



Reflections On The Soul

Variations On A Theme By Plotinus

Swami Abhayananda

REFLECTIONS ON THE SOUL

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REFLECTIONS ON THE SOUL:

Variations On A Theme By Plotinus

by Swami Abhayananda

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Reflections On The Soul

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Preface

The *soul* has been a topic of metaphysical speculation since Plato in the West and the Upanishads in the East. But do we believe in the *soul* today? Some do; but for many, it is an archaic concept. The concept of the *soul* or Spirit is rarely considered to be an element of our contemporary cosmological framework; rather, the *body* or Matter is routinely considered to be the sole existent. Yet, there are many questions, even today, concerning the nature of life, consciousness, and the subjective experiences we label as “spiritual”, that still beg for answers. Finding few satisfactory answers in the contemporary ‘scientific’ worldview, many are wondering if it might not be beneficial to have another look at the answers provided by the philosophers and ‘seers’ of ancient times who were more inclined to a spiritual or metaphysical approach. One such philosopher that stands out for reexamination is the third century Neoplatonist, Plotinus.

I first wrote about Plotinus in the early 80’s; since then, my fascination with this remarkable mystic-philosopher has continued and grown. I hadn’t believed then, nor do I now believe that Plotinus, in the third century, had a handle on everything; in fact, he got many things wrong—we must remember that they had a very fuzzy view of the world and the physical cosmos in those days. But Plotinus was extraordinarily gifted with spiritual vision, and he attempted as best he could to reproduce his vision in rational terms for the benefit of all who struggle to understand the nature of this reality in which we live. And, though he was handicapped by the lack of a mature body of natural science on which to rely, his vision

of a world filled with the Divine is one which influences us even today, more greatly than we know.

In reformulating and enhancing Plotinus' vision for our times, I am not suggesting that this revised vision is definitive either. But I think you will find that it offers a credible and consistent worldview that not only passes the test of Ockham's razor, but has a clarion ring of truth to it as well. Here, then, for what it's worth, is a metaphysical worldview based on the vision of Plotinus—with a modern twist. You, the reader, no doubt have your own perspective and your own favorite view of things, but try on this newly polished pair of glasses just to see if they fit. They won't fit everyone, but they might just make things a little clearer for *you*.

—Swami Abhayananda, 2009

Note: *This Third revised edition of Reflections On The Soul was necessitated by my desire eight years after it was originally completed and published to bring the text up to date in accord with some of my more recent views.*

S.A., January, 2018

Introduction

The twentieth century philosopher, Alfred North Whitehead, said that “all philosophy is but so many footnotes to Plato”—and it’s true that Plato furnished many of the core ideas upon which all subsequent Western philosophy draws; but it was Plotinus who was the first dedicated Western mystic, and the first and most profound Western author of a thoroughly nondual metaphysical scheme. He was certainly not the first great Western philosopher to experience, through deep contemplation, the revelation of his Divine Self; however, his main predecessor, Socrates (469-399 B.C.E.), who seems certain to have also attained this Self-knowledge, had apparently been uninclined to set his thoughts in writing; rather, it was Socrates’ student, Plato (427-347 B.C.E.), who, by putting his master’s teachings into the form of written conversations, or dialogues, gave occasional hints, in his rambling piecemeal style, of the nature of the mystical vision.

Here and there in these Dialogues of Plato were jewels of mystical insight, but nothing like a systematic metaphysics, or even a clear outline of a consistent metaphysical vision. But, more than five hundred and fifty years after the death of Plato, Plotinus (205-270 C.E.), born in Lycopolis, Egypt, would formulate a more comprehensive metaphysics, a spiritual perspective, based, not only upon the teachings of Socrates cum Plato, but upon his own visionary experience as well. It is this perspective which would ultimately be labeled by scholars as *Neoplatonism* (“the new Platonism”).

Plotinus had experienced, through contemplation, his identity with the Divine, and his insights into the nature of God and the soul are deeply authentic and valuable; but his speculations on the origin and constituency of Matter were greatly hampered by the insufficiency of the accumulated physical knowledge of his time. Plotinus lived in the third century, at a time when little was known of the constituent elements of Matter. Matter had been broken down by Aristotle (384-322 B.C.E.) into the so-called 'elements' of earth, fire, wind, water, and aether; and, despite the earlier atomic theory of Democritus (460-390 B.C.E.), Aristotle's 'elements' comprised the extent of the accepted physical analysis of Matter during Plotinus' lifetime. Also, his knowledge of our cosmic environment was extremely limited; in fact, it was widely believed at that time that the universe consisted of a series of concentric spheres, with earth at the center, surrounded by the sub-lunar sphere, and that surrounded by a revolving stellar sphere, on the inner surface of which the planets and stars were fixed. This cosmic view had been established by Aristotle (384-322 B.C.E.), and later modified somewhat by Ptolemy of Alexandria (90-168 C.E.).

While there had been a heliocentric cosmology suggested by Aristarchus of Samos (320-250 B.C.E.), the Aristotelian-Ptolemaic geocentric universe was the one academically and popularly accepted during Plotinus' lifetime. Plotinus seems to have accepted this cosmology as well; and so, he had only an inadequate and unrealistic base of knowledge from which to make an assessment of the nature of the physical universe. We must not hesitate therefore to doubt his conclusions regarding the origin of the material

universe, and to revise his assumptions in this area to accord with present-day physical and cosmological knowledge.

In this book I will utilize current cosmological science and the fruits of my own contemplative experience to modify the otherwise meticulous metaphysics of the celebrated mystic-philosopher, Plotinus, thus presenting an enhanced version of his vision to accommodate our current knowledge. I would like to ask the reader to consider the following brief presentation of a *new* perspective on an old metaphysics, a *new* and slightly different formulation of an old theology, that I believe you will find well suited to our current knowledge and times.

* * *

PART ONE: THE METAPHYSICS OF PLOTINUS

If then, Socrates, amidst the many opinions about the gods and the generation of the universe, we are not able to give notions which are altogether and in every respect exact and consistent with one another, do not be surprised. Enough if we adduce probabilities as likely as any others, for we must remember that I who am the speaker and you who are the judges are only mortal men, and we ought to accept the tale which is probable and inquire no further.

—Plato ¹

I. Plotinus's Vision

The many metaphysical theories that have surfaced from prolific minds over the centuries shows to us the incredible range of imagination to which man is heir, and shows us as well the vastness of man's capacity to err. Yet we must acknowledge that this seemingly limitless capacity we have to imagine and to err is driven by the need to explain what is unexplained, to find answers for our most obstinately perplexing questions. The present century demands a metaphysical vision that is answerable to the latest empirical, psychological, and spiritual findings; one that takes into consideration all the accumulated scientific knowledge of our time, as well as the accumulated mystical gleanings of centuries past.

The increase in scientific knowledge, that is, in the empirical knowledge of our phenomenal world, has proceeded over the years and centuries, so that much of what was once a matter for speculation and myth has given way to a vast body of reliable knowledge currently available to everyone. But the accumulation of such knowledge took a great deal of time, effort, and perseverance on the part of those who ferreted it out from its secret recesses. Think, for example, how long men struggled to know the conditions and order of movement of the stars and the planets of our solar system, and how many false theories preceded our eventual understanding. Today, the vision of man reaches to the furthest limits of the universe.

The current radical evolution of our empirical knowledge demands an equally radical evolution in our comprehension of the invisible elements of the universal order which exist beyond our senses. In this endeavor too, the struggle has been long and arduous, and much still remains to be uncovered, but some advances also have been made. Such problems cannot be solved, or even investigated, however, solely from the perspective of reason and observation; they require the gleanings from the personal intuition and visionary experience of the countless mystics who have 'seen' into the subtle realms of universal manifestation.

It is the consistent nature of the unitive visionary experience, occurring to numerous souls over a great expanse of time, that provides insight into the nature of our Source and the manifestation of our universe. Without the accumulation of many common experiences of a supersensual reality, we would have no real clue as

to our true nature, but only the endless arguments between faith-based partisans and secular rationalists. Our powers of observation and imagination alone are simply not adequate to the task. It is visionary, or mystical, experience, obtained by grace through prayer, contemplation or meditation, that reveals to us the true nature of our own conscious self and the universe in which we live.

Plotinus was one who had experienced such 'vision', and, in his attempt to explain it, he formulated a metaphysics borrowing heavily upon the terminology of Plato. It is not a metaphysics based *solely* on a prior metaphysics or on rational speculation, like some others, but one that is primarily based on his own unitary vision in the contemplative state, which he is said to have experienced on at least four occasions. Plotinus saw the one Spirit as a continuum of Consciousness that is all-pervading, inhabiting both the subtle and manifest universe. He describes the successive stages of Spirit as three: the One, The Divine Mind (*Nous*), and Soul, in a manner analogous to the successive stages of radiation expanding from the Sun. Here are his own words:

There exists a Principle which transcends Being; this is The One, ...Upon The One follows immediately the Principle which is at once Being and the Divine Mind. Third comes the Principle, Soul. ... Thus our soul, too, is a divine thing, belonging to another order than sense; . . .²

There is, we may say, something that is the Center;
 about It, a circle of light shed from It; then, around
 Center and first circle alike, another circle, light
 from light ...³

It must be noted that, in this representation by Plotinus, these three “principles” are not to be thought of as separate, independent entities; rather, they represent a *causal* progression only. It is the One whose creative Power is called ‘the Divine Mind’; and it is the creative Power of the One whose radiance spreads as Soul. Despite the names given to these “layers”, there is never anything but the One, and only the One, filling all.

‘The One’ represents for Plotinus the transcendent Absolute, the Unmanifest Ground. It is prior to the creative activity of the Divine Mind; and so, in the One, the universe of time and space does not even exist. The One is the absolute Void, the indescribable Godhead. It is the ultimate Identity of everything. In the Vedic tradition, It is called “Brahman”, in the Taoist tradition, the “Tao,” and in the Christian writings of Meister Eckhart, “*Gottheit*”. The active principle, the creative Power of the One, Plotinus calls ‘The Divine Mind’ (*Nous*). And ‘Soul’ (*psyche*) is the active presence of the Divine Mind in the intelligible as well as the phenomenal universe.

Plotinus pointed out in his *Enneads* that the Absolute, who is the ultimate Source and foundation of all, cannot be described or even named accurately, since It is prior to all qualities, prior even to the designation of ‘Being’. Nonetheless, he names It “the One”, or he

uses Plato's previous designation, "the Good." But he is always quick to stipulate that any descriptive name limits and qualifies the Absolute, and thereby misrepresents It. This judgment has been seconded by many other respected authorities after him.

Today, we use the word "God" or "Godhead" to represent the indescribable One, with the understanding that this too is merely a shorthand pointer to That which can never be conceived or expressed by the human mind. God may be directly *experienced*, but never adequately captured in thought or language. For this reason, a clear and rational comprehension or description of the One is concealed from our understanding. "We see now", said Saint Paul, "but vaguely, as through a darkened glass; but then (meaning: when we have direct *vision* of God) we shall see as though face to face."

While the One cannot be described or clearly comprehended, nonetheless, we can get a sense of It by analogy with our own nature, since we are made in Its image. Like the eternal Consciousness, our own individual consciousness is one and unchanging, while the energetic outpouring of thought, comprising our individual mind, is multiple and subject to flux. Our thoughts are contained as potentiality in our own consciousness which is their substratum and source, and yet these thoughts, even when given expression, do not in any way affect that consciousness, any more than clouds passing through the sky alters or affects the sky. This, I believe, is analogous to the unity of the One and Its active, creative Power, the Divine Mind; for while the One remains transcendent,

unaltered, and unaffected, Its energetic outpouring of creativity continues apace as the Divine Mind.

And so we are able to recognize these two aspects of our own minds as in some way comparable to the two aspects of God: the One (the pure Absolute), and Its creative Power. They are not two separate entities, of course, any more than those two aspects of our own minds are separated. They are one, yet they have a semblance of duality, since one is causally primary to the other, just as, while the Sun and the light it radiates are one, the Sun is primary to its radiance.

The Divine Mind is the first Act of The One and the first Existence; The One remains stationary within Itself, but the Divine Mind acts in relation to It and, as it were, lives about It. And the Soul, outside, circles around the Divine Mind, and by gazing upon it, seeing into the depths of it, through it sees God.⁴

According to Plotinus, we may think of Soul as a spreading Field of radiation from the Divine Mind. It is the outspreading light of Divine Intelligence, the invisible radiation of the Divine Consciousness, that manifests as the intelligible (spiritual) world. Soul is one undivided radiance, and though it contains souls, they are as yet unmanifest, undifferentiated. We must remember that Soul does not consist of an ethereal substance; it is a projection of the conscious Intelligence of the Divine Mind.

One might reasonably ask, “Is it even necessary for God to extend throughout space as Soul in order to manifest in bodies? Isn’t He already all-pervasive, and inherent in everything that exists?” And the answer is “Yes, He is all-pervasive throughout the universe—and it is just this all-pervasiveness of God, the Divine Consciousness, that we call ‘Soul’; or, when referring to the Divine awareness in man, ‘the Self’.”

“Soul” is, unfortunately, a word that carries with it some negative overtones for many of us. It tends to remind us of some of the hazy imaginings conjured up by the religious instructions of our childhood. It is a word that has dwindled from our modern vocabulary due to such associations, and due also to its seeming vagueness. But let us understand “Soul”, as Plotinus did, as a term intended to represent the ineffable Intelligence that wafts from the Divine Mind, pervading everything, invisibly present in every place, enlivening every life-form, imbuing us with vitality, consciousness and intelligence; and constituting the medium connecting our existence to God. Soul is invisible and immaterial; it cannot even be conceived of or imagined, and yet it is impossible to deny that such a Divine principle exists, and operates, and rules over all. And so, if we must represent this universal Divine presence with a word, let us agree to call it “Soul.”

Soul pervades the phenomenal universe of time, space and form, and that universe also is a production of the Divine. But, unlike Soul, which is the eternal radiance of God’s very Consciousness and Being, the material universe is made of a transient form-producing burst of Divine Energy, on which I will elaborate later.

So, we must see that it is not the material form that constitutes our true and eternal identity, but it is, rather, our soul that is our true being, our eternal source of life and joy, being the niche we currently inhabit on the spectrum of Consciousness, and by which we may, with His grace, ascend to the highest Divinity. Our material form is merely a transient appearance that serves as our terrestrial vehicle.

Is this vision of Plotinus a duality then? No; for since both the matter-bearing Energy and the indwelling Spirit have their source in the One, there is nothing else but that One. It's true, He causes the appearance of two; and so we could call It 'a duality-in-unity'. The duality, however, is only apparent.

II. The Mind-Body Problem

Though Plotinus was fuzzy on the subject of the origin and nature of matter, he explicitly acknowledged that matter and soul were distinct and dissimilar 'substances'—each produced from the one Divine source, but each uniquely distinct in nature. This was merely the beginning of a long-standing controversy that continues to this day regarding what has come to be called 'the mind-body problem.' This problem is, in many ways, the *ultimate* problem, the solution to which has been the pursuit of every great mind from the beginning of time. The problem is simply this: 'If mind and body are two different substances, different in kind, how does the non-material mind, solely by the power of will and intention, bring about effects in the material body (as when you decide to move your finger), and

how does the material body bring about effects in the non-material mind (as when bodily injury results in mental pain or otherwise affects mental functioning)?'

The solution to this problem offered by Plato and Plotinus is that the eternal Consciousness (the Divine Mind) in its radiance as Soul, and consequently as the individualized soul, which constitutes the conscious mind of sentient beings, interpenetrates and inheres in the body and brain. As we will later show, this is also the position of various non-Western sources, including the *Upanishads* and the *Bhagavad Gita*. However, all of these sources, including Plotinus, concede that this interpenetration occurs in a manner inscrutable to human understanding.

It is clear to our modern understanding that from an empirical point of view, this universe is comprised of an Energy-field that was initiated 14 billion years ago. The body-brain complex that I call 'mine' is produced by that Energy-field, and consists entirely of matter generated by that Energy-field. But there is no doubt that there is a subtler reality that we know as mind, or consciousness, and that we refer to as 'I'.⁵

Everyone experiences themselves as both body and mind (soul), and the difference in the characteristics of these two is equally recognized by everyone. When we subjectively examine mind, and objectively examine matter, we realize at once that they are of two different orders of being. While we may insist that they both derive from the same Source, they are nonetheless entities different in kind: they are in fact two very different, albeit interpenetrating, realities:

one noumenon, one phenomenon; one essence, one substance; one consciousness, one energy.

For much of human history, nearly everyone concluded, as Descartes did, that God manifests as two complementary ‘substances’: a subtle one of Spirit, or soul, that manifests as a subjective conscious awareness (mind); and a coarser one of matter, or body. And that, at human conception or birth, the two are joined, and then, at the cessation of life in the body, they separate. At death, the body returns to its elements, eventually decaying back into its original Energy state, while the soul continues to live in its subtle Spirit realm, until such time as, according to some, it is re-embodied in a newly born creature; or, according to others, it is relegated eternally to a place of punishment or reward, depending on the deserts accumulated in its earthly sojourn. This dualistic scheme is all very reasonable, and very neat: there is the material world, and the spiritual world, both made of God-stuff, but of different kinds. They combine and interpenetrate during the lifetime of the body, and then separate when the body is no longer an apt host.

How, then, are we to explain this intermingling of Soul and Matter in a manner consistent with our current understanding of the nature of Matter? We can’t, of course. For Soul is not a substance; it cannot be described in a way similar to material particles or to photons or wave frequencies. It leaves no physical imprint; it requires no medium; I suspect it has no spatial or temporal signature at all. It is utterly undemonstrable to the senses. It is a Divine and eternal Consciousness which, despite its non-material nature, permeates and interacts with the world of phenomenal

material; and which, though undetectable by the senses, is clearly perceived subjectively as human awareness.

Plotinus, utilizing his flawed third-century knowledge of natural science, attempts to draw an apt analogy:

May we think that the mode of the soul's presence to body is that of the presence of light to the air? This certainly is presence with distinction: the light penetrates through and through, but nowhere coalesces; the light is the stable thing, the air flows in and out; when the air passes beyond the lit area it is dark; under the light it is lit: we have a true parallel to what we have been saying of body and soul, for the air is in the light quite as much as the light [is] in the air."⁶

But, of course, the permeation of Matter by Soul cannot truly be compared to the permeation of air by light: both of these latter are of a physical, or phenomenal, nature; whereas Soul, we may rightly say, is of another 'dimension'. It is not phenomenal, but noumenal.

Plotinus formulated a linear progression of generation: from the One to the Divine Mind, to Soul, to the material universe. For, since the Divine Mind was engendered by the One, and Soul was engendered by the Divine Mind, the material universe, thought Plotinus, must have been engendered by Soul. It appeared to him

that it had to have been Soul that imaged forth a material universe of forms in which to reside. Here are his words:

In the absence of body, soul could not have gone forth, since there is no other place to which its nature would allow it to descend. Since go forth it must, it will generate a place for itself; at once body also exists.

When the Soul...comes at last to the extreme extent of its light and dwindles to darkness, this darkness, now lying there beneath, the soul sees and by seeing brings [it] to shape...⁷

But such a causal scheme is logically untenable. For one thing, it would contradict Plotinus' condition that Soul could not have gone forth without the pre-existence of body, or Matter. Also, his suggestion that Soul is analogous to light, that it dwindles as it recedes, and has the power to create a universe out of darkness, is an incorrect and fanciful one. We now know the origin and constituency of Matter to a degree unknown in Plotinus' time. And so, we must "revise" the vision of Plotinus somewhat: asserting that it is not Soul, but the Divine Mind that projects a universe of substance: a periodically appearing world of 'matter', in which Soul is disposed to operate.

In order to visualize this process of universal generation, we must suppose that the Divine Mind sends forth a sudden great burst of Energy with the capability of transforming into an expanding world

of time, space, and material substance—a substantial world which Soul inhabits, and which it is able to set in order according to its own designs. Soul, the amorphous realm of multiple ideas, now has a playground where it may temporarily inhabit substantial forms, and act out its many fantasies to its heart's content. We will explain this 'creation' of the material universe in more detail when we get to the section on "The Phenomenon of Light"; but for now, we will continue to discuss the nature of the Soul.

Plotinus regards Soul as the intelligent organizing principle that impresses its order upon matter. In the language of contemporary knowledge, we would say that Soul is the all-pervading Intelligence that coalesces matter wave-particles into structures such as atoms, molecules, cells; and organizes them into microbiological structures such as amoeba and bacteria, into photosynthetic vegetation and aquatic creatures, becoming the very life-pulse of all that lives and moves. Matter alone has no abilities such as these; it is Soul that permeates the expanding heavens and earth, bringing living organization into matter and enabling replication and evolutionary change. Soul is the guiding intelligence, the evolutionary force, and the breath of Life permeating all the universe.

Soul, as an organizing influence in the structuring of the material universe, on either the microcosmic or macrocosmic level, is not empirically evident; but cumulatively, the various "fine-tuned" developments in the ordering of the simplest atoms to the grandest galaxies leads us to discern a purposeful intelligence at work that has been recognized even by hardened empiricists, who have dubbed it "the anthropic principle". This principle derives from the

increasing recognition on the part of scientific observers that nature appears from the beginning, at every step, and in countless ways, to be teleologically structured with an innate intention toward the emergence of human life-forms. May we not accept this principle as evidence of the presence of an invisible guiding intelligence such as that Plotinus labeled “Soul”?

Soul, the all-pervading Intelligence of God, may be said to be the “unified force” that manifests as the weak, strong, electromagnetic, and gravitational forces, binding the elements of this universe together. We may also account for the phenomenon of quantum interconnectedness known as ‘quantum entanglement’, which requires a medium of transmission allowing for the instantaneous relaying of information, if we assume the existence of an all-pervading consciousness extending throughout the universe—something akin to what Plotinus refers to as ‘Soul’. Further, Soul is the life-force that transforms inert matter into living, breathing entities. And it is the conscious intelligence that operates as the minds of men, acting as an evolutionary force to lead them to the knowledge of their true source and being, the one Spirit, their own Divine Self.

Throughout most of our history, every major theology has agreed with this conception of a dual-faceted Divine Reality, consisting of a transcendent/immanent Mind, or Consciousness, and an active Energy emanating from that absolute Consciousness, by which the universe of forms is made manifest. These two aspects of Reality were given innumerable names throughout the course of history, such as *Purusha* and *Prakrti*, *Brahman* and *Maya*, *Shiva* and *Shakti*,

Jahveh and Chokmah, Theos and Logos, Tao and Teh, Dharmakaya and Samsara, Haqq and Khalq, and on and on.

This classic Spirit-Matter dualism has not only been the conventional Eastern metaphysical view; it has been the conventional Western metaphysical view as well, from the time of Pythagorus and Plato, on through the Neoplatonists, Hermetics, and Jews, carried forward by Christianity and Islam, and reaffirmed analytically in the seventeenth century by René Descartes. Its rationality and broad acceptance firmly established this Spirit-Matter dualism in the depths of our collective psyche. But by many today, this dualistic worldview is considered archaic and moribund. Today, we base our knowledge, our convictions, on what is revealed solely by our sense-experience; that is to say, by what is revealed to us through empirical evidence; and Spirit or Consciousness, which is only experienced subjectively, remains, from the standpoint of the empiricist, an inexplicable mystery, as does the origin of Life and Consciousness itself.

III. Life and Consciousness

From the perspective of materialistic science or scientific materialism, the question of how life arose on earth appears to be one of the greatest mysteries. And, clearly, if we attempt to explain the arising of the phenomena of life on earth, relying solely on the physical sciences and our rational faculties, we run into many difficult-to-answer questions.

We may assume that the original creative act by the transcendent Spirit was the instigation of a great burst of Energy, the particles of which transformed into “matter” through the ‘spontaneous’ process of energy-matter transformation, thus forming the universe of time and space. But in order to account for the development from inorganic matter (minerals, gases, and liquids) to micro-organisms that resulted in bacterial and vegetative life arising on earth, we need to assume some rather remarkable additional transformations. However, no one can account for how the mere handful of ingredients existing on earth prior to the existence of life might have spontaneously produced living organisms.

Our present evolutionary theory, including our understanding of natural selection and the spontaneous mutation of genes, begins with the transformations that occurred from simple microbiological forms to more complex animal forms, and subsequently to humans. But the prior elementary transformations, from mineral to vegetable and microbial life forms, are wholly unexplained. The causal progression of those ‘elementary transformations’ represents a gap or ‘missing link’ in the evolutionary story (beginning with matter-bearing Energy and culminating in man) that materialistic science is currently unable to bridge. Despite a couple of centuries of active scientific research, the transformation from inorganic to organic matter has not been observed to occur, and no scientist has been able to account for its having occurred.

However, the knowledge acquired in the past fifty years concerning the biological mechanism of heredity, and its working, is nothing

short of awe-inspiring. We have learned how the cells of living tissue encode instructions, store information, and manufacture the necessary nutrients to form the new cells that maintain all bodily functions. The complexity and productivity of the manufacturing process going on every second within each of the seventy-five trillion cells of our bodies, producing four to five million new cells every second, as other cells die and are replaced, dwarfs any concepts of complexity and productivity that we may have previously had. Truly, what a marvel of God's Energy, Consciousness and Joy we are! If only we had eyes to see!

Biological scientists celebrate having found "the secret of life" in the information storage and processing factories discovered to reside in the nucleus of every living cell: the tiny strand of genetic material called *deoxyribonucleic acid*—DNA for short. For they have discovered that the information that instructs every one of the amazingly complex processes of life is encoded in the DNA molecules located in the nuclei of the cells that make up our bodies. It is the encoded information in this double-helix strand of nucleic material that directs, empowers, and produces the dazzling complexity that is our living body. But the *Source* of that intracellular information, the *Designer*, the *Organizer*, the *Programmer*, of that information, is hidden from them, and from us. Clearly, there is some intelligent force bringing about so marvelous a machine as the human body. No one could conceivably imagine that the encoded information in a strand of DNA just randomly arranges itself in such a way without an indwelling intelligence. And if it is conceded that there is some manner of intelligence at work here, what is its source? Science has no answer to this question. But

mustn't it be an invisible yet pervasive Intelligence similar to what Plotinus has described as "Soul"?

I think it is entirely possible that we may never fully understand the details of the transformations which gave rise to life on earth, but of this much we may be certain: The one eternal Consciousness, He whom we call God, breathes His own Life as Soul into all that is created. That God-essence, that Soul, is the Life in all life-forms. He is the substratum of all that lives and breathes, of all that is sentient and aware, and of all that appears in our world. He is the only Awareness, filling the entire universe, enlivening, animating, and constituting the consciousness of all beings. Life—in fact, all existence, including the material entropy we call death—is contained in and supported by His Being.

The essence of life cannot, therefore, be reduced simply to the complexity of any material structure, but is attributable only to the one transcendent and eternal Source of all. Life arose on earth by His power, enlivening matter through His extension as Soul in order to manifest His own Life in among the stars. Soul pours itself into individual forms, enlivening them and becoming thereby individualized conscious souls.⁸

But today, the overwhelming trend is toward a nondual materialistic worldview in which Spirit (including soul) is rejected, and Matter (including body) is all that is said to exist. This, in fact, is the nearly unanimously avowed position of the contemporary scientific community, which has, in effect, drawn the entire civilized world toward a purely materialistic worldview; and handily solved 'the

mind-body problem' by declaring that there is no problem, because there is no soul or mind, but only material bodies and their effects.

Materialists are spoken of in some types of literature as 'physicalists,' *physicalism* being the preferred scientific term for the position that everything is in fact physical, that *consciousness*, for example, is simply an attribute of a particular physical state of the animal or human brain, and not the attribute of an indwelling *Soul*. One representative of this group of skeptics, a professor of philosophy at UC Berkeley, here epitomizes the doubt of the scientific community regarding the existence of such a thing as "soul":

It is a logical possibility, though I think it extremely unlikely, that when our bodies are destroyed, our souls will go marching on. I have not tried to show that this is an impossibility (indeed, I wish it were true), but rather that it is inconsistent with just about everything else we know about how the universe works and therefore it is irrational to believe in it.⁹

But perhaps what we *know* about how the universe works is not correct. For our distinguished professor, as for so many others, consciousness does not require the necessity of a soul: "Consciousness", he says, "is just a brain process. It is a qualitative, subjective, first-person process going on in the nervous system."¹⁰ And he takes the somewhat unusual position that Descartes was wrong to define *mind* (soul) and *body*, or *consciousness* and *matter*, as two separate experiential realms; that in fact the phenomenon of

consciousness, along with its subjective nature, is just one of the ways matter—biological matter—appears and behaves, and therefore, despite its unique attributes, consciousness falls under the heading of *matter*—a biologically enhanced aspect of matter, but matter nonetheless. “At the most fundamental level,” he says:

Points of mass/energy are constituted by the forces that are described by the laws of nature. From those laws the existence of consciousness follows as a logical consequence, just as does the existence of any other biological phenomena, such as growth, digestion, or reproduction.¹¹

From the viewpoint of our representative materialist/physicalist philosophy professor, life (biology) is inherent in matter, and “consciousness is *caused* by microlevel processes in the brain,”¹² though all that has ever been actually shown by neurological evidence is that consciousness *corresponds to*, or is *accompanied by*, microlevel processes in the brain. Here is one neurobiologist addressing this issue:

Consciousness indubitably exists, and it is connected to the brain in some intelligible way, but the nature of this connection necessarily eludes us.¹³

Another says:

I doubt we will ever be able to show that consciousness is a logically necessary accompaniment to any material process, however complex.

The most that we can ever hope to show is that, empirically, processes of a certain kind and complexity appear to have it.¹⁴

Over the years leading up to the present (2009 C.E.), little progress has been made in the attempt to formulate a satisfactory theory of the material origin of consciousness. In the beginning of a recent book of memoirs (2006) by Nobel prize-winning Neurobiologist, Erich Kandel, a hopeful and promising picture of future progress is offered:

The new biology of mind ...posits that consciousness is a biological process that will eventually be explained in terms of molecular signaling pathways used by interacting populations of nerve cells.... The new science of mind attempts to penetrate the mystery of consciousness, including the ultimate mystery: how each person's brain creates the consciousness of a unique self and the sense of free will.¹⁵

But then, in the latter part of the book, he admits that

Understanding Consciousness is by far the most challenging task confronting science. ...Some scientists and philosophers of mind continue to find consciousness so inscrutable that they fear it can never be explained in physical terms.¹⁶

What we do not understand is the *hard problem* of consciousness—the mystery of how neural activity gives rise to subjective experience.¹⁷ ...Biological science can readily explain how the properties of a particular type of matter arise from the objective properties of the molecules of which it is made. What science lacks are rules for explaining how *subjective* properties (consciousness) arise from the properties of objects (interconnected nerve cells).¹⁸

It is clear to me that the disappointed expectations of materialistic science in solving the mystery of consciousness have their roots in the basic assumptions of materialists regarding the origin of the universe and the origin of life on earth. Their position on consciousness is logically dependent upon the theory that life (biological phenomena) occurs spontaneously and is intrinsic to matter, without the necessity of any extraneous operative; and that theory is in turn dependent upon the assumption that the universe itself originated from a material source without the involvement of any supernatural cause. The materialist-physicalist theory of consciousness is founded on those precedent assumptions; and without those assumptions, the physicalist theory of consciousness crumbles. It is a theory based on a theory based on a theory, each one dependent, not upon the accumulation of evidence, but upon the *lack* of empirical evidence to the contrary.

The 'archaic' theory of the *Soul* also has no evidentiary foundation. It has been suggested by some of its advocates that the individual human brain is constructed, through the process of evolution, to act

as a receiver and processor of Soul-consciousness in a manner similar to a radio that receives and processes radio signals. The radio receiver is not the source of the broadcast signal, but its range and quality determines the range and quality of the signal produced. Is it not possible that our brains act in a similar manner in relation to Soul-consciousness? One might also compare the human brain to the power and hardware drive of a computer, and the Soul to the software used to program that computer. But, despite such analogies, we clearly do not yet have a precise comprehension of how the consciousness of Soul and individual brains might interact.

No; the only hard evidence for the Soul is the subjective personal experience known to thousands, perhaps millions, who have been referred to as “mystics” or “yogis,” but whom materialists refer to as deluded and “irrational” individuals, whose “mystical” experiences they regard as aberrational hallucinations caused by some neuronal malfunction in the brain. In the interest of transparency, I must admit that I am one of those “mystics” who has been fortunate enough to experience the Divine reality; and so, I think it is both appropriate and beneficial to interject here an account of my own experience of the Divine reality in order to provide a first-hand account of just what such an experience reveals:

At the age of twenty-seven, I began experiencing the presence of interior sensations and spiritual understandings which led me to actively seek the knowledge of the existence or non-existence of God. At the time of the occurrence of my contemplative ‘vision’, I had retired to a small cabin in a secluded forest environment, and was giving all of my attention to the pursuit of that goal: the

revelation of God. One evening, I was having my usual nocturnal conversation with my divine Father; and after a while, I found myself in an elevated and finely-focused state, experiencing an intense longing for God in the very deepest part of my own soul. I felt then that my sole purpose in life was to ascend to union with the Divine, in order to be able to knowledgeably praise and glorify God for the benefit of all His children. And I was willing to die in the process, if necessary.¹⁹

As I prayed for that union, my consciousness was suddenly expanded so that I became aware of myself as all-pervasive, beyond time, and indivisible. In my newly altered awareness, 'I' had become aware of my identity with the one cosmic energy and consciousness that constituted this entire universe and all beings in it. There was no duality of Spirit and Matter, of soul and body, however. It was clear that 'I' was one undivided Essence that was *both* consciousness *and* the energy comprising form. My 'I' was seen to be the 'I' of every conscious being as well as of every inanimate object within this universe. It is an 'I' beyond time and place that fills all spatio-temporal beings with life and awareness, even though I might mistakenly attribute that 'I' exclusively to this individual body-brain complex.

More than that, as the focus of my concentration continued, I could see at a more elevated, subtler level, the unmanifest source, the transcendent Absolute, as the very font of all origination. I say that I *saw*, but it was not the seeing by a subject of an object, a second; rather, it was a recognition, from that eternal vantage point, of my

own transcendent nature, my own true Self. What I saw, I saw through identity with it rather than as a seer separate from the seen.

In this visionary experience I saw no separate soul—neither my own nor any other; but experienced my identity as the universal and all-inclusive Consciousness-Energy that manifests all this universe of forms, including the form I am accustomed to calling “my own”. Clearly, there was nothing else but the one all-pervading Divinity, with no sense of a separate personal soul-identity. I had not become immobile during this experience, but was allowed to write by candlelight my impressions as they occurred. But in reflecting on this experience in the ensuing years, many questions remained. My reason and learning told me that multiple souls exist; yet my visionary (spiritual) experience told me otherwise. For, in that unitive mystical experience, I had not ‘seen’ a soul, or even the suggestion of a soul. I had known only the indivisible spiritual unity of all existence.

Now, at last, thanks in part to the reflections of Plotinus, the truth has dawned on me: The soul is not experienced in the unitive vision because the soul is the *experiencer*! It is seeing what is above it, namely its prior: the creative aspect of God, the Divine Mind, which is its unqualified source, its own true Self, at a higher level of consciousness. It glimpses also That which is prior to the Divine Mind, namely, the Absolute, the One, *through* the Divine Mind. The individualized soul is that in us which is conscious of limited selfhood; and it is that which is silenced and made transparent, enabling it to experience its identity as the transcendent source, the Divine Mind.

IV. Individualized Souls

We are all cognizant that each of us is an individual soul that is distinct and unique in its development and experience, and, in the manifest world, has an apparent “identity” of its own, regardless of its unitive identity with other souls in the one Oversoul. This simultaneous unity and multiplicity is readily acknowledged by Plotinus; but neither he nor any other has been able to satisfactorily explain the manner in which the one Soul becomes a multitude of individualized souls; how Soul, though one and indivisible, is also, at the same time, divisible and manifold, becoming separate, individually responsible, souls. Nevertheless, he does offer an explanation:

There is one identical Soul, every separate manifestation being that Soul complete.²⁰ The differentiated souls ...issue from the unity while still constituting, within certain limits, an association. ...They strike out here and there, but are held together at the source much as light is a divided thing upon earth, shining in this house and that, while yet remaining uninterruptedly one identical substance.²¹

The entity described as “both the undivided Soul and the soul divided among bodies,” is a Soul which is at once above and below, attached to the Supreme and yet reaching down to this sphere, like a radius from a center. Thus it is that, entering this [earthly] realm,

it possesses still the vision inherent in that superior [indivisible] phase by virtue of which it maintains its integral nature unchanged. Even here [on earth] it is not exclusively the partible soul: it is still the impartible as well...²²

The nature, at once divisible and indivisible, which we affirm to be soul has not the unity of an extended thing. It does not consist of separate sections; its divisibility lies in its being present at every point of the recipient, but it is indivisible as dwelling entire in the total, and entire in any part. To have penetrated this idea is to know the greatness of the soul and its power, the divinity and wonder of its being, as a nature transcending the realm of "things."

Itself devoid of mass, it is present to all mass. It exists here and yet is [still] there, and this not in distinct phases but with unsundered identity. Thus it is "parted and not parted," or, better, it has never known partition, never become a parted thing, but remains a self-gathered integral, and is "parted among bodies" merely in the sense that bodies, in virtue of their own sundered existence, cannot receive it unless in some partitive mode. The partition, in other words, is an occurrence in body and not in soul.²³

That such individualized souls exist is clearly evident to us who know ourselves as separate, individualized, self-governing, units of self-awareness. We may understand that Soul is nothing less than an emanate of the Divine consciousness; and yet, we must also acknowledge that each soul's perspective is unique. Differences in perspective seem to arise and persist through the accumulation of individual experience, inference, and willful intent. And so, there appears a multitude of souls, united in the Divine Consciousness, but separate in manifestation. Later, we will examine the alternative theory of the Buddha, which suggests that there are no individual souls, but only aggregates of tendencies.

