

BESHARA

ISSUE 3

AUTUMN 1987

An Obituary of Bulent Rauf

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DR. ROM HARRÉ Ontology and Physics

CHRISTOPHER RYAN A Journey in Ottoman Turkey

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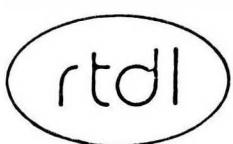
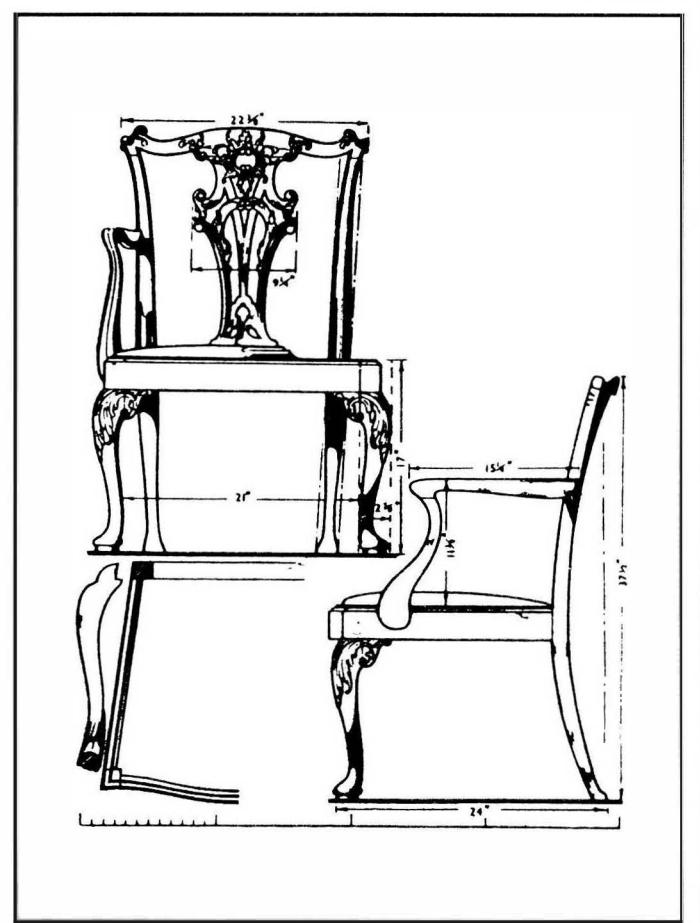
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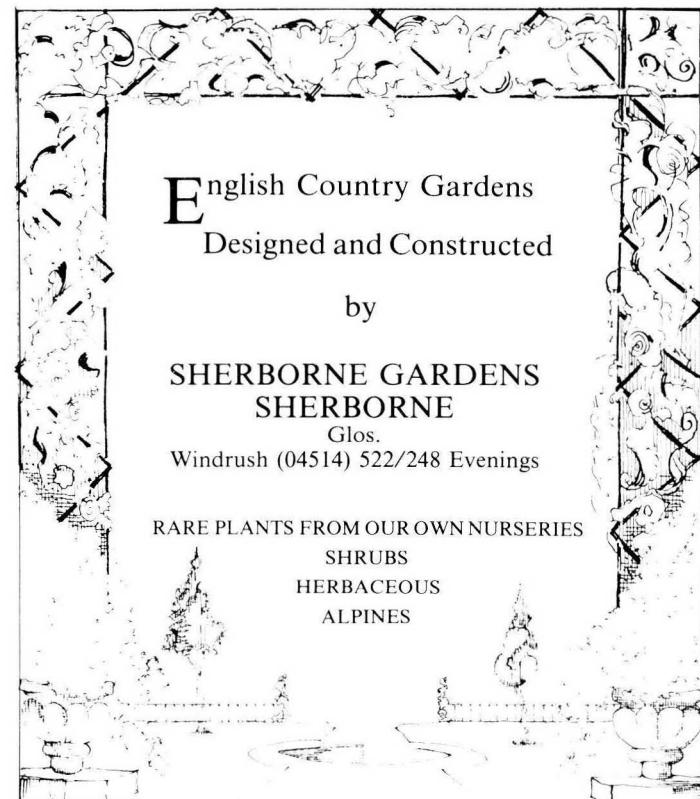
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BESHARA

The Magazine of the Beshara Trust

Issue 3 Autumn 1987

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EDITORIAL

It is with great sadness that we report the death of Bulet Rauf on September 5th. His contribution to this magazine was immeasurable, both in the vision which led to its inception and in the wise advice he gave and valuable contributions he made to the first two issues. In this, as in so many things, he will be greatly missed.

Publication of this issue has been slightly delayed as we wished to include an obituary. We also have talks by two distinguished scholars, Dr. Rom Harré and Dr. R.W.J. Austin, and the first of what we hope will be many travel features in Christopher Ryan's piece on Ottoman Turkey.

If there is a theme to be discerned in the diversity of articles in this issue, it is that of dependence. The idea that we are not self-sufficient, but dependent on a totality, is implicit in all holistic formulations, which assert the inter-connectedness and inter-penetration of things. Dr. Harré refers to this trend in modern science when he says, in his article "Ontology and Physics", "... not only the mass, but all the properties of an object could be created by the rest of the universe. There are not isolated things; ... The universe is one entity...". Similar ideas are, of course, emerging in other fields such as ecology, biology and economics.

Within the spiritual traditions, dependence is often related to concepts of poverty and service, which are considered essential for real progress. In the writings of men like Ibn 'Arabi and Meister Eckhart which embody a perspective based on absolute unity, it is a completely positive idea, as Dr. Austin points out on page 22. In acknowledging the fact of our indigence, we become open to receive generosity and are offered the possibility of participating, through conformity to its order, in the creative movement of the whole.

This is supremely demonstrated by the Virgin Mary, whom we are particularly invited to celebrate in this Marian Year. In the state of receptivity and perfect servanthood which she exemplifies, we find our true dignity as human beings; Elizabeth Roberts in her article on "Reaffirmation" quotes from Meister Eckhart, "It is here in this poverty that man regains the eternal being that once he was, now is and ever more shall be".

