed, measured, analysed and defined for posterity. The self is the very dance of life, changing mood and tempo all the time yet with an inner continuity that is real and true although inexpressible. The nature of self is openness, its quality or process is clarity and spontaneity and its content or energy is the ceaseless flow of transformation displaying whatever forms are required.

Who can prove it? Only oneself ...

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