In Plotinus' scheme, however, because body-bound souls are uniquely distinct, they are able to formulate desires and set out to fulfill them in the (lower) material world, thereby losing sight of their Divinity. And so, in place of the one Soul, which is truly their common Source and Reality, a multitude of separate selves comes into existence, each driven by its own independent desires and circumstances, as well as by its false identification with the material body.

These individualized souls, we must not forget, are manifestations of the Divine. Nonetheless, while inhabiting or being associated with bodies, they pass through various experiences which may serve to forge a strong bond with the material world. However, over time, the indwelling Divinity instructs those 'individualized souls' by those very experiences in the errors of their ways, and returns them by various and sundry ways to the awareness of their true integral nature as the one Soul, guiding them by the most blessed path to the

reformation of their awareness of all-inclusiveness and the restoration of their natural bliss. This is known as ‘the evolution of the soul’.

According to Plotinus, the Divine Mind, in its infinite wisdom, allows more than one ‘incarnation’ for the soul to traverse this evolutionary path. The soul’s excursion into the material realm is fraught with difficulties and dangers, and may bring with it many painful and binding impressions. These must be resolved and released in order for the soul to regain its blissful freedom. And so the process of soul-evolution may be prolonged and stretched over a number of soul-incarnations. Whatever necessity requires will inevitably find a means for its accomplishment in the evolutionary journey toward truth and freedom.

Jesus put it well when he said, “You shall know the Truth, and the Truth shall make you free.” According to this understanding, a man is free insofar as he is cognizant of his essential identity with the Highest, and bound when he departs from the knowledge and awareness of his Divinity, identifying with the body/brain complex. He then succumbs to the rule of earthly necessity, and is moved willy-nilly by the causative forces inherent in Nature. He has the power, as the Divine Self, to will freely, unencumbered, uncompelled by circumstance; and, for that reason is responsible for his individual actions. All souls are linked by inclusion to the one Soul, and by extension to the Divine Mind; but only he who is cognizant, aware, of his Divine Identity, is truly free.

Meanwhile, along the way, in the soul's evolutionary journey, an inescapable justice continually operates. As Saint Paul warned, "Be not deceived: God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap."²⁴ Plotinus, acknowledging this same universal law of justice, then known as *adrastieia*, and today known as "the law of actions, or *karma*", says:

No one can ever escape the suffering entailed by ill deeds done. The divine law is ineluctable, carrying bound up, as one with it, the fore-ordained execution of its doom. The sufferer, all unaware, is swept onward towards his due, hurried always by the restless driving of his errors, until at last, wearied out by that against which he struggled, he falls into his fit place and, by self-chosen movement, is brought to the lot he never chose. And the law decrees, also, the intensity and the duration of the suffering while it carries with it, too, the lifting of chastisement and the faculty of rising from those places of pain—all by power of the harmony that maintains the universal scheme²⁵

Thus a man, once a ruler, will be made a slave because he abused his power and because the fall is to his future good. Those who have misused money will be made poor—and to the good poverty is no hindrance. Those who have unjustly killed, are killed in turn, unjustly as regards the murderer but justly as regards the victim, and those who are to suffer are

thrown into the path of those who administer the merited treatment.

It is not an accident that makes a man a slave; no one is prisoner by chance. Every bodily outrage has its due cause. The man once did what he now suffers. A man who murders his mother will become a woman and be murdered by a son. A man who wrongs a woman will become a woman, to be wronged.²⁶

We humans are, undoubtedly, of a two-fold nature: We are, in essence, identical with the Divine Consciousness, our Divine Self, which assures us of immortality and a free will; we are only secondarily individualized souls, with their accompanying karmic tendencies. We are a combination, a duality, of identities existing together in the one spectrum of Consciousness: we are the Divine Self, and we are also the divinely limited individual soul. Our essence, the one Divine Consciousness, is the only true 'I' in all the universe and beyond; It is everyone's eternal Identity. But, by God's mysterious Power of illusion, everyone born into this world takes on a limited set of characteristics as well, constituting the limited temporal identity of each, what we refer to as the individualized soul. According to that soul's previous history and its corresponding mental tendencies, the characteristics of each soul are made manifest.

The 'soul' is in essence the Divine, but as it appears within the material universe, it manifests both the Divine and the illusory—

just as in a dream, we partake of both our true conscious selves and an illusory self. The analogy is exceedingly apt, as in both instances, we retain our fundamental reality, while operating in an illusory, 'imaged', reality. The individual soul is, to a great degree, who we experience ourselves to be in this world; and we operate in this life from the past karmic tendencies we embody. However, at a more fundamental level, we are identical with the Divine Self, which comprises, not only our freedom to will and act from a level of consciousness beyond the properties and characteristics of our individualized soul, but comprises the very consciousness by which we, as souls, exist. The past karmic tendencies are very powerful in their influence; and they can lead us where we don't necessarily want to go, unless we are able to identify with our true nature as the Divine Self and turn those inherent tendencies to Divine purposes.

Here is Plotinus again, with some pertinent comments on this subject:

If man were... nothing more than a made thing [whose behavior is determined], acting and acted upon according to a fixed Nature, he could be no more subject to reproach and punishment than the mere animals. But as the scheme holds, man is singled out for condemnation when he does evil; and this with justice. For he is no mere thing made to rigid plan; his nature contains a [Divine] Principle apart and free.²⁷ ...This, no mean Principle, is... a first-hand Cause, bodiless and therefore supreme over itself, free, beyond the reach of Cosmic Cause.²⁸

We may indeed identify solely with our limited self as an individualized soul, says Plotinus;

...[But] there is another [higher] life, emancipated, whose quality is progression towards the higher realm, towards the Good and Divine, towards that Principle which no one possesses except by deliberate usage. One may appropriate [this Higher Principle], becoming, each personally, the higher, the beautiful, the Godlike; ...For every human Being is of a twofold character: there is that compromise-total [consisting of soul conjoined to body], and there is the authentic Man [the divine Self].²⁹

The great Vedantic sage, Shankaracharya, taught, “the soul is in reality none other than Brahman” (*jivo brahmaiva naparah*). And this is true; for, in essence, the soul is identical with the transcendent Source of all, and is supremely, absolutely, free. In its transcendent aspect, it is always free, immutable and unaffected by the bodily conditions or worldly circumstances of individuals. However, when the soul identifies with the conditional, it is bound; it is subject to being carried along in the floodwaters of the archetypal forces of Nature. Only when it knows and identifies with the One, the Divine Self, does it realize and manifest its true freedom. This is the view of Vedanta, and the basis for its concept of “liberation”; and this is the view of Plotinus as well.

Soul is the essential radiance of the Divine Mind, and individualized souls partake of that same reality, though by their connection to body, they are confined to time and space. These souls, enamored of the material world, become disoriented, bound by their own attachment to matter; but by a deliberate reversal of its intention, an individualized soul is able to look within, examine itself, and 'see' its Origin, its higher Self, thereby regaining awareness of its true, eternal identity. Since both Soul and Matter are the emanated products of the Divine Mind, and both consist of the Divine essence, an individual soul inhabiting a body may look within and come to realize that both its conscious self and its material casing consist of the one Divine Mind; that truly he is nothing else but that one eternal Reality.

Plotinus describes, from his own experience, the vision of a soul turned inward to its own Source:

Once pure in the Spirit realm, [gazing intently inward toward the Divine Mind] the soul too possesses that same unchangeableness: for it possesses identity of essence. When it is in that region it must of necessity enter into oneness with the Divine Mind by the sheer fact of its self-orientation, for by that intention all interval disappears; the soul advances and is taken into unison, and in that association becomes one with the Divine Mind—but not to its own destruction: the two are one, and [yet] two. In such a state there is no question of stage and change. The soul, motionless,

would be intent upon its intellectual act, and in possession, simultaneously, of its self-awareness; for it has become one simultaneous existence with the Supreme.³⁰

Here is no longer a duality but a two-in-one; for, so long as the presence holds, all distinction fades. It is as lover and beloved here [on earth], in a copy of that union, long to blend. The soul has now no further awareness of being in body and will give herself no foreign name, not man, not living being, not Being, not All. Any observation of such things falls away; the soul has neither time nor taste for them. This she sought and This she has found and on This she looks and not upon herself; and who she is that looks she has not leisure to know.

Once There she will barter for This nothing the universe holds; not though one would make over the heavens entire to her. There is nothing higher than this, nothing of more good. Above This there is no passing; all the rest, however lofty, lies on the downward path. She is of perfect judgment and knows that This was her quest, that nothing is higher.³¹

The soul wishes to remain forever in that unitive vision,

But it leaves that conjunction; it cannot suffer that unity; it falls in love with its own powers and possessions, and desires to stand apart; it leans outward, so to speak: then, it appears to acquire a memory of itself [as an individualized soul once again].³²

My own experience of this unitary vision was identical in all respects with that of Plotinus, and I shared his conclusions; but I had been puzzled regarding *souls*. There was no *soul* in my (mystical) vision! There was no soul in that vision because the “soul”, in its vision of its prior, is “taken into unison” with its prior, the Divine Mind, and is made transparent and unaware of itself as something apart. It is the soul that is *seeing*, experiencing its identity with its source, its subtler Self, as a wave’s sense of individuality might disappear as it becomes aware it is the ocean. Likewise, the soul merged in the Divine Mind doesn’t see any *other* souls, because in the Divine Mind all Soul is one; it is only when it becomes embodied that Soul becomes individualized.

So long as the soul is *not* caught up in union with the Divine Mind, the soul is inspired from within by an attracting love for God; but when the soul is merged in God, there is no longer the duality of lover and Beloved, but only one blissful Self-awareness. When the soul is ‘merged’ in the Divine Mind, it sees from the vantage point of the Eternal, and no longer sees from the spatio-temporal vantage point. In that sense, the world disappears. But, in fact, the ‘world’ continues to exist; it is just that the soul is seeing it from the inside, as the one Consciousness-Energy. Without the perspective of the

ego-self, all duality is annihilated, dissolved in the unitive Identity of the Divine Mind.

Duality—all duality—comes into existence with the descent of Consciousness from the Divine Mind-identity to the individualized soul-identity; in other words, the inexplicable leap downward in consciousness from the Eternal to the temporal. Then, instead of the one all-inclusive Identity, there are two identities: an ‘I’ and a ‘Thou’. From this initial duality, all other dualities are born: the dualities associated with time and space—such as “now” and “then”, or “here” and “there” or “near” and “far”, “night” and “day”; the dualities associated with personal identity—such as “life” and “death”, “pleasure” and “pain”, “joy” and “sorrow”, “sound” and “silence”, “moving” and “still”; and the dualities associated with possessiveness—such as “mine” and “yours”, “love” and “hate”. All these are born from the establishment of a soul-identity, an ‘I’, separate from and other than the one all-inclusive Mind.³³ From that perspective, the soul recognizes that it alone constructs duality:

Even now, I speak the word, “Thou”, and create duality;
I love and create hatred;
I am in peace, and am fashioning chaos;
Standing on the peak, I necessitate the depths.³⁴

But when the separate soul-identity is once again merged in the one Divine Mind, even if only temporarily, all these dualities disappear. Time and space also disappear, and all is Eternity once again:

But now, weeping and laughing are gone;

Night is become day;
Music and silence are heard as one;
My ears are all the universe.

All motion has ceased; everything continues.
Life and death no longer stand apart.
No I, no Thou; no now, or then.
Unless I move, there is no stillness.³⁵

In its vision of the Divine Mind, the soul, now transparent, now ascended in consciousness, experiences its own eternal Self. The soul 'sees' now that: 'I' am all-pervading, 'I' am the one Consciousness-Energy constituting all minds and bodies and all this universe, wherein all things move together of one accord and by a universal assent; and it exclaims:

I am the pulse of the turtle;
I am the clanging bells of joy.
I bring the dust of blindness;
I am the fire of song.
I am in the clouds and in the gritty soil;
In pools of clear water my image is found.³⁶

And this liberating knowledge, upon which is based the soul's conviction of its eternal and indivisible identity, remains with it always.

V. Material Bodies

Let us now turn to the question of how our bodies as well as this entire material universe came to be: Here is where we part company with Plotinus. Taking the emanation metaphor to its extreme, he imagined that, like the radiation of light, Soul, reaching the outermost extent of its radiation, lapses into the darkness of non-being, or Matter. Ignorant of the nature of matter, Plotinus engaged in a long series of erroneous reasonings, coming finally to the conclusion that Matter is beyond the fringe of “Being”; it is “indeterminateness”, “a non-existent”—he even calls it “evil”,³⁷ though in some other contexts he appears less condemnatory. In his view, the material universe had to have been brought into being by wayward souls, in their outward projections far afield of their source, the Divine Mind. Today, much knowledge has been gathered regarding the origin and constituency of the material universe, both empirically and in mystical vision; and on both counts the Platonist/Neoplatonist view is rejected as unsatisfactory.

Science, or empirical knowledge, looks to comprehend the spatio-temporal universe; whereas mystical vision opens up an entirely new realm of experience grounded in the Eternal. The sense-experience of a world of multiple beings in a universe of temporal activity is wholly replaced in the mystical vision by an undivided, non-relational, and timeless realm of pure Identity with the Divine Mind. In this, my own experience was somewhat dissimilar to what Plotinus describes; I found myself suddenly ‘seeing’ from an eternal vantage point. And from that eternal ‘I’, as the Divine Mind, I experienced an emanation going out from Myself, spreading

outwardly as the universe of form. It was seen to be projected in a manner similar to the expiration of a breath, and once again withdrawn. In union with the Divine Mind, I experienced this 'expiration' and 'inspiration' of the Divine breath, as the vapor of my love flew to the four corners of the world, and 'I' declared:

I have but breathed, and everything is rearranged and set in order once again. A million worlds begin and end in every breath, and in this breathing all things are sustained.³⁸

The universal material manifestation was seen to be contained in and identical with that divine breath, an operation of divine will, so that:

All things move together of one accord;
Assent is given throughout the universe to every falling grain.³⁹

Having seen the world from this portal of eternity, how differently it is seen when viewing it once again from the portal of time and space! My own mystical vision revealed that the Divine Mind 'breathes' forth Its own essence in the form of Light, in a cyclic manner, followed by a period wherein that Light-Energy that forms the cosmos is withdrawn, much as in our own human experience a breath is exhaled and alternatively inhaled. From our human perspective, the periods of cosmic manifestation and withdrawal endure for tens of billions of annual revolutions of our earth in its

elliptical path around the Sun. But from the perspective of the Eternal, these periods last but the space of a breath.

Had there been someone to see it from a temporal vantage point, the cyclic initiation of this Divine breath would have been seen to manifest around 14 billion years ago as ‘the Big Bang’ or ‘Great Radiance’ by which the phenomenal universe is produced. At that instant, an immense radiation of high-frequency Energy was released that resulted in the formation of elementary bonding particles of matter, which then formed the stars, galaxies, life forms, and eventually us. That universe of forms is coextensive with and interpenetrated by God’s Spiritual essence manifesting as Soul, which guides and moves everything “together of one accord.” And, since we partake of both the evolutionary Energy and the Consciousness inherent in Soul, we are comprised of, and contain within us, a dual-sidedness: We have both a material and a mental constituency; we are both body (evolved Energy) and mind (Consciousness, or Soul).

Though these two aspects of our being appear, from the spatio-temporal perspective, to be separate, they are, from the eternal perspective, one. Both Consciousness (Soul) and Energy (Matter) are united in the Divine Mind, the creative Power of God. And together, they constitute all being. At the end of the universal cycle, all material forms revert to Divine Energy, which ceases its transformations and merges into the Divine Mind from which it came. Soul also is retained in its originating source, the Divine Mind. In fact, Soul and the Divine Mind were never two; Soul is merely the Divine Mind *in extantia*. At the end of Its manifestory

cycle, the Divine Mind of the One rests, dormant, prior to projecting once again an apparent universe of conscious souls and forms, another seeming duality upon His/Its eternal oneness.

In order to consolidate our empirical observations with what has been seen from the contemplative state regarding how the material universe comes to be, we must first demolish some popular myths: Contemporary cosmological science has ingrained in us the idea that this manifest universe is the product of the explosion of an extremely dense speck of condensed matter that just happened to be floating in the eternal void prior to “the Big Bang”. This dimensionless point of infinite density is referred to by physicists as a *singularity*. The concept of a ‘singularity’ came about as a result of the attempt to mentally run the expansion of the universe in reverse, whereby we see in our imagination, as in the rewinding of a film, this expanded matter brought back into a proximity which at some point becomes an infinite density, compacted into a single point; hence, a ‘singularity’. But that is merely the picture that the imagination offers in its attempt to envision a reversal of the present universal expansion. It is not necessarily true, however, that our universe actually began as an infinitely dense point.

Some theorists speculate that perhaps there was no singularity, but instead a quantum vacuum, seething with activity; and the fluctuating activity of the quanta in this vacuum spontaneously produced matter particles, and hence the manifestation of the entire material universe. But this theory leaves open the question of ‘from whence came this quantum vacuum and all these fluctuating

quanta?’ just as the singularity theory begs the question of ‘from whence came this singularity?’

Having been graced, in the contemplative state, with a unitive vision of the transcendent Reality, I dismiss both the singularity theory and the quantum fluctuation theory. Rather, it is my contention, my certainty, based on that spiritual revelation, that the universe originated in the eternal Consciousness of God, and was initiated by His Divine Power in the manner of a great Breath of Energy, which transformed as it expanded into a world of material substance. That burgeoning universe of transformed divine Energy was permeated from its beginning by the divine Consciousness in which and of which it was born.

According to the standard scientific Big Bang model of the origin of the universe, the Big Bang was the explosive expansion of a pre-existent primary state consisting of an ultra-dense concentration of mass-energy.⁴⁰ Yet those scientists who accept this model have refused to speculate on where, why, and how such an ultra-dense concentration of mass-energy came to be in the first place. That, they say, is beyond the purview of ‘empirical science’; and of course it is.

I have to wonder, however, why these scientists so easily accept the idea of a pre-existent *singularity*, but have been so unwilling to hypothesize the “creation” or “emanation” by a transcendent Mind of a sudden initial burst of Energy that subsequently resulted in the formation of expanding matter by a process of energy-matter conversion. Is it simply to avoid allowing the possibility of a

supernaturally initiated cosmogeny? Is it possible that the Big Bang cosmology of contemporary physics is merely an ideational framework constructed to avoid acknowledging a supernatural Origin and to support instead a materialistic metaphysics?

Whatever the answer to that question might be, let us now depart from the traditional materialistic model, and make a bold and adventurous enquiry into the possibility that it might have been (Divine) Energy that started it all, and let's see where this theory takes us. If we hypothesize that it was the appearance of a sudden flash of Divine Energy that precipitated this expanding universe, we must ask, "What kind of Energy could result in a material universe?" There is an ancient, pre-scientific, tradition in India according to which, the material universe was produced from sound: specifically the *pranava*, said to be audible as the sound, "Aum", or "Om". No one, however, has succeeded in producing matter from this or any other sound, or even formulating a process by which this might be accomplished. Indeed, it appears that *sound* itself is in all cases produced by matter; not the other way around. However, it is a proven fact that *light-energy* is transformable to material particles—energy and matter being interchangeable states of the same thing.

We must ask, then, "Mightn't it have been an immense burst of what we have come to call 'electromagnetic radiation' —in other words, *Light*—that produced this vast universe of forms?" Light certainly would fit the requirements! And such a beginning would not only provide a confirmation of the account found in many religious documents; it would clearly account for the initial heat and

expansion known to have been produced in the earliest stages of the universe's origin.

Scientists of our contemporary world have not seriously considered this theory, however. Rather than positing a spiritual source, or even a radiant energy source, their immediate instinct is to suppose that there was an original phenomenal entity that somehow 'blew up', scattering matter throughout the length and breadth of space-time. But, just for the purpose of following out the supernaturally produced Light theory to its logical ends, let us imagine for a moment that in the beginning there *was* a supernaturally produced burst of high-energy light, and examine whether or not the existence of space-time and this material universe could possibly have formed and evolved from that initial Energy burst.

VI. The Phenomenon of Light

Anyone familiar with the peculiar nature and behavior of light must be profoundly struck by the stubborn incomprehensibility of this unique and elusive 'stuff'. Many scientists and philosophers over the ages have sought to comprehend the nature of light without success, among them Albert Einstein. Though Einstein made extraordinary discoveries involving light's invariable speed, its relation to time and space, and its corpuscular nature, he was never able to fathom just what this 'stuff' called "light" *is*. In 1917, long after the publication of his Special and General Theories of Relativity, he wrote: "For the rest of my life I will reflect on what light is!"⁴¹ and thirty-four years later, in 1951, he admitted: "All

the fifty years of conscious brooding have brought me no closer to the answer to the question, 'What are light quanta [photons]?' Of course, today every rascal thinks he knows the answer, but he is deluding himself."⁴²

Why is light so difficult to comprehend? Einstein's perplexity over the nature of light was based on the recognition that, at the submicroscopic quantum level, the properties of light are indescribable. A photon of light is neither wave nor particle, though it can appear in either guise. It is not a substance, but an intangible and indefinable *essence* that some have likened to a mental rather than a physical reality; and yet all that we perceive as the physical, 'material' world is made of it. This 'stuff' called *light* is miraculously endowed with the ability to transform itself into what we call 'material' particles. And, even though we can describe and predict this transformation, it is clearly an *a priori* capability that can only be described as "miraculous". In addition, light, by its very nature, expands from its source at a constant and absolute 186,000 miles/sec. Space-time is measurable only in relation to the absolute speed of light radiation. So, if the initial appearance of light created space-time, those space-time parameters would have expanded at the rate of 186,000 miles/sec. Space-time, it seems, is merely an effect of light, and as it expanded, that light cooled and transformed itself into material (mass-bearing) particles, and the expansion rate of the material universe decreased accordingly.

Light, or electromagnetic radiation, does not consist of matter; that is, it has no mass, but is an insubstantial, though ubiquitous, form of energy. Nonetheless, in its most energetic states, it is convertible

into ‘matter’; and *vice versa*. This is due to the now well-known interconvertibility of mass and energy, according to Einstein’s formula: $E=mc^2$. For example, when an electron bound to a nucleus makes a “quantum jump” from a higher energy level (orbital) to a lower one, it gives off that same amount of energy in the form of a photon of light. When an electron and a positron (its antiparticle opposite) collide, they both annihilate in a flash of light (photons). When a proton and an antiproton collide, they are both annihilated in a flash of light (photons). Why are mass and energy interconvertible? No one knows. Apparently, these particles and antiparticles are merely returning to their ‘ground’ state. From light they came, and to light they must return.

“Visible light”, as we all know, forms but a small segment of the electrical and magnetic field that extends outwardly from its source in wavelike undulations of varying frequencies and wavelengths, called the electromagnetic (EM) spectrum. In the vacuum of space, EM radiation travels nearly 300 million meters (186,000 miles) per second, or 670 million miles per hour; and can be variously described and labeled according to its different wavelengths. But, as Albert Einstein has shown, it is also measurable as tiny packets or *quanta* of energy called *photons*, measured according to their energy in electron volts (eV). Light can be described either as a wave or a particle, depending on the method used to measure it. And though no one seems able to rationally describe or account for this wave-particle duality, in order to make some verbal sense of it, we say that EM waves are *associated with*, or *complementary to*, the light quanta known as photons. Naturally, *matter* also possesses this

characteristic of wave-particle duality, since *matter* is nothing more than light-*energy* appearing as form and substance.

The entire EM spectrum includes cosmic gamma rays, x-rays, ultraviolet light, the visible spectrum, infrared, microwaves, radar, FM radio, AM radio, and Direct electrical current; ranging in wavelength from 10^{-15} (a point with fourteen zeros, and then a one) of a meter to indefinitely long. At one end of the EM spectrum, this charged field vibrates as short transverse waves of very high frequency; these are the gamma-rays and x-rays. At the other end of the spectrum, wave lengths can be indefinitely long and the frequencies very low; these are the radio and long-wave radio waves. In between the high and low-frequency waves of this spectrum are varying EM wavelengths such as those of visible light. Visible light is but a small portion of the EM spectrum, consisting of wavelengths from 0.4 to 0.7 micrometers (one millionth of a meter)—i.e., about half the length of a bacterium.

As in all wavelular phenomena, the shorter the wavelength, the higher is the wave's frequency; and the longer the wavelength, the lower is the wave's frequency. Frequency is measured in units called hertz (abbreviated Hz.), after the nineteenth century German physicist, Heinrich Hertz. One hertz means one oscillation per second. For example, radio waves in AM broadcasting have a wavelength of 300 meters, and vibrate at the frequency ranging from 530 kilohertz (530,000 hertz) to 1.6 megahertz (1,600,000 hertz). By contrast, gamma rays, with the extremely short wavelength of 10^{-15} meter, may have the incredible frequency of 300 Ehz (one exahertz=one quintillion [10^{18}] hertz).

Though light is energy, and massless, it can be converted, or transformed, into mass-bearing material particles (according to the formula: $E=mc^2$). In fact, high energy, short-wavelength light (such as a gamma ray) routinely decays spontaneously into particle-antiparticle pairs—and vice versa. When we speak of high-energy light as an EM *wave*, we speak of it as high-frequency (300 Ehz), short wavelength (10^{-15} m) radiation; when we speak of it as *particulate*, or *corpuscular*, we must regard it as consisting of photons, each photon with an energy in the realm of 1.24 MeV (million electron volts).

Gamma rays, then, are the highest frequency EM waves, consisting of the highest energy photons, so far discovered. These waves originate in the nuclei of atoms, and may be released by nuclear explosions. They can also be produced in certain laboratory experiments, for example, by certain radioactive materials, or when a particle and an antiparticle annihilate each other. Conversely, gamma rays are capable of decaying spontaneously into particle/antiparticle pairs, such as an electron and a positron. Gamma rays also exist naturally throughout the cosmos, even showing up in the formation of terrestrial lightning bolts. In 1997, astronomers using the Compton Gamma Ray Observatory (GRO) satellite, found evidence for a gigantic, diffuse halo of gamma rays around our own Milky Way galaxy that they are currently endeavoring to know more about; and distant cosmic gamma ray bursts appear almost daily to astronomer's telescopes.

Cosmic gamma ray bursts are brief bursts of high-energy light that come to us from up to 12 billion light-years away (in other words, light that was emanated 12 billion years ago). Astronomers have speculated that they are from distant supernovae, giant collapsing stars in the midst of their death-throes; although researchers could find no supernova associated with a 2006 burst observed by NASA's Swift satellite. In March of 2008, the same NASA satellite recorded "the brightest explosion ever seen" when a massive star 7.5 billion light-years away collapsed to form a black hole, driving powerful gamma ray jets outward. In September of 2009, another gamma ray burst (designated GRB090902B) produced even higher energies—up to 33.4 billion electron volts or about 13 billion times the energy of visible light.⁴³ Such cosmic gamma ray bursts are so energetic that their brightness is equal to the brightness of all the stars of the entire universe combined. One burst of 10 seconds duration can release more energy than the light emitted by our sun in its entire 10 billion-year lifetime.

As we earlier suggested, it is possible that all the matter in this universe originated from a spectacularly large burst of high-energy light, or electromagnetic radiation; but is such an evolution, from light to matter, possible? Yes; as we have seen, it is. It *is* possible and highly probable that, in the very earliest moments of the Big Bang, in that unimaginably hot, spreading radiation field, some of the densely packed, intensely active, high-energy photons spontaneously decayed (transformed) into mass-bearing particles and antiparticles. Spontaneous decay is a common fate of high-energy photons, such as gamma rays. And, while nearly all of the resulting particle/antiparticle pairs created by photon-decay would

have been annihilated upon contact with each other, as it happens, there was a slight disparity or “asymmetry”⁴⁴ in the total number of particles over antiparticles; and for that reason, there would still have been one-in-every ten billion particles remaining—in the form of electrons, protons, and neutrons—to constitute the building blocks of the entire material universe.

Such a real possibility lends credence to the theory that a sudden burst of (Divine) Energy in the form of an intense field of electromagnetic radiation, *and not the explosion of a pre-existent super-dense speck of condensed mass-energy*, constituted the origin of our universe. But, of course, such a “Great Radiance” theory could be regarded as a scientifically viable alternative to the ‘Big Bang’ theory only as a non-falsifiable speculation, one not subject to experimental confirmation. Both possibilities are equally plausible, and equally unconfirmable. Even the Cosmic Background Microwave Energy that was detected by Penzias and Wilson might be equally cited as evidence for either the ‘Great Radiance’ scenario *or* the ‘Big Bang’ scenario. However, scientists are extremely reluctant to even consider the possibility of a supernatural source and origin to our universe.

We may suppose, further, that what we call *spacetime* is a correlate of light and its innate proclivity for very rapidly spreading itself in all directions. Where there is extension, there is *space*; where there is a sequence of events, there is *time*. And while time and space are relative to the speed of light, light itself, the primary ‘stuff’ of the universe, is the sole constant by which time and space are measured.

Like Einstein, we can describe and measure it, but we struggle unsuccessfully to know and understand just what it is.

Now, if it was a sudden pulse of Divinely-produced Energy that created the universe, it would have to have been a tremendous amount of Energy. We know this because of Einstein's formula which declares that the amount of initiating Energy that would account for all the mass in the universe would have to have been the product of all the mass in the universe times the speed of light squared. I don't know how much mass the universe contains, but you would have to multiply that figure by 448, 900, 000,000,000, 000 (the speed of light squared in mph) to get the amount of Energy required to produce it. It is easy to see that it would have to have been quite a burst of Energy!

If a thousand suns appeared simultaneously in the sky, their light might dimly resemble the [radiant] splendor of that Omnific Being!⁴⁵

Such an immense burst of electromagnetic energy would no doubt follow the same progressive development as that suggested by the physicists who advocate a 'natural' origin of the universe: In the first moments, the Energy-Matter and Matter-Energy transformations would alternate in rapid flux. Expanding at the speed of light, some of that Energy would be converted to particle-antiparticle pairs, most of which would annihilate, and some of the remaining matter in the form of quarks, along with their interacting gluons (what is called a *quark-gluon plasma*⁴⁶), would eventually combine to form protons and neutrons; other particles, the free electrons,

would inevitably bond to the protons, forming the element, hydrogen.

These hydrogen atoms would collect in the form of a gas; and this gas, reaching a large enough volume, would be affected by a gravitational force (that Einstein says is a function of the geometry of spacetime), which, in turn, would draw such gas nebulae into a density great enough to initiate nuclear fusion; and thus stars, and whole galaxies of stars would be born. In the interior furnaces of these stars, heavier elements would be created; and when the cores of the stars would collapse, they would explode into space; and their remnants would form into a second generation of stars, like our sun and its satellite planets. And, of course, it all began with a great burst of light!

Is such a scenario possible? Or plausible? Does this explanation fit all the available physical and mathematical data? I don't know with certainty. I leave it for those scientifically trained experts familiar with the properties and possibilities of high-energy radiation and the intricacies of nucleosynthesis to determine. For my part, I only know for a certainty that this universe is a product of the Divine Energy of God, breathed into existence by His loving grace, and mingled with His own Divine Consciousness.

We must ask ourselves: 'How could such a thing as an immense and awesomely productive burst of light come to be where before there was nothing? Can a burst of light occur without a physical source?' This same question of origination presents itself, whether it is the pure energy of light we speak of, or a super-dense entity

(singularity) about to explode, or a fluctuating quantum vacuum spontaneously sprouting universes.

There could have been no *natural* cause, for there was no “nature” as yet. There could have been no material cause; for there was no “material” anything as yet. There could have been no “place” for such an event to “occur”, for there was no space as yet. There was no “when” for it to happen, for there was no time as yet. Only now we are able to place it at the beginning of time by counting back in earth years to that beginning. In attempting to speak of the origin of time, space, and mass-energy, our very language, our calculations, become meaningless, having no reference or basis. Can something appear without a cause? Why no, of course not. But can something appear without a ‘natural’ —that is, *material*— cause? Well, it had to have, didn’t it?

The materialists hold that all forms of matter, including biological (living) matter, is the product of ‘natural’ causes, ‘natural’ processes. But what do they mean by ‘natural’? They explain that there is no need to postulate a ‘supernatural’ agency in the creation and evolution of the universe, for, they say, “It is simply the nature of light-Energy to “decay” into material particles; and it is simply the nature of those particles, such as quarks and electrons, to act under the attraction of the electromagnetic and ‘color’ charges inherent in those particles.” Further, they say, “It is simply ‘natural’ processes that account for the fact that the aggregates of particles that we call “atoms,” collect together to form the molecules that make up the various ‘elements’ of chemical, material and biological substances; and these molecules have a ‘natural’ propensity to

mutate into biological tissue and to evolve by ‘natural’ means into the various life forms that populate the earth.” “In short,” they say, “the entire universe is a product of ‘natural’ material processes.”

One even hesitates to point out to such foolish people that the ‘Great Radiation’ from which the entire universe is formed did not spontaneously arise from *nothing* and from *nowhere*, as they so intently wish to believe. By seeing such Energy as a ‘given’ condition, as a ‘natural’ phenomenon, we are able to regard all its subsequent transformations also as ‘natural’. How easily we take it for granted that we live in a universe where Energy and Matter are interconvertible! And by seeing that condition as ‘natural’, we fail to see how extraordinary and *supernatural* it truly is.

It is by labeling the manifestation of that initial supernatural Energy as ‘natural’, that the rationalizers of materialism justify their simplistic and utterly false view of all existence. The manifestation of that initial Energy is indeed ‘natural’—for a supernatural creative Power. The transformation of that initial light-Energy into material particles is indeed ‘natural’—for a supernatural Essence imbued with Soul-Intelligence. The attractive and repulsive forces inherent in the particles causing them to cluster into atoms is indeed ‘natural’—for a supernatural Essence imbued with Soul-Intelligence. The spontaneous congregation and organization of clusters of atoms into molecules is indeed ‘natural’—for a supernatural Essence imbued with Soul-Intelligence. Given the properties of light and of matter, all these developments are indeed ‘natural’, but mustn’t we ask, “Given by what or by whom?”

The Light-Energy that emanated from God [the Divine Mind] at the moment of Creation around 14 billion years ago was, and is, a *spiritual* substance. The *material* universe which developed from it is still a *spiritual* substance, though we call it “material” due to its form, mass, and apparent substance. The differentiation between *spiritual* and *material* is imaginary, is non-existent; matter is Energy, and Energy is God’s Light-breath. Nothing exists but God, whether manifest or unmanifest. All matter—all that we experience as the world about us, including ourselves—is born of the Divine Light. Our bodies are formed of the ‘matter’ that was produced from that Divine Light, and therefore consist of a Divine substance. Our bodies are God’s Energy manifest in form. In the soul’s experience of union, it is clearly seen that all that exists in this world is God’s manifestation; and the soul cries out:

O my God, even this body is Thine own!
 Though I call to Thee and seek Thee amidst chaos,
 Even I, who seemed an unclean pitcher amidst Thy waters,
 Even I am Thine own.⁴⁷

From the initial ‘Great Radiance’ comes all that exists as material objects and all activity in the universe today and for all time. Every exploding star, every movement of gaseous nebulae far-off in space, every object and every motion—including the blinking of your eye, has its source and origin in that initial burst of light. According to the Law of the conservation of mass-energy, the First Law of Thermodynamics, it is an undeviating quantity of Energy. According to this Law: ‘the sum of the mass-energy within a closed system (like the universe) remains constant’. In other words, the

total initial Energy of which all material forms and all manifestations of energy in the universe are constituted, remains always the same total. It means that all that we do and perceive, including our own bodies and its movement, is made of that initial Light, and is nothing else but that original Light.

But there is another existent, isn't there: the consciousness by which we perceive, by which we are aware, by which we think and reflect and conceive and dream. The living consciousness, by which we *know* ourselves to exist, is the radiant consciousness of God, which we call "Soul". It invisibly permeates the material universe, and makes us living beings, enlivened by God's own Being, linking us by an indissoluble bond to Him, through which we share the one Identity, the one undivided Self.

VII. The Undivided Self

In Plotinus' scheme, Soul is the eternal radiation of the Divine, inhering in an eternal universe. But today we know that the universe is not eternal; it is originated and extinguished in a periodic cycle. We must see, therefore, that in those periods in which there is no temporal universe to inhabit, Soul must either remain confined solely to the intelligible (spiritual) world, or remain unmanifest in the Eternal as mere potential. For it stands to reason that, while the Eternal contains in Itself the capability of radiating Itself eternally, It has nothing for Its all-pervasive Soul-essence to permeate until a universe was 'created'. While Its

radiance was there eternally *in potentia*, that radiance did not—could not—manifest physically until a universe came into being.

It is here that we depart from the vision of Plotinus: for Plotinus taught that Soul, emanating from the divine Mind, infiltrates Matter, flowing into it in a distinct manner, as smoke infiltrates a room. But this idea must be challenged. The conscious Spirit is eternally existent; It exists prior to form, even prior to space. Therefore, It has no need to *flow into* the universe of form. The Divine Mind is eternally present. It is the universe of form, the phenomenal universe, that comes and goes *within* the field of Consciousness that is the Divine Mind. As a dreamed form arises within our individual mind and then dissolves back into it, so does the universe of form arise from within the one Consciousness, and then is dissolved back into that Consciousness. Plotinus got it wrong: the conscious Spirit does not *flow into* the universe of forms; that Spirit (the eternal Consciousness) is the very Ground and substance of the universe of forms. The universe and Spirit (the eternal Consciousness) were never separate, never distinct; the universe is ‘made of’ the eternal Consciousness. ‘Matter’ is the projected dream-stuff of the one Consciousness.

So, it must be acknowledged that the radiation of Divine Consciousness, as Soul, necessarily permeates and pervades the nascent universe at its inception. The Divine Light originates in the one Consciousness, and manifests as a universe of forms within that one Consciousness. That universe is therefore inherently permeated by the divine Consciousness, just as the thoughts of our

own minds are permeated with consciousness due to their existence within our conscious minds.