Jane Clark

BESHARA

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News and Views

A New Translation of Ibn 'Arabi's Fusus al-Hikam

The second volume of an English translation of Ismail Hakki Bursevi's translation of and commentary on the **Fusus al-Hikam** by Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi appears in October. This book, which is described by Ismail Hakki Bursevi as "magnificent of value and great of address and order", has been rendered into English by Bulent Rauf with the help of Hugh Tollemache and Rosemary Brass and will appear in five volumes. The first volume, containing Ismail Hakki Bursevi's illuminating introduction, together with the first two chapters on Adam and Seth, was published in January 1986 and is still available.

Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi, who calls himself '*a complying servant*' in the bringing down and exposing of this book, was born in Murcia in Southern Spain in 1165 AD. He spent much of his youth in the company of learned and saintly people and from the age of thirty he travelled extensively, meeting many of the great mystics and thinkers of his time. This led to a great interchange of ideas. He was known in the West as Doctor Maximus and in the East as al-Shaykh al-Akbar, the greatest Shaykh. He completed in the region of 500 books, writing down for the first time many of the teachings which until then had remained within the oral tradition.

He writes from the perspective of the Unity of Existence which by its Absoluteness includes all possibilities with a universality that excludes nothing. In this way his writing, which may at first glance appear very particular, leaves no domain untouched in its implications. For the one who reads his works unprejudiced by opinion or belief or narrowness of vision, there are indications of divine knowledges which '*result from complete facing and joy of thought and freedom of place after the Divine Munificence*' (page 15) intensifying and refining the taste for the Beauty of the Real Beloved. Ibn

'Arabi elevates the position of Man for the one who would reach perfection, in explanation of the saying that 'He who knows himself, knows his Lord' when he writes that: "*The Perfect Man is he who knows without doubt that all existence is nothing but the existence of God*".

In 1223 Ibn 'Arabi settled in Damascus where, apart from a short visit to Aleppo, he lived until his death in 1240. It was while he was in Damascus that he wrote the 'Fusus al-Hikam', which of all his works is considered to be outstandingly significant, due to the purity of its manner of arrival, disclosed and attested to by Ibn 'Arabi himself in the account detailed in the extraordinarily explicit introduction to the first volume.

Each of the twenty-seven chapters of the Fusus treats of a unique aspect or 'bezel' (*fass*) of the Divine Wisdom as exemplified in a particular prophet in the line from Adam to Mohammed, the whole book shedding light on the many-faceted jewel of the Unique and Infinite Wisdom, hence the title which translates as "*The Bezels of Wisdom*".

This second volume will contain the following five chapters:

The Wisdom of the Transcended Magnificat in the Word of Noah,
The Wisdom of Sanctity in the Word of Idris (Enoch),
The Wisdom of Ecstasy and Rapture in the Word of Abraham,
The Wisdom of the Truth in the Word of Isaac,
The Wisdom of Exaltedness in the Word of Ishmael,

Ismail Hakki Bursevi, who translated the book into Turkish with explanation and commentary, was born in Aydos near Adrianople in 1653 AD. He lived in Bursa for more than thirty years and died there in 1725, hence his name *The Bursevi*. When he was three, he met the Jelveti Shaykh Osman Fazli and was

then known by him as 'our student since the age of three'. He eventually became his successor. He wrote over 100 books, expressing himself equally well in both Turkish and Arabic. His commentary on the 'Fusus al-Hikam' is of inestimable value for not only does it incorporate his knowledge of all previous commentaries, but it is drawn from the same source as the original work and in accordance with the order upon the Fusus "*Bring it out to the people who will benefit by it*".

The entire English-speaking world, especially those who thirst for the reality and meaning of the knowledge contained in this book, may now profit from this particular translation and commentary which is a further enlargement of the Mercy of God. Bulent Rauf writes in his forward to the first volume about the all-engulfing power of such Mercy. In undertaking the translation of such a work, which seemed an insurmountable task, he observed: "*the undertaking was not a result of my knowledge of what was to be understood, but...the undertaking itself undertook to teach me all that was necessary to bring about this tremendous task*".

It is a book which reveals possibilities of an unforeseen magnitude. Rosemary Brass writes in her excellent foreword to the second volume: "*This book is beyond ordinary measure. It is beyond the general run of mystical writings, and it is more than just a book of meanings. It is to do with the very meaning of meanings, with the meanings, the realities and the knowledges of God, and it comes directly from God according to His own manner and wish.*"

The translation has been published by the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society and is available through all good bookshops. A further three volumes are in preparation.

An Obituary of Bulent Rauf

Bulent Rauf was consultant to the Beshara Trust from its inception in 1971 until his death on September 5th 1987.

In the passing of Bulent from this life to the next, we have lost a true friend and a wise counsellor. We mourn deeply at his departure, however inevitable.

Most obituaries deal with the past. For Bulent, I would like his obituary in this magazine, which will be read by many who knew him well, to deal with the future. No eulogy would do justice to this extraordinary man, and doubtless a biography will be written at some later stage.

It is important to realise that there was something that Bulent embodied that we need. He often said that he was just a signpost, pointing the way to those who recognised that he knew what they were looking for. He avoided in any way being a teacher or guru figure, being strongly critical of those who interpose themselves between the seeker and the sought. *"Don't look at me; look at what I see. Don't love me; love what I love."* For Bulent to be more than a great man of the past, we must look at what it was he embodied, and become that ourselves. Where we saw his humility, be that; where we saw his constancy, be that; where we saw his knowledge and understanding, be that. Otherwise, his work will be to no avail.