I firmly believe that, at the initiation of the matter-producing Energy of the “Big Bang”, or “Great Radiance”, God, the one Spirit, the eternal Consciousness, was already present everywhere, and, that all the material bodies that then came into physical existence were permeated by that ubiquitous Consciousness. It is in this way that everyone and everything is ensouled. Clearly, body and soul are of different natures; or put more aptly, nature (body) exists only in the temporal frame; the Divine Consciousness (Soul) is eternal in its nature. They are both of God, but the soul is of the *essence* of God, the eternal Reality; while the body is merely one form among many in a transient projection of God’s eternal Energy. The unity of body and soul consists in their common origin in the Divine Mind; but they are different in type and in substance, and therefore, they each have an independent existence. Otherwise, how could soul and body separate, as they are seen to do when the body ceases to function as a viable host?

It is, of course, the body that “dies”, and not the soul. *Soul* is just another name for the Divine Consciousness. It is eternal. *Body* is of a different stuff. It is temporal and has a limited duration. It is formed of Divine Energy, which is itself an eternal propensity of the Divine Mind; but once that Energy is solidified in the guise of matter, it follows the inexorable law of entropy, losing its formal integrity over time. When Soul leaves the body, not only does the consciousness and the life-force depart the body, but also the cohesive principle operative in the physical body departs. The

molecular structure of the body breaks down; the atomic structure breaks down, and the matter that once was living tissue dissolves into its elementary constituents, and eventually to dust. This process is commonly experienced, and is undeniable. Body, no longer enlivened by Soul, dissolves into its constituent elements, and is absorbed into the surrounding matter, all of which eventually returns to its initial state as divine Energy; while the soul continues to evolve toward awareness of its Divine identity in accordance with the Divine Will.

So, this entire phenomenal universe exists within God and is ensouled by God; it is a universe made of God's Light contained in and permeated by His living Field of Consciousness. How do we know that this is so? Many individualized souls have *seen*, experienced, this truth within their own consciousness in the contemplative state. When the mind is stilled and made receptive to that revelation, the all-pervading Consciousness-Energy reveals itself as the eternal Source of our own awareness, the eternal 'I AM', as well as the Source of the Energy that constitutes our bodies and all other matter.

When I was immersed in the unitive vision, I wondered "Where is the temple (of the body)? Which is the imperishable (soul), and which the abode (the body)?" For there was to be seen no separate body-temple with an imperishable soul within. There was no division to be found at all. In the Divine Mind, all is Consciousness-Energy! It is an inseparable unity, and all of it is imperishable. It is only the various *shapes* or forms produced by the transformation of Energy into matter, that are so changeable and perishable; but the

Source, the Divine Mind, is one, eternal, and indivisible, as is the Energy that It contains as Its Creative Power.

The duality of body and soul, of Matter and Spirit, exists only in the temporal world of appearance. In the Eternal (the Divine Mind), this duality, this separation, does not exist. In the Divine Mind, they are indistinguishable. Like water and ice in a glass, they are separable though they are one in essence. Those who have 'seen' into their own eternal reality have realized that both the subtle Soul, containing life and consciousness, and the Energy constituting gross Matter, are emanated, or radiated, from the Divine Mind. This is why the mystic, experiencing his identification with the Divine Mind, experiences himself, not simply as Soul, but as an illimitable awareness that is *both* universal Soul *and* universal Matter. Matter and Soul are both projections of the Divine Mind. The unmanifest Light and the manifested Light together form all that is. Ultimately, they are one, as they both derive from the same One. In the end, when the universal cycle comes to an end, the projected Energy of which matter consists and the projected Soul of which individualized souls consist are both resolved back into the one Divine Mind.

At the end of a universal cycle, the expansion of the material universe is reversed, and matter, as it is compacted, returns to its Energy state, as it existed in the beginning; and is withdrawn back into the Divine Mind. It is 'the Great Radiance' in reverse. All souls return to the one Soul, and are united in the Divine Mind. The Divine Mind returns to dormancy in the One, and there follows an extensive and refreshing period of rest. Then, again, at Its own

pleasure, the One reawakens Its creative Power, the Divine Mind; Soul is once again radiated, and a burst of Energy is once again initiated to produce a bright new expanding universe of life and death. In the Divine Mind, these opposites of life and death never stand apart, of course. There are no opposites in the Divine Mind. So, while body and soul, Energy and Spirit, appear separate and divided at the spatio-temporal level, in the true Self—that is, in the Divine Mind—they are one and the same.

The Divine Mind, being integral to the One, is beyond time and space, and all manifestation; It is the eternal Identity of all that exists. It transcends the universe, while constituting the essence of the universe—as a dreaming human mind transcends its dream-images, while constituting both the consciousness and the essence of those dream-images. Consciousness is not the property of matter, or of any individual being; it is not produced by any material process; but rather it is the property of the Divine Mind, and pervades all matter throughout the universe. The Divine Mind is also the hidden producer of all matter through its cyclic projection of the Divine Energy. It is dual-faceted: as Soul It is the fundamental nature of conscious Being; as Energy, it is the foundation and essence of the phenomenal universe. We are the evolved manifestations of this Divine activity, capable of knowing the eternal Consciousness by following our own consciousness back to its Divine Source, where we awake to our own eternal Self, beyond time, beyond space.

Earlier, I stated that we have “two” identities; but, actually, we have three—make that *four*—identities. Many people identify almost

exclusively with the grossest and most evident of these, the transient Energy-based physical body. By virtue of the genes passed down from our parents, this physical body, which determines our manifest appearance as well as our bodily health, is related to our immediate family, and constitutes for many their primary and most prominent identity—as a family member, as son or daughter, and later as father or mother themselves. However, the subtler body, the soul, is closer to our true essence; it is constituted of our own inclinations, tendencies, wishes and dreams, inherited as karma from our previous lifetimes.

Soul, breathed into the nascent universe, with one Will pervading all matter, molds the material world to its ends, and so, each individual soul enters into the Energy-based setting which God has prepared for it and that is appropriate to its individual purposes. Each of these souls is made of the breath of God—is His essence individualized. Our subtlest and most significant identity—what we might call our “causal” body—is of course the Divine Mind, the Creator. He is our true and eternal Self. We may count the fourth, the One, as our “supercasual” identity. But we have a great deal of evolution ahead of us in order to become aware of *that* ultimate identity. Nonetheless, it is clear that that is where the evolutionary energy inherent in us is leading us.

We are made of the Consciousness and Energy of God. His Consciousness manifests as Soul, and His Energy is sent forth to establish the material universe at the ‘Big Bang’, ‘Big Burst’, ‘Great Radiance’, or whatever you wish to call it. And the true Origin, Source, and *initiator* of that field of Consciousness and Energy, is

the One. All that exists is His. It is His projection, His exuberant radiance. Nothing else exists but that nameless One. Our sense of 'I' too is Him. 'I' am the one and only 'I' that is. My consciousness is His consciousness. My body, as well as the whole universe, is His manifest form. I and the Father are one. If you ask a beam of light, "Who are you?" it will answer, "I am the Sun." If you ask a wave on the sea, "Who are you?" it will answer, "I am the ocean." If you ask a soul, "Who are you?" it must answer, "I am the One in all. I am He who alone exists now and forever. I am the light of the one Sun; I am a wave on the one Sea; I am a living breath of the one Life. I am in all that is seen or unseen. I am the One in all."

Jesus said, "I am the Light that is over all things. I am all: From me all has come forth, and to me all returns. Split a piece of wood; I am there. Lift up the stone, and you will find me there."⁴⁸

Unfortunately, many believe that this is a truth that applies only to one unique historical figure; but it is a *universal truth*, a truth for all, and a truth to be realized: *I* am not merely this body, not just this spark of consciousness, nor merely the entire manifested universe; I am the Source of the universe, and the universe itself. I am both the subject and the object. There is nothing else here but I AM. Here is what the great Shankaracharya said:

The fool thinks, 'I am the body'. The intelligent man thinks, 'I am an individual soul united with the body'. But the wise man, in the greatness of his knowledge and

spiritual discrimination, sees the Self as [the only] reality, and thinks, 'I am Brahman'.⁴⁹

I am that Brahman, one without a second, the ground of all existences. I make all things manifest. I give form to all things. I am within all things, yet nothing can taint me. I am eternal, pure, unchangeable, absolute.

I am that Brahman, one without a second. Maya [the Creative Power], the many-seeming, is merged in me. I am beyond the grasp of thought, the essence of all things. I am the truth. I am knowledge. I am infinite. I am absolute bliss.

I am beyond action; [I am] the reality which cannot change. I have neither part nor form. I am absolute. I am eternal. Nothing sustains me, I stand alone. I am one without a second.

I am the Soul of the universe. I am all things, and above all things. I am one without a second. I am pure consciousness, single and universal. I am joy. I am life everlasting.⁵⁰

* * *

PART TWO: THE VISION OF GOD

Of that Heaven which is above the heavens what earthly poet ever did or ever will sing worthily? It is such as I will describe: for I must dare to speak the truth, when Truth is my theme. There abides the very Being with which true knowledge is concerned; the colorless, formless, intangible Essence visible only to mind, the pilot of the soul. Every soul which is capable of receiving the food proper to it rejoices at beholding Reality. ...She beholds knowledge absolute, not in the form of generation or of relation, which men call existence, but Knowledge absolute in Existence absolute.

—Plato¹

I. Who Sees God?

It is only God (the Divine Mind) who sees God—but He does so through the souls of men. Soul is able to search within itself, and ascend in consciousness all the way to God. If it were not an expression of the Divine, it could not do that. When a soul rises to the vision of God, it is no longer soul, but is merged in and made one with God, so that it is not the soul that sees, but God Himself who is seeing Himself. Looking within itself, it sees its own original Self, an infinite, eternal, and all-pervasive Self. No longer two, soul and God are one Spirit, seeing Itself. Nonetheless, the vision is

retained by the soul, even after the soul is no longer united in vision with God.

And so, the soul is able to speak of the experience. And the story told is identical with that of all other souls who have seen God. There have been, over the centuries, many well-known and unknown souls who have seen Him, this soul among them. And it may be useful to look to some of the best known seers who have described this experience, in order to piece together a consolidated description of what has been seen:

From **the Upanishads** [10th to 4th century B.C.E.]:

He cannot be seen by the eye, and words cannot reveal Him. He cannot be realized by the senses, or by austerity or the performance of rituals. By the grace of wisdom and purity of mind, He can be seen in the silence of contemplation.²

When a wise man has withdrawn his mind from all things without, and when his spirit has peacefully left all inner sensations, let him rest in peace, free from the movement of will and desire. ... For it has been said: There is something beyond our mind, which abides in silence within our mind. It is the supreme mystery beyond thought. Let one's mind and subtle spirit rest upon that and nothing else.

... When the mind is silent, beyond weakness and

distraction, then it can enter into a world, which is far beyond the mind: the supreme Destination. ... Then one knows the joy of Eternity.

... Words cannot describe the joy of the soul whose impurities are washed away in the depths of contemplation, who is one with the Atman, his own Self. Only those who experience this joy know what it is. ... As water becomes one with water, fire with fire, and air with air, so the mind becomes one with the infinite Mind and thus attains Freedom.³

When in inner union he is beyond the world of the body, then the third world, the world of the Spirit, is found, where man possesses all—for he is one with the ONE.⁴

From **the Bhagavad Gita** [5th century B.C.E.]:

When the mind of the yogi is in peace, focused on the Self within, and beyond all restless desires, then he experiences Unity. His mind becomes still, like the flame of a lamp sheltered from the winds. When the mind rests in the prayerful stillness of yoga, by the grace of the One, he knows the One, and attains fulfillment. Then he knows the joy of Eternity; he sees beyond the intellect and the senses. He becomes the Unmoving, the Eternal.⁵

... In this experience of Unity, the yogi is liberated,

delivered from all suffering forever. ... The yogi whose heart is still, whose passions are dissolved, and who is pure of sin, experiences this supreme bliss and knows his oneness with Brahman. ⁶

Maximus of Tyre [2nd century C.E.]:

The eye cannot see God, words cannot name Him, flesh and blood cannot touch Him, the ear cannot hear Him; but within the soul That which is most fair, most pure, most intelligible, most ethereal, most honorable, can contemplate Him because it is like Him, can hear Him because of their kinship.

... The soul holds herself erect and strong, she gazes at the pure light [of the Godhead]; she wavers not, nor turns her glance to earth, but closes her ears and directs her eyes and all other senses within. She forgets the troubles and sorrows of earth, its joys and honors, its glory and its shame; and submits to the guidance of pure reason and strong love. For reason points out the road that must be followed, and love drives the soul forward, making the rough places smooth by its charm and constancy. And as we approach heaven and leave earth behind, the goal becomes clear and luminous—that is a foretaste of God's very self. On the road we learn His nature better; but when we reach the end, we see Him. ⁷

How, we must ask, do we attain such vision? And all who have experienced that inner revelation of the Divine Self declare that they have done so only through the grace of God. One cannot therefore speak of the 'attainment' of that vision; it is given. It cannot be produced according to one's own will. Those who are truthful acknowledge this, and give thanks to the One who so generously blessed them; and they shower Him with a constant love, knowing that this love too is His own. Here, Plotinus acknowledges this truth.

Plotinus [3rd century C.E.]:

When there enters into it a glow from the Divine, the soul gathers strength, spreads true wings, and, however distracted by its proximate environment, speeds its buoyant way to something greater; ... its very nature bears it upwards, lifted by the Giver of that love. ... Surely we need not wonder that It possesses the power to draw the soul to Itself, calling it back from every wandering to rest before It. From It came everything; nothing is mightier.⁸

... In advancing stages of contemplation, rising from contemplation of Nature, to that in the soul, and thence again to that in the Divine Mind, the object contemplated becomes progressively a more and more intimate possession of the contemplating being, more and more one with them. ... In the divine Mind itself, there is complete identity of knower and

known, no distinction existing between being and knowing, contemplation and its object, [but] constituting a living thing, a one Life, two inextricably one.⁹

In this state of absorbed contemplation, there is no longer any question of holding an object in view; the vision is such that seeing and seen are one; object and act of vision have become identical.¹⁰

... There, our Self-seeing is a communion with the Self restored to purity. No doubt we should not speak of “seeing,” but, instead of [speaking of] “seen” and “seer,” speak boldly of a simple unity. For in this seeing we neither see, nor distinguish, nor are there, two. The man is changed, no longer himself nor belonging to himself; he is merged with the Supreme, sunken into It, one with It; it is only in separation that duality exists. This is why the vision baffles telling; for how could a man bring back tidings of the Supreme as something separate from himself when he has seen It as one with himself?¹¹

Meister Eckhart [(1260-1328 C.E.):

As the soul becomes more pure and bare and poor, and possesses less of created things, and is emptied of all things that are not God, it receives God more purely, and is more completely in Him; and it truly

becomes one with God, and it looks into God and God into it, face to face as it were; two images transformed into one.¹²

...Some people think that they will see God as if He were standing there and they here. It is not so. God and I, we are one.¹³ ...I am converted into Him in such a way that He makes me one Being with Himself—not a *similar* being. By the living God, it is true that there is no distinction!¹⁴ ...The eye by which I see God is the same as the eye by which God sees me. My eye and God's eye are one and the same—one in seeing, one in knowing, and one in loving.¹⁵

The soul awakens to know itself as the Divine Mind, but the One, Its prior, is experienced only from a distance, as it were. The One is the transcendent Source of all, and beyond all predication or qualification; It is indescribable, as It is prior to all discernible qualities. The soul is keenly aware of the blissful imperturbability, unlimited power, omniscience, and eternal existence of its ultimate Source; but It is not distinctly 'seen', nor does the soul 'merge' with It. Nonetheless, the soul in union with the Divine Mind keenly recognizes that One as the beginningless Source of its own identity and of all that follows upon It—as the Sun hidden in the cover of the clouds is recognized to be the source of the omnipresent light.

That One was even before the first movement of Creation:

Rig Veda [15th century B.C.E.?]:

Then, neither the non-Real (*asat*) nor the Real (*sat*) existed. There was no sky then, nor the heavens beyond it. What was contained by what, and where, and who sheltered it? What unfathomed depths, what cosmic ocean, existed then?

Then, neither death nor deathlessness existed; Between day and night there was as yet no distinction. That ONE (*tad ekam*), by Its own power (*svadha*) breathlessly breathed. ¹⁶

Lao Tze [6th century B.C.E.]:

Before heaven and earth existed, there was something unformed, silent, alone, unchanging, constant and eternal; It could be called 'the Source of the Universe.' I do not know Its name and simply call It "Tao." ¹⁷

Plotinus:

The All-Transcendent, utterly void of multiplicity, is Unity's Self, independent of all else... It is the great Beginning, wholly and truly One. All life belongs to It. ¹⁸ ...The One is, in truth, beyond all statement; whatever you say would limit It; the All Transcendent has no name. ¹⁹ ... [It] is That which is the

truly Existent. ... It is the Source from which all that appears to exist derives that appearance.²⁰

... Everywhere one and whole, It is at rest throughout. But, ... in Its very non-action It magnificently operates and in Its very self-being It produces everything by Its Power.²¹ ... This Absolute is none of the things of which It is the Source; Its nature is that nothing can be affirmed of It—not existence, not essence, not life—It transcends all these. But possess yourself of It by the very elimination of [individual] being, and you hold a marvel! Thrusting forward to This, attaining, and resting in Its content, seek to grasp It more and more, understanding It by that intuitive thrust alone, but knowing Its greatness by the beings that follow upon It and exist by Its power.²²

Here, **Meister Eckhart** distinguishes between the One and the Divine Mind, using the terms “Godhead” and “God”:

God and the Godhead are as different from each other as heaven and earth... Creatures speak of God—but why do they not mention the Godhead? Because there is only unity in the Godhead and there is nothing to talk about. God acts. The Godhead does not. ...The difference between God and the Godhead is the difference between action and non-action.

...The Godhead is poor, naked and empty as though it were not; it has not, wills not, wants not, works not, gets not. It is God who has the treasure and the bride in Him; the Godhead is as void as though it were not.²³

Eckhart's "God" is the manifestory Power of the One, which has been referred to as *Prakrti*, *Maya*, *Nous*, *Shakti*, *Logos*, and many other names; we are calling It 'the Divine Mind'. The Divine Mind is not a thing apart from or distinct from the One; It is the causal aspect or agency of the One. It is the 'Creator' aspect of Divinity, from which Soul is radiated as an extension of Itself. It is the Divine Mind with which the soul is reunited, and by It, through It, knows the One as its eternal Self.

But how can it be that this immoveable, unchangeable, contentless One produces from Itself a Power so great containing all this universe? Is it, as the *Rig Veda* suggests, the arising of 'Desire' within the One that gives rise to that Power; or is it, as Plotinus suggests, a 'Circumradiation'; or is it simply a wish to be many, instead of alone, as suggested by the author of the *Taittiriya Upanishad* or the Gnostic, Valentinus? Here are those various original suggestions:

Rig Veda:

In the beginning, darkness lay wrapped in darkness;
All was one undifferentiated (*apraketa*) sea (*salila*).

Then, within that one undifferentiated Existence, [Something] arose by the heat of concentrated energy (*tapas*). What arose in That in the beginning was Desire (*kama*), [Which is] the primal seed of mind (*manas*)...²⁴

Plotinus:

Given this immobility in the Supreme, It can neither have yielded assent nor uttered decree nor stirred in any way towards the existence of a secondary. What happened, then? What are we to conceive as rising in the innards of that immobility? It must be a circumradiation—produced from the Supreme but from the Supreme unaltering—and may be compared to the brilliant light encircling the sun and ceaselessly generated from that unchanging substance. ...There [in the One] is the Unity which is the potentiality of all existence. ...The perfection entails the offspring; [for] a power so vast could not remain unfruitful.²⁵

Taittiriya Upanishad:

He [the One] desired: ‘May I be many, may I procreate. He performed *tapas* (created heat); and, having performed *tapas*, He created all this—whatever there is. Having created all this, He

entered into it. Having entered into it, He became both the manifest and the unmanifest, both the defined and the undefined, both the supported and the unsupported, both the intelligent and the non-intelligent, both the real and the unreal.²⁶

The Gnostic, **Valentinus** [2nd century C.E.]:

The Father existed alone, unbegotten, without place, without time, without counselor, and without any conceivable qualities ..., solitary and reposing alone in Himself. But as He possessed a generative Power, it pleased Him to generate and produce the most beautiful and perfect that He had in Himself, for He did not love solitude. He was all love, but love is not love if there is no object of love. So the Father, alone as He was, projected and generated [the world].²⁷

Each of these speculations provides a plausible scenario; but do we really think that we can determine, by any amount of speculation, just how and why the one Divine Father, the absolute Consciousness, managed to possess a creative Power by which the Spiritual and material universe is produced? Really! If, as the Gnostic, Valentinus, and others have suggested, He abandoned His Oneness and entered into all this apparent multiplicity and tumult out of a desire to escape Aloneness, to be many, it may be that He is happily enjoying being all these worlds and creatures; or it may be that, underneath it all, He is still quite aware that it's all only Himself, and still feels Alone. What do you think?

In many religious traditions, the One is regarded as the masculine component, and Its creative Power (the Divine Mind) is regarded as the feminine aspect. This genderization of God and His Power is certainly not to be taken literally, but is merely a metaphorical device to emphasize their apparent duality within a subsuming Unity. It is a metaphor that is most evident in the Hindu and Buddhist Tantric traditions, as well as in the ancient Mesopotamian and Caananite religious traditions; but it exists also in many other unrelated traditions, such as in the Taoist tradition, where *Tao* is the One, the Father; and *Teh*, Its feminine aspect, is Its manifestory Power:

Lao Tze:

... The Tao that can be spoken of is not the absolute Tao. That Nameless [Tao] is the Father of heaven and earth; That which is named [Teh] is the Mother of all things.²⁸

These two are the same; they are given different names in order to distinguish between them.

Together, they constitute the Supreme Mystery.²⁹

The Tao is an empty cup, yet It is inexhaustible;

It is the fathomless Fountainhead of all things.³⁰

That which gave birth to the universe may be regarded as the Mother of the universe [*Teh*].³¹ The

Womb of creation is called the Mysterious Female;
it is the root of heaven and earth.³²

The myriad objects of the world take form and rise
to activity, but I have seen THAT to which they
return, like the luxuriant growth of plants that return
to the soil from which they spring.³³

That ONE called Tao is subtle, beyond vision, yet
latent in It are all forms. It is subtle, beyond vision,
yet latent in It are all objects. It is dark and obscure,
yet latent in It is the creative Power of life [Teh].³⁴

From the ancient days till now Its manifestation has
never ceased; it is because of this [Teh] that we
perceive the Father of all. It is the manifestation of
forms that reveals to us the Father [*Tao*].³⁵

The Tao is never the doer, yet through It everything
is done.³⁶ The Tao fathers, and the Teh brings
everything forth as the world of form, time, and
space.³⁷

The later Taoist sage, **Chuang Tze** [3rd century B.C.E.], explains
these two: the One and Its manifestory Power, in a straightforward
manner, without the genderization:

In the beginning, even nothing did not exist. There
was only the Tao. Then something unnamed which

did not yet have form came into existence from the Tao. This is Teh, from which all the world came into being. ...It is in this way that Teh created all forms.³⁸

The Tao is the source of the activity of universal manifestation, but It is not this activity. It is the Author of causes and effects, but It is not the causes and effects. It is the Author of universal manifestation and dissolution, but It is not the manifestation or dissolution. Everything proceeds from It, and is governed by It; It is in all things, but is not identical with things, for It is neither divided nor limited.³⁹

Tao is invisible, hard to hold, and difficult to describe. However, I will outline It for you: The visible world is born of the Invisible; the world of forms is born of the Formless. The creative Power [Teh] is born from Tao, and all life forms are born of this creative Power, whereby all creation evolves into various forms.

...Life springs into existence without a visible source and is reabsorbed into that Infinite. The world exists in and on the infinite Void; how it comes into being, is sustained and once again is dissolved, cannot be seen. It is fathomless, like the Sea. Wondrously, the cycle of world-manifestation begins again after every completion. The Tao sustains all creation, but It is never exhausted.

... That which gives life to all creation, yet which is, Itself, never drawn upon—that is the Tao.⁴⁰

Plotinus:

Time was not yet; ... it lay ... merged in the eternally Existent and motionless with It. But an active principle there ... stirred from its rest; ... for the One contained an unquiet faculty, ... and it could not bear to retain within itself all the dense fullness of its possession. [Like] a seed at rest, the nature-principle within, unfolding outwards, makes its way towards what appears a multiple life. It was Unity self-contained, but now, in going forth from Itself, It fritters Its unity away; It advances to a lesser greatness.⁴¹

Philo Judaeus [1st century C.E.]:

God is high above place and time ... He is contained by nothing, but transcends all. *But though transcending what He has made, nonetheless, He filled the universe with Himself.* [My italics]⁴² The supremely generic is God, the next is the Logos of God;⁴³ ... That which comes after God, even if it were the most venerable of all other things, holds second place, and was called feminine in contrast to the Creator of the universe, who is masculine ...⁴⁴

Here is another surprisingly perceptive treatment of the One and Its creative Power represented as masculine and feminine, by the 1st century Gnostic, **Simon Magus**, who refers to the One as “the Divine Mind”, and Its Energy-producing Power as ‘the Thought’:

There are two aspects of the One. The first of these is the Higher, the Divine Mind of the universe, which governs all things, and is masculine. The other is the lower, the Thought (*epinoia*) which produces all things, and is feminine. As a pair united, they comprise all that exists. The Divine Mind is the Father who sustains all things, and nourishes all that begins and ends. He is the One who eternally stands, without beginning or end. He exists entirely alone; for, while the Thought arising from Unity, and coming forth from the Divine Mind, creates [the appearance of] duality, the Father remains a Unity. The Thought is in Himself, and so He is alone. Made manifest to Himself from Himself, He appears to be two. He becomes “Father” by virtue of being called so by His own Thought.

Since He, Himself, brought forward Himself, by means of Himself, manifesting to Himself His own Thought, it is not correct to attribute creation to the Thought alone. For She (the Thought) conceals the Father within Herself; the Divine Mind and the Thought are intertwined. Thus, though [they appear]

to be a pair, one opposite the other, the Divine Mind is in no way different from the Thought, inasmuch as they are one.

Though there appears to be a Higher, the Mind, and a lower, the Thought, truly, It is a Unity, just as what is manifested from these two [the world] is a unity, while appearing to be a duality. The Divine Mind and the Thought are discernible, one from the other, but they are one, though they appear to be two. [Thus,] ... there is one Divine Reality, [conceptually] divided as Higher and lower; generating Itself, nourishing Itself, seeking Itself, finding Itself, being mother of Itself, father of Itself, sister of Itself, spouse of Itself, daughter of Itself, son of Itself. It is both Mother and Father, a Unity, being the Root of the entire circle of existence.⁴⁵

The Divine Mind breathes forth, or projects, Its own light of Consciousness which we name 'Soul'; but Soul, being invisible Spirit, requires a substantial and relatively stable world of forms to inhabit; and so the Divine Mind periodically sends forth a burst of Energy, that transforms into the Matter of which the physical universe is constituted. He sends forth this Energy in cycles, first projecting His Light Energy, and then, at the end of a cycle, withdrawing the universe of matter, time and space. To us, perceiving this drama from the temporal side, these cycles appear to last for billions and billions of years; but for the soul united in

consciousness with the Eternal, the Divine Mind, they are seen to last but the space of a breath.

The Divine emanation of Soul enters into and inhabits this material universe formed by the Divinely manifested Energy, becoming its indwelling evolutionary force, its living vitality, and its conscious intelligence. By inhabiting the distinctly manifested forms, Soul becomes associated with those individually distinct forms, and thus takes on the individual characteristics of each one; thus appearing as separate and multiple souls, while yet retaining its inseparability and singularity. Soul, by virtue of its inhabiting of body, takes on an individuality, thus becoming distinct souls; and yet, because it is an emanate of the Divine Mind, it retains its Divine Unity as Soul, united in essence with the Divine Mind.

Philo Judaeus:

That aspect of Him which transcends His powers cannot be conceived of at all in terms of place, but only as pure Being; but that power of His by which He made and ordered all things ... pervades the whole and passes through all the parts of the universe. ⁴⁶

Heraclitus [5th century B.C.E.]:

Of all the wise philosophers whose discourses I have heard, I have not found any who have realized the one Intelligence, which is distinct from all things ⁴⁷

and yet pervades all things.⁴⁸ That Intelligence is One; to know It is to know the Purpose, which guides all things and is in all things.⁴⁹ Nature has no inherent power of intelligence; Intelligence is the Divine.⁵⁰ Without It [Intelligence], the fairest universe is but a randomly scattered dust-heap.⁵¹

Plotinus:

There is one identical Soul, every separate manifestation being that Soul complete. The differentiated souls issue from the Unity and strike out here and there, but are united at the Source much as light is a divided thing on earth, shining in this house and that, and yet remains one. One Soul [is] the source of all souls; It is at once divided and undivided.⁵²

... Diversity within the ONE depends not upon spatial separation, but sheerly upon differentiation; all Being, despite this plurality, is a Unity still.⁵³ ... The souls are apart without partition; they are no more hedged off by boundaries than are the multiple items of knowledge in one mind. The one Soul so exists as to include all souls.⁵⁴

Soul, permeating and inhabiting the spiritual substance of Matter, lends its Intelligence and Vitality to the material forms, thus

bringing life and an evolutionary force to the material universe. As Heraclitus rightly states, the universe of Matter, without the Intelligence of Soul, would be nothing but 'a randomly scattered dust-heap'.

As for the material universe which Soul indwells, we have shown that it is the product of a periodic burst of (electromagnetic) Energy cast forth by the Divine Mind, and which has the ability to transmute into material forms (wave-particles), which in turn aggregate into the larger forms that make up the universe.⁵⁵ Plotinus did not have this knowledge, of course, and so he could never grasp the nature of Matter.

Plotinus was also tripped up in his attempt to understand the nature of Matter by his Platonist concepts. He could only conceive of the world of things as eternal Idea-forms, and so he had to regard Matter as an eternal existent; and yet, in other instances, he saw the material universe as the very outer limits of the radiance of the Divine Mind, where, extending beyond Soul, it fades into utter darkness. Plotinus often equated this darkness, this extremity of the reach of the Divine, with the world of Matter. Brilliant and insightful as he was, Plotinus simply did not have all the facts, and so could not piece together all the elements of manifest existence into a comprehensive and consistent whole.

The eighth century Indian Nondualist philosopher, Shankara, declared that the appearance of the universe is an illusion, a product of Maya, the creative power of Brahman. And, as contemporary science has shown, the universe does indeed consist of (a Divinely

produced) Energy that transforms into material particles; but these material particles are really nothing more than submicroscopic electromagnetic impulses, mere ‘points of Energy’, interacting in such a way that the appearance of substance is produced—forming, in other words, an illusory world.

How do these “points” of Energy, these wave-particles that began as “photons”, manage to produce the illusion of form and substance? They are transformed into particles such as electrons, and quarks—which combine to form protons and neutrons, which combine to form atoms; and the atoms combine to form molecules, which combine in vast numbers to form perceptible gases, liquids, and solids in a variety of sizes and configurations. And yet the atoms of which these perceivable solids consist are mostly empty space in their interior. In fact, all of what we call *Matter* is 99.999999999999 percent empty space; the other infinitesimal part seems to be nothing more than energy wavelets and intangible forces. Subatomic wave-particles consist of intangible electrically charged impulses held in proximate “orbits” about one another by invisible forces, so as to form the appearance of much grander substantial entities. And these appearances are multiplied in infinite profusion and variety as if by some magician’s hand, to appear before our eyes as a multitudinous world of objects. And so, this material world, this phenomenal reality of ours, is a marvelous magic show of truly immense proportions!

Soul is Spirit, and the Energy that becomes Matter is also Spirit; they are both from the Divine Mind, but the two are distinctly different: Soul is noumenon, and Energy is phenomenon. Obviously, they

require distinctly different means of production. Soul, possessing Intelligence, is inherently Divine, emanating from and partaking of the Divine Intelligence. It is an extension or radiance of the Divine Itself. Whereas Matter, woven of Light Energy, had to have been produced deliberately as an illusion-producing force expressly to produce the appearance of form and substance—it is, as Shankara tells us, Maya, or illusion.

Intelligence, or Soul, is a direct extension of the Divine, an emanate of conscious Intelligence identical with its source; and the Energy constituting Matter is of an entirely different kind, transient and lifeless, lacking Intelligence, whose only function is to house the Soul or Spirit. We call this universe-manifesting Energy ‘electromagnetic radiation’ but it may just as rightly be regarded as ‘the power of Maya’.

Shankara [8th century C.E.]:

Maya, ...also called the Undifferentiated, is the power (*shakti*) of the Lord. She is without beginning, ...being the Cause of all. One who has a clear intelligence infers Her existence from the effects She produces. It is She who brings forth this entire universe. Maya is neither real nor unreal, nor both together; She is neither identical with Brahman nor different from Him, nor both; She is neither differentiated nor undifferentiated, nor both. She is most wonderful and cannot be described in words.⁵⁶
 ...Everything, from the intellect down to the gross

physical body, is the effect of Maya. Understand that all these and Maya itself are not the [absolute] Self, and are therefore unreal, like a mirage in the desert. ⁵⁷

Clearly, the Divine Energy-producing Power, also referred to as *Prakriti*, *Maya*, *Logos*, etc., must be differentiated from the Soul-emanation that is essentially identical with the Consciousness of the Divine Mind. Soul, being identical with the Divine, is eternal; the world-producing Energy is temporal, and transient, and therefore, by Shankara's definition, 'unreal'. It is produced by the Divine Mind periodically, in a cyclic manner, similar to the production of a recurrent respiration. This has been repeatedly 'seen', experienced, in the unitive vision, and described by numerous seers. Here is how this cyclic "creation" and "destruction" is described some others who have seen it:

Svetasvatara Upanishad [4th to 1st century B.C.E.]:

He [the Lord] spreads his net [of appearance] and then withdraws it again into His *Prakriti* [His creative Power].⁵⁸

And here, from the *Maitri Upanishad* [5th century B.C.E.]:

The supreme Spirit is immeasurable, inapprehensible, beyond conception, never-born, beyond reasoning, beyond thought. He is vaster than the infinity of space. At the end of the worlds, all things sleep; and He alone is awake in eternity. Then from his infinite space new worlds arise and awake, a

universe which is a vastness of thought. In the consciousness of Brahman the universe exists, and into Him it returns.⁵⁹

In the 5th century B.C.E., the author of the *Bhagavad Gita* has Krishna explaining to Arjuna the process of manifestation and demanifestation in the following passages:

They who know that the vast ‘day’ of Brahma (the personified creative Power), ever lasts a thousand ages; and that his ‘night’ lasts also a thousand ages—they know in truth day and night.

When that day comes, all the visible creation arises from the Eternal; and all creation disappears into the Eternal when the night of darkness comes. Thus the infinity of beings which live again and again all powerlessly disappear when the night of darkness comes; and they all return again at the rising of the day. But beyond this creation, visible and invisible, there is a higher, Eternal; and when all things pass away, this remains for ever and ever.⁶⁰

Krishna, who is identified with the Eternal, continues, referring to His creative Power by the Sankhya term, *Prakrti*:

At the end of the night of time all things return to my [creative Power, called] *Prakrti*; and when the new day of time begins, I bring them into light. Thus through my

Prakrti I bring forth all creation, and these worlds revolve in the revolutions of time. But I am not bound by this vast work of creation. I exist alone, watching the drama of this play. I watch and in its work of creation *Prakrti* brings forth all that moves and moves not: and thus the worlds go on revolving.⁶¹

What do the mystics of other traditions have to say? **Lao Tze**, of the Taoist tradition of China, who lived in the 6th century B.C.E., also spoke of the universal creation/dissolution cycle:

The myriad objects of the world take form and rise to activity, but I have seen THAT to which they return, like the luxuriant growth of plants that return to the soil from which they spring.⁶²

And **Chuang Tze**, who lived in the 3rd century B.C.E., wrote:

The visible world is born of the Invisible; the world of forms is born of the Formless. The creative Energy [Teh] is born from the Eternal [Tao], and all life forms are born of this creative Energy; thus all creation evolves into various forms.

...Life springs into existence without a visible source and is reabsorbed into that Infinite. The world exists in and on the infinite Void; how it comes into being, is sustained and once again is dissolved, cannot be seen.

It is fathomless, like the sea. Wondrously, the cycle of world-manifestation begins again after every

completion. The Eternal [Tao] sustains all creation, but It is never exhausted. ... That which gives life to all creation, yet which is, Itself, never drawn upon – that is the Eternal [Tao].⁶³

Heraclitus adds his voice to the consensus:

What is within us remains the same eternally; It is the same in life and death, waking and sleeping, youth and old age; for, It has become this world, and the world must return to It.⁶⁴

This ordered universe...always was, is, and shall be, [like] an ever-living Flame that is first kindled and then quenched in turn.⁶⁵

(This last, by the way, led unilluminated commentators to say that Heraclitus believed the universe was made of fire.)

By all accounts, the creative expansion and “eternal return” of the universe to a state of potentiality in the Divine Mind was also recognized by Pythagoras (570-490 B.C.E.), Empedocles (495-435 B.C.E.), and the early Stoics, and was an established major tenet of Stoic metaphysics by the time of Plotinus. Yet both Plato and Plotinus assumed that the material universe was eternal and unchanging. Plotinus emphatically stated this opinion in his *Enneads*. How could he have begun to imagine the countless wonders that would eventually be discovered in the heavens with the aid of the telescope, including the revelation that the universe is expanding, and that it had its beginning around fourteen billion years ago? No doubt, we in this current time are also woefully deficient in both spiritual and material knowledge, the future

addition of which will one day more perfectly complete our understanding of ourselves, our world, and our place in it.

II. Where Is God?

In the 'mystical experience' the introspective soul, united with the Divine Mind, is aware of its greater Self, its absolute Ground, which it labels 'the One', 'the Godhead'. That One is the subsuming Reality in which the creative Power (the Divine Mind) inheres. They were never two. It is only language that makes them appear so. And the mystic has only language by which to express what he has seen. When they are subsequently labeled as *masculine* and *feminine*, as *Father* and *Mother*, the appearance of duality, of separateness, is further accentuated. But there is only the One.

The One is the only one. He is without a second. He has no 'inside' or 'outside'; so, while we may say that all is contained within Him, for the noumenal, there is really no spatial relationship such as "within". The creative faculty of the One is called the Divine Mind. But we cannot say that it is "within" Him either. Terms of spatial relationship, such as "within" or "outside of", are applicable to phenomena, but not to noumena. Nevertheless, the Divine Mind cannot be separated from the One. Can you separate the creative power of your own mind from your consciousness? I don't think so. Your mind's creative power is integral to your consciousness. Likewise, the attempt to separate the creative Power (the Divine Mind, God) from the transcendent Absolute (the One, the Godhead)

is futile. His power of creating is inherent and integral to Him. They are not two. Recall the Biblical dictum: “I am the one Lord. There is no other beside Me.”⁶⁶

When we attempt to picture the hierarchy of Divinity, our minds, bound by spatio-temporal concepts, tend to picture a linear progression of separate and distinct entities: the Void above, the creative Power below; the outward burst of a great light that forms our universe, spreading into infinite spaces; and the radiance of Spirit as Soul expanding from the Divine Mind, and entering into the material forms. But hold on! Let us recall that Spirit is invisible, insubstantial; it is illimitable, and non-relational. When we try to picture that invisible Spirit, we invariably err. The metaphor of radiation or emanation from the Divine Mind is just that, a metaphor, patterned on the phenomenon of the radiation of light from a central Sun. It gives us a way to picture what is essentially unfigurable.

In the days before the modern revolution in astronomy and cosmology, when the heavens were conceived in the old Aristotelian/Ptolemaic manner as concentric spheres within spheres, we knew where heaven was and where God dwelt. It was up there! All was one great multi-layered reality, enclosing both the terrestrial world and the heavenly world above. A stationary sphere, surrounding the fifty-five concentric transparent spheres rotating at different velocities, was the domain of the “Prime Mover”, God’s heaven. But today, the heavens are no longer beyond our ken: our telescopes reveal that the clusters of galaxies go on and on for billions of light-years; and heaven—the eternal abode of God—has

been evicted from the upper regions of our universe. *Where*, then, does God live? From whence did He fling forth this vast universe of space and time, and from where does He watch and govern the doings of creatures here on earth?

Why, from right here, of course! The invisible Spirit-realm overlaps our own time-bound spaces. All the heavenly bodies, and earth, and every human form is permeated and inhabited by the Divine as Soul; therefore, the Divine, the Eternal, is not in some distant heaven, but is here, co-habiting this universe, co-existing in this very present here and now.

All is indeed infiltrated by, encompassed by, and contained in the One; the Divine Mind acts as the bridge between eternity and time, by sending forth His Energy to become a material world of time and space upon the very mind-stuff of the eternal One. We err when we think of God as being in His own realm apart from the universe He created. The two are not separate in place; they overlap, one superimposed, or “intraposed”, on the other. The eternal One is the Spirit-Ground of all appearance. He is equally present everywhere. There is no place where He is not in His fullness. Truly, “in Him we live and move and have our being.”

Since the Divine Mind is the causal agent for the production of the Energy of which universal matter consists, it is natural for our individualized minds to assume that the Divine Mind is separate from, and other than, the material universe. But Soul and the Divine Mind share their presence with this vast universe. This world—including you and I—concurrently occupies the same space as the

Divine Mind. Though we use language suggestive of temporal and spatial relations, we must understand that the material world has no spatio-temporal relationship to the Divine Mind, but is *co-existent* and *co-present* with It. This infinite and eternal Mind, this Divine Mind, is the Ground of which the universe is the figure. The universe is not somewhere outside It, or even “within” It; but is permeated by It and co-extensive with It.⁶⁷

We may speak of the ‘emanation’ of Soul *from* the Divine Mind, but we mustn’t be deluded into thinking that this connotes an exterior outflowing similar to the case of photons of light streaming from the Sun in the material universe. Nothing is *outside* the Divine Mind. The relation of Soul to the Divine Mind is not a spatial one; they are not two. As the various thoughts in one man’s mind exist together in that mind, so do all souls exist together in the Divine Mind. In short, we are merged in God; everything is merged in God—the Divine Mind, Soul, the far-flung universe, everything. How could it be otherwise? Where else could we be? Nonetheless, it is strange, is it not, that, though we are integrated with God, we must look within our own souls in order to know Him! This is because it is our soul that is our conscious connection to the Divine Mind, the all-pervading Spirit. The self into which we look is truly none other than He.

God, being so close, is easily accessible to us;
 He is always within the reach of our call,
 Always ready to provide succor in our need,
 And the light of wisdom in our times of darkness.
 Our own soul is the conduit of this accessibility,

This communication, this succor and this wisdom.
In our own soul, when the chattering of the mind is silenced,
And all our attention is focused on His presence,
There He is found in the very qualities of the soul;
For we are rays from His brilliance,
Diminished only by our unwillingness
To manifest His light.

He is the air in our nostrils and the earth under our feet.
He is the light of our eyes and the music in our breast.
He is the bright awareness that lives as you,
And He is the storied tale your living tells.
You dance in His firelight; you float on His sea.
You breathe by His breathing; you move by His joy.
No matter how far you may gaze into the rolling
Galaxies cascading above;
No matter what dark or clownish scenes you dream,
Or terrestrial landscapes you cross;
In the depths of the ocean, or on the chilly
Snow-peaked mountains;
And even in the abyss of death and darkness,
You are ever within His close embrace.
You cannot leave Him, nor scamper from His sight.
For you are in Him as a fish is in the ocean
Or a bird is in the sky.
His love surrounds and holds you,
And He sees all through your eyes

* * *

PART THREE: METAPHYSICAL COMPARISONS

Now, we must believe that some of the venerable philosophers of old discovered the Truth; but it is important to examine which of them really hit the mark and by what guiding principle we can ourselves attain to certitude.

—Plotinus ¹

I. Plotinus And Vedanta

The experience of the revelation of one's identity with the Eternal is an ecstatic and totally blissful experience; it is only when one tries to *rationaly* explain it to oneself that it can appear baffling and inexplicable. To be 'enlightened' is effortless; it is a passive, albeit focused, gazing upon what is being revealed, and requires only the receptive soul. Likewise, if the desire to verbally express the knowledge acquired in that vision is inspired and informed by the Spirit, the truth is revealed easily and effortlessly. But to attempt to derive from that "vision" a complete metaphysical system, and to formulate an explanation of "reality" that is consistent and comprehensive, and to set it down in a logically organized manner that is easily understood—that is a formidable task for the cognitive intellect.

The rational construction of thoughts and words in a logical sequence involves great effort, like the attempt to progress one's boat on a sea of gelatin. Or it is like a giant picture puzzle in which none of the parts seem to fit, and the more pieces of the puzzle one

discovers, the more obscure becomes the total picture. With the understanding that the solving of this picture puzzle is an ongoing endeavor, let us examine some of the different metaphysical frameworks that mystics of both East and West have constructed, in order to sort them out one from the other, and judge each one according to its soundness in the light of our present-day understanding.

The mystical experience of one's eternal and all-pervasive identity undoubtedly occurs to people of both East and West; and, while the question of whether it was the East or the West, India or Greece, that served as the birthplace of a mystically-based metaphysics is an intriguing one, it is a question which will probably never be resolved. It is my belief that the similarities between the metaphysics of Eastern mystics and Western mystics are due to the commonalities of the mystical experience itself rather than any philosophical interchange between East and West; but there was no doubt some opportunity for such interchange to occur in the remote past, and this contact should be acknowledged..

There are records of commercial trade between India and Mesopotamia from around the 15th century B.C.E., and between India and Greece going back to the 10th century B.C.E. The teachings of the early Upanishads presumably reached Greece around the 6th century B.C.E., during the time when both countries were part of the Persian empire and enjoyed increased commerce with each other. There were no printed translations of Sanskrit works at that time that we know of; ² and so any religious or philosophical ideas would have to have been shared verbally

between traveling religious scholars, probably with the mediation of an interpreter. That would certainly lessen the possibility of a detailed transmission of metaphysical ideas; nonetheless, the possibility exists of an Indian influence upon the earliest Greek philosophers such as Thales (624-545 B.C.E.), Pythagorus (572-512 B.C.E.), Xenophanes (570-470 B.C.E.), Parmenides (540-480 B.C.E.), etc., who in turn had great influence upon later Greek philosophers such as Socrates and Plato.³

There was much mutual interchange between East and West thereafter, and the philosophies of Plato (427-347 B.C.E.) and later Plotinus (205-270 C.E.) no doubt quickly traveled Eastward and wielded their own influence upon the shores of India as well as around the world. Buddhist texts did not surface until around the fourth century C.E.—a century to a century and a half after the time of Plotinus—and so had no influence during the classic Hellenist or Neoplatonist period.

We must remember, when discussing the early mystical philosophies, that most of the important discoveries about our universe, our world, and our place in it, have occurred only in the last few recent centuries; and that mystics and philosophers of the *Upanishads*, or Plato and Plotinus, and even Shankaracharya (b. ca. 686 C.E.), lived in a relatively Dark Age when knowledge of the nature of the phenomenal world was extremely rudimentary. These philosophers viewed the visible universe as a series of concentric shells in the manner described by Aristotle; the Sun revolved around a flat earth; the sublunar spaces were filled with demons and angels; the heavenly bodies revolved on the inner surface of an earth-

surrounding globe; the physical body was composed of the five elements (including ether); life was generated by decay; and no one guessed that the universe was expanding, or imagined that energy and mass were interconvertible, or could even dream of biological evolution. But some things were the same as they are now: the differences between mind and matter were just as apparent as they are today; and life and death still had the same dissimilar characteristics.

The existence of an individual life-force or Soul that animated material bodies was no doubt inferred by early *homo sapiens*, and quickly became one of the most evident of realities among the people of early civilizations. This belief in the existence of individualized souls began thereafter to play a prominent role in the philosophies of advanced minds everywhere. And it seemed reasonable to some to assume that a previously existent soul could be reincarnated in a newly-born body. This concept, of the transmigration or reincarnation of souls, appears early on in both the philosophies of the East and of the West, but it is not certain where it originated. Herodotus thought it may have originated in pre-dynastic Egypt. In any case, reincarnation forms an integral part of the early *Upanishads* (1000-800 B.C.E.), and the *Bhagavad Gita* (ca. 500 B.C.E.) of India, where it was and is regarded as a process of experience-gathering toward the purification and eventual liberation of the soul.

This idea appears also in Greece in the Orphic tradition (7th and 6th century B.C.E.), and was thereafter adopted by Pythagorus, and later Plato. The notion of reincarnation, and the eventual liberation of the

soul, was already common in Greece by the time of Plato, and in Plato's Dialogue, *Phaedo*, Socrates was depicted affirmatively discussing this notion with his friends on the night of his execution. Centuries later, Plotinus took up the reincarnation idea as a central doctrine of his own Plato-inspired metaphysics. It was an idea that was widely accepted in the East, Near-East, and West alike during those early years. There is evidence that it was an accepted doctrine of esoteric Judaism as well, most particularly in the Essene sect, and that it was acknowledged as a reality by Jesus and members of the early Church, most notably by the Alexandrian theologian, Origen (182-251 C.E.); but the doctrine ceased to have a position in Christian theology when it was declared anathema to faithful Christians at the Fifth General Council convened by emperor Justinian in 553 C.E.

In the earlier Upanishads, connected by lineage to the more archaic Vedas, Aranyakas, and Brahmanas, the nature of the individual soul was seldom mentioned, and rarely well-defined. The Upanishads are among the earliest recorded utterances of men who had experienced the Eternal as their own essential identity, but they do not comprise a consistent homogeneous system of thought; rather they are individual treatises by individual authors, often separated widely by time and place of origin, as well as by individual idiosyncrasies. In one of the later Upanishads, the *Maitri Upanishad*, the narrator, Prajapati, after a lengthy explanation of the Divine Self (*atman*), acknowledges briefly the existence of the individual soul (*jiva*):

Yes, there is indeed a soul, composed of the elements, who is bound by the good or bad effects of

actions, and who, born again from these good or bad effects, rises or falls in its wanderings under the sway of duality. This human soul is under the power of Nature (*Prakṛti*) and its conditions, and thus it falls into confusion. Because of this confusion, the soul cannot become conscious of the God who dwells within, and whose power gives us the power to act. The soul is thus whirled along the rushing, muddy, stream of Nature, and becomes unsteady and uncertain. It is filled with confusion and full of desires, without concentration, and agitated with pride. Whenever the soul has thoughts of “I” and “mine,” it binds itself to a limited sense of selfhood, a limited identity, just as a bird is bound in the net of a snare.⁴

In this Upanishad, the “soul” or *jiva*, is described as “composed of the [material] elements”; it is regarded as an illusory identity obscuring the true identity, which is the Divine Self (*Atman*). There is little in this Upanishad, however, to metaphysically link the soul to Brahman or to provide a real sense of its nature. For that, we must turn to the *Svetasvatara Upanishad*, where a more unified and carefully thought-out picture is presented:

I sing of Brahman: the subject, the object, the Lord
of all!
He’s the immutable Foundation of all that exists;
Those souls who realize Him as their very own Self,
Are freed forever from the need for rebirth.

The Lord is the Foundation of both aspects of reality: He is both the Imperishable and the perishable, the Cause and the effect. He takes the form of the limited soul, appearing to be bound; But, in fact, He is forever free.

Brahman appears as Creator, and also as the limited soul; He is also the Power that creates the appearance of the world. Yet He remains unlimited and unaffected by these appearances; when one knows that Brahman, then that soul becomes free.⁵

... Within the Cycle [of existence], in which all live and seek rest, the swan-like soul wanders restlessly; It thinks it's separate and far from God, but, by His Grace, it awakes to its identity with Him.⁶

When that Lord, who pervades all the worlds everywhere, gave birth to the first motion, He manifested Himself as creation. It's He alone who is born in this world. He lives in all beings; it's only Him everywhere.

... Those who have known Him say that, while He manifests all worlds by His Power, He remains ever One and unchanged. He lives as the one Self of everyone; He's the Creator and Protector to whom all beings return.⁷

Clearly, Svetasvatara's vision is identical in all respects to the revised metaphysics of Plotinus, upon which we have just elaborated. That same metaphysical vision of Plotinus, as currently revised, is also identical to that of the *Bhagavad Gita*, if we allow for the differences in language and terminology.

The author of the *Bhagavad Gita* alternated his terminology between that of Kapila (ca. 800 B.C.E.), and that of the Vedas. The Sankhya system of Kapila named the transcendent Spirit as *Purusha*, and Its creative Power to manifest the material universe as *Prakriti*; and this terminology is used throughout the *Gita*. But the author also uses the Vedic terminology, which most commonly regards what Plotinus calls "the One" as *Nirguna Brahman* (*Brahman* without [*nir*] qualities [*guna*]). What Plotinus refers to as "The Divine Mind" is called *Saguna Brahman* (*Brahman* with [*sa*] qualities). *Nirguna Brahman* is referred to throughout the *Gita* simply as *Brahman*; *Saguna Brahman* is personalized as *Brahma* or *Ishvara* (Lord). And it is *Saguna Brahman*, or *Brahma*, who weilds the veiling power of *Maya*, or illusion. The relationship between "The One" and "The Divine Mind" as explained by Plotinus is identical with that of *Brahman* and *Brahma* in the *Bhagavad Gita*. Here, for comparison, is a listing of the terms used in the *Bhagavad Gita* and those used by Plotinus:

Bhagavad Gita

Brahman, Purusha
Brahma (Maya), Prakriti
Atman
Jiva

Plotinus

The One (*to Hen*)
 The Divine Mind (*Nous*)
 Soul (*psyche*)
 The individualized soul

The *Bhagavad Gita* (Song of God) was written ca. 500 B.C.E., as part of a larger work, the *Mahabharata*, (reputedly by the legendary sage, Vyasa), as a dialogue between Krishna (an incarnation of God) and Arjuna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra. And it is Krishna who, speaking as the Divinity itself, teaches to Arjuna the perennial philosophy, explaining that in His Divine transcendent state He manifests the entire universe, which he describes as his ‘lower’ nature;⁸ and He manifests this ‘lower nature’, the material universe, in a cyclic fashion, periodically creating, then dissolving it:

At the end of a cycle, all beings, O son of Kunti, enter into My *Prakriti* [His creative Power], and at the beginning of a cycle, I generate them all again. Controlling My own *Prakriti*, I send forth, again and again, all this multitude of beings, helpless under the sway of maya.⁹

But, as He tells Arjuna, He contains a ‘higher nature’ that is not subject to this cyclic manifestation:

But different from it, know, O mighty Arjuna, My

higher nature—the Indwelling Spirit by which the universe is sustained.¹⁰ ...By Me, in my unmanifest form, are all things in this universe pervaded.¹¹

Pervading the material universe, He (*Brahman*) is the invisible Spirit, or soul, in all:

The Lord [Krishna] said: Brahman is the Imperishable, the Supreme. Dwelling in each body, Brahman is called the individual soul.¹²

This soul, says Krishna, “is indivisible, and yet It is, as it were divided among beings.”¹³

It is never born, nor does It ever die, nor, having once been, does It again cease to be. Unborn, eternal, permanent, and primeval, It is not slain when the body is slain. Only the bodies, of which this eternal, imperishable, incomprehensible Self is the indweller, are said to have an end. That by which all this is pervaded know to be imperishable. None can cause the destruction of That which is immutable.¹⁴

He goes on to explain to Arjuna that this indestructible soul or Self is not limited to one embodiment only:

Even as the embodied Self passes, in this body, through the stages of childhood, youth, and old age,

so does it pass into another body. Even as a person casts off worn-out clothes and puts on others that are new, so the embodied Self casts off worn-out bodies and enters into others that are new.¹⁵

So, as I'm sure the reader can easily see, there are many remarkable parallels between the (revised) metaphysical vision of Plotinus and that of the *Bhagavad Gita*. These parallels arise from the fact that both Vyasa and Plotinus had directly experienced these truths in their visionary revelations, as have innumerable other souls. We must not forget, however, that Plotinus must certainly have had some introduction to the Indian metaphysics through his guru, Ammonius, who was said to be conversant with both the Persian and Indian metaphysics.

Much later, the illustrious teacher (*acharya*), Shankara (eighth century C.E.), attempted a reformulation of *Advaita* (Nondual) Vedanta, and in the process introduced some ideas which are controversial to this day. In many ways, his metaphysical worldview is also remarkably similar to that of Plotinus: Like Plotinus, Shankaracharya regarded the Soul or Self as identical with the Divine. He asserts that, in man, the Self (*Atman*) is the witness to the various activities of the mind, residing in stillness, unaltered and unaffected by either the form or content of one's mental activity; and that this Self is *identical* to Brahman, the One, the Absolute. Here, for reference, is a comparison of the terms used by each:

Shankaracharya*Parabrahman* or simply *Brahman**Brahma* or *Ishvara**Atman**Jivataman* or simply *jiva**Jagat***Plotinus**The One (*To hen*)The Divine Mind (*Nous*)Soul (*psuche*)

Individualized soul

The material world

But what do we mean when we say that the Self of man is identical to Brahman? If Brahman is present in every human being, by what means does He appear as their innermost Self? God is one; the beings are many: by what means does He spread Himself out in this way while remaining one? Plato and Plotinus postulated an all-pervading radiation of the Divine Consciousness throughout the material universe, which they called "Soul". It is by means of this pervading Divine Consciousness, says Plotinus, that God is present as the Self of everyone. Shankaracharya offers no such explanation; in fact, for him, there is no universe to be pervaded. There is only *Brahman/Atman*; and the universe is but a projected illusion existing only in the consciousness of the *jiva* (which is really the *Atman*).

Nevertheless, he concedes that, from a relative point of view, *Brahman/Atman* is omnipresent as the absolute Consciousness that is the substratum of the universe and the inner Self of man, falsely appearing as the soul or *jiva*. He explains that it is due to *Ishvara*'s

power of *Maya* that one *appears* to be an individualized soul; but this soul is actually *Atman*, the Divine Self, and can be realized as such. Here, using the same light-radiation metaphor as Plotinus, Shankara explains the identity of the individual soul and the Divine Self (*Atman/Brahman*):

The transmigrating soul is not different from the Lord. ...Just as the light of the Sun and the Sun itself are not absolutely different, so also the soul and the supreme Self are not different.

...Because all souls are essentially non-different, and their apparent difference is due to ignorance (*avidya*) only, the individual soul, after having dispelled ignorance by true knowledge, passes into Unity with the supreme Self.¹⁶

The Self...can be directly realized as pure Consciousness and infinite Bliss. Its appearance as an individual soul is caused by the delusion of our understanding and has no reality. By its very nature, this appearance is unreal. When our delusion has been removed, it [the individualized soul] ceases to exist.¹⁷

However, it is when Shankara explains the illusory nature of the universe that interpretive difficulties arise. The *Upanishads* and the *Bhagavad Gita* hold that Brahman possesses a creative Power, called *Maya*, by which He creates or projects, an objective universe

of visible objects. Passages from certain of the works attributed to Shankara, such as the following from his *Atma Bodha*, would lead one to believe that he held a similar position:

Visible objects, like the body, mind, etc., are born of the primal Energy (*Shakti*) and the ignorance (*avidya*) attending it, and are evanescent like bubbles. One should realize the pure, eternal Self, which is other than these, and know, "I am Brahman (*aham brahmasmi*)."¹⁸

But Shankara (whose understanding of the physical nature of the universe was as flawed as that of Plotinus) clearly believed that the world was never actually created; that it is merely a "projection" (*adhyasa*) upon Brahman produced by the individual soul or mind, due to an ignorance (*avidya*) Divinely inherent in it. From his considerable body of works, it is apparent that Shankara believed that we "project" or "superimpose" an imagined world upon Brahman, as one "projects" a mirage upon the desert, or an imaginary snake upon a rope. This is known as 'the doctrine of superimposition' (*vivartavada*). Here is Shankara's explanation of this idea:

The universe does not exist apart from the Self (*Atman*). Our perception of it as having an independent existence is false, like our perception of blueness in the sky. How can a superimposed attribute have any existence, apart from its

substratum? It is only our delusion which causes this misconception of the underlying reality.¹⁹

...The apparent world is caused by our imagination, in its ignorance. It is not real. It is like seeing the snake in the rope. It is like a passing dream”²⁰

Thus, while in the *Upanishads*, the *Bhagavad Gita*, and (our revised version of) Plotinus’s metaphysics, the world is represented as an illusory, but objective, phenomenon produced by God, Shankara’s ‘doctrine of superimposition’ asserts that the perceived universe is merely an imaginary projection by the individual mind or soul of a world of objects upon the substrate of *Brahman*—in other words, that it is an illusion that takes place solely in the mind, or individual *jiva*.

Shankara, following in the tradition of his *paramguru* (his guru’s guru), Gaudapada, taught that only Brahman exists, and that the universally perceived phenomena of ‘the world’ appear, not because they are actually ‘created’ by God, but rather because we humans, while actually seeing only *Brahman*, project, or “superimpose” names and forms upon that substratum by the power of our own imaginations. He interprets God’s power of *Maya* (illusion) to be, not God’s power to ‘create’ an illusory objective universe, but a power placed by God within the human soul to project, or imagine, a world where there is truly only Brahman, much as one might imagine a snake where there is actually a rope, or a body of water where there is only a dry desert. But since Brahman is not an object of our perception upon which an illusory object might be

superimposed, we must wonder how that could be possible.

The theory of ‘superimposition’ asserts that the subjective human ego, or *jiva*, endowed with a Mayic power, projects an entire universe of objects upon Brahman—but we must remember that in Shankara’s time no one even imagined that man had *evolved* over time from more primitive species. Insofar as Shankara knew, man had existed forever; and had always been around to imagine (or superimpose) a world. He did not know that the genus *Hominidae* (the great apes) only came into existence around 15 million years ago, and that bipedal man (*Homo erectus*) only evolved around 2 million years ago; that so-called ‘wise’ men (*Homo sapiens*) only evolved around 350,000 years ago; and that anatomically modern humans (*Homo sapiens*) came along only around 200,000 years ago. And if the world could only be ‘imagined’ (that is, superimposed) by a human being, then not even an imaginary world existed prior to the evolution from the lower animal species to the human species. If this were true, the present evidence for the evolutionary history of the universe, from its beginning to the development of *homo sapiens*, including astronomical observations, geological strata, fossils, etc., is only imaginary as well.

Had he known of the relatively recent origin of man, it would have been necessary to suggest that perhaps the earlier animals and even bacterial life-forms, who seem also to perceive a world of objects, project the world by means of the same Mayic power of imagination, this same mental projection! But what of the compelling evidence for the existence of the universe during preceding billions of years

prior to the appearance of even the simplest forms of life? How could we possibly justify the belief that the universe only came into existence when there was a conscious living being to imagine or superimpose it upon Brahman? Because there are so many questions that arise when this theory is examined closely, the majority of cautious contemporary thinkers, influenced by current scientific observations, tend to accept that the universe of matter is an external, objective illusion, rather than an internal, subjective one.

Our current understanding of the nature of the material world leads us to conclude that the forms we perceive through our senses are ultimately mere agglomerations of the electric charges and emergent forces that constitute the fermions and bosons produced from the original electromagnetic radiation (the 'Great Radiance'), and that the perceivable forms produced by the congregation of these insubstantial wave-particles are virtually "illusory". Shankara, however, could not possibly have understood in his own time that the illusion of physical matter arises from the organization of intangible submicroscopic wave-particles in such a way that they present the appearance of substance and extension. He knew nothing of such wave-particles. Though he had not *imagined* them, we have every reason to believe that they nonetheless existed, even then. He did know, from his unitive visionary experience, that the Soul (*Atman*) is identical with Brahman and that the phenomenal world, in relation to eternal Being, is illusory; but, without a knowledge of the true nature of matter, and perhaps influenced somewhat by the Buddhist metaphysics popular at the time, he was able to account for the unreality of the world only by assuming that it was an illusion produced by a Mayic ignorance (*avidya*) within

the human mind, causing the mind to project, imagine, or superimpose a world exterior to it.

The revelatory unitive experience is the same for all who have known it, and yet it is interpreted variously. For everyone who has experienced this revelation, the Divine Self is realized to be the source of the universe; but in the one interpretation, the Self projects an Energy from Itself that forms the perceived universe; and in the other interpretation, the Self projects (or imagines) a non-existent universe *within* the perceiver. The one interpretation states that the universe exists objectively, even when there is no one to be consciously aware of it; and the other interpretation holds that, without a conscious ‘imager’, the universe does not exist. Which view do *you* regard as “true”?

Unfortunately, whether you may think that the phenomenal universe is an illusory reality produced objectively by the Divine Mind, or a subjective illusion produced by a Divine Mayic capacity within the human mind, the resolution of this dispute is not, and probably never will be, amenable to conclusive and demonstrable proof. However, the *practical* conclusion remains the same in either case, as expressed by Shankara in the following premise:

Brahma satyam
Jagat mithya
Jivo brahmaiva naparah

(Brahman is the Reality;
 The phenomenal universe is merely an appearance,

an illusion;
The soul is truly Brahman, without a doubt.)

You will find in this statement no disparity with the vision of Plotinus. In fact, while it's a bit of a strain to shift between the two terminologies and to translate one to the other, anyone who takes the trouble to do so will discover that the philosophical visions of Plotinus and Shankaracharya are essentially the same. In all *practical* respects, Plotinus and Shankaracharya are seen to be in perfect agreement.

We must acknowledge that, although neither of them clearly comprehended the nature of the phenomenal world (nor did anyone else before the mid-twentieth century), both Shankaracharya and Plotinus had intimately known the one Reality behind all appearances. They were both illumined seers, and master teachers. There is no doubt that both men came to the direct knowledge of the Self as their true, eternal identity, and knew: 'There is no other true identity but the eternal One by whom and in whom all exists.' And the central and most important message of both Shankaracharya and Plotinus is the message of all authentic seers of the Truth: 'Realize the Reality for yourself! Renounce all transient and illusory appearances and focus upon the Eternal. Know your lasting and permanent Self, wherein all knowledge and all Bliss resides, and free yourself from the snare of ignorance and suffering.'

II. Plotinus And The Buddha

The man, Siddhartha Gotama, who is said to have been born in northeastern India in 563 B.C.E., sought enlightenment as a young man, and upon attaining it, became known as 'the Buddha', the awakened one. His experience of the Eternal, an experience he called *nirvana*, suggesting the extinguishing of the ego-sense, was undoubtedly genuine. It was identical with the experience of all who have obtained the vision of the transcendent Reality both before and after him. However, the metaphysics he contrived in order to explain his experience in conceptual terms is uniquely his own, and bears little similarity to either the Platonist metaphysics or the metaphysics of Advaita Vedanta.

The Buddha began his spiritual quest in his late twenties, was enlightened in his mid-thirties or early forties, and lived on into his eighties, and so for many years freely gave his teachings to those student-disciples who gathered around him. We may be fairly certain, therefore, that the teachings that have come down to us were for the most part what he taught, even though nearly a century had passed before his teachings were collected, and several centuries passed after his death before those collected teachings were written, published, and became known as the tenets of 'Buddhism'.

No doubt, the three most identifiable doctrines of Buddhism pertaining to our comparison are these: the doctrine of the *skandhas* (or "aggregates"); the doctrine of *pratitya samutpada* (dependent origination); and the doctrine of *anatman* (the non-existence of a self, or soul).

Since there is no Godhead or Its creative Power in the Buddhist system, there is no cosmological genesis such as is posited in a Theistic system. The Buddha's teachings center, not on a cosmological origin, but rather on the origination of human existence. This is where the *skandhas* come in. These are the aggregations of tendencies that the Buddha says bring about a human birth. According to him, a human is composed of five bundles or aggregates (*skandhas*): (1) the aggregate of *matter*, which includes the body made of four elements (solid, fluid, heat, and motion), from which are derived five basic sense organs (eye, ear, nose, tongue, and skin); (2) the aggregate of *feelings*: pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral, which arise from the contact between a sense organ and a sense object, and which also give rise to a sixth sense organ: the mind, which perceives mental objects; (3) the aggregate of *perceptions*, which arise from the interrelationship between the six sense organs and their objects; (4) the aggregate of *mental formations*, which includes all the possible activities of the mind; and (5) the aggregate of *consciousness*, the various kinds of which arise as awareness of the various objects of perception by the senses and the mind. Notice that Consciousness, in the Buddha's system, does not exist independently, but arises only as an awareness dependent upon the contact between a sense organ and its object.

According to the Buddha, it is these five aggregates, or bundles, which, coming together, constitute the spontaneous arising of the ego-sense, the sense of 'I'. There is no suggestion in the Buddhist metaphysics of a central originating Power, Consciousness, or

eternal Ground to serve as the source of these various 'bundles'; nor is there anywhere in this scheme any mention of either a natural or supernatural origination of the universe. This, some will say, is due to the Buddha's famous unwillingness to formulate a complete metaphysical system. Alas, a metaphysical system developed nonetheless. Perhaps we must hold lesser luminaries responsible for the results; but the doctrines of Buddhism are steadfastly attributed to the Buddha himself, and so we must charge him with inventing the features of the system attributed to him.

Here, I think it is necessary to insert a cautionary note: Anyone who has read widely, who is familiar with the writings of men living in past centuries as well as contemporaries, knows that accurate knowledge regarding the workings of both physical and psychological nature has increased rather than declined over the centuries, and many an assumption from centuries ago is now regarded as obsolete and inapplicable to our present understanding of things. Indeed, lists of constituent ingredients such as the Buddha enumerates above were common among Indian philosophers of the period, and are now viewed as archaic.

How unfortunate that intelligent men who ponder the things of the Spirit tend to place such unquestioning trust in the authoritarian utterings of those seers who lived in very ancient times, or in a permanent legacy of literature containing the purported utterances of such men! In every lasting religious tradition, there is a faithful reliance on the absolute verity of writings that originated in the minds of men whose experience and learning was excellent in the

time that they wrote several millennia ago, but who can no longer be regarded as well-informed by our present standards.

Spiritual understanding is frequently exempted from this kind of critical thinking because, it is argued, spiritual realities, being eternal, are not affected by changing views concerning the psychological or physical world. Yet we must recognize that so very often the written texts handed down as religious documents contain not only spiritual directions, but also many references to matters that may well be subject to empirical scrutiny—matters which have been shown in modern times to have been sorely misapprehended, or simply erroneously stated.

It would not be inappropriate therefore for sincere researchers in each of the religious traditions to carefully re-examine even their most revered ancient books, with the understanding and realization that these holy books were written in a time when the world, let alone the distant galaxies, had not been explored, when the notions firmly held regarding creation, cosmology, history, and the laws of nature were yet simplistic, primitive, and often false. I am not suggesting, as extreme elements among the secular materialists of today do, that we should throw out the good and true along with the bad and false in the various religious texts; I am only suggesting that we think of re-evaluating spiritual teachings in a way that better satisfies our modern intellectual integrity, and better represents our present understandings. Much of our religious past is profoundly valuable; and sadly, much of it is valuable only as an historical record chronicling the many speculative and imaginative accounts left by men of past ages.

Real mystical experience can profoundly challenge one's earlier perspective, and in the search for a perspective that makes rational sense of our experience, we may be introduced to various spiritual traditions whose roots date from an obscure past and whose tenets, which may be absurd on their face, are well fortified by the ardor and certainty of accumulated testimonials. The personal appeal of one tradition over another no doubt involves an element of one's previous karma, even though we may prefer to think that our choices are purely rational. And, while we are not merely the products of our previous tendencies and actions, we are nonetheless deeply influenced by these ingrained habits. This is why it is important to carefully analyze and compare competing doctrines that purport to explain spiritual (mystical) experience so as to reach conclusions that fit in all respects with what is actually experienced in the unitive vision.

Let us now move on to a doctrine in the Buddhist lexicon that may seem to be in conflict with the previously described doctrine of the *skandhas*: that of *pratitya samutpada*, the doctrine of 'dependent origination'. It posits a 12-linked chain of causes likewise meant to explain the generation of a cycle of human birth. The originating cause of existence, says the Buddha, is (1) *avidya*, or 'ignorance'; which gives rise to (2) 'volitional action'; which in turn gives rise to (3) 'conditioned consciousness'; which in turn gives rise to (4) 'name-and-form'; which in turn gives rise to (5) 'the six bases (i.e., the five senses plus mind)'; which in turn gives rise to (6) 'sense-impressions'; which in turn gives rise to (7) 'feelings'; which in turn gives rise to (8) 'desire' or 'craving'; which in turn gives rise to (9)

‘attachment’; which in turn gives rise to (10) ‘becoming’ (the birth or rebirth process); which in turn gives rise to (11) ‘birth’ or ‘rebirth’; which gives rise (eventually) to (12) ‘old age and death’.

This elaborate chain of causes is intended to describe how we arise as existents from the (unnamed, but implied) undifferentiated One; and this brings us to the third and most important doctrine of the Buddha: the doctrine of *anatma*, or, literally, ‘no-self’. As we can see from the above listing of the elements of human existence, there is no permanent identity anywhere to be found; all indeed is *dukkha*, ‘suffering’; *anitya*, ‘impermanent’; and *anatman*, ‘not self’.

This doctrine, of *anatma*, that no individual soul exists, brings up numerous questions, such as the obvious questions regarding rebirth and karma. While the Buddha believed in rebirth, he did not believe in reincarnation because, in his view, there is no soul to reincarnate. What, then, we must ask, is reborn? And the Buddha replies, ‘the *skandhas*, the aggregates of tendencies and the results of karmas’. But no specific person is reborn, so there is no continuation, no progressive evolution of a particular being (though it is said that the Buddha remembered *his own* past incarnations). When ignorance is destroyed (by enlightenment), there is no longer a causal ‘seed’ prompting further rebirth, and so liberation results. Since there is no soul or permanent identity, what is liberated upon enlightenment is apparently the *skandhas*. To some, this may seem an anticlimactic and unfortunate denouement.

The very designation, *anatman*, is unfortunate as well, since *atman* is not the traditional term for the ego-sense, but is the Sanskrit word

used to signify the Eternal—the very antithesis of the ego-sense. Had the term *ajiva* been used instead, much misunderstanding could long ago have been avoided; but as it is, the word *anatman* (*anatta* in the Pali scriptures), which is intended to negate the ego-sense, has the unfortunate connotation of negating the very Reality that supplants the ego-sense in the experience of enlightenment. That there is no permanent personal identity associated with the human body/mind complex is a long-held conviction of the Advaita Vedanta philosophy of the Upanishads, and a truth that is self-revealed in the mystical experience which they refer to in their literature as *samadhi*, and that Buddhists refer to as *nirvana*.

But, does that experience reveal only that there is no personal identity? No. In the Vedantic tradition, as in the Platonist tradition, it is well established that the sense of self arises from an eternal Ground, or substratum of Consciousness; and so the (mystical) experience reveals the Eternal Reality that alone is the *true* identity of all, and the source of the Consciousness one had been experiencing all along. It is not a personal identity, but an eternal Identity, which the Upanishads call the *Atman*, ‘the Self’. It is none else but the One, *Brahman*. Though some later Buddhist writers called that One the *Dharmakaya*, here, in a passage from an ancient text purporting to be his own words, the Buddha calls that eternal Reality “the Unborn”:

Monks, there is an Unborn, Unoriginated, Unmade and Unconditioned. Were there not the Unborn, Unoriginated, Unmade and Unconditioned, there would be no escape from the born, originated, made

and conditioned. Since there is the Unborn, Unoriginated, Unmade and Unconditioned, there is escape from the born, originated, made and conditioned.²¹

This acknowledgement by the Buddha of an eternal Reality beyond the 'dependently originated' *skandhas*, accessible to creatures born into this world, would seem to belie much of what we have absorbed about Buddhism up to this point, and to align his teachings with a 'theological' perspective. And so, there remains much ambiguity to overcome. What is clear is that the Buddha, having experienced the One, rightfully taught his disciples the means of approaching that experience through introspection, and through meditation on their own true nature. There, as he rightfully indicated, they would find the truth for themselves. But, when it came to formulating a comprehensive and consistent metaphysics, he fell a bit short, and left behind a confusing legacy of contradictions and misconceptions. One feels it might have been fortunate if he had kept to his stated intention to say nothing about such matters.