He was told in 1966 by someone he had never met before in Istanbul to go to England. He knew that this was an order of a different level. *"Don't you know that you are required in England? We have been waiting for you for a long time, stop wasting your time and go".* He had no idea what he would expect in England, nor what he was supposed to do, but the order was compelling and he arrived in England. After some time, he was working in an antique shop when a

man came in talking about a lecture on Ibn 'Arabi, and Bulent said that he would like to listen as he knew a little about the subject. From then on he realised that he had not been sent to England by chance, and a series of remarkable coincidences occurred which demonstrated to him that his real work had begun. He was fortunately able to read the old Ottoman Turkish, and was therefore able to translate the exceptionally difficult commentary on Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi's 'Fusus al-Hikam' by Ismail Hakki Bursevi – an immense work which is being published in five volumes, and which Bulent regarded as the most important contribution to esoteric literature, mapping as it does so comprehensively the Spiritual landscape. He was Life President of the Ibn 'Arabi Society,

It was evident that only by an intimate knowledge of the most profound spiritual stations was he able so clearly to imbue the listener with understanding. His attention was constantly on that highest goal that Man can attain – Union with God, and all questions and actions were transformed towards helping others to appreciate that goal. In the best Socratic tradition, he illuminated with infinite patience the perennial wisdom summarised in the Delphic inscription "Know Thyself".

His varied life and broad interests enabled him to relate his spiritual knowledge to many other fields. An Archaeological scholar educated at Cornell and Yale Universities, he was an authority on early Civilisations, and his great concern was the dilemma of modern man's lack of spiritual dimension. He was equally secure in great wealth and in great poverty. He was married to Princess Faiza of Egypt until 1962. His wide circle of influential friends of many nationalities saw little

of him in later years as he became increasingly conscious of the need to devote his time to educating the next generation. He was able to express himself equally clearly in the language of Christian, Moslem, Jew, Zoroastrian, scientist and even apparent atheist, and many looked to him to explain the meanings of their own traditions. He had no time for the religious bigot nor for dogma.

His wife Angela, whom he married in 1973, was a devoted wife who fortunately understood the demands on him made by the many who looked to him for advice. He always had time for us, knowing that he had much to do in a relatively short time. He was accosted by one lady who said: *"I have two weeks holiday, and would like to understand it all before I return."* To which Bulent's reply was: *"It can take two seconds or two thousand years; it all depends on you."* Angela was a great support to him and an influence whose importance cannot be quantified. Our heartfelt condolences and love go out to her at this time.

Bulent was confident of the future of Beshara; he had few doubts about the future when he reflected upon what the present encompassed. He often said that most leaders were unwilling to make sufficient preparation for the time after they died, and that the inspiration so often died with them. Remarkably, without establishing dogma or rules, he was confident that Beshara would continue to develop in its correct way. It is up to those who understood him to live up to his confidence.

A photograph of Bulent is interesting and gives a partial and surface view of the man. For this reason, Bulent seldom allowed his photograph to be taken. Equally, this obituary is like a photograph, giving only an imperfect impression of a complete man.

The Man from whom God Nothing Hid

Meister Eckhart's acceptance by the Catholic Church may be imminent.

Moves to re-habilitate the great German mystic and writer, Meister Eckhart, into the Catholic Church could bear fruit this autumn, when a report will be presented to the Master General of the Dominicans. The Eckhart Committee, which was set up in 1980 to examine Eckhart's orthodoxy, will be suggesting that there should be "*an official declaration by the Pope acknowledging the exemplary character of Eckhart's activity and preaching...and recommending his writings (particularly the spiritual works, treatises and sermons) as an expression of authentic Christian mysticism and as trustworthy guides to Christian life according to the spirit of the gospels.*"

Meister Eckhart is regarded by many as one of the greatest of the Christian mystics. Born in Germany around 1260, he was a Dominican preacher who rose to be Prior of Erfurt and Vicar General of Bohemia. He established himself as a man of learning and spiritual insight – the title *Meister* indicating the high regard in which he was held. It is mainly for his sermons, delivered in vernacular German, that he is loved today. These were given to a public hungry for instruction but lacking education in theology and they express the very highest spiritual perception in a vigorous, bold and accessible language, full of metaphor, which reads as freshly now as it did in the fourteenth century.

In around 1322 Meister Eckhart was honoured with an appointment to the *Studium General* in Cologne, to the chair once occupied by Albertus Magnus, (whose pupil St. Thomas Aquinas was canonised in 1323). It was here, in 1326, that he attracted the attention of the Inquisition. Accused of spreading dangerous doctrines amongst the common people, a list of 108 statements made by, or ascribed to, him was drawn up and in 1327 he appeared

before the Papal court, which was then at Avignon. Before going, he made a solemn declaration that he was not a heretic, but that his statements had been distorted and misunderstood; nevertheless, he formally retracted all statements which might be considered to be heretical.

He was not, as some people think, excommunicated but died whilst his case was under consideration, in 1328. The following year the Pope, John XXII (who was himself later condemned), issued a bull in which 26 articles from Eckhart's Latin works were mentioned, 15 of which were considered heretical, the remaining eleven being termed 'suspect'.

This declaration had the effect of suppressing Eckhart's work for many centuries, and he is not studied formally within the Catholic Church to this day. He had some influence, notably upon his disciples, Suso and Tauler and later, upon the great Cardinal Nicolas of Cusa, but it was not until the 19th century, when the German scholar, Pfeiffer, issued the first collected edition of his German works that he became widely known. His stature was instantly recognised, both in Germany and the English-speaking world, and the scholarship and study of his work has continued to grow ever since.

In recent years, there has been a great intensification of interest in Eckhart, both inside and outside the church, and a growing scholarly consensus that his writings are entirely orthodox. Moreover, he has attracted the attention of non-Christians, notably from the Buddhist and Vedantic traditions, who have found him one of the most accessible of Christian thinkers, and it is clear that he has a considerable role to play in the developing Interfaith dialogue between Christianity and Eastern religions. These factors have added to the need

for the Church to make its position clear. In 1980 a petition, initiated by lay Dominicans and signed by eminent people from different religions, was presented to the General Chapter of the Dominicans in Warlberg, requesting that the Sacred Congregation for the Faith examine the question. This resulted in the institution of an Eckhart Commission in 1983, headed by the eminent scholar Professor Dr. Heinrich Stirnimann, OP. This has undertaken a detailed study of the writings and the influences upon his thought, which has resulted in the interim recommendation quoted above. It is not intended that the bull of 1329 should be reversed as such, but that the Pope should make an official declaration of Eckhart's acceptability as a Christian theologian and spiritual master. The final, fully documented report is expected to be submitted to the head of the Dominican order in November.

The receptivity of the Church to embrace Eckhart is indicated by the fact that Pope John Paul has recently quoted him in public; in 1985, in an audience with 150 participants of an ecclesiastical seminar (1), he said "Did not Eckhart teach his disciples 'All that God asks of you most pressingly is to go out of yourself... and let God be God in you'? One would think that in separating himself from creatures, the mystic leaves his brothers, humanity, behind. The same Eckhart affirms that, on the contrary, the mystic is marvellously present to them on the only level where he can truly reach them, that is, in God."

In this respect, it is interesting that amongst the elements which the Commission identify as justifying a reconsideration of Meister Eckhart, they include "growing contemporary interest, among both Christians and non-Christians, in new forms of spirituality, interior life and mystical experience" and in their list of important consequences of re-instatement that it would "encourage many sisters and brothers of the order of preachers to read and study the writings of Eckhart as well as the works of other eminent representatives of the mystical tradition in the order".

As part of the movement towards rehabilitation, a two day conference –

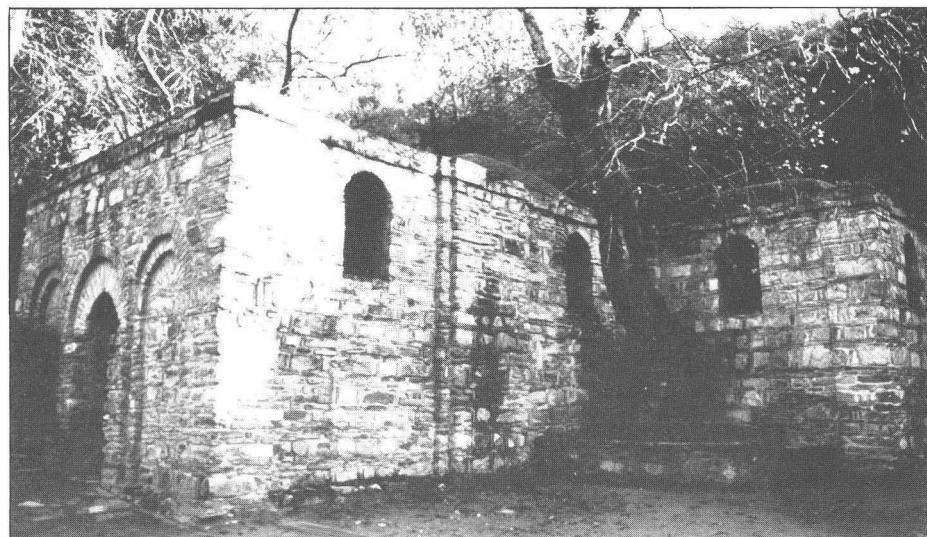
The Marian Year

On June 7th this year, Pope John Paul II inaugurated The Marian Year – only the second in the history of the church to be dedicated to the Virgin Mary. The 'year' will run for 14 months, ending on 15th August 1988, on the Feast of the Bodily Assumption of Mary into Heaven, and it will be marked by worldwide celebrations and pilgrimages to Mary's shrines, including a visit by Pope John Paul himself to Poland's Our Lady of Czestochowa.

Martha Chamberlin writes:-

The announcement by Pope John Paul II of the present Marian Year is of interest not only to Catholics and observers of that Church, but to all who are attracted to the Virgin's compelling grace. It is the grace of perfect servitude, perfection verified and which has no imitators.

Perfect servitude means perfect receptivity to the wishes of the Lord; thus Mary, having received perfectly His Word by the agency of the Archangel Gabriel, reception 'became' no other than the received, which is to say that the three elements implied in 'receive', (i.e. the receiver, the received and the reception) are understood to be one by virtue of the dominant influence of the perfection mentioned above. That which receives perfectly becomes no other than that which it receives. Her purity may be seen in this absolution of trinities -- they are said to be absolved because no relation manifesting itself in three, nor indeed any single atom of existence, is left untouched by purity of heart.



Mary's House at Ephesus, Turkey, where she spent the last years of her life. It was proclaimed an official place of pilgrimage by the Catholic Church in 1973.

The Virgin's supreme example is best followed by one who wishes to serve and receive in the proper manner. Yet such a one must remind himself often that thoughts such as "I receive" do not enter in, for, as we have said, in the matter of true reception there can be neither subject nor object, neither does any relation obtain – without doubt, his wish implies a place which can be called essential, for this is an Essential matter. His concern must therefore be, as Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi has written

" ... to face God with absolute unification, which is not marred by any form of polytheism, implicit or explicit, and by denying with absolute conviction all causes and intermediaries, whole or part ..." (1)

That this is possible, and is even – and most emphatically so – God's

pleasure, is no other than the Good News, which in Arabic is *Beshara*, and it is news which invites to and requires for its reception, total fiding in God, exactly as exemplified by Mary in the accounts which have come down to us of the Annunciation. May God help us in this endeavour, for no-one can understand His servant Mary except God, and to aspirers towards a fitting response, both to the Essential invitation and to the announcement of this named and thereby especially blessed year, He has offered, and always offers without restriction, prayer; God is the Guide, the Most Wise.

(1) Quoted in 'The Mystical Philosophy of Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi' by A. E. Affifi. Cambridge, England. 1939.

Meister Eckhart Continued

"Meister Eckhart, the man from whom God nothing hid" – was held at the Dominican Conference Centre in Staffordshire in June. Chaired by Dr. Ursula Flemming, this was attended by over 50 people, and included papers by Fr. Edmund College, Fr. Cyprian Smith and the Buddhist, Lama Chimi Rinpoche. As a result of the interest generated, it was decided to make it an annual event and moves are now afoot to form a Meister Eckhart society

which will not only support the work of the Eckhart Commission, but also aim to disseminate Meister Eckhart's work to a wider public. In recognition of the very great stature of Meister Eckhart and the sublimity of his spiritual understanding, this will surely bring great benefit and we wish them well.