Let us now examine and compare the metaphysics of Plotinus. Any system of Metaphysics is considered to be, by definition, empirically undemonstrable. For the purpose of metaphysics is not to demonstrate the reality of physical entities or systems, but rather to provide a plausible framework for explaining the human *experience* in the contemplative state of a noumenal reality that underlies and sustains this phenomenal world of time and space. One of the most widely influential and longest lasting metaphysical schemes is that of Plato and those followers who articulated and

amplified upon his vision. Most noted among these “Neoplatonists” is the third-century Roman, Plotinus.

Plotinus, following Plato, offers a scheme whereby Soul is breathed into the material universe from the Divine Mind. Here is Plotinus’ vision of this implanting of Divine Soul into the material universe:

Let every soul recall, then, at the outset the truth that soul is the author of all living things, that it has breathed the life into them all, whatever is nourished by earth and sea, all the creatures of the air, the divine stars in the sky; it is the maker of the sun; itself formed and ordered this vast heaven and conducts all that rhythmic motion; and it is a principle distinct from all these to which it gives law and movement and life, and it must of necessity be more honorable than they, for they gather or dissolve as soul brings them life or abandons them, but soul, since it never can abandon itself, is of eternal being.

How life was purveyed to the universe of things and to the separate beings in it may be thus conceived:

[To conceive of the entrance of Soul into the material world,] ...Let not merely the enveloping body be at peace, [and] body’s turmoils stilled, but all that lies around, earth at peace, and sea at peace, and air and the very heavens. Into that heaven, all at rest, let the great Soul be conceived to roll inward at every point,

penetrating, permeating, from all sides pouring in its light. As the rays of the sun throwing their brilliance upon a louring cloud make it gleam all gold, so the Soul entering the material expanse of the heavens has given life, has given immortality. What was abject it has lifted up; and the heavenly system, moved now in endless motion by the Soul that leads it in wisdom, has become a living and a blessed thing. The Soul domiciled within, it takes worth where, before the Soul, it was stark body—clay and water—or, rather, the blankness of Matter, the absence of Being...

The Soul's nature and power will be brought out more clearly, more brilliantly, if we consider how it envelops the heavenly system and guides all to its purposes: for it has bestowed itself upon all that huge expanse so that every interval, small and great alike, all has been ensouled.

...By the power of the Soul the manifold and diverse heavenly system is a unit; through Soul this universe is a god. And the sun is a god because it is ensouled; so too the stars; and whatsoever we ourselves may be, it is all in virtue of Soul...

This, by which the gods are divine, must be the oldest God of them all: and our own soul is of that same Ideal nature, so that to consider it, purified, freed from all accrument, is to recognize in ourselves that

same value which we have found Soul to be,
honorable above all that is bodily.²²

The permeation of the material universe by Soul constitutes the foundation of Plotinus' metaphysical vision. Soul, emanated from the Divine Mind has no physical parameters; It does not consist of mass or energy; It does not extend as a radiation into space. It is entirely beyond comparison with physical spatio-temporal phenomena. But the fact is that our language is grounded in phenomenal temporality, and we have only the tools of phenomenally based language in use when attempting to convey the operation of the Divine Mind by means of conceptual language.

Can we even form an image in our minds of the emanated extension of the Divine Mind that is referred to as "Soul"? Yet without such an extension of Spirit, how and in what way would we be connected to, and therefore be of the same essence as, the Divine? We are souls, of a Divine nature; or we are some other thing, with no connection or access to a Divine and eternal nature. It is not enough to simply say, 'There is no soul, yet we nonetheless partake of eternal Consciousness.' If we experience in our own being that eternal Consciousness, by what means do we do so? And by what pathway are we connected to it? Surely we cannot reasonably state that the originating Cause of existence is 'ignorance'.

We reach the heart of this dispute when we see that Plotinus and the Buddha use the one word, "soul," to mean two different things: the Buddha means by it an illusory personal identity applied to a particular body-mind complex; Plotinus means by it an emanation

from the Divine Mind, who is the creative aspect of the One. In negating the existence of the ego-soul, the Buddha is correct; if Plotinus were to negate the soul, he would be an apostate, an infidel.

Plotinus acknowledges, as do the Upanishads, that the soul is capable of remaining blind to its Divine nature, its innate capacity, attributing an illusory 'I' to its transient embodiment, and thereby living a superficial life concerned only with sensual and emotional pleasures, promoting its own aggrandizement and individual welfare. But eventually it must revise its outlook; for, understand, the soul is nothing else but the Divine—as a ray of sunlight is nothing but sun. Its only real identity is Divine Consciousness. Its association with body establishes an ego-sense, the illusion of an 'I', a *personal* identity, associated with one particular physical entity in a spatio-temporal universe. But there was never an actual personal identity; it was always the Divine Consciousness. Its sense of a personal individual identity was simply an illusion, to be sure. But that does not mean it is not Soul.

Soul, remember, is the one Divine Consciousness; it is not something other than the one Divine Consciousness. When the soul is illumined by the vision of its true nature, its eternal, illimitable Self is revealed, and the illusion of a separate personal identity vanishes as all erroneous imaginations do. It is still soul—it is still a ray of Divine Consciousness. One must not become beguiled by mere word-confusion. If we could form meaningful language by using just one word, we could simply say: "God God God God." But no one would know what we were trying to convey. In order to speak of the different ways that God manifests, we give different

names to His differing aspects, and we speak of God as soul, God as matter, God as energy, God as consciousness; and so we have all these seemingly disparate words. But “soul” is nothing but God; body is nothing but God, the many worlds strung throughout the night sky are nothing but God. How might one speak more clearly?

For those who acknowledge the one Divine existence as the Ground of all reality including themselves, the question of a separate personal self does not arise. If such a question were to arise, they would answer: ‘The One who *is* lives me. And He alone is, manifesting as soul and all else as well.’ For such as these, it is clear that only pitifully empty dreams remain when the blissful Giver of life and joy is discounted and rejected as the center and life-breath of one’s very being.

You may tell me, “there is no soul.” And I will reply, ‘With what will you replace it? If you don’t like my word, please use your own word to describe what you are. But you cannot negate That which is intended by the word, *soul*; for It is the eternal fabric of your very being, of your thinking and speaking and seeing and acting; It is indeed the famous “Unborn” of the Buddha. It is the only reality that exists in and as whatever phenomena or noumena you may suggest for consideration.

If you are truly confirmed in the belief or knowledge that there is one and only One who is the origin, activator, manifestation and experiencer of all that exists, and in the faith or knowledge that nothing outside of or other than that One exists in all the three worlds, be at peace; we are in perfect agreement. And if you are

consistent in this belief or knowledge, you must acknowledge that you, being one of those things that exists, are undoubtedly included in the one Reality, are made of the one Reality, and are connected by indissoluble bonds to It and to all else that has existence, and are safely and inescapably contained in, embraced and empowered by, and ultimately one with, the omnipresent Reality—which you are free and most welcome to call by any name you like.

III. Plotinus And The Judaeo-Christian Tradition

Judaism, while proudly monotheistic, never advanced to a mystically-based metaphysics; specifically, the Jews never attained a Nondual perspective. The patriarchal figures, Abraham and Moses, were said to have spoken with God, but neither is said to have experienced *oneness with God*; that is, never experienced the Divine identity as their own. And since orthodox Judaism refuses to abrogate the authority of the patriarchs, a strict doctrinal separation between God and His creation is maintained in Judaism, and the possibility of the “union” of man and God is disavowed. Nevertheless, the mystical ‘union with God’ has been taught by scattered mystics of the Hasidic and Kabbalistic schools within the Judaic tradition.

The Hebrew Bible—what the Jews call the *Tanakh* (which includes the five books of Moses, or *Torah*, the *Prophets*, and the *Writings*), and what the Christians call ‘the Old Testament’—is less a theological work than an attempt to establish a quasi-historical basis for the claim that the land of Israel was promised to the Jews by

God. While it purports to recount historical events from the 16th to the 9th century B.C.E., the text of the Hebrew Bible was not actually edited and assembled as one official scripture until around the 3rd century B.C.E., probably in Alexandria. The text currently in use by practicing Jews is a reproduction of a Masoretic text edited and compiled in the 11th century C.E.; the ‘King James’ version of the Christians’ collection of the books of the Old Testament was published several centuries later.

If we seek a sophisticated metaphysics in the scriptural texts of the early Jews, we will be profoundly disappointed: God (*Yahweh* or *Elohim*) is never treated metaphysically in the Judaic scriptures. He is presented rather as a mythological and anthropomorphic deity who molded his creatures from clay, and sometimes walked with them in Eden. He made covenants, spoke to His prophets, and took a fatherly role in leading His chosen people, the Jews, in their wanderings and in their promised conquest of Canaan.

The story of Creation is contained in the book of Genesis—and there are two conflicting versions. Neither, we are told by later commentators, are to be taken literally, though that is how they were taken for more than twenty centuries; they are, according to modern commentators, to be regarded only as allegories. God’s first act of creation, according to one version of Genesis, was to utter the words, “Let there be light!” This seems not be a mystically revealed event, however, but rather the simple reiteration of a mythological account dating back untold centuries from Egyptian roots, where God’s power of creation was said to lie in His spoken word (*Ptah*).

Following the account of the Creation of light, the book of Genesis then states that God commenced to create the heavens and the earth, and the various creatures. But, little did the author of Genesis know, there was no need for further creation; for all subsequent manifestations and creatures were contained in and evolved from that initial Light.

The specific case of the creation of man is described in Genesis in the following words:

Then the Lord God formed a man (*adam*) from the dust of the ground (*adamah*), and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. Thus the man became a living creature.²³

However, in order to alleviate the appearance of anthropomorphism, and, since the infusion of God's Spirit (or Soul) into the first man fails to explain the presence of Soul in all subsequent men, this Biblical account has to be viewed as an allegory. In order for this account to jibe with current evolutionary knowledge, we must take this allegory to mean that God created the matter (the dust) by His own light-energy, and then breathed into it His own Spirit, causing the universe to evolve according to His will, eventually giving birth to living creatures, including man. But, of course this is more than allegorical interpretation; it is revisionist interpretation. We have to ask ourselves 'by what measure do we determine what is allegory and what is merely inaccurate in the light of current knowledge?' But perhaps it doesn't really matter, since those ancient writings got the important (allegorical) facts correct: According to Jewish

tradition, God manifested (created) the material universe, and then infused His living Spirit into it, thus initiating life and consciousness into all Creation, including man.

The ancient author of Genesis (traditionally thought to be Moses) realized that the creature formed of dust (matter) would be nothing more than an inanimate clay figurine without the divine Spirit animating it and making it sentient and conscious. For man to become what he is—“a living creature”, he had to be infused with the enlivening spirit of God Himself. And so, this Biblical account establishes a very important metaphysical truth, one that is fleshed out by Philo Judaeus, a Platonized Alexandrian Jew of the the 1st century C.E., and one of the earliest interpreters of the Bible as allegory:

Moses says that “God made man, having taken clay from the earth, and He breathed into his face the breath of life.” ...[He] asserts that the formation of the individual man, perceptible by the external senses, is a composition of earthly substance and divine spirit. For that the body was created by the Creator taking a lump of clay and fashioning the human form out of it; but that the soul proceeds from no created thing at all, but from the Father and Ruler of all things. For when he uses the expression, ‘He breathed into,’ etc., he means nothing less than the Divine Spirit proceeding from that happy and blessed nature, sent to take up its habitation here on earth for the advantage of our race in order that, even if man

is mortal according to that portion of him which is visible, he may at all events be immortal according to that portion which is invisible; and for this reason, one may properly say that man is on the boundaries of a better and an immortal nature, partaking of each as far as it is necessary for him; and that he was born at the same time both mortal and the immortal: mortal as to his body, but immortal as to his intellect [or soul].²⁴

This profound understanding does not, however, carry over in an evident manner into the remainder of the Bible, which consists primarily of a rambling, largely fictional, account of the early history of the Jewish people and their struggles. Aside from a brief mention in the Book of *Ecclesiastes*, that, upon death of the body, the soul or spirit (Hebrew, *nephesh*) goes upward, i.e, returns to God from whence it came, there is little further mention of the soul in the 'Old Testament' Bible.²⁵ There are, however, some interesting metaphysical touches in the books that make up what is called 'the Wisdom literature' of the Bible. But these books are of late origin, and seem to have borrowed much from the Greek Platonist tradition already well established.²⁶

When Christianity came into existence, Judaism was rightly viewed as its foundational background, since Jesus, the founder and object of Christian worship, was born and raised in the Jewish religious tradition. We must assume, therefore that Jesus adopted and assented to the Biblical account of Creation. However, when Jesus experienced God directly and proclaimed his mystical unity with

God, he posed a threat to the Judaic doctrine of the separation of man from God, and aroused the ire of the Jewish orthodoxy. These religious legalists hounded and arrested him and put him to death in a public manner usually reserved for enemies of the state.

Jesus had been merely an obscure Jewish mystic, but the story of his brief life and tragic death spread far and wide, and inspired and raised the spiritual aspirations of generations of people all over the world.

He had taught the mystical path to his disciples; but few of his followers, either during his lifetime or after, could follow him into those rare heights. After he was persecuted and executed for expounding his unitive vision, his followers began to gather together for inspiration, and the small gatherings soon developed into a sizeable church organization. And, when the few became many, diverse interests inevitably came into play: some were attracted to contemplation; some to charitable or teaching activities; and some preferred to deify their master, Jesus, as an object of ritual worship.

Jesus had not formulated a detailed metaphysics to guide his followers; but a metaphysics developed around him nonetheless, fueled not only by his Judaic background, but by the persuasive Greek influence of the times. In particular, the Greek philosophical concept of the *Logos* played an important part in the metaphysics of the early Christian theologians.

The common Greek word, *logos*, was originally understood in several different ways; one of which was as “intention, hypothesis,

or thought”. Heraclitus, in the 4th century B.C.E., the first to use the word in a metaphysical sense, intended by it the Divine Intelligence by which all the world is pervaded. Much later, a contemporary of Jesus, Philo Judaeus—an influential Alexandrian Jew with strong ties to the Greek, and specifically the Platonic, philosophical tradition—used the word to denote the Mind or Thought of God, wherefrom the Idea of the world took form. Here is how he expressed it:

God who, having determined to found a mighty state, first of all conceived its form in his mind, according to which form he made a world perceptible only by the intellect, and then completed one visible to the external senses, using the first one as a model. ...It is manifest also, that the archetypal seal, which we call that world which is perceptible only to the intellect, must itself be the archetypal model, the idea of ideas, the *Logos* of God.²⁷

...The incorporeal world then was already completed, having its seat in the Divine *Logos*; and the world, perceptible by the external senses, was made on the model of it.²⁸

For Philo, the *Logos* was not only the Idea in the mind of God, but was that very Ideational Power of God that Plotinus would later call *Nous*, or “The Divine Mind”. Philo, acknowledging that the *Logos* was the creative Power of the One, referred to it as “the first-born of

God. [It was] conceived in God's mind before all things, and is that which manifests as all things."²⁹

One of the four Gospel authors, living in the 1st or 2nd century C.E., and known to us only as 'John', was apparently familiar with the writings of Philo, and taking his theological cue from him, began his Gospel with these words:

In the beginning was the Logos, the Logos was with God, and the Logos was God. ...All things were made by the Logos; without him, nothing was made. It was by him that all things came into existence.³⁰

This was, of course, quite in keeping with the Philonian concept; but then John added these words:

And the Logos became flesh and lived among us... as the only-begotten son of his father.³¹

Some of the most influential Christian theologians and apologists, such as Justin Martyr (100-165 C.E.), Irenaeus (130-200 C.E.), Tertullian (150-225 C.E.), and others, jumped on this bandwagon, campaigning strongly for the recognition of Jesus as synonymous with the *Logos*, or Creative Power, of God; though there were others, called *alogi*, who were against this idea. And so there was much argument and discussion among these early Christians. It was a time when theological and metaphysical ideas were very much 'in the air'; and it is clear that many of the learned Christian theologians and Apologists of the time were influenced not only by the Judaic

tradition, but by the Neoplatonist vision, as well as by the writings of Philo Judaeus, and possibly the Gnostics, Hermetics and Stoics as well. Borrowing the terminology of Philo, as echoed by the Gospel writer, John, they regarded the *Logos* much the way Plotinus regarded *Nous*, the Divine Mind: as the active Creative Power of the transcendent Godhead, or “the One”. For the Christians, the Godhead was referred to as “the Spirit” or “the Father”, and His creative power was referred to as “the Logos” or “the Son”. According to Tertullian (150-225):

The Spirit is the substance of the Logos, and the Logos is the activity of the Spirit; the two are a unity (*unum*).³²

Athenagoras (133-190) writes:

If you ask what is meant by the Son, I will state briefly that he is the first product of the Father, not as having been brought into existence (for from the beginning, God, who is the eternal Mind has the Logos in Himself, being from eternity instinct with Logos); but inasmuch as the Logos came forth to be the Idea and energizing power of all material things.³³

Later, Athanasius, Patriarch of Alexandria (293-372), using the very analogy of the Sun’s radiation offered by Plotinus, says:

Was God, who IS, ever without the Logos? Was He, who is light, ever without radiance? ...God is, eternally; then, since the Father always is, His radiance also exists eternally; and that is His Logos.³⁴ The Logos of God *is* creator and maker; he *is* the Father's will.³⁵

From these many theological interchanges a consensus arose; and the historical Jesus became permanently associated with the *Logos*, and was thereafter regarded by Christians as an incarnation of God; or, in popular circles, 'the Son of God'. Then, to the duality of the Father and the Son was added a never adequately defined "Spirit" or "Holy Ghost", thus constituting a holy Trinity. This doctrine of the Trinity became firmly established as a metaphysical tenet of the Church with the formulation of the Nicene Creed following the first ecumenical council assembled by emperor Constantine in 325 C.E.—though in later years Christendom would become bitterly divided in its acceptance of this tenet.

It is not apparent that Christianity played any part in Plotinus' thought; though he was no doubt keenly aware of the Christian movement of his time. In Plotinus' youth, under the tutelage of Ammonius Saccus, a longshoreman turned philosopher, one of Plotinus' fellow-disciples was a brilliant student by the name of Origen (182-251 C.E.), who would later become a famous and influential Christian theologian. Also, Plotinus' disciple, Porphyry (ca. 233-305 C.E.), had been a Christian for a time, but had later rejected it. Both in his Alexandrian youth and in his maturity at Rome, Plotinus had to have been keenly aware of the presence of the

Christians and their teachings, though he said nothing in his writings about them, either critically or in passing. He was critical, however, of some of the Gnostic sects, who were equally vociferous at the time.³⁶

Plotinus lived in a time when numerous individuals and sects were formulating a metaphysics purportedly based on mystical experience. And since Plotinus was exceedingly well taught by mystical experience, having entered that contemplative 'union' at least four times, he was understandably impatient with the many pretenders and fraudulent mythologizers who taught under the banner of 'Gnosticism', or spiritual knowledge.

The authentic mystical teachings of Plotinus, having the advantage of being written by his hand, did not suffer from the distortions that plagued some of the Gnostics' teachings nor from the ignoble interpretations that plagued the teachings of Jesus. In fact, in the centuries after his death, both the orthodox Christians and the Gnostics borrowed heavily from the philosophical and theological teachings of Plotinus, incorporating them into their own writings.

There soon followed a period of state-sponsored Christianity, when all things pagan were banned by the Christian rulers, including the writings of Plotinus; nonetheless, his writings continued to greatly influence Christian mystical theology through Gregory of Nyssa (ca. 335-390 C.E.), St. Augustine (354-430 C.E.), Pseudo-Dionysius (5th century C.E.), and many later Christian mystics such as Saint Bonaventure (1221-1274 C.E.) and Meister Eckhart (1260-c. 1328 C.E.). Clearly, the writings of Plotinus greatly influenced the

contemplatives of the early Church and of the Middle Ages; however, there is little remaining of that contemplative tradition in contemporary Christianity.

Plotinus' *Enneads* also strongly influenced Islamic thought when they were paraphrased in Arabic by al-Kindi in the 9th century and foisted upon the West as 'The Theology of Aristotle'. Many thinkers of the Renaissance were also influenced by Plotinus when he was 'rediscovered' in the 15th century by Marcilio Ficino (1433-1492) and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494); and his teachings continue to inform and enlighten spiritual students to this day.

IV. Plotinus And Materialism

The modern metaphysical vision, based on the vision of Plotinus, which is here presented, asserts that there is a transcendent, eternal and blissful Spirit, who radiates His/Its own conscious Intelligence as Soul; that the eternal Spirit also manifests, in a cyclic manner, an immense periodic burst of Light, that transforms itself into time, space and form (mass); that the Divine radiance of Soul permeates and inheres in those forms manifested from the Divinely produced Light; and that these subsequently living forms, consisting of body and soul, though initially unaware of their identity with their originating Source, evolve and grow in knowledge, understanding and spiritual vision, for the purpose of discovering and enjoying the transcendent freedom and bliss of their eternal Spirit, their own Divine Self.

Contrast this view with that of the materialists, which is so prevalent today, and according to which: 'The *universe* originated in an unknown manner—though we feel certain it did not have a supernatural Source. *Life* then originated in an unknown manner on at least one planet—but we are certain its origin was not supernatural. From life, *consciousness* originated in an unknown manner—we are certain, however, that there is no supernatural Being at work here; and that all this happened randomly and without any aim or purpose.'

Even in the time of Plotinus, the philosophy of materialism competed with the spiritual philosophy of Platonism. Here is Plotinus' third-century description of that materialist 'school' of thought:

To a certain school, ...existence is limited to bodies: there is one only Matter, the stuff underlying the primal constituents of the universe. Existence is nothing but this Matter; everything is some modification of this, the elements of the universe [being] simply this Matter in a certain condition.³⁷

This is still the credo of materialism today. Materialism is not a 'religion', of course; but it is, for many, a firmly held article of faith. And implicit in a faith in the materialist view is the denial of the existence of Spirit or Soul. It is, in other words, an atheist faith. Materialism precludes not only the existence of God from consideration, but also precludes such noumenal categories as *mind*,

consciousness and *soul*—all existents that Plotinus, as a representative of *gnosis*, was most concerned to elucidate. Rather, they prefer to place a great emphasis on the discipline of *science*, which does not entertain consideration for such subjects.

The distinction between Matter and Spirit, or body and soul, necessitates this division between the two areas of knowledge: matter being the province of *science*, and Spirit being the province of *gnosis* (or spiritual realization). It is asserted that the two cannot be subject to the same means of study, since the one is concerned with a subjective noumenal reality, and the other concerned with perceivable phenomenal objects; and so they must of necessity have their own distinctive areas of study, methodology, and nomenclature.

Science is defined as “the study of the physical and natural world of phenomena.” And no one will deny that scientific methods are essential determinants of what is true and false in ‘the natural world of phenomena’. But when it is asserted that no other field of experience exists; that there is no reality other than “the physical and natural world of phenomena,” and therefore no other valid field of study, this is not science, but *scientism*.

When *science* becomes the singular focus, as it has in our contemporary culture, it is very easy for science to drift toward *scientism*. Science deals only with the phenomenal reality, and it’s only a small step from there to the assumption that this is the *only* reality. Though the reality of subjective consciousness is always present, it gets ignored as one focuses on the objective phenomena.

And, naturally, when there is a consistent focus on the behavior of “the physical and natural world of phenomena”, that focus becomes not only predominant, but exclusive; and the existence of anything outside that focus gets first ignored, then denied.

Scientism is virtually identical to *materialism*, in that the advocates of both believe that matter is the sole existent in this universe, and therefore that only what is empirically demonstrable—that is, apparent to the senses—is a valid object of study. The *real fallacy of scientism* is the belief that scientific method determines the *truth*. Scientific method can only be used to decide what is *science*—what is scientifically demonstrable; not what is true. Plotinus’ theory of Soul cannot be considered *science* because it cannot be demonstrated in accordance with scientific criteria. Yet it may well describe reality as it truly *is*. Or not. We can easily decide what is *science* and what is *gnosis* or metaphysics; these are formally well-defined. But the determination of what is ‘true’ is not within our collective capability; it must remain forever a matter of one’s own *individual experience* and faith.³⁸

There is, however, a widespread belief in our contemporary world that *science* is synonymous with *true* knowledge; that what is not *science* is not true. This is *scientism*. It is this very doctrine that is the most predominant faith of our current time, one that wields an ubiquitous stranglehold on our culture, our education system, and the spiritual aspirations of our future generations.

Scientists jealously guard their strictly defined discipline from the introduction of non-scientific constructs. Naturally, any theory

which suggests the existence and efficacy of an invisible supernatural power, a Divine spacetime-transcending Source and governing principle present and active in this material universe, is out of the question. Such a notion does not fit scientific criteria and therefore must be rejected outright; and it must be adamantly repudiated by the defenders of scientific protocol. If you doubt that this occurs, please consider this revealing example of such a repudiation by the late renowned genetic biologist, Richard Lewontin:

We take the side of science *in spite* of the patent absurdity of some of its constructs, *in spite* of its failure to fulfill many of its extravagant promises of health and life, *in spite* of the tolerance of the scientific community for unsubstantiated just-so stories, because we have a prior commitment, a commitment to materialism. It is not that the methods and institutions of science somehow compel us to accept a material explanation of the phenomenal world, but, on the contrary, that we are forced by our *a priori* adherence to material causes to create an apparatus of investigation and a set of concepts that produce material explanations, no matter how counterintuitive, no matter how mystifying to the uninitiated. Moreover, that materialism is absolute, for we cannot allow a Divine foot in the door.³⁹

We may judge this repudiation of the Divine in two different ways: (1) As a defense of scientific integrity: in which case it is a perfectly valid and legitimate defense; or (2) As a defense of truth: in which case it is a biased and prejudiced opinion. For, in the quest for *scientific* knowledge, there are certain limiting rules, one of which is that supernatural entities or beings may not be introduced as causes. In the quest for truth, however; in other words, for the knowledge that corresponds with reality, with the way things really *are*, there are no such limiting rules. Clearly, the line between the two has become very confused, and it is often difficult to determine whether someone is defending *science* and the scientific method, or defending their own vision of reality, their own vision of the truth.

Science has staked out its claim to that portion of knowledge concerned with the phenomenal world, with matter, with the body; *religion* has similarly staked out a claim for concerns having to do with God, the spirit, the soul. They have divided reality among themselves, and fashioned a split patterned on the Cartesian division between Spirit and matter, soul and body. But the wise operate within an integrated reality, with a unified knowledge, that embraces every facet of existence: body and soul; Matter and Spirit (Mind). The wise see with an all-encompassing and undivided vision, which cannot be categorized as either *science* or *religion*, but contains and embraces both Matter and Spirit, both body and soul, both science and religion.

The unfettered minds of the great place no restrictions on their intellectual explorations. They follow truth wherever it may lead. Those who profess to follow truth, but qualify their willingness to

follow it by saying, ‘so long as it doesn’t lead in *that* direction’, are hypocrites at best. Yet this is precisely the attitude of much of the materialist community who limit their endeavors to the discovery of ‘natural’—that is to say, ‘material’— causes, stipulating that a ‘supernatural’ Power or Intelligence may not be attributed as a causal agent under any circumstances. But they must be reminded that those who exclude the untrodden roads may never reach the destination, may never find their way to certain truth. To exclude in principle the invisible is to imprison oneself in the false and narrow confines of appearance. And, as Plotinus has said: “Those who make sense the test of reality, annul the supremely real.”⁴⁰

Plotinus had risen above the reality apparent to the senses, and had *experienced* the supremely real. And so he gave but meager attention to those who had neither soared in Spirit, nor aspired to, nor even thought deeply about, their own nature:

All human beings from birth onward live to the realm of sense more than to the spiritual. Forced of necessity to attend first to the material, some of them elect to abide by that order and, throughout their lives, make its concerns their first and their last; the sweet and the bitter of sense are their good and evil. They feel they have done all if they live along pursuing the one and barring the doors to the other. And those of them that pretend to reasoning have adopted this as their philosophy. They are like the heavier birds which have incorporated much from

the earth and are so weighted down that they cannot fly high despite the wings Nature has given them.⁴¹

V. Summing Up

And so these two opposed perspectives, the theory of Spirit and soul up against the theory of Matter and body only, square off against one another. Not only their theories of Being, but their subjective experiences are irreconcilably opposed, and so these two camps can only agree to disagree. Happily, they and we will all inevitably discover the truth one day.

We will undoubtedly discover that the Source of consciousness is, in fact, beyond time and space, and all manifestation; It is the eternal Identity of all that exists. It transcends the universe, while constituting its essence—as a dreaming mind transcends its dream-images, while constituting their essence. Consciousness is not the property of matter, or of any individual being. It is not produced by any material process; but rather is a Divine stream of Intelligence filling the entire universe. It is the fundamental nature of Being, the foundation of the phenomenal universe, and the light of awareness filling it. We are able to know it by following our own consciousness back to its Source, where we are able to discover our original Self. That Self is God. He is the one Source of the material universe and He is the life and awareness pervading it. But, of course, we must see It for ourselves. Our soul/mind must be illumined by the eternal Light itself, and drawn into Its hidden depths. To obtain that grace,

all men focus their minds on that One through prayer and contemplative longing, and He shines His Light on whom He will.

Whether His cosmos is fashioned by light or by some other means; whether His revealed presence in man is by the permeation of His own essence as Soul into and throughout the nascent material universe, or by some other means; all, all is contained in Him, and co-operates under His singular and unfailing will. How many fools have set out to explain or justify the ways of God to man! I do not wish to be one of those. His ways are too deep, His means indiscernible. And even were we to see Him in the act of casting forth these worlds and multitudes of souls or beings, there would be no words to fit the magic mystery of it. How feeble would be such words! No. I wish only to acknowledge His supreme majesty, to praise His great Goodness, to point all souls back to Him from whom all life and blessings flow. Let all reason and consciousness awake to know Him and to revel in Him, sunken in the awareness that is His own awareness, loving by the power of His love, and rejoicing by the power of His joy.

Let us call on Him, and see if He will offer some hints to help us know Him and lead us to see our true life in Him.

If He were to reply to our plea, He might say something like this:

It's pretty much like they taught you in Sunday school: I created the world with a great light from myself; but, more importantly, I live within you as the Soul of your soul, and lead you like a magnet to

my fond embrace, merging you in myself. Pretty great, huh?

So, what's the problem? You rebel; you don't want to listen to me within you. You become impatient, and turn to seeking pleasure in 'the world'—the false world I made with my light. And so, again and again, you come up empty, grasping only shadows. For some of you it takes a long time for you to figure out where your greatest good lies. It's a long drawn-out process for dummies. But all is good in the end. Drama accomplished. Everyone's in Bliss. But didn't it seem like hell going through the learning process! Well, if it didn't, you never would have learned the way back home.

We'll do it all again, and again; but don't dismay. It's all just make-believe. It's all just me all along. You're never apart from me; in fact, I'm you—I'm both your form and your essence. I'm the only one who ever is. Never forget it.

There is one issue on which the various religious traditions agree: the freedom and accountability of the human will. The Jews were keenly aware of the fact that man's free will allowed for the disobedience of God's will, as illustrated in the 'garden of Eden' story; later Christians declared that Jesus' sacrifice on the cross constituted 'redemption' and 'salvation' from man's earlier 'Fall from grace'. The Buddha's philosophy, and that of Shankara and

Plotinus also, postulates the human ‘will to separateness’ as the instigator of human suffering. Here is Plotinus’ take on man’s Fall:

What can it be that has brought the souls to forget the Father, God, and, though [they are] members of the Divine and entirely of that world, to ignore at once themselves and It? The evil that has overtaken them has its source in self-will, in the entry into the sphere of process, and in the primal differentiation with the desire for self-ownership. They conceived a pleasure in this freedom and largely indulged their own motion. Thus they were hurried down the wrong path, and in the end, drifting further and further, they came to lose even the thought of their origin in the Divine.⁴²

The Jews, Christians, the Buddha, Shankara, Plotinus—all put the blame for human suffering upon the separative will of the individual. And rightly so, no doubt; for in the Divine itself, there is no suffering. Had the One no hand, then, in the creation of the defiant soul? Does a freely willing soul, or in the Buddhist terminology, ignorance and volition, have the ability to bring itself into existence? I am doubtful. Is it possible that we do not ‘will’ our way to separateness, but are ‘sent’ to it? Must we not wonder if anything at all comes to pass that is not of His doing? The soul’s ability to will freely—had He no hand in that? May it not be that our embodied existence in this spatio-temporal world is also His doing? Is it not possible that this going forth into the school of separate existence is, as the Vedantists assert, His play or sport?

And is it not possible that we are sent forth into this material school to prove and improve, to be tested and to evolve in His knowledge, in His joy?

Suffering is only the failure to learn; suffering is blindness to our existence in Him and for Him. It is indeed we who create suffering through ignorance and error; but it is He who comprises the essence of this soul with its capacity for willing, and it is He who fashioned this universal school for the soul's correcting. Can we imagine that He was ignorant of the outcome?

The wave's suffering of separation from the ocean may seem real enough; but it is based on illusion. Once the wave realizes its true nature, all suffering disappears. We are in a similar situation: unknowing, we suffer; knowing, we rejoice. It is not existence that constitutes suffering, but existence in delusion. When we awake to our Divine existence, all suffering vanishes. Is this not the essence of the Buddha's message, and the message of all who see the truth?

All creatures, down to the smallest microbes, and up to the great apes, have the power of will; but only the creature known as man has the ability to know his Source and Ground as Spirit, and strive to overcome his merely fleshly impulses. Is that circumstance only accidental, or is there a purposeful evolution at work here? Man is the culmination of God's purposes; and only he is able to find within himself the eternal One. It's true that, in following his own appetites and cravings, man brings himself to know suffering; but though the expanse presented before him is broad and vast, and his opportunities many, the field of experience leads him inexorably to

wisdom; the Divine in him leads him to Itself. The soul itself, being of Divine lineage, cannot long refuse the lure and fragrance of its homeland. By its own power, or rather by the power of the Divine in it, the soul stirs and awakes in its proper time, follows the trail of bliss leading it home, and at last is illumined by the inner light of God to know the One in whom it lives, and from whom it has never been separated.

Once caught in that Light, once illumined by the Eternal, does a soul will its restoration to embodied selfhood in the artificial multiplicity of *samsara*? I think not. Yet it re-emerges into that embodied life nonetheless—but with a new perspective: *Samsara* is now *Nirvana*. The mundane is now Divine. The mind and intellect are infused with a new awareness: all is bright with Divinity, within and without.

When I slipped from that pure land, returning involuntarily to the spatio-temporal world, it was in no way a ‘willing’ toward separate existence! The mental effort required to maintain the intense singular concentration was simply too much after some time, and I felt a failing of that one-pointedness, as I slipped unwillingly away from that vision. If there was a ‘willing’ toward a breaking of that unitive bond, it was not mine. It was more a failing of strength than a willing to depart. Thereafter, I collapsed, exhausted, and fell into a deep sleep.

We, embodied souls on this earth, are not *able* to remain long in that place of Spirit. Is it karma that draws us back? Unfinished business? Whatever pulls us back to this world, we are given the opportunity to refashion our lives in the light of what has been

revealed to us. There is now a transparency to things in this new life—as though one’s body and all the objects were but holographic images with no substantial reality. All is permeated with a Divine sweetness, and our life is seen to be His.

Nothing to lament, nothing to vanquish,
 Nothing to pride oneself on;
 All is accomplished in an instant.
 All may now be told without effort.
 Where is there a question? ⁴³

What is there left to do in such a life but praise Him? Jnaneshvar, who knew the Divine truth intimately, acknowledged that, in this state:

Truly, there is neither bondage nor freedom;
 There is nothing to be accomplished.
 There is only the pleasure of expounding. ⁴⁴

There is one Consciousness. It is the Consciousness of the One Being. And all the manifested universe exists within that one Consciousness. The various objects of this manifested universe move and operate, not by individual forces or laws of physics, but in and by that One. Immersed in that one Consciousness, awakened to and united with It, one sees that: “all things move together of one accord; assent is given throughout the universe to every falling grain.” Who, then, is doing what? In Him we live and move. In Him one Will operates throughout. And we, mere dust motes

dancing in His sunbeam, are swallowed and encompassed in His light. Look within, and see: It's true; even your 'I' is Him.

* * *

**PART FOUR:
SELECTED WRITINGS OF PLOTINUS**

Soul we must place at the crest of the world of beings. This principle [is] not merely the Soul of the universe, but included in it, the soul of the individual. This, no mean principle, is needed to be the bond of union in the total of things—not itself an object sprung like things from living seeds, but a first-hand cause, bodiless and therefore supreme over itself, free, and beyond the reach of cosmic [natural] causes.

— Plotinus ¹

I. Introductory Note

There were other so-called Western philosophers before Socrates who appear to have taught what might be called a mystical philosophy—such as Pythagoras from the island of Samos (c. 570-490 B.C.E.), Heraclitus of Ephesus (540-480 B.C.E.), Xenophanes of Colophon (570-475 B.C.E.), Parmenides of Elea (b. 515 B.C.E.), and Anaxagorus of Ionia (b. 500 B.C.E.). But we have only inconclusive fragments and hearsay by which to judge in these cases, and certainly nothing like a personal account of mystical experience. Socrates (469-399 B.C.E.), himself, is a likely candidate for the label, “mystic”; but we have only accounts of his teachings from Plato and Xenophon, and though they suggest his possession of a “mystical” knowledge, he too seems to have made only vague references to his own mystical experience.

It remains to say something about the various possible mystical influences existing from the time of Plato to Plotinus: Zeno of Citium in Cypress (335-265 B.C.E.), the founder of Stoicism, seems by all accounts to have taught a philosophy based on mystically perceived revelations; but, again, we can only surmise, as we have no actual personal account of mystical experience from his hand. The same is true of his followers, Cleanthes of Assos (b. 330 B.C.E.), Chrysippus of Cilicia (280-205 B.C.E.), and the later Stoic philosopher, Poseidonius of Apamea (135-51 B.C.E.). Epictetus of Hierapolis (50-138 C.E.), whose writings though still extant, containing many mystical elements, still makes no mention of personal mystical experience.

The writings of the Alexandrian Jew, Philo Judaeus (20 B.C.E. to 40 C.E.) were plainly mystical in nature, and may indeed have been read by Plotinus. The scriptural books of the Jews of Palestine, and the teachings of the martyred Nazarene, Jesus (4 B.C.E. to 30 C.E.), and those of his followers, the Christians, no doubt reached him as well. It is nearly certain that he was familiar with the clearly mystical texts of the Hermetic tradition which surfaced in the 1st century C.E., claiming to be an ancient Egyptian legacy; and with the various writings of the Gnostics, which also made their appearance at this time. They were of various Eastern origins, and, for the most part, fostered a Dualistic philosophy to which Plotinus greatly objected.

Other mystical influences of the time include the Neo-Pythagorean, Apollonius of Tyana (1st century C.E.), who was revered as a God-

man, and no doubt taught a mystical philosophy, but we know little of his thought and that only from a later biographer. Numenius of Apamea (Syria), who lived in the latter part of the 2nd century C.E., was reputedly one of Plotinus' major influence, but we possess nothing of his writings. And so we come to the time of Plotinus. In Rome, by the middle of the 3rd century of the Current Era, the great Greek philosophers of the golden age were merely a distant memory, and the last of the Roman Stoics, the Emperor Marcus Aurelius (121-180 C.E.), had long since passed away. It was now the time of the Christian theologians, Clement of Alexandria (ca. 215 C.E.), Origen (185-251 C.E.), and Tertullian (150-225 C.E.); and Christianity, while still in its birth throes, was gathering wide public support, as were the Gnostic and Hermetic sects of the time.

The ancient civilizations were in a period of decline; the revolt of Maximus (ca. 235 C.E.) marked the beginning of an endless series of civil and foreign wars, domestic calamities, plagues and famines, which depopulated and impoverished the Roman empire, and put an end to culture, learning, and philosophy, along with the elite who had the leisure to pursue them. Amidst this dark and unhappy period of political transition and religious tumult in Rome, Plotinus (205-270 C.E.) stands out as a singular guiding light—the first great Western representative of mystical knowledge. There is no doubt that he must be regarded as the Father of Western mysticism, and counted as one of the most influential mystical philosophers who ever lived. He was, indeed, a great Sage, a World-Teacher, whose fame, reputation and influence grows brighter with every passing age.

According to tradition, Plotinus was born at Lycopolis (the modern city of Asyut) in Upper Egypt, but moved to Alexandria in his youth. We are told by his biographer, Porphyry of Tyre (233-304 C.E.), that at the age of twenty-eight, Plotinus made a decision to follow the life of philosophy. He no doubt had some kind of spiritual awakening at this time—a not uncommon age for this to occur if we think of the Buddha, Jesus, and other major religious figures. At this time, Plotinus read and heard the teachings of many philosophers, but found no one he wished to take as his mentor until he heard the teachings of Ammonias Saccus, who was known as “the God-taught.” After hearing one of Ammonias’ lectures, Plotinus said to a friend, “This is the man I’ve been looking for.”

Ammonias was well learned in the Persian and Indian philosophical traditions, and his philosophy was highly compatible with the mystical philosophy taught in those lands. After studying for eleven years with Ammonias, Plotinus, having heard so much of the philosophy of Persia and India, decided he would like to learn more of the thought of those peoples first-hand. With this object in mind, he joined up with the expeditionary forces of Emperor Gordian III which were *en route* to Persia. He got as far as Mesopotamia, when the Emperor was assassinated, and the expedition was halted. Plotinus managed to escape to Antioch and then to Rome, where he arrived in the year 245 of the Current Era, at which time he was forty years of age.

For the next twenty-five years, Plotinus seems to have stemmed his travel urges, and remained in Rome, teaching his mystical philosophy. His lectures were free and open to the public, and he

apparently lived solely on the favors of his wealthy students and patrons. He taught from his own mystical experience, but he usually framed his thoughts in terms familiar to students of Plato; and for that reason he became labeled in much later times as “the founder of Neoplatonism.” This is an unfortunate misnomer, however, for it tends to detract from the fact that Plotinus’ message was ultimately founded, not so much on any one tradition, but on his own personal realizations.

In the first ten years of his life in Rome, Plotinus wrote nothing, but by the time Porphyry had become his follower in the year 263 C.E., he had completed twenty-one treatises. In answer to the questions of his later students, he wrote thirty-three more, which were circulated without titles among his closest followers. And, after Plotinus’ death, Porphyry gathered these fifty-four treatises together into a book of six sections, containing nine treatises each; hence the title, *Enneads* (“Nines”), by which Plotinus’ book is known.

In his meetings with his friends and students, Plotinus would explain in an imaginative and compelling manner the truths of the spiritual life. Says Porphyry: “When he was speaking, the light of his intellect visibly illuminated his face; always of winning presence, he became at these times still more engaging: a slight moisture gathered on his forehead; he radiated benignity.”² “Plotinus,” said Porphyry, “lived at once within himself and for others; he never relaxed from his interior attention unless in sleep; and even his sleep he kept light by an abstemiousness that often prevented him taking as much as a piece of bread, and by constantly concentrating on his own highest nature.³ ... He was gentle, and always at the call of

those having the slightest acquaintance with him. After spending twenty-six years in Rome, acting, too, as arbiter in many differences, he had never made an enemy of any citizen.”⁴

Plotinus taught and wrote and discussed questions with his devoted students, but a great deal of his time was spent in solitary contemplation, leading his soul to union with its divine Source. Porphyry states that, during the time he knew him, Plotinus attained that exalted state of awareness four times. In order to share his revealed knowledge with future generations, Plotinus had written fifty-four treatises of various length expounding diverse elements of his mystical vision; and these were gathered and presented by Porphyry as the *Enneads*.

The treatises included in the *Enneads* were not presented by Porphyry in the order in which they were written by Plotinus, nor was Plotinus' philosophy systematically presented in this written collection of treatises. In fact, a clear understanding of the whole of Plotinus' philosophy may be obtained only by a laborious search, ferreting out from amongst his fifty-four treatises the common meaning of various terms and the interconnection of each element of his metaphysical vision. This, of course, presents a great obstacle and difficulty for the uninitiated student attempting to obtain from a casual reading of the *Enneads* an overall comprehension of Plotinus' metaphysics. An additional difficulty is added as a result of Plotinus' lack of economy and continuity of expression, which may be partially explained as a result of his failing eyesight, which prevented him from editing or even rereading what he had written in his spontaneous outpourings of thought.

When, in his later years, he became gravely ill, suffering from malignant diphtheria, Plotinus retired to the estate of a nobleman disciple in Campania. A friend who visited him there, reports that Plotinus, weak and scarcely able to speak, whispered, "I am striving to give back the divine in me to the divine in all." He died soon thereafter at the age of sixty-six.

All Western mystical philosophy after Plotinus bears the stamp of his vision. His was the model on which Jewish, Muslim, and Christian theology in the Middle Ages was founded. The great Christian theologian, St. Augustine (354-430) was greatly influenced by Plotinus, as was Boethius (480-524), Eriugena (810-877), and pseudo-Dionysius (5th century), as well as the Spanish Moslem philosophers Al-Farabi (870-950), Avicenna (980-1037), and Averroes (1126-1198); the Jewish philosopher, Ibn Gabirol (1021-1070), as well as the medieval Christians, Meister Eckhart (1260-1328), Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), and the Christian Scholastics of the 13th century were all also greatly influenced by the writings of Plotinus. In 1492 Marcilio Ficino resurrected the metaphysics of Plotinus by translating him into the Latin of his day, thereby greatly shaping the philosophical milieu of the Renaissance. Thus, his influence through the centuries has been, and continues to be, immense.

I have attempted in the following brief selection of Plotinus' writings to offer a systematic presentation of his thought on distinctly separate elements of his metaphysics, in order to facilitate an understanding of his integrated vision. I have arranged these

selections topically, and while each topic may certainly be read independent of the rest, they are arranged in an order from first to last that seems to me to best conduct the reader progressively to a clear understanding of Plotinus' metaphysics. I have left out of my selections much of what may be considered obscure or redundant, and also a great deal more in the interest of keeping these selections focused and succinct. Thus they reflect to a great degree my own judgment of what is of most value in Plotinus, and what is of secondary value. Above all, I have attempted to form a coherent, readable, and hopefully instructive and illuminative collection of excerpts from his writings.

All of the following texts are excerpted from Plotinus' *Enneads*, and are based on the translations from the original Greek by Stephen MacKenna, to whom I offer my thanks and acknowledge my indebtedness. Where his phrasing, punctuation or terminology seemed to me archaic or obscurative of the meaning, I have corrected it to form what seems to me a simpler and more intelligible expression of Plotinus' thought:

II. The One

When we speak of The One and when we speak of The Good we must recognize an identical nature. We must affirm that they are the same—not, it is true, as venturing any predication with regard to that [primal] Person (*hypostasis*), but simply as indicating it to ourselves in the best terms we can find. Even in calling It “The First” we mean no more than to express that It is the most absolutely simplex. It is

the Self-Sufficing only in the sense that it is not of that compound nature which would make it dependent upon any constituent. It is The Self-Contained because everything contained in something other must also exist by virtue of that other.

Deriving then from nothing other, entering into nothing other, in no way a comprised thing, there can be nothing above It. We need not, then, go seeking any other Principles. This—The One and The Good—is our First. Next follows the Divine Mind, [which is] the Primal Thinker. And upon this follows Soul. Such is the order in nature. The Spiritual realm allows no more than these and no fewer.¹

He [the One] has no task, we hold, because nothing can present itself to Him to be done. He is sufficient; He need seek nothing beyond Himself, He who is over all. To Himself and to all He suffices by simply being what He is. And yet this "He is" does not truly apply: the Supreme has no need of Being. Even "He is good" does not apply since it indicates Being. The "is" should not suggest the existence of another thing; it is [merely] to state identity. The word "good" used of Him is not a predicate asserting His possession of goodness; it conveys an identification. It is not that we think it exact to call Him either good or The Good; it is [just] that sheer negation does not indicate [anything at all]. We use the term The Good to assert identity without the affirmation of Being.²

The One is all things and none of them. The Source of all things is not all things; and yet It is all things in a transcendental sense . . . But [how can there be] a universe from an unbroken unity, in which

there appears no diversity, not even duality? It is precisely because there is nothing within the One that all things are from It. In order that Being may be brought about, the Source must be no Being but Being's generator, in what is to be thought of as the primal act of generation. Seeking nothing, possessing nothing, lacking nothing, the One is perfect and, metaphorically, has overflowed, and Its exuberance has produced something new. This product has turned again to its begetter and been filled and has become its contemplator and therefore a Divine Mind.³

The only reasonable explanation of act flowing from It lies in the analogy of light from a sun. The entire Spirit realm may be thought of as a kind of light with the One in repose at its summit as its King: but this manifestation is not cast out from It—that would cause us to postulate another light before the light—but the One shines eternally, resting within Itself. The Divine Mind, not identical with its source, is yet not severed from It nor of so remote a nature as to be less than Real-Being; it is no blind thing, but is seeing, self-knowing, the primal knower.

The One, as transcending Mind, transcends knowing. Above all need, It is above the need of the knowing which pertains solely to the Secondary nature. Knowing remains a unitary thing, but defined; the First is One, but undefined. A defined One would not be the One-Absolute. The absolute is prior to the definite. Thus The One is in truth beyond all statement. Any affirmation is of a thing; but "all-transcending, resting above even the most august Divine Mind"—this is the only true description, since it does not make It a thing among things, nor name It where no name could identify It.

We can but try to indicate, in our own feeble way, something concerning It. When in our perplexity we object, "Then It is without self-perception, without self-consciousness, ignorant of Itself," we must remember that we have been considering It only in Its opposites.

If we assume that It possesses within Itself the distinction of knowing and known, we make It a manifold; and if we allow intellection in It, we thereby make It needful. Even if It were accompanied by intellect, Its intellection would have to be superfluous.⁴

This accepted, it follows that anything that is to be thought of as the most utterly simplex of all, cannot have self-intellection; to have that would mean being multiple [i.e., It must become an object to Itself in order to be the subject]. The Transcendent, thus, neither knows Itself nor is known in Itself. How, then, do we ourselves come to be speaking of It? No doubt we are cognizant of It, but we do not describe It; we have neither knowledge nor intellection of It.

But in what sense are we even cognizant of It when we have no hold upon It? We do not, it is true, grasp It by knowledge, but that does not mean that we are utterly void of It; we hold It not so as to describe It, but so as to be able to speak about It. And we can and do state what It is not, while we are silent as to what It is. We are, in fact, speaking of It in the light of Its sequels; unable to state It, we may still possess It.

Those divinely possessed and inspired have at least the knowledge that they hold some greater thing within them, though they cannot tell what it is. From the movements that stir them and the utterances that come from them they perceive the power, not themselves, that moves them. In the same way, it must be, we turn towards the Supreme when we hold the Divine Mind pure. We know the Divine Mind within, that which gives Being and all else of that order; but we know, too, that other [the One], know that It is none of these, but a nobler principle than anything we know as Being; fuller and greater; above reason, mind, and feeling; conferring these powers, not to be confounded with them.⁵

What then must The Unity be? What nature is left for it? ...The soul or mind reaching towards the Formless finds itself incompetent to grasp That which is unlimited or to take impression where the impinging reality is all-encompassing. In sheer dread of holding to nothingness, it slips away. The state is painful; often it seeks relief by retreating from all this vagueness to the region of sense, there to rest as on solid ground, just as the sight distressed by trying to see the minute rests with pleasure on the bold.

The soul must see in its own way; this is by absorption, unification; but in seeking thus to know the Unity it is prevented by that very unification from recognizing that it has found; it cannot distinguish itself from the object of this knowing. Nonetheless, this is our one resource if our philosophy is to give us knowledge of The Unity.

We are in search of unity; we are endeavoring to know the principle of all, the Good and First; therefore we may not stand away from the

realm of Firsts and lie prostrate among the lasts. We must strike for those Firsts, rising from things of sense which are the lasts. Cleared of all evil in our intention towards The Good, we must ascend to that Principle within ourselves. From many, we must become one; only in doing so may we attain to knowledge of That which is Principle and Unity. We shape ourselves into the Divine Mind; we make over our soul in trust to the Divine Mind and set it firmly in That. Thus, what That sees the soul will waken to see. It is through the Divine Mind that we have this vision of The Unity. It must be our care to bring over nothing whatever from sense, to allow nothing from that source to enter into the Divine Mind. With a pure intellect, and with the height of intellect, we are to see the All-Pure.

...The Unity, then, is not the Divine Mind but something higher still. The Divine Mind is still a being but that First is no being but precedent to all Being. It cannot be a being, for a being has what we may call the form of its reality, but The Unity is without form, even spiritual form. Generative of all, The Unity is none of all: neither thing nor quantity nor quality nor intellect nor soul. It is not in motion, not at rest, not in place, not in time. It is the self-defined, unique in form or, better, formless, existing before Form was, or Movement or Rest, all of which are attachments of Being and make Being the manifold it is.

...When we speak of this First as Cause we are affirming something happening not to It but to us; [we are affirming] the fact that we derive from this Self-Enclosed. Strictly speaking, we should put neither a "this" nor a "that" to It. We hover, as it were, about It, seeking the expression of It in an experience of our own, sometimes

neering this Reality, sometimes baffled by the enigma in which It dwells.

The main source of the difficulty is that awareness of this Principle comes neither by knowing nor by the intellection that discovers the Spiritual Beings, but by a presence overpassing all knowledge. In knowing, soul or mind must abandon its unity; it cannot remain a simplex. Knowing is taking account of things; that accounting is multiple. The mind thus plunging into number and multiplicity departs from Unity.⁶

Think of The One as Mind or as God, you think too meanly. Use all the resources of understanding to conceive this Unity and, again, it is more authentically One than God, even though you reach for God's unity beyond the most perfect unity you can conceive. For This is utterly a self-existent, with no concomitant whatever. This self-sufficing is the essence of Its unity. Something there must be supremely adequate, autonomous, all-transcending, most utterly without need.

... The sovereignly self-sufficing principle will be absolute Unity, for only in this Unity is there a nature above all need, whether within Itself or in regard to the rest of things. Unity seeks nothing for its being or Its well-being or Its safehold upon existence. Cause to all, how can It acquire its character outside of Itself or know any good outside? The good of Its being cannot be borrowed: This is The Good.

Nor has It place; It needs no place to stand as though It were incapable of sustaining Itself. What calls for such underpropping is

the soulless, some material mass that must be firmly founded or fall. This [the One, the Good] is foundation to all, cause of universal existence and of ordered placement. All that demands place is in need; a First cannot go in need of its sequents. All need is effort towards a first principle; the First, principle to all, must be utterly without need. If the Unity be seeking, It must inevitably be seeking to be something other than Itself; [in other words,] It would be seeking Its own destroyer. Whatever may be said to be in need is needing a good, a preserver; nothing, therefore, can be a good to The Unity.

Neither can It have will to anything; It is beyond good, not even to Itself a good, but to such beings only as may be of quality to have part with It. Nor has It intellection; that would imply diversity. Nor has It movement; It is prior to movement as to intellection. To what could Its intellection be directed? To Itself? But that would imply a previous ignorance. It would be dependent upon that intellection in order to have knowledge of Itself. But It is the Self-Sufficing. Yet this absence of self-knowing, or self-intellection, does not imply ignorance; ignorance is of something outside—a knower ignorant of a knowable—but in the Solitary there is neither knowing nor anything unknown. Unity, self-present, It has no need of self-intellection. Indeed, this "self-presence" were better left out, the more surely to preserve the unity.

We must eliminate all knowing and all association, all intellection whether internal or external. It is not to be thought of as having but as being Intellection. Intellection does not itself perform the intellectual act but is the cause of the act in something else and cause

is not to be identified with caused. Most assuredly, the Cause of all is not a thing within that all. This Principle is not, therefore, to be identified with the good of which It is the source; It is good in the unique mode of being The Good above all that is good.⁷

As one wishing to contemplate the spiritual nature will lay aside all the representations of sense and so may see what transcends the sense-realm, in the same way one wishing to contemplate what transcends the spiritual attains by putting away all that is of the intellect, taught by the intellect, no doubt, that the Transcendent exists but never seeking to define It.

Its definition, in fact, could be only "the Indefinable"; [for] what is not a thing is not some definite thing. We are in agony for a true expression; we are talking of the untellable. We name, only to indicate for our own use as best we may. And this name, "The One," contains really no more than the negation of plurality. . . . If we are led to think positively of The One, name and thing, there would be more truth in silence. The designation as "The One" is a mere aid to inquiry, and was never intended for more than a preliminary affirmation of absolute simplicity to be followed by the rejection of even that statement. It was the best that [is] offered, but remains inadequate to express the nature indicated. For this is a principle not to be conveyed by any sound; it cannot be known on any hearing but, if at all, by vision; and to hope in that vision to see a form is to fail of even that.⁸

That Source, having no prior, cannot be contained. It is not "within" any of those other forms of being which are within It; It is orbed

round all, but not so as to contain them as constituents. It possesses but is not possessed. Holding all—though Itself nowhere held—It is omnipresent, for where Its presence failed, something would elude Its hold. At the same time, in the sense that It is nowhere held It is not present. Thus, It is both present and not present; not present as not being circumscribed by anything; yet, as being utterly unattached, not inhibited from presence at any point. ...Void of nothing, yet containing no particular, God is sovereignly present through all. We cannot think of something of God here and something else there, nor of all God gathered at some one spot. There is an instantaneous presence everywhere, containing nothing and [yet] leaving nothing void, everything therefore fully held by the Divine. ...The First is neither remote from things nor directly within them. There is nothing containing It; It contains all. It is the Good to the universe if only in this way, that towards It all things have their being, all dependent upon It, each in its mode, so that thing rises above thing in goodness according to its fuller possession of [that] true Existence.⁹

Now it is clear that we cannot possess ourselves of the power of this Principle in its concentrated fullness; to do so one must be identical with It. But some partial attainment is within our reach. You who make the venture will throw forward all your being, but you will never tell It entire—for that, you must yourself be acting as the Divine Mind—and at your utmost success It will still pass from you or, rather, you from It. When you see The Good [the One], see It entire. Later you may think of It and identify with The Good whatever you can remember.

It is The Good since, being a power, It is the cause of the intelligent and intellectual life as It is of all life and intellect. For these grow from It as from the source of essence and of existence, the Source as being one, simplex and first because before It nothing was. All derives from This. It is the origin of the primal Movement which It does not possess and of the Repose which is but Its absence of need; for neither rest nor movement can belong to That which has no place in which either could occur. Center, object, ground, all are alike unknown to It, for It is before all. Yet Its being is not limited; what is there to set bounds to It? Nor, on the other hand, is It infinite in the sense of magnitude; what place can there be to which It must extend, or why should there be movement where there is no lacking? All Its infinitude resides in Its power. It does not change and will not fail; and in It all that is unfailing finds duration.

It is infinite also by right of being a pure Unity with nothing towards which to direct any partial content. Absolutely One, It has never known measure and stands outside of number, and so is under no limit either in regard to any external or within Itself; for any such determination would bring something of the dual into It. And, having no constituent parts, It accepts no pattern, forms no shape.

Reason recognizing It as such a nature, you may not hope to see It with mortal eyes, nor in any way that would be imagined by those who make sense the test of reality and so annul the supremely Real. For what [appears to us and] passes for the most truly existent is most truly non-existent—the thing of extension least real of all—while this unseen First is the source and principle of Being and sovereign over Reality.¹⁰

God has no need of anything that derives from Him; He ignores all that produced realm, never necessary to Him, and remains identically what He was before He brought it into being. So too, had the secondary [the Divine Mind] never existed, He would have been unconcerned, exactly as He would not have grudged existence to any other universe that might spring into being from Him, were any such possible. Of course, no other such could be since there is nothing that has not existence once the All exists.

But God never was the All; that would make Him dependent upon the universe. Transcending all, He was able at once to make all things and to leave them to their own being, He above. ... Thus we rob It of its very being as The Absolute Good if we ascribe anything to It, existence or intellect or goodness. The only way is to make every denial and no assertion, to feign no quality or content there but to permit only the "It is" in which we pretend to no affirmation of attributes which are non-existent. There is an ignorant praise which, missing the true description, drags in qualities beneath Its real worth and so abases It. Philosophy must guard against attaching to the Supreme what is later and lower. Moving above all that order, It is the cause and source of all these, and is none of them.

... Thus is revealed to us the primarily Existent, the Good, above all that has being, good unalloyed, containing nothing in itself, utterly unmingling, all-transcending, cause of all.¹¹

The integral omnipresence of unity is universally recognized; for all men instinctively affirm the God in each of us to be one, the same

in all. ...In virtue of that unity the Good may be regarded as truly inherent. Hence the Good is not to be sought outside; it could not have fallen outside of what is. It cannot possibly be found in non-Being; within Being the Good must lie, since It is never a non-Being. If that Good has Being and is within the realm of Being, then It is present, self-contained, in everything. We, therefore, are not separated from Being; we are in It; nor is Being separated from us. Therefore all beings are one.¹²

[How did The One come to be?] There has been no "coming" so that you can put it to the question, "How does this come to be? What chance brought It here or produced It?" Chance did not yet exist; there was no "automatic action": these imply [the existence of] something before themselves and occur [only] in the realm of [the creative] process. ...The Principle of All must be of higher quality than anything that follows It. It is therefore in a sense determined—determined, I mean, by Its uniqueness and not in any sense of being under compulsion. Compulsion did not coexist with the Supreme but has place only among secondaries and even there can exercise no tyranny; this uniqueness is not from outside.

This, then, It is; This and no other. Simply what It must be, It has not "happened," but is what by a necessity prior to all necessities It must be. We cannot think of It as a chance existence; It is not what It chanced to be but what It must be—and yet without a "must." All the rest waits for the appearing of the King, to hail Him for Himself; not a being of accident and happening but authentically King, authentically Principle, The Good authentically; not a being that acts in conformity with goodness—and so, recognizably, a secondary—

but the total unity that He is, not molded upon goodness but the very Good itself.

...Can we conceivably say, "Apparently, It just so happened to be"? Neither "so" nor in any mode did It happen to be. There is no happening; there is only a "so, and not otherwise than so." And even "so" is false; it would imply limit, a defined form. To know This is to be able to reject both the "so" and "not-so." . . . The One, therefore, is beyond all things that are "so." Standing before the Indefinable you may name any of Its sequents but you must say "This is none of them." At most It is to be conceived as the total power towards [the existence of] things, supremely self-centered, being what It wills to be or rather projecting into existence what It wills, Itself higher than all will, will [being] a thing beneath It. In a word, It neither willed its own "so"—as something to conform to—nor did any other make it "so."

...Since there is nothing before Him who is the First, we must call a halt; there is nothing to say. We may inquire into the origin of His sequents but not of Himself who has no origin.¹³ But this Unoriginating, what is It? We can but withdraw, silent, hopeless, and search no further. What can we look for when we have reached the furthest? Every inquiry aims at a first, and that attained, rests.

Besides, we must remember that all questioning deals with the nature of a thing, its quality, its cause or its essential being. In this case the Being—insofar as we can use the word—is knowable only by Its sequents. The question as to cause asks for a principle beyond, but the Principle of all has no [previous causal] principle. The

question as to quality would be looking for an attribute in That which has none. The question as to nature shows only that we must ask nothing about It but merely take It into the mind if we may, with the knowledge gained that nothing can be permissibly connected with It.

The difficulty this Principle presents to our mind insofar as we can approach to conception of It may be exhibited thus: We begin by positing space, a place, a Chaos. Into this container, whether conceived in our imagination as created or pre-existent, we introduce God and proceed to inquire. We ask, for example, whence and how He comes to be there. We investigate the presence and quality of this newcomer projected into the midst of things here from some height or depth. But the difficulty disappears if we eliminate all space before we attempt to conceive God. He must not be set in anything either as enthroned in eternal immanence or as having made some entry into things. He is to be conceived as existing alone, in that existence which the necessity of discussion forces us to attribute to Him, with space and all the rest as later than Him—space latest of all. Thus we conceive, as far as we may, the spaceless; we abolish the notion of any environment. We circumscribe Him within no limit; we attribute no extension to Him. He has no quality since no shape, even intellectual shape; He holds no relationship but exists in and for Himself before anything is.¹⁴

...He is the First, the Authentic, immune from chance, from blind effect and happening. God is cause of Himself. For Himself and of Himself, He is what He is, the first Self, the transcendent Self.¹⁵

III. The Divine Mind

There exists a Principle which transcends Being; this is The One, whose nature we have sought to establish insofar as such matters lend themselves to proof. Upon The One follows immediately the Principle which is at once Being and the Divine Mind. Third comes the Principle, Soul. ...Thus our soul, too, is a divine thing, belonging to another order than sense; ...¹

There is, we may say, something that is the Center; about It, a circle of light shed from It; then, around Center and first circle alike, another circle, light from light; outside that again, not another circle of light but one which, lacking light of its own, must borrow.²

...All that is fully achieved engenders. Therefore the eternally achieved engenders eternally an eternal being. At the same time, the offspring is always minor. What then are we to think of the All-Perfect but that It can produce nothing less than the very greatest that is later than Itself? This greatest, later than The Unity, must be the Divine Mind, and it must be the second of all existence, for it is that which sees The One on which alone it leans while the First has no need whatever of it. The offspring of the prior to Divine Mind can be no other than that Mind itself and thus is the loftiest being in the universe, all else following upon it—the Soul, for example, being an utterance and act of the Divine Mind as that is an utterance and act of The One. But in Soul the utterance is obscured, for Soul is an image and must look to its own original. That Principle [the

Divine Mind], on the contrary, looks to the First without mediation—thus becoming what It is—and has that vision not as from a distance but as the immediate next with nothing intervening, close to the One as Soul [is] to it.³

... From such a Unity as we have declared The One to be, how does anything at all come into substantial existence—any multiplicity, dyad, or number? Why has the Primal not remained self-gathered so that there be none of this profusion of the manifold which we observe in existence and yet are compelled to trace to that absolute Unity?⁴ ... [In other words, how does there come to be] a universe from an unbroken Unity, in which there appears no diversity, not even duality? It is precisely because there is nothing within the One that all things are from It. In order that Being may be brought about, the Source must be no Being but Being's generator, in what is to be thought of as the primal act of generation. Seeking nothing, possessing nothing, lacking nothing, the One is perfect and, in our metaphor, has overflowed; and Its exuberance has produced something new; [and] this issue has turned again to its begetter and been filled and has become its contemplator and so a Divine Mind.

That which perceives The One establishes Being. That vision directed upon the One establishes the Divine Mind. Looking to the One for the purpose of vision, it is simultaneously Divine Mind and Being; and attaining resemblance in virtue of this vision, it repeats the act of the One in pouring forth a vast power. This second outflow is an image or representation of the Divine Mind as the Divine Mind represents its own prior, The One. This active power sprung from the Divine Mind is Soul.⁵

The Divine Mind in its mentation thinks itself; the object of the thought is nothing external: thinker and thought are one. Therefore in its thinking and knowing it possesses itself, observes itself and sees itself not as something unconscious but as knowing. In this primal knowing it must include, as one and the same Act, the knowledge of the knowing. And even the logical distinction mentioned above cannot be made in the case of the Divine; the very eternity of its self-thinking precludes any such separation between that intellectual act and the consciousness of the act.⁶

...He [The Divine Mind] will know himself to be a unity existing by virtue of the one Eternal Life, and in this sense unlimited. And his knowledge of the Unity will not be as of something seen from outside but as of something embraced in true knowledge, for this Unlimited is an eternal indweller within himself—or, to be more accurate, eternally follows upon him—and is seen by an indwelling knowledge. God knows his own unlimited life, and, in that knowledge, knows the activity that flows from him to the Cosmos; but he knows it in its unity, not in its process.⁷

The duality [between The One and the Divine Mind], is [in fact] a unity; but how is this unity also a plurality? The explanation is that in a Unity there can be no seeing [for seer and seen require at least the semblance of Duality]. In Its contemplation the One is no longer a Unity; if it were still a Unity, the Divine Mind would not exist. The Highest began as a Unity but did not remain as it began; all unknown to itself, it became manifold. It became pregnant, so to speak: desiring universal possession, It flung Itself outward, though

it were better had It never known the desire by which a Second came into being. ...This Being is limitless and in all the outflow from it there is no lessening, neither in its emanation, since this also is the entire universe, nor in itself, the starting point, since it is no assemblage of parts [capable of being diminished]. ...The Divine Mind is the earliest form of Life: it is the Activity presiding over the outflowing of the universal order...

In its character as Life, as emanation, as containing all things in their precise forms and not merely in the agglomerate mass . . . it must of necessity derive from some other, from one that does not emanate but is the Principle of Emanation, of Life, of Intellect, and of the Universe. ...And what will such a Principle essentially be? ...This Principle on the thither side of Life is the cause of Life [and not the manifester of Life]—for that manifestation of Life which is the universe of things is not the First Activity; it is itself poured forth, so to speak, like water from a spring.

Imagine a spring that has no source outside itself; it gives itself to all the rivers, yet is never exhausted by what they take, but remains always integrally as it was; the tides that proceed from it are at one within it before they run their several ways, yet all, in some sense, know beforehand down what channels they will pour their streams.

Or think of the life coursing throughout some mighty tree while yet it is the stationary principle of the whole, in no sense scattered over all that extent but, as it were, operating in the root. It is the giver of the entire and manifold life of the tree, but remains unmoved itself, not manifold but the principle of that manifold life. And this

surprises no one—though it is, in fact, astonishing how all that varied vitality springs from the Unvarying, and how that very manifoldness could not be unless before the multiplicity there were something all singleness. For the Principle is not broken into parts to make the total; on the contrary, such partition would destroy both [the many and its originating Principle]; nothing would come into being if its cause, thus broken, up, changed character. Thus we are always brought back to The One.

Every particular thing has a one of its own to which it may be traced; the All has its one, its prior but not yet the absolute One; through this we reach that absolute One, where all such reference comes to an end. Now when we reach a one—the stationary principle—in the tree, in the animal, in Soul, in the All—we have in every case the most powerful, most precious element. When we come to the One in the authentically Existent Beings—their Principle and source and potentiality—shall we lose confidence and suspect it of being—nothing?

Certainly this Absolute is none of the things of which It is the source—Its nature is that nothing can be affirmed of It—not existence, not essence, not life—since It is That which transcends all these. But possess yourself of It by the very elimination of Being and you hold a marvel. Thrusting forward to This, attaining, and resting in yourself, seek to grasp It more and more—understanding It by that intuitive thrust alone, but knowing Its greatness by the Beings that follow upon It and exist by its Power.

Another approach: The Divine Mind is a Seeing, a Seeing which sees itself; therefore it is a potentiality [within The One] which has become effective. This implies the distinction of matter and form in it—as there must be in all actual seeing—the matter [and form] in this case being the Intelligibles [i.e., the Thought-forms] which the Divine Mind contains and sees. All actual seeing implies duality; before the seeing takes place there is the pure Unity. That Unity acquires duality, and the duality is a Unity.

Now as our sight requires the world of sense for its satisfaction and realization, so the vision in the Divine Mind demands, for its completion, The Good [i.e., the One]. It cannot be, itself, The Good, since then it would not need to see or to perform any other act; for The Good is the center of all else, and it is by means of The Good that every thing has act, while The Good is in need of nothing and therefore possesses nothing beyond Itself.

Once you have uttered "The Good," add no further thought: by any addition, and in proportion to that addition, you introduce a deficiency. Do not even say that It has Intellection [i.e., Thought]; you would be dividing It; It would become a duality, The Good and The Divine Mind. ...The transcendent Being [The Good, the One] neither strives, since It feels no lack, nor attains, since It has no striving. And this marks It off from the Divine Mind, to which characteristically belongs the striving, the concentrated strain towards its Form.

Yet, The Divine Mind—beautiful, the most beautiful of all; lying lapped in pure light and in clear radiance; circumscribing the nature

of the authentic existents; the original of which this beautiful world is a shadow and an image; tranquil in the fullness of glory since in it there is nothing devoid of intellect, nothing dark or out of rule; a living thing in a life of blessedness—this, too, must overwhelm with awe anyone who has seen it, and penetrated it, to become a unit of its Being.

But as one who looks up to the heavens and sees the splendor of the stars thinks of the Maker and searches, so whoever has contemplated the Intelligible [i.e., Spiritual] universe and known it and wondered about it must search after its Maker too. What Being has raised so noble a fabric? And how? Who has begotten such a child, this Divine Mind, this lovely abundance so abundantly endowed? The Source of all this cannot be an Intellect; nor can It be an abundant Power: It must have been before Intellect and abundance were; these are later and things of lack; abundance had to be made abundant and Intellection needed to know.

These [i.e., Intellect and abundant Power] are very near to The Un-needing, to That which has no need of knowing; they have abundance and intellection authentically, as being the first to possess [them]. But, there is That before them which neither needs nor possesses anything, since, needing or possessing anything else, It would not be what It is—The Good.⁸

Here [in the Divine Mind] is contained all that is immortal: there is nothing here but Divine Mind; all is God; this is the place of every soul. Here is rest unbroken: for how can that seek change, in which all is well? What need that reach to, which holds all within itself?

What increase can that desire, which stands utterly achieved? All its content, thus, is perfect, that itself may be perfect throughout, as holding nothing that is less than the Divine, nothing that is less than Intellective. Its knowing is not by search but by possession, its blessedness inherent, not acquired. For all belongs to it eternally and it holds the authentic Eternity imitated by Time which, circling round the Soul, makes towards the new thing and passes by the old. Soul deals with thing after thing—now Socrates, now a horse: always some one entity from among beings—but the Divine Mind is all and therefore its entire content is simultaneously present in that identity. This is pure Being in eternal actuality. Nowhere is there any future, for every then is a now; nor is there any past, for nothing there has ever ceased to be. Everything has taken its stand forever, an identity well pleased, we might say, to be as it is. And everything, in that entire content, is Divine Mind and Authentic Existence; and the total of all is Divine Mind entire and Being entire.

Divine Mind by its intellective Act establishes Being, which in turn, as the object of intellection, becomes the cause of intellection and of existence to the Divine Mind ...Now while these two are co-existents, having their existence in common, and are never apart, still the unity they form is two-sided [i.e., has two aspects]: there is the Divine Mind as against Being, the intellectual agent as against the object of intellection. We consider the intellective Act [as subject] and we have the Divine Mind; we think of the object of that act and we have Being. Such a differentiation must be if there is to be any intellection. But similarly there must also be identity [wherein, ultimately, subject and object are one]. ... Thus, the Divine Mind is ... shaped in a certain sense by The One and in

another sense by itself, since its potential vision becomes actual [because of the apparent separation]. Intellection is, precisely, an act of vision in which subject and object are identical.

But how and what does the Divine Mind see and, especially, how has it sprung from That which is to become the object of its vision? The mind demands the existence of Being, but it is still in trouble over the problem endlessly debated by the most ancient philosophers: from such a Unity as we have declared The One to be, how does anything at all come into substantial existence, any multiplicity, or dual principle, or quantity? Why has the Primal [The One] not remained self-gathered so that there be none of this profusion of the manifold which we observe in existence and yet are compelled to trace to that absolute Unity?