(1) At a seminar on the ecclesial mission of Adrienne Von Speyr, quoted in *L'Observatore Romano* Oct. 28 1985.

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Nature, House of the Soul

Kathleen Raine's Seminar at Beshara Sherborne in July 1987

Hilary Williams reports on the weekend and Irene Young explores some of the thoughts it provoked.

It was indeed a treat and an honour for those of us who were able to be present at this seminar given by the distinguished poet and scholar Kathleen Raine because, by her own admission, she now rarely accepts invitations to conferences. An acknowledged authority on Blake and Yeats, and author of numerous books, Dr. Raine is also the editor of TEMENOS, which she describes as a "review devoted to the arts of the imagination", whose editorial position is to reaffirm those spiritual values which must be the ground of any human culture. (1)

Dr. Raine took as her theme **Nature, House of the Soul**. In her opening paper (2) she made the following observation: "We are mistaken when we think of 'nature poetry' as conferring meaning upon nature; rather, nature itself is the true poetry of the universe, to which the poet listens. Sun and stars, trees, clouds, birds, every creature, are words in the language which the universe itself speaks.... Is it possible to remember back to the kind of knowledge we had of our world before inner and outer became separate?... It is knowledge of being that the poet seeks, a knowledge not of something other but a kind of self-knowledge, and this in fact is the vision of what is called poetry."

The true poet is not simply an observer but rather, a whole-hearted participant who is able to respond to those 'ancient springs' of the Self that are the ground of the creative life and of being; for it is the supreme Self that is at once the one life of the universe and the life of man, the microcosm. In her book 'Defending Ancient Springs' (3), Kathleen Raine writes of Shelley's poetry. "Those enchanted landscapes are not reflections of nature but immediate creation of that mental ground of which

natural forms are themselves images, '*idle shadows! Of thought's eternal flight*'. Therefore it is, that in reading such poetry, what we experience seems more real than reality; it comes from that source".

Kathleen Raine brought to the seminar examples of the very finest nature poetry – Vernon Watkins, Blake and Tagore – and we were privileged to be able to bring the poetry of the great Persian saint and poet, Jalaluddin Rumi.

Reading these together, we were able to experience for ourselves the pleasure of poetry whose potential power, as the receptive reader can testify, is that of transforming consciousness itself. As nature itself, such poetry holds before us icons, images of reality which will open to us meanings if we are capable of an open-hearted response.

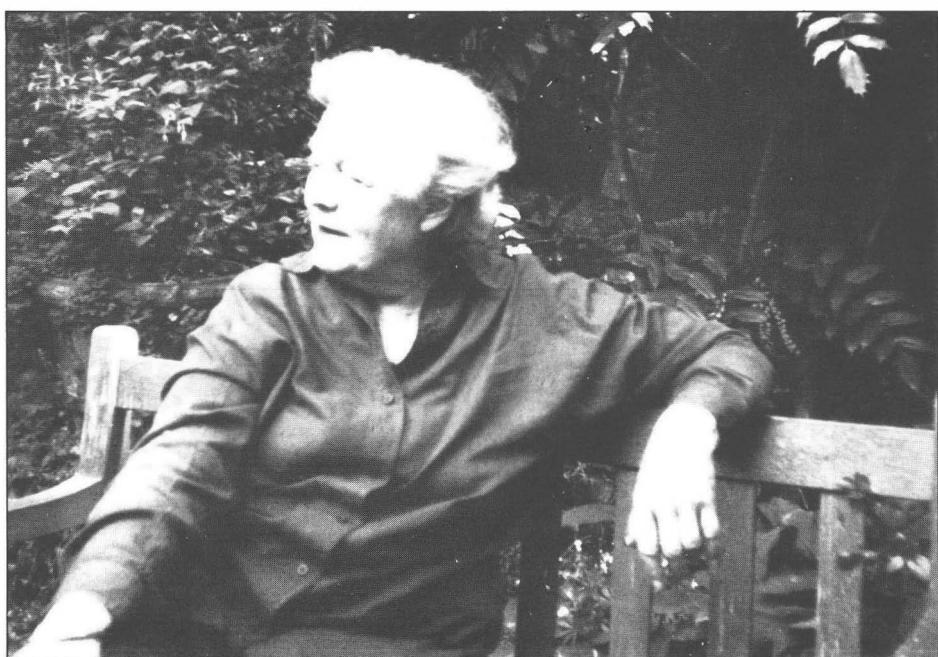
Kathleen Raine says, "However much we have learned, what is given to every child at birth, unsought, is incomparably, immeasurably more. Given with life itself, inseparable from what we are, we have no need to learn or study that on which our eyes open, our ears hear, our fingers touch. We have only to look and listen... Nature is vision – epiphany – indeed, theophany; it is the discourse of life itself as it shows itself in and through the myriad of forms of the natural world... Nature can be weighed and measured – and science is essentially quantification – but it can be known in other ways, in terms not of measurable facts but of immeasurable values, and that world of immeasurable values belongs to the world of poetry and the arts..."

She points out that throughout the materialist centuries it has been the poets, implicitly or explicitly, who have challenged the materialist view of nature that has led to its abuse and desecration and it is these, like Los, the poet and time spirit in Blake's great mythology, who have kept faith with the living universe. Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, Herbert, Blake, Vaughan, Coleridge, Keats, Shelley, Yeats and others echo one another, and the doctrine of poetry in all is the same. "The three deviant centuries are over" says Yeats, "Wisdom and poetry return".

(1) The latest issue, Temenos 8, is reviewed on page 30.

(2) To be published in Temenos 9 in 1988.

(3) Golgonooza Press. Reissued 1986.