In venturing an answer, we first invoke God Himself, not in loud word but in that way of prayer which is always within our power, leaning in soul towards Him by aspiration, alone towards the Alone. But if we seek the vision of that great Being within the inner sanctuary [of the soul]—self-gathered, tranquilly remote above all else—we begin by considering the images stationed at the outer precincts... How the Divine Mind comes into being must be explained:

Everything moving has necessarily an object towards which it advances; but since the Supreme can have no such object, we may not ascribe motion to It. Anything that comes into being after It can be produced only as a consequence of Its unfailing self-intention. And, of course, we dare not talk of generation in time, dealing as we

are with eternal Being. Where we speak of origin in such reference, it is in the sense, merely, of cause and subordination. Origin from the Supreme must not be taken to imply any movement in It. That would make the Being resulting from the movement not a second principle but a third, [since] the movement would be the second phase (*hypostasis*).

Given this immobility in the Supreme, It can neither have yielded assent nor uttered decree nor stirred in any way towards the existence of a secondary. What happened, then? What are we to conceive as rising in the innards of that immobility? It must be a circumradiation—produced from the Supreme but from the Supreme unaltering—and may be compared to the brilliant light encircling the sun and ceaselessly generated from that unchanging substance.

...The Divine Mind stands as the image of The One, firstly because there is a certain necessity that the First should have its offspring, carrying onward much of its quality, in other words that there be something [of Itself] in Its likeness as the sun's rays tell of the sun. Yet the One is not an intellective principle; how then does It engender a Divine Mind? Simply by the fact that in Its self-searching It has vision: this very *seeing* is the Divine Mind. [All seeing is within itself, as within a closed circle] ... Of course, the divisibility belonging to the circle does not apply to The One; here [in a circle], to be sure, is a unity; but there [in The One] is the Unity which is the potentiality of all existence. ...The perfection entails the offspring; a power so vast could not remain unfruitful.⁹

For the moment let us define the Nature of the Good as far as the immediate purpose demands: The Good is That on which all else depends, towards which all existences aspire as to their source and their need, while Itself is without need, sufficient to Itself, aspiring to no other, the measure and aim of all, giving out from Itself the Divine Mind and Existence and Soul and Life and all Thought.

All until The Good is reached is beautiful; The Good is beyond beautiful, beyond the Highest, holding kingly state in the Intellectual [Spiritual] World, that realm constituted by a Principle wholly unlike what is known as intelligence in us. Our intelligence is nourished on the propositions of logic, is skilled in following discussions, works by reasonings, examines links of demonstration, and comes to know the world of Being also by the steps of logical process, having no prior grasp of Reality but remaining empty, all intelligence though it be, until it has put itself to school.

The Divine Mind we are discussing is not of such a kind. It possesses all. It is all. It is present to all by Its self-presence. It has all by other means than having, for what it possesses is still itself, nor does any particular of all within it stand apart; for every such particular is the whole and in all respects all, while yet not confused in the mass but still distinct, apart to the extent that any participant in the Divine Mind participates not in the entire as one thing but in whatsoever lies within its own reach.

The Divine Mind is the first Act of The Good and the first Existence; The Good remains stationary within Itself, but the Divine Mind acts in relation to It and, as it were, lives about It. And the Soul, outside,

circles around the Divine Mind, and by gazing upon it, seeing into the depths of it, through it sees God.¹⁰

IV. The Soul

The authentic Reality [the One] gives life to the Intelligible [Spiritual] realm. The Divine Mind is the noblest of Its content, but It contains also souls, since every soul in this lower [earthly] sphere has come from there. *There* is the world of unembodied spirits, while to our world belong those that have entered body and undergone bodily division. *There* the Divine Mind is a concentrated all; nothing of it is distinguished or divided. And in that unitive realm all souls are concentrated also, with no spatial discrimination.

... The Divine Mind is forever repugnant to distinction and to partition; however, Soul, though without distinction and partition there, has a nature lending itself to divisional existence, and this division is secession, entry into body. [And so] in view of this seceding and the ensuing partition we may legitimately speak of it as a partible thing.

But if so, how can it still be described as indivisible? [It remains indivisible] in that the secession is not of the entire Soul; something of it holds its ground: that in it which recoils from separate existence. The entity described as "both the undivided soul and the soul divided among bodies," is a Soul which is at once above and below, attached to the Supreme and yet reaching down to this sphere, like a radius

from a center. Thus it is that, entering this [earthly] realm, it possesses still the vision inherent in that superior [indivisible] phase by virtue of which it maintains its integral nature unchanged. Even here [on earth] it is not exclusively the partible soul: it is still the impartible as well...¹

The nature, at once divisible and indivisible, which we affirm to be soul has not the unity of an extended thing. It does not consist of separate sections; its divisibility lies in its being present at every point of the recipient, but it is indivisible as dwelling entire in the total, and entire in any part. To have penetrated this idea is to know the greatness of the soul and its power, the divinity and wonder of its being, as a nature transcending the realm of "things."

Itself devoid of mass, it is present to all mass. It exists here and yet is [still] There, and this not in distinct phases but with unsundered identity. Thus it is "parted and not parted," or, better, it has never known partition, never become a parted thing, but remains a self-gathered integral, and is "parted among bodies" merely in the sense that bodies, in virtue of their own sundered existence, cannot receive it unless in some partitive mode. The partition, in other words, is an occurrence in body and not in soul.²

...Soul is, in the degree indicated, one and many, parted and impartible. We cannot question the possibility of a thing being at once a unity and multi-present, since to deny this would be to abolish the principle which sustains and administers the universe. There must be a principle which encircles and supports all and conducts all with wisdom, a principle which is multiple since existence is

multiple, and yet is one Soul always since a container must be a unity. By the multiple unity of its nature, it will furnish life to the multiplicity of the contents of an All; by its impartible unity, it will conduct that Total to wise ends. ... Soul, therefore, is, in this definite sense, one and many; the Ideal-Form [soul] residing in the body is many and one. Bodies themselves are exclusively many; the Supreme is exclusively one.³

All is one universally comprehensive living being, encircling all the living beings within it, and having a soul, one Soul, which extends to all its members in the degree of participant membership held by each. Secondly, every separate thing is an integral part of this All by belonging to the total material fabric—unrestrictedly a part by bodily membership, while, insofar as it has also some participation in the All-Soul, it possesses in that degree spiritual membership as well. [It is] perfect where participation is in the All-Soul alone, partial where there is also a union with a lower soul.

But, with all this gradation, each several thing is affected by all else in virtue of the common participation in the All, and to the degree of its own participation. This One-All, therefore, is a sympathetic total and stands as one living being... Where all is a living thing summing to a unity, there is nothing so remote in point of place as not to be near by virtue of a nature which makes of the one living being a sympathetic organism. ...It is not merely one living organism; it is also a manifold.⁴

. . . There is one identical Soul, every separate manifestation being that Soul complete.⁵ ... What is thought of as a part must in reality

be no part but the identity of an unparted thing. But if this is the true account of the unity of Soul, we must be able to meet the problems that ensue: firstly, the difficulty of one thing being present at the same moment in all things; and, secondly, the difficulty of soul in body as against Soul not embodied.

We might be led to think that all soul must always inhabit body. This would seem especially plausible in the case of the Soul of the universe, not thought of as ever leaving its body as the human soul does. There exists, no doubt, an opinion that even the human soul, while it must leave the body, cannot become an utterly disembodied thing; but, assuming its complete disembodiment, how comes it that the human soul can go free of the body but the All-Soul not, though they are one and the same.

... The one Soul holds aloof, not actually falling into body. The differentiated souls ... issue from the unity while still constituting, within certain limits, an association. They are one Soul by the fact that they do not belong unreservedly to any particular being; they meet, so to speak, edge to edge. They strike out here and there, but are held together at the source much as light is a divided thing upon earth, shining in this house and that, while yet remaining uninterruptedly one identical substance.

The All-Soul would always remain above, since essentially it has nothing to do with descent or with the lower, or with any tendency towards this sphere. The other souls would become ours [i.e., our individual souls] because their lot is cast for this sphere, and because they give attention to a thing [the body] which requires their care.⁶

... In the absence of body, soul could not have gone forth, since there is no other place to which its nature would allow it to descend. Since go forth it must, it will generate a place for itself; at once body, also, exists.

While the Soul (as an eternal, a Divine Being) is at rest—in rest firmly based on Repose, the Absolute—yet, as we may put it, that huge illumination of the Supreme pouring outwards comes at last to the extreme extent of its light and dwindles to darkness. This darkness, now lying there beneath, the Soul sees and by seeing brings to shape. For in the law of things this ultimate depth, neighboring with soul, may not go void of whatsoever degree of the Divine it can absorb, the dimmed principle of reality at its faintest.⁷

...The souls of men ...have entered into that realm in a leap downward from the Supreme. Yet even they are not cut off from their origin, from the Divine Mind. It is not that they have come bringing the Spirit down in their fall; it is that though they have descended even to earth, yet their higher part holds forever above the heavens.⁸

The rise of all these forms of being, their destruction, and their modification, whether to their loss or gain, all goes to the fulfillment of the natural unhindered life of that one living being. For it was not possible for the single thing to be as if it stood alone. The final purpose could not serve to that only end, intent upon the partial; the concern must be for the whole to which each item is member. Things are different both from each other and in their own stages,

and therefore cannot be complete in one unchanging form of life. Nor could anything remain utterly without modification if the All is to be durable; for the permanence of an All demands varying forms.⁹

Let every soul recall ...the truth that Soul is the author of all living things, that it has breathed the life into them all—whatever is nourished by earth and sea, all the creatures of the air, the divine stars in the sky. It is the maker of the sun; itself formed and ordered this vast heaven and conducts all that rhythmic motion. And it is a principle distinct from all these to which it gives law and movement and life, and it must of necessity be more honorable than they, for they gather or dissolve as Soul brings them life or abandons them, but Soul, since it never can abandon itself, is of eternal being.

How life was purveyed to the universe of things and to the separate beings in it may be thus conceived: That great [Generative] Soul must stand pictured before another [Celestial] Soul, one not mean, a Soul that has become worthy to look [toward the Higher, away from the lower], emancipate from the lure, from all that binds its fellows in bewitchment, holding itself in quietude. Let not merely the enveloping body be at peace, body's turmoils stilled, but all that lies around, earth at peace, and sea at peace, and air and the very heavens. Into that heaven, all at rest, let the great Soul be conceived to roll inward at every point, penetrating, permeating, from all sides pouring in its light. As the rays of the sun throwing their brilliance upon a louring cloud make it gleam all gold, so the Soul entering the material expanse of the heavens has given life, has given immortality. What was abject it has lifted up; and the heavenly system, moved now in endless motion by the Soul that leads it in

wisdom, has become a living and a blessed thing. The Soul domiciled within, it takes worth where, before the Soul, it was stark body—clay and water—or, rather, the blankness of Matter, the absence of Being ...

The Soul's nature and power will be brought out more clearly, more brilliantly, if we consider how it envelops the heavenly system and guides all to its purposes: for it has bestowed itself upon all that huge expanse so that every interval, small and great alike, all has been ensouled.

The material body is made up of parts, each holding its own place, some in mutual opposition and others variously separated. The Soul is in no such condition; it is not whittled down so that life tells of a part of the Soul and springs where some such separate portion impinges. Each separate life lives by the Soul entire, omnipresent in the likeness of the engendering Father, entire in unity and entire in diffused variety. By the power of the Soul the manifold and diverse heavenly system is a unit; through Soul this universe is a god. And the sun is a god because it is ensouled; so too the stars: and whatsoever we ourselves may be, it is all in virtue of Soul ...

This, by which the gods are divine, must be the oldest God of them all: and our own soul is of that same Ideal nature, so that to consider it, purified, freed from all accrument, is to recognize in ourselves that same value which we have found Soul to be, honorable above all that is bodily. ...If, then, it is the presence of Soul that brings worth, how can a man slight himself and run after other things? You honor the Soul elsewhere; honor then yourself.

The Soul once seen to be thus precious, thus divine, you may hold the faith that by its possession you are already nearing God. In the strength of this power make upwards towards Him. At no great distance you must attain; there is not much between. But over this Divine, there is still Diviner: grasp the upward neighbor of the Soul, its prior and source.

Soul, for all the worth we have shown to belong to it, is yet a secondary, an image of the Divine Mind. [In man] reason uttered is an image of the reason stored within the soul, and in the same way Soul is an utterance of the Divine Mind. It is even the total of its activity, the entire stream of life sent forth by that Principle to the production of further being. It is the forth going heat of a fire which has also heat essentially inherent. But within the Supreme we must see energy not as an overflow but in the double aspect of integral inherence with the establishment of a new being. Sprung, in other words, from the Divine Mind, Soul is intellective, but with an intellection operating by the method of reasonings. For its perfecting it must look to that Divine Mind, which may be thought of as a father watching over the development of his child born imperfect in comparison with himself.¹⁰

Once pure in the Spirit realm [within the Divine Mind], the soul too possesses that same unchangeableness: for it possesses identity of essence. When it is in that region it must of necessity enter into oneness with the Divine Mind by the sheer fact of its self-orientation, for by that intention all interval disappears; the soul advances and is taken into unison, and in that association becomes

one with the Divine Mind—but not to its own destruction: the two are one, and [yet] two. In such a state there is no question of stage and change. The soul, motionless, would be intent upon its intellectual act, and in possession, simultaneously, of its self-awareness; for it has become one simultaneous existence with the Supreme.

But it leaves that conjunction; it cannot suffer that unity; it falls in love with its own powers and possessions, and desires to stand apart; it leans outward, so to speak: then, it appears to acquire a memory of itself [as an individualized soul].¹¹

But we must examine how soul comes to inhabit the body [in the first place], a question of no minor interest:¹² The souls peering forth from the Divine Mind descend first to the [astral] heavens and there put on a body. This becomes at once the medium by which, as they reach out more and more towards magnitude [physical extension], they proceed to bodies progressively more earthy. Some even plunge from heaven to the very lowest of corporeal forms; others pass, stage by stage, too feeble to lift towards the higher the burden they carry, weighted downwards by their heaviness and forgetfulness.

As for the differences among them, these are due to variation in the bodies entered, or to the accidents of life, or to upbringing, or to inherent peculiarities of temperament, or to all these influences together, or to specific combinations of them. Then again, some have fallen unreservedly into the power of the destiny ruling here: some often yielding [to that destiny], some holding to their own.

There are those who, while they accept what must be born, have the strength of self-mastery in all that is left to their own act. They have given themselves to another dispensation: they live by the code of the aggregate of beings, the code which is woven out of the Reason-Principles and all the other causes ruling in the cosmos, out of soul-movements and out of laws springing in the Supreme; a code, therefore, consonant with those higher existences, founded upon them, linking their sequents back to them, keeping unshakably true all that is capable of holding itself set towards the divine nature, and leading round by all appropriate means whatsoever is less natively apt. In other words, all diversity of condition in the lower spheres is determined by the descending beings themselves.

The punishment justly overtaking the wicked must therefore be ascribed to the cosmic order which leads all in accordance with the right. But what of chastisements, poverty, illness, falling upon the good outside of all justice? These events, we will be told, are equally interwoven into the world order and fall under prediction, and must consequently have a cause in the general order. Are they therefore to be charged to past misdoing?

No. Such misfortunes do not answer to reasons established in the nature of things; they are not laid up in the master-facts of the universe, but were merely accidental sequents. A house falls, and anyone who chances to be underneath is killed, no matter what sort of man he be; two objects are moving in perfect order—or one if you like—but anything getting in the way is wounded or trampled down. Or we may reason that the undeserved stroke can be no evil to the sufferer in view of the beneficent interweaving of the All or

again, no doubt, that nothing is unjust that finds justification in a past history.

We may not think of some things being fitted into a system with others abandoned to the capricious; if things must happen by cause, by natural sequences, under one Reason-Principle and a single set scheme, we must admit that the minor equally with the major is fitted into that order and pattern. Wrong-doing from man to man is wrong in the doer and must be imputed, but, as belonging to the established order of the universe [it] is not a wrong even as regards the innocent sufferer; it is a thing that had to be, and, if the sufferer is good, the issue is to his gain. For we cannot think that this ordered combination proceeds without God and justice; we must take it to be precise in the distribution of due, while, yet, the reasons of things elude us, and to our ignorance the scheme presents matter of censure.

Various considerations explain why the souls going forth from the Spiritual realm proceed first to the heavenly [astral] regions. The heavens, as the noblest portion of sensible space, would border with the least exalted of the Spiritual realm, and will, therefore, be first ensouled, first to participate as most apt; while what is of earth is at the very extremity of progression, least endowed towards participation [in the Spiritual realm], remotest from the unembodied.

All the souls, then, shine down upon the heavens and spend there the main of themselves and the best; only their lower phases illuminate the lower realms. And those souls which descend deepest

show their light furthest down—not themselves the better for the depth to which they have penetrated.

There is, we may put it, something that is [at the] center; about it, a circle of light shed from it. Round center and first circle alike, another circle, light from light. Outside that again, not another circle of light but one which, lacking light of its own, must borrow. The last we may figure to ourselves as a revolving circle, or rather a sphere, of a nature to receive light from that third realm, its next higher, in proportion to the light which that itself receives. Thus all begins with the great Light, shining self-centered; in accordance with the reigning plan [of progressive emanation], this gives forth its brilliance.

The later beings [souls] add their radiation—some of them remaining above, while there are some who are drawn further downward, attracted by the splendor of the object they illuminate; these last find that their charges need more and more care. The steersman of a storm-tossed ship is so intent on saving it that he forgets his own interest and never thinks that he is recurrently in peril of being dragged down with the vessel. Similarly, the souls are intent upon contriving for their [bodily] charges and finally come to be pulled down by them. They are fettered in bonds of sorcery, gripped and held by their concern for the realm of Nature.

If every living being were of the character of the All-perfect, self-sufficing, in peril from no outside influence—the soul now spoken of as indwelling would not occupy the body; it would infuse life while clinging, entire, within the Supreme.¹³

Now comes the question of the soul leaving the body: where does it go? It cannot remain in this world where there is no natural recipient for it; and it cannot remain attached to anything not of a character to hold it. It can be held here only when it is less than wise, containing within itself something of that which lures it. If it does contain any such alien element, it gives itself, with increasing attachment, to the sphere to which that element naturally belongs and tends.

The space open to the soul's resort is vast and diverse; the difference will come by the double force of the individual condition and of the justice reigning in things. No one can ever escape the suffering entailed by ill deeds done; the divine law is ineluctable, carrying bound up, as one with it, the fore-ordained execution of its doom. The sufferer, all unaware, is swept onward towards his due, hurried always by the restless driving of his errors, until at last wearied out by that against which he struggled, he falls into his fit place and, by self-chosen movement, is brought to the lot he never chose. And the law decrees, also, the intensity and the duration of the suffering while it carries with it, too, the lifting of the chastisement and the faculty of rising from those places of pain—all by power of the harmony that maintains the universal scheme. Souls, body-bound, are apt to body-punishment; clean souls no longer drawing to themselves at any point any vestige of body are, by their very being, outside the bodily sphere. Body-free, containing nothing of body—there where Essence is, and Being, and the Divine within the Divinity—among Those, within That, such a soul must be.¹⁴

... If man were all of one piece—I mean, if he were nothing more than a made thing, acting and acted upon according to a fixed

nature—he could be no more subject to reproach and punishment than the mere animals. But as the scheme holds, man is singled out for condemnation when he does evil; and this with justice. For he is no mere thing made to rigid plan; his nature contains a [higher] Principle apart and free.

...And since the higher exists, there must be the lower as well. The universe is a thing of variety, and how could there be an inferior without a superior or a superior without an inferior? We cannot complain about the lower in the higher; rather, we must be grateful to the higher for giving something of itself to the lower.

...Now, in humanity the lower is not supreme; it is an accompaniment. But neither does the higher rule unfailingly. The lower element also has a footing, and man, therefore, lives in part under sensation, for he has the organs of sensation, and in large part even by the merely vegetative principle, for the body grows and propagates. All the graded phases are in a collaboration, but the entire form, man, takes rank by the dominant, and when the life-principle leaves the body, it is what it is, what it most intensely lived.

This is why we must break away towards the High. We dare not keep ourselves set towards the sensuous principle, following the images of sense, or towards the merely vegetative, intent upon the gratifications of eating and procreation. Our life must be pointed towards the intellective, towards the Divine Mind, towards God.¹⁵

V. Purification

The purification of the soul is simply to allow it to be alone. It is pure when it keeps no company; when it looks to nothing outside of itself; when it entertains no alien thoughts; ...when it no longer sees in the world of image, much less elaborates images into veritable affections. Is it not a true purification to turn away towards the exact contrary of earthly things? ¹ The soul's true good is in devotion to the Divine Mind, its kin; evil to the soul lies in frequenting what is alien to it. ² ...[Therefore] in the soul, the directing of vision towards the Divine Mind is wisdom and prudence.³

If a man has been immersed in filth or daubed with mud, his native comeliness disappears and all that is seen is the foul stuff besmearing him. His ugly condition is due to alien matter that has encrusted him, and if he is to win back his grace it must be his business to scour and purify himself and make himself what he was.

And so [it is with] the soul; let it be but cleared of the desires that come by its too intimate converse with the body, emancipated from all the passions, purged of all that embodiment has thrust upon it, withdrawn, a solitary, to itself again—in that moment the ugliness that came only from the alien is stripped away. For, as the ancient teaching was, moral-discipline and courage and every virtue, not even excepting wisdom itself, all is purification.

The soul thus cleansed is all idea and reason, wholly free of body, intellectual, entirely of that divine order from which the wellspring of Beauty rises and all the race of beauty.

Hence the soul heightened to the Divine Mind is beautiful to all its power. For intellection and all that proceeds from intellection are the soul's beauty, a graciousness native to it and not foreign, for only with these is it truly soul. And it is just to say that in the soul's becoming a good and beautiful thing is its becoming like to God, for from the Divine comes all the beauty and all the good in beings.

Therefore we must ascend again towards the Good, the desired of every soul. Anyone who has seen This, knows what I intend when I say that It is beautiful. Even the desire of It is to be desired as a good. To attain It is for those who will take the upward path, who will set all their forces towards It, who will divest themselves of all that we have put on in our descent. So, to those who approach the holy celebrations of the mysteries, there are appointed purifications and the laying aside of the garments worn before, and the entry in nakedness—until, passing, on the upward way, all that is other than God, each in the solitude of himself shall behold that solitary-dwelling Existence, the Apart, the Unmingled, the Pure, That from which all things depend, for which all look and live and act and know, the Source of life and of intellection and of being.

And one who shall know this vision—with what passion of love shall he not be seized, with what pang of desire, what longing to be molten into one with This, what wondering delight! If he who has never seen this Being must hunger for It as for all his welfare, he that has known [It] must love and reverence It as the very Beauty; he will be flooded with awe and gladness, stricken by a salutary

terror. He loves with a true love, with sharp desire. All other loves than this he must despise, and disdain all that once seemed fair.

This, indeed is the mood even of those who, having witnessed the manifestation of gods or supernatural beings, can never again feel the old delight in the comeliness of material forms. What then are we to think of one who contemplates absolute Beauty in Its essential integrity, no accumulation of flesh and matter, no dweller on earth or in the heavens—so perfect Its purity—far above all such things in that they are non-essential, composite, not primal but descending from This?

Beholding this Being—the Self-Intent that ever gives forth and never takes—resting, rapt, in the vision and [in] possession of so lofty a loveliness, growing to Its likeness, what Beauty can the soul yet lack? For This, the Beauty supreme, the Absolute, and the Primal, fashions Its lovers to Beauty and makes them also worthy of love.

And for This, the sternest and the uttermost combat is set before the souls. All our labor is for This, lest we be left without part in this noblest vision, which to attain is to be blessed in the blessed sight, which to fail of is to fail utterly.

For not he that has failed of the joy that is in color or in visible forms, not he that has failed of power or of honors or of kingdom has failed, but only he that has failed of only This, for whose winning he should renounce kingdoms and command over earth and ocean and sky, if

only, spurning the world of sense from beneath his feet, and straining to This, he may see.

But what must we do? How lies the path? How come to vision of the inaccessible Beauty, dwelling as if in consecrated precincts, apart from the common ways where all may see, even the profane?

He that has the strength, let him arise and withdraw into himself, foregoing all this that is known by the eyes, turning away forever from the material beauty that once made his joy. When he perceives those shapes of grace that show in body, let him not pursue: he must know them for copies, vestiges, shadows, and hasten away towards That they tell of. For if anyone follow what is like a beautiful shape playing over water—is there not a myth telling in symbol of such a dupe, how he sank into the depths of the current and was swept away to nothingness?

"Let us flee then to the beloved Fatherland" [*a reference to the words of Odysseus in his homeward flight*]: this is the soundest counsel. But what is this flight? How are we to gain the open sea? For Odysseus is surely a parable to us when he commands the flight from the sorceries of Circe or Calypso—not content to linger for all the pleasure offered to his eyes and to all the delight of sense filling his days. The Fatherland to us is There whence we have come, and There is The Father.

What then is our course, what the manner of our flight? This is not a journey for the feet; the feet bring us only from land to land. Nor need you think of a coach or a ship to carry you away. All this order

of things you must set aside and refuse to see: you must close the eyes and call instead upon another vision which is to be waked within you, a vision, the birthright of all, which few turn to use.

And this inner vision, what is its operation? Newly awakened, it is all too feeble to bear the ultimate splendor. Therefore the soul must be trained—to the habit of remarking, first, all noble pursuits, then the works of beauty produced not by the labor of the arts but by the virtue of men known for their goodness. Lastly, you must search the souls of those that have shaped these beautiful forms.

But how are you to see into a virtuous soul and know its loveliness? Withdraw into yourself and look. And if you do not find yourself beautiful yet, act as does the creator of a statue that is to be made beautiful: he cuts away here, he smooths there, he makes this line lighter, this other purer, until a lovely face has grown upon his work. So do you also. Cut away all that is excessive, straighten all that is crooked, bring light to all that is overcast; labor to make all one glow of beauty and never cease chiseling your statue, until there shall shine out on you from it the godlike splendor of virtue, until you shall see the perfect goodness firmly established in the stainless shrine.⁴

VI. The Return

The soul, ... stirred by the Divine, becomes Love. ...When there enters into it a glow from the Divine, the soul gathers strength, spreads true wings, and, however distracted by its proximate environment, speeds its buoyant way to something greater; ... its very nature bears it upwards, lifted by the Giver of that love. Surely we need not wonder that It possesses the power to draw the soul to Itself, calling it back from every wandering to rest before It. From It came everything; nothing is mightier.¹

To real Being we go back, all that we have and are. To That we return as from That we came. Of what is There [in the Spirit-realm] we have direct knowledge, not images or even impressions. And to know without image is to be; by our part in true knowledge we are those [supernal] beings. We do not need to bring them down into ourselves, for we are There among them. Since not only ourselves but all other things also are those beings, we all are they. We are they while we are also one with all: therefore we and all things are one.

When we look outside of That on which we depend we ignore our unity. Looking outward we see many faces; look inward and all is the one Supreme. If a man could but be turned about ...he would see at once God and himself and the All. At first no doubt all will not be seen as one whole, but when we find no stop at which to declare a limit to our being we cease to close ourselves out from the total of reality; we reach to the All as a unity—and this not by any stepping

forward, but by the fact of being and abiding There where the All has its being. ²

In that you have entered into the All, no longer content with the part, you cease to think of yourself as under limit but, laying all such determination aside, you become an All. No doubt you were always That, but there has been an addition and by that addition you are diminished. For the addition was not from the realm of being—you can add nothing to being—but from non-being. It is not by some admixture of non-being that one becomes an entire, but by putting non-being away. By the lessening of the alien in you, you increase. Cast it aside and there is the All within you. Engaged in the alien, you will not find the All. Not that it has to come and so become present to you; it is you that have turned from it. And turn though you may, you have not severed yourself; it is there; you are not in some far region. Still there before it, you have faced to its contrary. ³

If there is to be perception of what is thus present, we must turn the perceptive faculty inward and hold it to attention There. Hoping to hear a desired voice we let all others pass and are alert for the coming at last of that most welcome of sounds. So here, we must let the hearings of sense go by, save for sheer necessity, and keep the soul's perception bright and quick to the sounds from above. ⁴

Every soul has something of the lower on the body side and something of the higher on the side of the Divine Mind. ⁵

Even in fire there is the heat which exists by virtue of its essential nature and there is the warmth going instantaneously outward from that characterizing heat by the fact that the fire, remaining unchangeable fire, utters the act native to its essential reality. So it is in the Divine also. Or rather we have there the earlier form of the double act: the Divine remains in its own unchanging being, but from its perfection and from the Act included in its nature there emanates the secondary or issuing Act which—as the output of a mighty power, the mightiest there is—attains to real Being as second to That which stands above all Being. That transcendent [One] was the potentiality of the All; this secondary is the All made actual. ⁶

What can it be that has brought the souls to forget the Father, God, and, though [they are] members of the Divine and entirely of that world, to ignore at once themselves and It? The evil that has overtaken them has its source in self-will, in the entry into the sphere of process, and in the primal differentiation with the desire for self-ownership. They conceived a pleasure in this freedom and largely indulged their own motion. Thus they were hurried down the wrong path, and in the end, drifting further and further, they came to lose even the thought of their origin in the Divine. ⁷

Let every soul recall, then, at the outset the truth that Soul is the author of all living things, that it has breathed the life into them all, whatever is nourished by earth and sea, all the creatures of the air, and the divine stars in the sky. It is the maker of the Sun, and itself formed and ordered this vast heaven and conducts all that rhythmic motion. It is a principle distinct from all these to which it gives law and movement and life, and it must of necessity be more honorable

than they, for they gather or dissolve as Soul brings them life or abandons them, but Soul, since it never can abandon itself, is of eternal being. ⁸

If, then, it is the presence of Soul that brings worth, how can a man slight himself and run after other things? You honor the Soul elsewhere; honor then yourself. The soul once seen to be thus precious, thus Divine, you may hold the faith that by its possession you are already nearing God. In the strength of this power make upwards towards Him; you must attain to no great distance: there is not much between. ⁹

This Light [from the Highest] shining within the soul enlightens it; that is, it makes the soul intellective, working it into likeness with itself, the Light above. Think of the traces of this Light upon the soul, then say to yourself that such, and more beautiful and broader and more radiant, is the Light itself. Thus you will approach to the nature of the Divine Mind and the Spirit-realm, for it is this Light, Itself lit from above, which gives the soul its brighter life. ¹⁰

We may know we have had the vision when the soul has suddenly taken Light. This Light is from the Supreme and is the Supreme. ...The soul remains unlit without that vision; lit, it possesses what it sought. And this is the true end set before the soul, to take that Light, to see the Supreme by the Supreme and not by the light of any other principle: to see the Supreme which is also the means to the vision; for that which illumines the soul is That which it is to see, just as it is by the Sun's own light that we see the Sun.

But how is this to be accomplished?

Let all else go. ¹¹

Many times it has happened [so to me]: [I have been] lifted out of the body into my Self, becoming external to all other things and centered upon my Self. Beholding a marvelous beauty, [I have been] then, more than ever, assured of community with the loftiest order. Enacting the noblest life, acquiring identity with the Divine, stationing within It by having attained that activity, [I became] poised above whatsoever within the Spirit-world is less than the Supreme. Yet, there comes the moment of descent from intellection to reasoning. And after that sojourn in the Divine, I ask myself how it happens that I can now be descending, and how did the soul ever enter into my body, the soul which, even within the body, is the high thing it has shown itself to be. ¹²

We are left wondering whence [this vision] came, from within or without; and when it has gone, we say, "It was here. Yet no; it was beyond!" But we ought not to question whence; there is no whence, no coming or going in place. Now it is seen and now not seen. We must not run after it, but fit ourselves for the vision and then wait tranquilly for its appearance, as the eye waits on the rising of the Sun, which in its own time appears above the horizon—out of the ocean, as the poets say—and gives itself to our sight. ¹³

Suppose the soul to have attained: the Highest has come to her, or rather has revealed Its presence; she has turned away from all about her and made herself apt, beautiful to the utmost, brought into

likeness with the Divine by those preparings and adornings which come unbidden to those growing ready for the vision. She has seen that presence suddenly manifesting within her, for there is nothing between. Here is no longer a duality but a two-in-one; for, so long as the presence holds, all distinction fades. It is as lover and beloved here [on earth], in a copy of that union, long to blend. The soul has now no further awareness of being in body and will give herself no foreign name, not man, not living being, not Being, not All. Any observation of such things falls away; the soul has neither time nor taste for them. This she sought and This she has found and on This she looks and not upon herself; and who she is that looks she has not leisure to know.

Once There she will barter for This nothing the universe holds; not though one would make over the heavens entire to her. There is nothing higher than this, nothing of more good. Above This there is no passing; all the rest, however lofty, lies on the downward path. She is of perfect judgment and knows that This was her quest, that nothing is higher. Here can be no deceit; where could she come upon [something that is] truer than the Truth? And the Truth that she affirms, she is herself; but all the affirmation is later and is silent. In this happiness she knows beyond delusion that she is happy; for this is no affirmation of an excited body but of a soul become again what she was in the time of her early joy.

All that she had welcomed of old—office, power, wealth, beauty, knowledge—of all she tells her scorn as she never could had she not found their better. Linked to This she can fear no disaster, not even if she has had the vision but once. Let everything about her fall to

pieces, she wouldn't mind if only she might be wholly with This, so huge [is] the happiness she has won to.

Such is the soul's temper in this union that even the act of intellect once so intimately loved she now dismisses; intellection is movement and she has no wish to move. The object of her vision has itself no intellection, even though it is by means of the Divine Mind that she has attained the vision, herself made over into Divine Mind and becoming that principle so as to be able to take her stand in the realm of Spirit. Entered there and making herself over to that, she at first contemplates that realm, but once she sees That which is higher still, she leaves all else aside. Thus when a man enters a house rich in beauty he might gaze about and admire the varied splendor before the master appears; but, face to face with that great person—no thing of ornament but calling for the truest attention—he would ignore everything else and look only to the master.

In this state of absorbed contemplation there is no longer [the] question of holding an object [in view]. The vision is continuous so that seeing and seen are one thing; object and act of vision have become identical. Of everything that until then filled the eye no memory remains. And our comparison would be closer if, instead of a man appearing to the visitor who had been admiring the house, it were a god, and not a god manifesting to the eyes but one filling the soul. ¹⁴

It is important to have [intellectual] knowledge of The Good or contact with It: this ...is the grand learning—the learning, not of looking toward It but attaining, first, some knowledge of It. We

come to this learning by analogies, by abstractions, by our understanding of its subsequents, of all that is derived from the Good, by the upward steps towards It. Purification has The Good for its goal. Also the virtues, all right ordering, ascent within the Spiritual, settlement therein, banqueting upon the Divine—by these methods one becomes, to self and to all else, at once seen and seer. Identical with Being and Divine Mind and the entire living All, we no longer see the Supreme as an external; we are near now, the next is That, and It is close at hand, radiant above the intelligible realm [of Spirit].

Here, we put aside all the learning. Disciplined to this intensity, established in Beauty, the quester still holds knowledge of the ground he rests on; but, suddenly, swept beyond it all by the very crest of the wave of Spirit surging beneath, he is lifted and sees, never knowing how. The vision floods the eyes with Light, but it is not a light showing some other object; the Light is itself the vision. No longer is there thing seen and light to show it, no longer intellect and object of intellection. This is the very radiance that brought both intellect and intellectual object into being for the later use and allowed them to occupy the quester's mind. With This he himself becomes identical with that radiance whose Act is to engender the Divine Mind, not losing [anything] in that engendering, but forever unchanged, the engendered coming to be simply because that Supreme exists. If there were no such Principle above change, no derivative could rise.¹⁵

God is cause of Himself; for Himself and of Himself He is what He is, the first Self, the transcendent Self [of all]. Lovable, very love,

the Supreme is also Self-love in that He is lovely to no one other than Himself and in Himself. The presence of Self to Self exists only when the associating [subject] is identical with the associated [object]. And since, in the Supreme, associated and associating are one, seeker and sought one—the sought serving as hypostasis and substrate of the seeker—once more God's being and his seeking are identical. Once more, then, the Supreme is the Self-producing, sovereign of Himself, not coming to be as some external [being] willed but existing as He wills it.

When we attain to this state and become This alone, what can we say but that we are more than free, more than self-disposing? And who then could link us to chance, hazard, happening, when thus we are become Life itself, [having] entered into That which contains no admixture but is purely Itself? ¹⁶

Our way then takes us beyond knowing. There may be no wandering from Unity; knowing and knowable must all be left aside; every object of thought, even the highest, we must pass by, for all that is on the upward path is later than This and derives from This, as from the Sun [is derived] all the light of the day.

[It is said that this vision is] "Not to be told; not to be written." In our writing and telling we are but urging towards It; by our discussion we are merely calling to vision. To those desiring to see, we point the path. Our teaching is of the road and the traveling; the seeing must be the very act of one who has made this choice.

There are those who have not attained to see. The soul has not [yet] come to know the splendor There; it has not felt and clutched to itself that love-passion of vision known to the lover [who has] come to rest where he loves. Or, struck perhaps by that authentic Light, all the soul lit by the nearness gained, we have remained weighted from beneath; the vision is frustrated. We should go without burden, and [yet] we go carrying that which can but keep us back; we are not yet made over into Unity.

From none is the Principle absent and yet [It is absent] from all. Present, It remains absent save to those fit to receive, disciplined into some accordance, able to touch It closely by their likeness and by that kindred power within themselves through which, remaining as it was when it came to them from the Supreme, they are enabled to see insofar as God may at all be seen.

Failure to attain may be due to some impediment or to lack of the guiding thought that establishes trust. Impediment we must charge against ourselves and strive by entire renunciation to become emancipate ...¹⁷

If the mind reels before something thus alien to all we know, we must take our stand on the things of this realm and strive thence to see. But in the looking beware of throwing outward; this Principle does not lie away somewhere leaving the rest void. To those of power to reach, It is present; to the inapt, [It is] absent. In our daily affairs we cannot hold an object in mind if we have given ourselves elsewhere, occupied upon some other matter. That very thing, and nothing else, must be before us to be truly the object of observation.