Courtesy of Kathleen Raine

Hilary Williams

*"Raven, kestrel wheeling round,
Show your minstrel the heart of
sound".*

from Taliesin's Voyage by Vernon Watkins

Poetry which reflects the spirit' was the subtitle of this two-day seminar. The discussion was based on, and constantly revolved around, the premise that the function of the poet is to mediate values and meanings, and that these values and meanings are ultimately rooted in the sacred. Kathleen Raine's introductory lecture elegantly and lyrically expanded on this premise, drawing on the wisdom of a wide range of traditions to give a profound and delightful overview of a qualitative vision of Nature as a realm of immeasurable values. From such a vision is the poet inspired.

For two days we were immersed in the poetry of Blake, Tagore, Yeats, Kebir, Rumi and Watkins. Central to reading the poetry and to the conversation was this quintessential appreciation of Nature, which, in one of its many guises, is the informing and inspiring Muse of the poets. A vision of nature as a mirror to the mind of Man, and a certainty that it speaks directly to his soul, is the insight shared by all our poets. To quote Dr. Raine, "It is not that poetry gives meaning to Nature, but that Nature itself is the poetry of the Universes". To this the poet listens and is thereby enabled, by being nature's scribe, to mediate values and meanings.

More than passive acquiescence is required for an adequate response to poetry which conveys such values. To accept fully the gift offered involves a receptivity to the quality of the vision of Nature which inspired it. This receptivity cannot be reached by means of scientific reductionism and by standing aside to analyse nature 'objectively', but rather, is fostered by means of a sympathetic concordance with Nature's own order, which is essentially the order of Being. When it is fully appreciated and acknowledged that Nature is a manifestation of Being, then one witnesses Life in all its myriad forms. Then, as Karen Singh has suggested (1) commenting on a poem

by Tagore, "*a profound reverence for life pervades our consciousness, manifesting itself as a deep compassion for all creatures... all the elements would be looked upon as manifestations of Divine Grace.*" Such a perspective is consciousness led by the Beauty of the Whole. This integrated vision of Nature does not preclude scientific investigation but rather, reverence for life is the light in which Nature's mysteries are explored, whether by scientist, conservationist or poet.

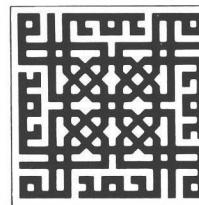
For each individual, the manner and depth of desire for, and the response to, such a unified vision is a matter of predilection and taste in knowledge. Where the response is to write and convey the meaning in verse then the man is qualified as poet and this is his service to Beauty. For those who have the taste, it is possible to choose consciously and willingly an unqualified service of love in which all acts, whatsoever they be, are performed in remembrance of Beauty. This sentiment anticipates and leads to a complete identification with Beauty itself.

Nature is variously referred to as the Veiled Goddess, the Receptive Mother, and is the maternal aspect of the Divine: that is, its creative energy. Here the concept of Nature extends far beyond the limits of corporeal images visible in the world of the senses, such as the images of growth, flowering, decay and renewal observable in plants and animals. These are certainly of nature, as are also the images of the intellect, knowledge, imagination, spirit and divine images.

Ibn 'Arabi says, in the Fusus-al-Hikam, "*Nature encloses all the receptive images of the Universe from its peak to its foundation*". Nature thus conceived as the inclusive and collective totality is comprehended only by essential insight and this is sublime knowledge. This collective receptivity is the same as the active spirit, the Self of the Compassionate. Consequently, if a man is given the insight that Mercy is the same as the images of Nature then great goodness and a close and certain intimacy with the One Indivisible Being is established.

1) From his address at the World Wildlife Fund's Nature and Interfaith Ceremony held at Assissi in 1986, published in Issue 1 of BESHARA.

Irene Young



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Ontology and Science

The case of Quantum Field Theory with special reference to how existing experimental technique influences the development of theory.

A talk given by Dr. Rom Harré at Beshara Sherborne in July 1987

In this talk, I am going to work my way into some quite deep ideas, but I am going to take it step by step. And I want to begin by talking a bit about the nature of the physical sciences, how they work and some of the illusions we might have about them.

The first thing one notices when reading accounts of physics – in **The Times** science report or a journal like **New Scientist** – is their extreme confidence. They tell us quite firmly and clearly about the nature of the world and describe in no uncertain terms what is going on on the other side of the galaxy, and reveal the inner structure of all the objects around us. Now this confidence is quite obviously misplaced. If we consider the history of physics, we see that it has been a series of such confident statements – from crystalline spheres upon which the planets were supposed to be poised, to the amazing Newtonian world of atoms buzzing around empty space through to the extraordinary aether of the 19th century. If you ask a physicist today what there is, he will tell you that there are a lot of quarks and an exchange of virtual gluons, etc. with great certainty; he probably thinks that he has unified the four forces and solved all the puzzles.

Now how seriously should we take any of this? Well, on the one hand we have got to take it seriously because there is no science which is as admirable as physics, with its discipline and the sophistication of the mathematics and the long history of eliminating errors and going on to successes. But on the other, we have got to be suspicious about some of the very dramatic claims that physicists make, and during this talk I want to work my way through to that sceptical position to give a hint of what it might be like.