So here also; preoccupied by the impress of something else, we are withheld under that pressure from becoming aware of the Unity. A mind gripped and fastened by some definite thing cannot take the print of the very contrary. As matter must be void of quality in order to accept the universal forms, so and much more must the soul be kept formless if there is to be no infixed impediment to prevent it being brimmed and lit by the primal Principle. ¹⁸

God ...is outside of none, [He is] present, [but] unperceived by all. We break away from Him, or rather from our Self; [and] what we turn from we cannot reach. Astray ourselves, we cannot go in search of another; [just as] a child distraught will not recognize its father. To find our Self is to know our Source. ¹⁹

Thus the Supreme, as containing no otherness, is ever-present with us; we [are] with It when we put otherness away. It is not that the Supreme reaches out to us seeking our communion; we reach towards the Supreme. It is we who become present. We are always before It, but we do not always look. Thus a choir, set in due order about the conductor, singing, may turn away from that center to which all should attend; let it but face aright and it sings with beauty, effectively present. We are ever before the Supreme—[to be] cut off is utter dissolution; we could no longer exist—but we do not always attend. When we look, our Goal is attained. This is rest; this is the end of singing ill. Effectively before Him, we lift a choral song full of God.

In this choring, the soul looks upon the wellspring of life, wellspring also of intellect, beginning of being, fount of good, root

of soul. It is not that these are poured out from the Supreme, lessening It as if It were a thing of mass. If that were true, these emanents [such as soul, intellect, being] would be perishable; but they are eternal. They spring from an eternal Principle, which produces them not by Its fragmentation, but in virtue of its intact identity. Therefore they too hold firm; [just as] so long as the sun shines, so long there will be light.

We have not been cut away; we are not separate. So what if the body-nature has closed about us to press us to itself. We breathe and hold our ground because the Supreme does not give and [then] pass, but gives on forever, so long as It remains what It is.

Our being is the fuller for our turning There. This is our prosperity; to hold aloof is loneliness and lessening. Here is the soul's peace, outside of evil, refuge taken in the place that is free of wrong. Here it has its Act, its true knowing. Here it is immune. Here is the true living; that of today, when all are living apart from Him, is but a shadow, a mimicry. Life in the Supreme is the native activity of intellect; in virtue of that silent converse it brings forth gods, brings forth beauty, brings forth righteousness, brings forth all moral good. For the soul is pregnant with all these when it has been filled with God. This state is its first and its last, because from God it comes. Its good lies There, and, once turned to God again, it is what it was. Life here, with the things of earth, is a sinking, a defeat, a failing of the wing.

That our good is There is shown by the very love inborn with the soul ... The soul in its nature loves God and longs to be at one with

Him in the noble love of a daughter for a noble father; but coming to human birth and lured by the courtships of this sphere, she takes up with another love, a mortal; she leaves her Father and falls. But one day, coming to hate her shame, she puts away the evil of earth, once more seeks the Father, and finds her peace.

Those to whom all this experience is strange may understand by way of our earthly longings and the joy we have in winning to what we most desire—remembering always that here what we love is perishable, hurtful, that our loving is of mimicries and turns awry because all was a mistake. Our good was not here; this was not what we sought. There only is our true love and There we may unite with it, not holding it in some fleshly embrace but truly possessing it. Those who have seen know what I have in mind.

The soul takes another life as it draws nearer and nearer to God and gains participation in Him. Thus restored, it feels that the dispenser of true life is There to see; that now we have nothing [else] to look for. But, rather, that we must put aside all else and rest in This alone, become This, This alone, all the earthly environment done away, in haste to be free, impatient of any bond holding us to the baser; so that with our entire being we may cling about This, no part in us remaining through which we are not in touch with God.

Thus we have all the vision that may be of Him and of our Self. But it is of a Self [that is] wrought to splendor, brimmed with the intellectual light, become that very light, pure, buoyant, unburdened, raised to Godhood or, better, knowing its Godhood, all aflame

then—but crushed out once more if it should take up the discarded burden.

But how comes the soul not to keep that ground? Because it has not yet escaped wholly. But there will be the time of vision unbroken, the Self hindered no longer by any hindrance of body. Not that those hindrances beset that in us which has truly seen; it is the other phase of the soul that suffers, and that only when we withdraw from vision and take to knowing by proof, by evidence, by the reasoning processes of the mental habit. Such logic is not to be confounded with that act of ours in the vision. It is not our reason that has seen; it is something greater than reason, reason's Prior, as far above reason as the very object of that thought must be.

In our Self-seeing There, the Self is seen as belonging to that order, or rather we are merged into that Self in us which has the quality of that order. It is a knowing of the Self restored to its purity. No doubt we should not speak of seeing; but we cannot help talking in dualities [such as] seen and seer, instead of [speaking] boldly [of] the achievement of Unity. In this seeing, we neither hold an object [in vision] nor trace distinction; there is no two. The man [himself] is changed, no longer himself nor self-belonging; he is merged with the Supreme, sunken into It, one with It. Center coincides with center, for centers of circles, even here below, are one when they unite, and two when they separate; and it is in this sense that we now [after the vision] speak of the Supreme as separate. This is why the vision baffles telling; we cannot detach the Supreme to state it. If we have seen something thus detached we have failed of the Supreme which is to be known only as one with ourselves.

This is the meaning of that rule of our [Pythagorean and Orphic] mysteries: "Nothing divulged to the uninitiate." The Supreme is not to be made a common story; the holy things may not be uncovered to the stranger, to anyone who has not himself attained [or is, at least, attempting] to see. There were not two; beholder was one with beheld. It was not a vision embraced but a Unity apprehended. The man formed by this mingling with the Supreme must—if he only remember—carry its image impressed upon him. He is become the Unity, nothing within him or without inducing any diversity; no movement now, no passion, no out-looking desire, once this ascent is achieved. Reasoning is in abeyance and all intellection and even, to dare the word, the very "self."

Caught away, filled with God, he has in perfect stillness attained isolation. All the being calmed, he turns neither to this side nor to that, not even inwards to himself. Utterly resting, he has become very rest. He belongs no longer to the order of the beautiful; he has risen beyond beauty; he has over passed even the choir of the virtues. He is like one who, having penetrated the inner sanctuary, leaves the temple images behind him—though these become once more the first objects of regard when he leaves the holies—for There his converse was not with image, not with trace, but with the very Truth in the view of which all the rest is but of secondary concern.

There, indeed, it was scarcely vision, unless of a mode unknown. It was a going forth from the self, a simplifying, a renunciation, a reach towards contact and at the same time a repose, a meditation towards assimilation. This is the only seeing of what lies with the holies: to

look anywhere else is to fail. Things here [in this world] are signs; they show therefore to the wiser teachers how the supreme God is known. The instructed priest reading the sign may enter the holy place and make real the vision of The Inaccessible.

Even those who have never found entry must admit the existence of that Invisible. They will know their Source and Principle, since by principle they see principle and are linked with it; by like they have contact with like and so they grasp all of the Divine that lies within the scope of mind. Until the seeing comes they are still craving something, that which only the vision can give. This Goal, attained only by those that have over passed all, is the All-Transcending.

It is not in the soul's nature to touch utter nothingness; the lowest descent is into evil and, so far, into non-being. But to utter nothing, never. When the soul begins again to mount, it comes not to something alien but to its very Self. Thus detached, it is in nothing but Itself. Self-gathered, it is no longer in the order of Being; it is in the Supreme.

There is thus a commingling by virtue of which the essential man outgrows Being, and becomes identical with That which transcends Being. The self thus lifted, we are in the likeness of the Supreme. If from that heightened self we pass still higher—[as an] image to its original—we have won the Goal of all our journeying. Once fallen back again, we waken the virtue within until we know ourselves all order once more. Once more we are lightened of the burden and move by virtue towards the Divine Mind and through the wisdom therein to the Supreme. This is the life of gods and of

the godlike and blessed among men, liberation from the alien that besets us here, a life taking no pleasure in the things of earth, the passing of the alone to the Alone.²⁰

VII. Happiness

If, then, the perfect life is within human reach, the man attaining it attains happiness... But are we to picture this kind of life as something foreign imported into his nature? No: there exists no single human being that does not either potentially or effectively possess this thing which we hold to constitute happiness.

But are we to think of man as including this form of life, the perfect, as a partial constituent of his entire nature? [No.] We say, rather, that while in some men it is present as a mere portion of their total being—in those, namely, that have it potentially—there is, too, the man, already in possession of true felicity, who is this perfection realized, who has passed over into actual identification with it. All else is now mere clothing about the man, not to be called part of him since it lies about him unsought, not his because not appropriated to himself by any act of the will.

To the man in this state, what is the Good? He himself by what he has and is. And the author and principle of what he is and holds is the Supreme, which within Itself is the Good but manifests Itself within the human being after this other mode. The sign that this state

has been achieved is that the man seeks nothing else. What [else] indeed could he be seeking? Certainly none of the less worthy things; and the best he carries always within him.

He that has such a life as this has all he needs in life. Once the man is an Adept, the means of happiness, the way to good, are within, for nothing is good that lies outside him. Anything he desires further than this he seeks as a necessity, and not for himself but for a subordinate, for the body bound to him, to which since it has life he must minister the needs of life, not needs, however, to the [authentic Self of the] true man of this degree. He knows himself to stand above all such things, and what he gives to the lower he so gives as to leave his true life undiminished.

Adverse fortune does not shake his felicity: the life so founded is stable ever. Suppose death strikes at his household or at his friends; he knows what death is, as the victims, if they are among the wise, know too. And if death taking from him his familiars and intimates does bring grief, it is not to him, not to his true Self, but to that in him which stands apart from the Supreme, to that lower self in whose distress he takes no part.¹

Now if happiness did indeed require freedom from pain, sickness, misfortune, disaster, it would be utterly denied to anyone confronted by such trials. But if it lies in the fruition of the genuine Good, why turn away from this Goal and look to means, imagining that to be happy a man must need a variety of things none of which enter into happiness? If, in fact, felicity were made up by heaping together things that are at once desirable and necessary—or perhaps even

things that are called desirable without being necessary—we must bid for them all. But if the Goal must be One and not many; if in other words our quest is of a Goal and not of goals; that only can be chosen which is ultimate and noblest, that which calls to the tenderest longings of the soul.

...It is certain that we shrink from the unpleasant, and such shrinking is assuredly not what we should have willed. To have no occasion for any such shrinking would be much nearer to our taste; but the things we seek tell the story as soon as they are ours. For instance, health and freedom from pain—which of these has any great charm? As long as we possess them we set no store upon them. And anything which, present, has no charm and adds nothing to happiness, which when lacking is desired because of the presence of an annoying opposite, may reasonably be called a necessity but not a good.

Such things can never make part of our final object. Our Goal must be such that though these pleasanter conditions be absent and their contraries present, it shall remain, still, intact. Then why are these [pleasanter] conditions sought and their contraries repelled by the man established in happiness? Here is our answer:

These more pleasant conditions cannot, it is true, add one particle to the Adept's felicity; but they do serve towards the integrity of his being, while the presence of the contraries tends against his being or complicates [adherence to] the Goal. It is not that the Adept can be so easily deprived of the Goal achieved but simply that he who holds the highest Good desires to have That alone, not something else at

the same time, something which, though it cannot banish the Good by its incoming, does not even compare with It.

In any case, if the man who has attained felicity meets some turn of fortune that he would not have chosen, there is not the slightest lessening of his happiness for that. If there were, his felicity would be veering or falling from day to day. The death of a child would bring him down, or the loss of some trivial possession. No. A thousand mischances and disappointments may befall him and leave him still in the tranquil possession of the Goal.²

As for violent personal sufferings, he will carry them off as well as he can; if they overpass his endurance they will carry him off. And so in all his pain he asks no pity. There is always the radiance in the inner soul of the man, untroubled like the light in a lantern when fierce gusts beat about it in a wild turmoil of wind and tempest.³ ...We cannot be indolent: this is an area for the powerful combatant holding his ground against the blows of fortune, and knowing that, sore though they be to some natures, they are little to his, nothing dreadful, nursery terrors.

So, the Adept would have desired misfortune? It is precisely to meet the undesired when it appears that he has the virtue which gives him, to confront it, his passionless and unshakeable soul.⁴

We shall perhaps be told [by some people] that in such a state the man is no longer alive; we answer that these people show themselves equally unable to understand his inner life and his happiness. If this does not satisfy them, we must ask them to keep in mind a living

Adept and, under these terms, to inquire whether the man is in happiness. They must not whittle away the man and then look for the happiness of a man. Once they allow that the Adept lives within, they must not seek him among the outer activities, still less look to the outer world for the object of his desires. To consider the outer world to be a field to his desire, to fancy the Adept desiring any good external, would be to deny substantial existence to happiness; for the Adept would like to see all men prosperous and no evil befalling anyone; but though it prove otherwise, he is still content.

If it be admitted that such a desire would be against reason, since evil cannot cease to be, there is no escape from agreeing with us that the Adept's will is set always and only inward.⁵

The pleasure demanded for the Adept's life cannot be in the enjoyments of the licentious or in any gratifications of the body—there is no place for these, and they stifle happiness—nor in any violent emotions, for what could so move the Adept? It can be only such pleasure as there must be where Good is, pleasure that does not rise from movement and is not a thing of process, for all that is good is immediately present to the Adept and the Adept is present to himself. His pleasure, his contentment, stands, immovable.

Thus he is ever cheerful, the order of his life ever untroubled. His state is fixedly happy and nothing whatever of all that is known as evil can set it awry—given only that he is and remains an Adept. If anyone seeks for some other kind of pleasure in the life of the Adept, it is not the life of the Adept he is looking for.⁶

Let the earth-bound man be handsome and powerful and rich, and so apt to this world that he may rule the entire human race: still there can be no envying him, the fool of such lures. Perhaps such splendors could not, from the beginning even, have gathered to the Adept; but if it should happen so, he of his own action will lower his state, if he has any care for his true life. The tyranny of the body he will work down or wear away by inattention to its claims; the ruler ship he will lay aside. While he will safeguard his bodily health, he will not wish to be wholly untried in sickness, still less never to feel pain. If such troubles should not come to him of themselves, he will wish to know them, during youth at least. In old age, it is true, he will desire neither pains nor pleasures to hamper him. He will desire nothing of this world, pleasant or painful; his one desire will be to know nothing of the body. If he should meet with pain he will pit against it the powers he holds to meet it; but pleasure and health and ease of life will not mean any increase of happiness to him nor will their contraries destroy or lessen it. When in the one subject a positive can add nothing, how can the negative take away? ⁷

...We discuss the happy man after our own feebleness; we count alarming and grave what his felicity takes lightly. He would be neither wise nor in the state of happiness if he had not quitted all trifling with such things and become as it were another being, having confidence in his own nature, [having] faith that evil can never touch him. In such a spirit he can be fearless through and through. Where there is dread, there is not perfect virtue; the man is some sort of a half-thing.

As for any involuntary fear rising in him and taking the judgment by surprise, while his thoughts perhaps are elsewhere, the Adept will attack it and drive it out; he will, so to speak, calm the refractory child within him, whether by reason or by menace, but without passion, as an infant might feel itself rebuked by a glance of severity. This does not make the Adept unfriendly or harsh: it is because of his great concern to be true to his own Self that he is the Adept. Giving freely to his intimates of all he has to give, he will be the best of friends by his very union with the Divine Mind.⁸

Those who refuse to place the Adept aloft in the Spirit-realm but drag him down to the accidental, dreading accident for him, have substituted for the Adept we have in mind another person altogether. They offer us a tolerable sort of man and they assign to him a life of mingled good and ill, a case, after all, not easy to conceive. But admitting the possibility of such a mixed state, it could not deserve to be called a life of happiness; it misses the great, both in the dignity of Wisdom and in the integrity of Good. The life of true happiness is not a thing of mixture. And Plato rightly taught that he who is to be wise and to possess happiness draws his good from the Supreme, fixing his gaze on That, becoming like to That, living by That. He can care for no other Goal than That: all else he will attend to only as he might change his residence, not in expectation of any increase to his settled felicity, but simply in a reasonable attention to the differing conditions surrounding him as he lives here or there.

He will give to the body all that he sees to be useful and possible, but he himself remains a member of another order, not prevented

from abandoning the body, nor under necessity to leave it at nature's hour, he himself always the master to decide in its regard.

Thus some part of his life considers exclusively the soul's satisfaction. The rest is not immediately for the Goal's sake and not for his own sake, but for the [body] thing bound up with him, the thing which he tends and bears with as the musician cares for his lyre, as long as it can serve him. When the lyre fails him, he will change it, or will give up lyres and lyring, as having another craft now, one that needs no lyre; and then he will let it rest unregarded at his side while he sings on without an instrument. But it was not idly that the instrument was given him in the beginning: he has found it useful many a time, until now.⁹

* * *

About The Author

Swami Abhayananda was born Stanley Ross Trout in Indianapolis, Indiana on August 14, 1938. After service in the Navy, he settled in northern California, where he pursued his studies in philosophy and literature. In June of 1966, he became acquainted with the philosophy of mysticism, and experienced a strong desire to realize God. Abandoning all other pursuits, he retired to a solitary life in a secluded cabin in the mountain forests near Santa Cruz, California; and, on November 18, of that same year, became enlightened by the grace of God.

After four more years in his isolated cabin, he subsequently met Swami Muktananda who visited Santa Cruz in 1970. Shortly thereafter, he joined Muktananda in India as his disciple, and later lived and worked in Muktananda's Oakland, California ashram. In May of 1978, he returned to India to be initiated by his master into the ancient Order of *sannyas*, and was given the monastic name, *Swami Abhayananda* (ub-hi'-uh-non-duh), "the bliss of fearlessness."

As a Swami, he taught in various cities in the U.S., including New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, and Oklahoma City; but in 1981, unwilling to condone what he saw as abuses of power, Abhayananda left Muktananda and his organization, and went into retreat once again, this time for seven years, in upstate New York. It was during this time that many of his books were written, and Atma Books was founded to publish them. At present, Swami Abhayananda is residing on the Treasure Coast of Florida, where he continues to work, teach, write, and publish his works on the knowledge of the Self.

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3. *Enneads*, IV.3.17: *Problems of the Soul*.
4. *Ibid.*, I.8.2: *The Nature and Source of Evil*.
5. "On the one hand I have a clear and distinct idea of myself, insofar as I am simply a thinking, non-extended thing; and on the other hand I have a distinct idea of body, insofar as this is simply an extended, non-thinking thing. Accordingly, it is certain that I am really distinct from my body, and can exist without it." (Descartes, *Meditations*, VI.)
6. Plotinus, *Enneads*, III.22.3.
7. *Ibid.*, IV.3.9.
8. According to Paramahansa Yogananda: "The soul makes its entry into matter as a spark of omnipotent life and

consciousness within the nucleus formed by the union of the sperm and ovum. As the body develops, this original “seat of life” remains in the medulla oblongata. ...In this “seat of life” is the first expression of the incarnate soul’s fine perceptions, imprinted with the karmically designed pattern of the various phases of life to come. By the miraculous power of *prana*, or intelligent creative life force, guided by the faculties of the soul, the zygote develops through the fetal and embryonic stages into a human body.”

Paramahansa Yogananda, *God Talks With Arjuna: The Bhagavad Gita*, (Commentary on Verse 1), Los Angeles, Self-Realization Fellowship, 1995; p. 10.

9. John R. Searle, *Mind: A Brief Introduction*, Oxford University Press, 2004; p. 132.

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14. Jeffrey Satinover, *The Quantum Brain*, N.Y., John Wiley & Sons, 2001; p. 220.

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16. Kandel, *Ibid.*; p. 377.

17. Kandel, *Ibid.*; p. 382.

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19. A more detailed description of my own mystical experience may be found in my book, *The Supreme Self*, originally published by Atma Books in 1984, and reprinted by O Books, in 2005.

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28. *Ibid.*, III.1.8: *Fate*.
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30. *Ibid.*, IV.4.2-3: *Problems of the Soul (1)*
31. *Ibid.*, IV.7.34-35: *The Multiplicity of the Ideal Forms*.
32. *Ibid.*, IV.4.2-3: *Problems of the Soul (1)*
33. The experience of “union”, or “mergence” of the soul and the Divine Mind, does not cause the universe to actually disappear. For those not experiencing this “soul-annihilation”, the world continues on as before. In fact, the world continues to exist even for the person experiencing the Divine Mind; it’s just that he/she is no longer consciously aware of it. For that person, “all motion has ceased; [but] everything continues.” Nonetheless, there are some who insist that the physical universe actually comes into existence with the ego-sense, and disappears entirely when the ego-sense disappears; but that is not correct. Otherwise, we would have to declare the demise of the universe each time we entered into deep sleep. Coincident with the disappearance of the ego-sense, the individual soul’s *awareness* of the phenomenal universe does indeed

cease, and is replaced with a direct awareness of its eternal Being, beyond time, space, and all duality. But the God-manifested universe does not depend for its actual existence upon the rising or setting of the individual's ego-sense, as some may suggest.

34. from Swami Abhayananda, "The Song of The Self", in *The Supreme Self*, Winchester UK, O Books, 2005; pp. 26-27.

35. *Ibid.*, pp. 28-29.

36. from Swami Abhayananda, "The Song of The Self", in *The Supreme Self*, Winchester UK, O Books, 2005; p. 31-32. This "Song of The Self", quoted throughout this book, was written *during* my unitive experience in 1966, and therefore has the unique status of a direct transmission of the words and vision of the eternal Self.

37. Plotinus, *Enneads*, II.4.16.

38. Swami Abhayananda, "The Song of The Self", in *The Supreme Self*, Winchester UK, O Books, 2005; p. 34.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 35.

40. *Energy* is usually defined as "the capacity [of matter] to perform work as a result of its motion [*kinetic energy*] or its position in relation to forces acting on it [*potential energy*]." But if *energy* is a "capacity of matter", matter is by definition prior to, and fundamental to, Energy. However, that's not correct. Energy is prior to, and fundamental to, matter! The notion that matter is

fundamental is the erroneous conceit of materialism. Not only is Energy fundamental, it is Divine; it is the outflowing breath of God. Matter is Energy appearing in a transiently stable state. Matter is the *disguise* of Energy. Matter is Energy in the guise of form, of substance. But examine it: it is nothing but insubstantial Energy (though it is in a relatively stable state). Why is it important to know this? Because the materialists have convinced us for centuries that this world has no connection with God; that there is no such thing as God; that there is only this material world (that just happens to be here). But the truth is: there is nothing but God; and He appears as this universe and the creatures who witness and take part in it.

41. Arthur Zajonc, *Catching The Light*, N.Y., Bantam Books, 1993; p. 256.

42. *Ibid.*, p. ix.

43. from JPL/NASA (<news:web>, reported in *Physorg Newsletter* at www.physorg.com/news175961092 appearing on 10/28/09).

44. The concept in physics that every particle has an antiparticle with an opposite charge is called “particle symmetry”; and there are also several theories to account for the breaking of this symmetry in the early universe. It is interesting to note that this idea of opposite but symmetrical pairs is reminiscent of (and possibly related to) the duality experienced in mystical vision whereby all relative states of consciousness are composed of opposites, such as love/hate, ahead/behind, life/death, joy/sorrow, I/Thou, etc. All

relative states of consciousness are seen to be composed of these opposites; yet in the mystical experience of Unity, there is a conjunction, or ‘marriage’ of all opposites in the one absolute Consciousness, which transcends (though it is the source of) all relative conscious states.

45. *Bhagavad Gita*, XI.12; Paramahansa Yogananda, *God Talks With Arjuna: The Bhagavad Gita*, Los Angeles, Self-Realization Fellowship, 1995; vol. II, p. 818.

46. This quark-gluon plasma (QGP), theorized to have been produced in the first few microseconds of the ‘Big Bang’, was recently reproduced at the Brookhaven National Laboratory by colliding gold ions at nearly the speed of light in their Relativistic Heavy Ion Collider, a 2.4 mile-circumference “atom smasher”, thereby creating a “liquid matter” (QGP) at a temperature of “about 4 trillion degrees Celsius”—about 250,000 times hotter than the center of the Sun. (from Brookhaven National Laboratory, reported by Physorg Newsletter, February 15, 2010; www.physorg.com).

47. From Swami Abhayananda, “The Song of The Self”, in *The Supreme Self*, Winchester UK, O Books, 2005; p. 24.

48. *The Gospel of Thomas*, 77.

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7. Maximus of Tyre, *Diss.*, XI.9-10

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60. *Bhagavad Gita*, Chapters VIII.17-20.
61. *Ibid.*, Chapter IX, 7-10.
62. Lao Tze, *Tao Teh Ching*, 16.
63. Chuang Tze, Chapter 22.
64. Heraclitus, fragment 88; based on Freeman, K., *Ancilla To The Pre-Socratic Philosophers*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1983.
65. Heraclitus, fragment 30; *Ibid.*
66. Old Testament, *Second Isaiah:45:4*; probably borrowed from the Egyptian “Papyrus of Ani”, dating from the 30th century B.C.E. (Budge, Wallis, *Egyptian Religion*, N.Y., University Books, 1959; pp. 37-40), wherein is found the following text:

“God is one and alone, and none other exists with Him; God is the One, the one who has made all things. ...He has endured for countless ages, and He shall endure to all eternity. God is a spirit, ... the Divine Spirit. He is a mystery to His creatures, and no man knows how to know Him. ... He has made the universe, and He has

created all that is in it; He has stretched out the heavens and founded the earth. What His heart conceived came to pass straightway, ... and it shall endure forever.

God, Himself, is existence. He lives in all things, and lives over all things. ...He multiplies Himself millions of times, and He possesses multitudes of forms and multitudes of members. God is life, and it is only through Him that man lives. ... God is merciful unto those who reverence Him, and He hears those who call upon Him. He protects the weak against the strong, and He hears the cry of him that is bound in fetters. ...God knows those who know Him; He rewards those who serve Him, and He protects those who follow Him.”

67. As illustration of the ill-suitedness of phenomenally-based language to describe noumenal realities, such as the relationship of the eternal to the temporal, try to come up with a word in the English language that indicates the simultaneous presence of two different things in the same place. Shankara called it a “superimposition”; but even that word does not fit the reality perfectly.

Part Three:

1. Plotinus, *Enneads*, III.7.1. trans. by Stephen MacKenna & B.S. Page; *Plotinus: The Enneads*, London, Faber & Faber, 1956.

2. The Upanishads were translated from Sanskrit to Persian in 1657 by Dara Shikoh; translated into Latin by Duperron in 1801; translated into German by Schopenhauer in 1818; and translated into English by Max Muller in 1879-1884.

3. For a scholarly, informative, and well-documented treatment of the historical themes in this article, see Thomas McEvelley, *The Shape of Ancient Thought*, N.Y., Allworth Press, 2002.

4. *Maitri Upanishad*, 3.2. For a thorough and lucid explanation of the Nondual philosophy of Vedanta, see Swami Nikhilananda, *The Principal Upanishads: "General Introduction"* and "Description of Brahman in The Upanishads", pp. 13-64; London, George Allen & Unwin, 1963; reprinted by Dover Publications, Inc., Mineola, New York, 2003.

5. *Svetasvatara Upan.*, I:7-10; II:15.

6. *Ibid.*, I:1-3, 6.

7. *Ibid.*, II:16; III:2.

8. *Bhagavad Gita*, VII.5; Swami Nikhilananda (trans.), *The Bhagavad Gita*, New York, Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1944, 1987; p. 83.

9. *Bhagavad Gita*, IX.7, 8; *Ibid.*, p. 103.

10. *Bhagavad Gita*, VII.5; *Ibid.*, p. 83.
11. *Bhagavad Gita*, IX. 4; *Ibid.*, p. 102.
12. *Bhagavad Gita*, VIII.3; *Ibid.*, p. 92.
13. *Bhagavad Gita*, XIII. 16; *Ibid.*, p. 151.
14. *Bhagavad Gita*, II. 20, 17; *Ibid.*, pp. 18, 19.
15. *Bhagavad Gita*, II. 13, 22; *Ibid.*, pp. 17, 20.

16. Shankaracharya, *Commentaries on The Vedanta Sutras*; Thibaut, G. (trans.), *The Vedanta Sutras of Badarayana*, N.Y., Dover Publications, 1962; Vol. I, p. 51; Vol. II, pp.173-74.

17. Shankara, *Vivekachudamani*, trans. by Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood; Hollywood, Vedanta Press, 1947; p. 64.

18. Shankara, *Atma Bodha*, 31.
19. *Vivekachudamani*, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 73. In order to illustrate the process of 'superimposition', Shankara utilizes several examples: A

person might see a piece of rope lying on the ground, and think that it is a snake. In such a case, that person is said to ‘superimpose’ a snake on the rope. Or, one might be walking by a field at night, and imagine that a wooden post is a man standing in the field; in such a case, one is said to have ‘superimposed’ a man on the post. Another example Shankara offers is that of a person seeing a piece of an oyster shell—what is known as ‘mother of pearl’; but he imagines that it is a piece of silver. He is said to have ‘superimposed’ the silver on the mother of pearl. All of these examples are intended to be analogous to the superimposition by the *jiva* of a world of objects upon what is really Brahman. And, while it’s easy to see how one could mistake one form for another, such as mistaking a post for a man, or a rope for a snake, or a piece of shell for silver; Brahman is formless. How, then, could one mistake Brahman for a universe of forms? The analogies do not stand up to scrutiny. Shankara does distinguish between a personal illusion (*pratibhasika*) and a universal, or collective, illusion (*vyavaharika*); but in both cases, it is the individual *jiva* who is responsible for the creation and maintenance of his own illusory perceptions.

21. *Udana*, 8.3.

22. Plotinus, *Enneads*, V.1.2-3; *The Three Initial Hypostases*.

23. Genesis II:7-8, from the New English Bible, New York, Oxford University Press, 1970.

24. Philo Judaeus, *On The Creation, XLVI, The Works of Philo*, translated by C.D. Yonge, New Updated Edition, New York, Hendrickson Publishing, 1993, 2000; pp. 134-135.

25. See Ecclesiastes 3:21, 12:7.

26. One of the Biblical books included in the 'Wisdom literature' is "The Wisdom of Solomon", which scholars suggest was written as late as the 1st century C.E. by an unknown Alexandrian Jew. The Alexandrian mystic-philosopher, Philo Judaeus (20 B.C.E.-40 C.E.), who was highly learned in the Greek Platonist philosophical tradition, is a prime candidate for its authorship.

27. Philo Judaeus, *On The Creation*, IV.18-25.

28. Philo Judaeus, *Ibid.*, X.36

29. Philo Judaeus, *Quod a Deo somm.*, 19; *The Posterity of Cain*, 63;
The Life of Moses, II., 134.

30. *New Testament, Gospel of John*, 1.1.

31. *Ibid.*, 1.2.

32. Tertullian, *Adversus Praxaen*, 26; Bettenson, Henry (ed.), *the Early Church Fathers*, London, Oxford University Press, 1956.

33. Athenagorus, R.M. Wilson (trans.); roberts, Rev. A. and Donaldson, J. (eds.), *The Ante-Nicene Christian Library*, Edinburgh, T. and T. Clark, 1892; vol. II, pp. 385-386.

34. Athenasius, *Contra Arianus*, I. 24-25; Bettenson, Henry (ed.), 1956; *op. cit.*

35. Athenasius, *Ibid.*, pp. 389-390.

36. See Plotinus, *Enneads*, II.9.

37. Plotinus, *Enneads*, II.4.1: "On The Two Orders of Matter".

38. The word, "true", must be understood in two distinct ways: (1) What is *absolutely* true is what *is*, i.e., the way things *are*, irrespective of human apperception or knowledge; and (2) what is *relatively* true, insofar as it can be humanly apperceived or known, which is always relative to the knower. It is in this latter sense that what is "true" must always remain an individual and subjective judgment. Similarly, what is *absolutely* "true" must remain unknowable.

39. Richard Lewontin, "Billions and Billions of Demons," *The New York Review of Books*, January 9, 1997, p. 31.

40. Plotinus, *Enneads*, V.5.11.
41. *Enneads*, V.9.1: “The Intellectual Principle”.
42. Plotinus, *Enneads*, V.1.1: *The Three Initial Hypostases*.
43. Swami Abhayananda, “Song of The Self”, from *The Supreme Self*, Winchester UK, O Books, 2005; pp. 30-31.
44. Jnaneshvar, *Amritanubhav*, V., 66; Swami Abhayananda, *Jnaneshvar: The Life And Works of The Celebrated Thirteenth Century Indian Mystic-Poet*, Olympia, Wash., 1989; p. 152.

Part Four:

I. Introductory Note

1. Plotinus, *Enneads*, III.1.8: Fate
2. Porphyry, *Life of Plotinus*, 13., from *Plotinus: The Enneads*, trans. by Stephen MacKenna, abridged by John Dillon, Penguin Books, London, 1991; p. cxii.
3. *Ibid.* 8., p. cix
4. *Ibid.* 9., p. cx

II. The One

1. Plotinus, *Enneads*, II.9.1: Against The Gnostics
2. *Ibid.*, VI.7.38-39: The Multiplicity of The Ideal-Forms
3. *Ibid.*, V.2.1: The Origin And Order of The Beings Following On The First
4. *Ibid.*, V.3.12-13: The Knowing Hypostases And The Transcendent
5. *Ibid.*, V.3.13-14: The Knowing Hypostases And The Transcendent
6. *Ibid.*, VI.9.3-4: On The Good, or The One
7. *Ibid.*, VI.9.6: On The Good, or The One
8. *Ibid.*, V.5.6: The Nature of The Good
9. *Ibid.*, V.5.9: The Nature of The Good
10. *Ibid.*, V.5.10-11: The Nature of The Good
11. *Ibid.*, V.5.12-13: The Nature of The Good

12. *Ibid.*, VI.5.1: On The Integral Omnipresence of the Authentic Existent

13. *Ibid.*, VI.8.9: On Free Will And The Will of The One

14. *Ibid.*, VI.8.11: On Free Will And The Will of The One

15. *Ibid.*, VI.8.14: On Free Will And The Will of The One

III. The Divine Mind

1. Plotinus, *Enneads*, V.I.10: The Three Initial Hypostases

2. *Ibid.*, IV.3.17: Problems Of The Soul

3. *Ibid.*, V.1.6: The Three Initial Hypostases

4. *Ibid.*, V.1.6: The Three Initial Hypostases

5. *Ibid.*, V.2.1: The Origin And Order Of The Beings

6. *Ibid.*, II.9.1: Against The Gnostics

7. *Ibid.*, IV.4.9: Problems Of The Soul (II)

- One
8. *Ibid.*, III.8.8-11: Nature, Contemplation, And The
 9. *Ibid.*, V.1.4-10: The Three Initial Hypostases
 10. *Ibid.*, I.8.2: The Nature And Source of Evil

IV. The Soul

- Soul (I)
1. Plotinus, *Enneads*, IV.1.1: On The Essence Of The
 2. *Ibid.*, IV.2.1: On The Essence Of The Soul (II)
 3. *Ibid.*, IV.2.2: On The Essence Of The Soul (II)
 4. *Ibid.*, IV.4.32: Problems Of The Soul (II)
 5. *Ibid.*, IV.3.2: Problems Of The Soul (I)
 6. *Ibid.*, IV.3.3-4: Problems Of The Soul (I)
 7. *Ibid.*, IV.3.9: Problems Of The Soul (I)
 8. *Ibid.*, IV.3.12: Problems Of The Soul (I)
 9. *Ibid.*, IV.4.32: Problems Of The Soul (I)
 10. *Ibid.*, V.1.2-3: The Three Initial Hypostases

11. *Ibid.*, IV.4.2-3: Problems Of the Soul (II)
12. *Ibid.*, IV.3.9: Problems Of The Soul (I)
13. *Ibid.*, IV.3.15-17: Problems Of The Soul (I)
14. *Ibid.*, IV.3.24: Problems Of The Soul (I)
14. *Ibid.*, III.4.2: Our Tutelary Spirit

V. Purification

1. Plotinus, *Enneads*, III.6.5: The Impassivity of the Unembodied.
2. *Ibid.*, I.2.4-6: The Virtues.
3. *Ibid.*, I.2.6-7: The Virtues.
4. *Ibid.*, I.6.1-9: Beauty.

VI. The Return

1. Plotinus, *Enneads*, VI.7.23: The Multiplicity Of The Ideal-Forms

- (II) 2. *Ibid.*, VI.5.7: Omnipresence Of Authentic Existent
- (II) 3. *Ibid.*, VI.5.12: Omnipresence Of Authentic Existent
4. *Ibid.*, V.1.11-12: The Three Initial Hypostases
5. *Ibid.*, IV.8.8: The Soul's Descent Into Body
6. *Ibid.*, V.4.2: How The Secondaries Rise From The
First
7. *Ibid.*, V.1.1: The Three Initial Hypostases
8. *Ibid.*, V.1.2: The Three Initial Hypostases
9. *Ibid.*, V.1.2-3: The Three Initial Hypostases
10. *Ibid.*, V.3.8: The Knowing Hypostases And
The Transcendent
11. *Ibid.*, V.3.17: The Knowing Hypostases And The
Transcendent
12. *Ibid.*, IV.8.1: The Soul's Descent Into Body
13. *Ibid.*, V.5.8: The Nature Of the Good

14. *Ibid.*, VI.7.34-35: The Multiplicity Of The Ideal-Forms
15. *Ibid.*, VI.7.36: The Multiplicity Of The Ideal-Forms
16. *Ibid.*, VI.8.14-15: On Free Will And The Will of The One
17. *Ibid.*, VI.9.4: On The Good, or The One
18. *Ibid.*, VI.9.7: On The Good, or The One
19. *Ibid.*, VI.9.7: On The Good, or The One
20. *Ibid.*, VI.9.8-11: On The Good, or The One

VII. Happiness

1. *Enneads*, I.4.4: Happiness
2. *Ibid.*, I.4.4-7: Happiness
3. *Ibid.*, I.4.8: Happiness
4. *Ibid.*, I.4.8: Happiness
5. *Ibid.*, I.4.11: Happiness
6. *Ibid.*, I.4.12: Happiness

7. *Ibid.*, I.4.14: Happiness
8. *Ibid.*, I.4.15: Happiness
9. *Ibid.*, I.4.16: Happiness

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