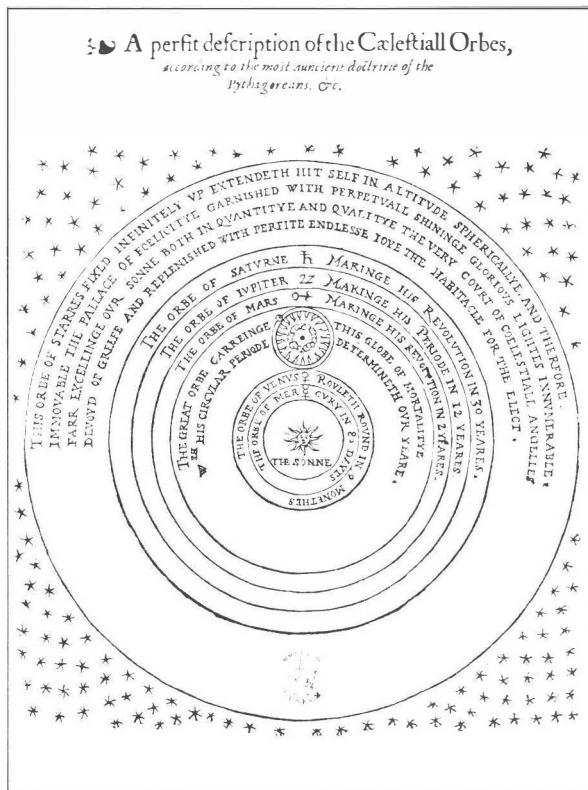
We have to rid ourselves of a fundamental error that people make about science – and with which scientists themselves are consumed – which is that science is the pursuit of truth, and that scientists have some sort of special monopoly and special method by which they are going to arrive at this, which they have refined over the past two millennia to such a degree that if we want to know the truth about something, then it is the scientists who are able to tell us. That picture is no good, and if we pause to consider why it is no good, it will give us quite a deep insight into the nature of science.

There are two things that scientists claim to have to hand; they have *laws* – such as Boyle's Law, Newton's Law of Gravity, etc – and they have *theories*, all manner of theories. Everyone is tremendously proud of these and at first sight it would seem that they are the important things on offer. And certainly philosophers who have read scientific writings, but who have not actually done any science (and there are a good many of these about) tend to assume that the object of the exercise is to find true laws and true theories. However, it has been known for a very long time that, for some powerful but quite simple logical reasons, we cannot have either.

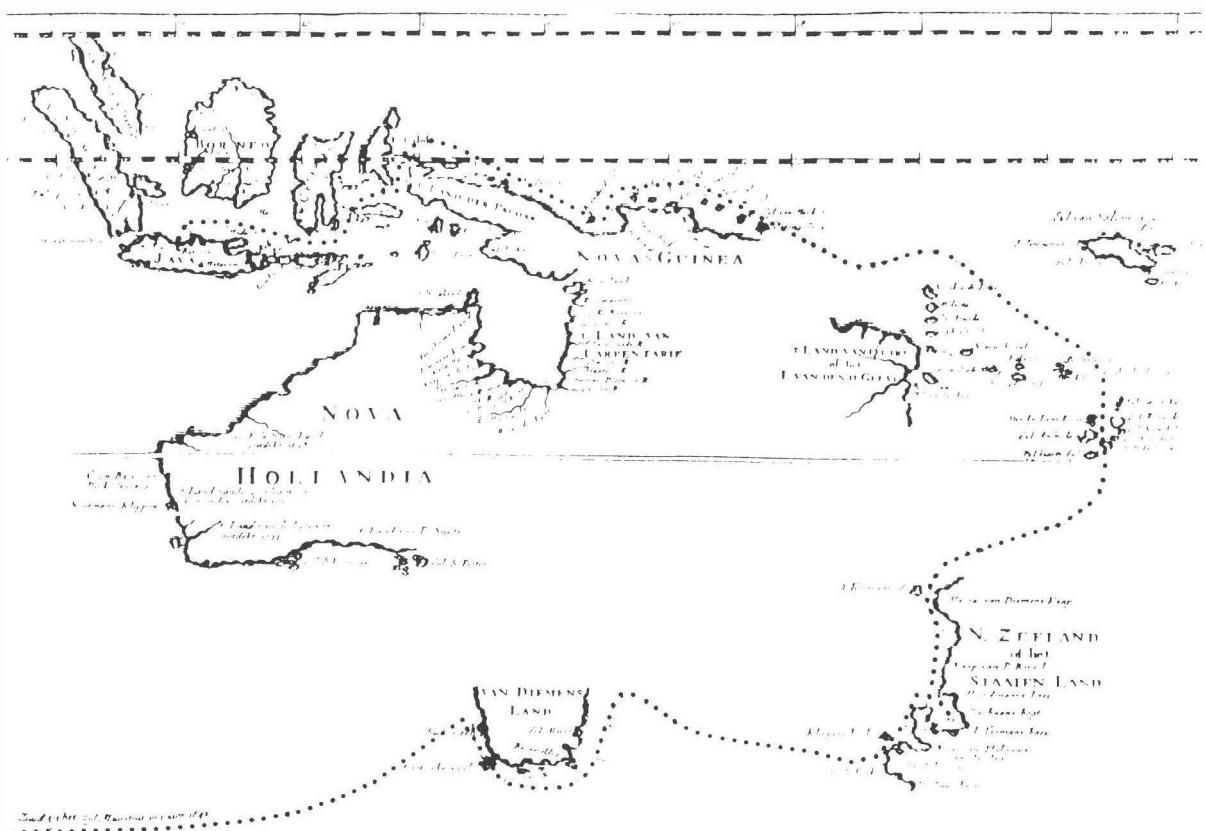
Let us consider laws first of all: for a law to be any good at all, it must be so general that it is actually universal – it must apply to everything in its compass at all times and all places. Now the only thing that we have to go on are some local facts and a few experiments. Think how long reliable experiments have been done: there were a few Greeks and one or two medieval scientists, but by and large we have only been doing good reliable experiments for 250 years, and so there are not an awful lot of them. And the earth is in a fairly uninteresting sort of place somewhere near the middle of the universe – we have our own little corner, but the rest of the universe may be extraordinarily different. And as for time; well, I was reading in the **The Times** this morning that it is really 'mid-morning' in the age of the universe, rather than 'early afternoon' as previously thought, but it is still a *particular* time.

Now what matters in science is universal statements and whether we can say that they are true or false. And it has been known for a very long time that local facts – even true ones – do not enable you to prove the truth of universal laws. To say this in terms of elementary logic, the proposition **All A are B** does not follow from **Some A are B** and this is called the **Fallacy of Induction**.

Further, William of Ockham, Francis Bacon and Karl Popper, and others over the last 1500 years, have all proposed something else: that if you presume something to be the case, and conduct an experiment to prove it and it does not turn out the way you expect, then you can say that the original



Map by François Valentijn of 1726, which shows Tasman's route around the coast of Australia. Note that New Guinea is still thought to be part of the mainland.



Tasman's route

of terrible mistakes; he sailed down the coast of New Zealand, which he thought was the edge of *Terra Australis*, then hit a bit of Australia and eventually drew a very interesting map with a lot of unknown territory which is now called the Tasman Sea. But as the years go by, we have gradually learnt quite a lot about Australia, and there is a technical term for this which has become fashionable in recent years – ‘gaining epistemic access’.

To take another interesting case; when Pasteur and Koch attempted to find bacteria to explain the suppuration of wounds, diseases, etc. they were guided by the powerful theory formulated by Baptiste van Helmont in 1625. He had the idea that disease was caused by the body being attacked by a kind of invisible invading army, which took it over, like an army taking over a town, and used all its facilities to produce poisons which made you ill. (3) Now he was right, but there was no possible way, in 1625, of testing it by looking for things. It was not until the mid-19th century that it could be tested against the competing theories by finding out whether these invaders – bacteria – actually existed. And what was involved? Improving the apparatus – in this case, the microscope, which is why I mention experiments in the title of this talk.

So we could say that we have developed a formula for doing science. We theorise about some phenomena, and in that theory we find certain kinds of things mentioned and if these ‘things’ or processes or substances excite our interest, then the

onus is on the makers of apparatus and designers of experiments to set about telling us how to find them. The apparatus gives us ‘epistemic access’, which leads to further exploration.

A recent example of this is provided by Freud. The idea of the unconscious mind and of suppressed unpleasant memories causing neurotic behaviour was very old, but no-one until Freud had any way of finding it. Freud thought of using dreams as a means of entering this mysterious realm in a way almost parallel to the invention of the microscope, and finding these things. I personally think that the whole Freudian thing is nonsense, but it does fit the idea of a science.

But unfortunately, it is not quite so simple, because we find that it does not take many steps of scientific investigation before you lose touch with things that are observable. This we will call the regress.

For example, suppose you are a chemist explaining to a friend how to make the Dutch drink Advocaat. You explain that you drop whole eggs into a large jar of lemon juice and the shells dissolve. Why? You reply, in the spirit of Freud and van Helmont, that it is because in the lemon juice there is a hidden substance – citric acid – which we can show you and which can be produced by chemical analysis, and it dissolves calcium carbonate. All well and good. But if your friend wants to go further and asks why citric acid behaves in this way, you reply that it is because it contains free hydrogen radicals. So he says, show me a free hydrogen radical like you showed me citric acid. Well, that’s a bit more

3. He was a Dutchman and it is perhaps no surprise that he formulated this theory in the last stages of the war between Spain and Holland.

difficult. In fact, here you have to answer as Newton did to Bentley (4) about gravity, "I'll have to take time to consider this and come back and give you an answer tomorrow". You see, these things are, as far as we are concerned, entirely imaginary, and this leads to another side of the story, and to the need to introduce some new ideas.

The idea that I want to introduce is that of a **power**, or a **disposition**, because that is the notion we need to tackle the problem of regress. In the end we will see that the world is made of this. Now **disposition** is a word which is in ordinary use, in everyday psychology, when we speak of a person having a disposition and character, etc. and it is a concept we use when we do not know what it is that brings about a certain activity.

A disposition which arises in the individual itself, and which is an active one, is called a **power**. We know, for instance, that the earth has the power to attract heavy bodies; I can demonstrate that it still has this power by holding up an object, then letting it go, and we see that it falls to the ground. This capacity of things to fall – to move, without any strings, rocket motors, etc. – is absolutely amazing and nobody, I assure you, not even the greatest physicist on earth, can explain it, although there are, of course, all sorts of views of the matter and almost as many theories as in the days of Christopher Clavius.

But clearly we can talk in terms of a disposition for a thing to fall. And when we talk about this, it gives us the very important concept of a field, the gravitational field and its energy. Now those people who are not physicists have no need to be alarmed at this concept of energy, because it is basically the same as disposition. To say that a field has energy simply means that certain dispositions are true of it; that certain things will happen, if they are about to do so, in that area because of the energy which is in the field. This idea goes back to the great Elizabethan physicist, William Gilbert, who, in one of the best science books ever written, the *de Magnete*, explored the power of magnets entirely in terms of a field and a disposition. This was around 1600; the concept of energy, of course, did not appear until the 19th century.

Now we can use the idea of disposition to go further in physics. Instead of talking about hydrogen radicals, we can talk about the disposition of hydrogen to have a negative charge and build up the whole picture, the whole regress, in these terms.

Let me give an example to illustrate a further very important point. It is quite obvious that human beings have known about gravity, and made use of it, more or less from the beginning of human life. But it is also extremely obvious that people have not known about electricity or magnetism until fairly recently. These dispositions were there in the world, but they had to be discovered. Now the world is a very rich source of dispositions – physicists are

forever discovering new ones – but we have to have the right equipment to bring them out, to make them reveal themselves. The same idea has application in psychology. There are many things of which a person is capable but we not know what they are until they are put in the right circumstances. There is a myth that people have fixed personalities, but it is now widely accepted that they do not. Rather, it is thought that people are all kinds of possibilities and that their capabilities, intelligence etc. depend on the demands put upon them.

The idea, then, is that the world will show us what we ask of it. If you are a physicist, then it is with apparatus and experiments that you question the world. Now there is one very interesting disposition which has become tremendously important in all our lives – electro-magnetic induction. You will never find electro-magnetic induction just lying around the place and it is immensely improbable that the apparatus would ever have come together by accident – Michael Faraday had to construct it. Electro-magnetism is a property of the world but it arises purely in the context of human construction and the technical term for this – for a disposition which comes about from something a human being has manufactured – is **affordance**. To give a simpler example, this wooden floor affords walking, but wood would not have manifested the property of being walked on if human beings had not made a wooden floor and walked over it. (5)

I am going to finish up with the problems of quantum mechanics, of which I am sure you have all heard. People like to baffle one with science, but it

4. Richard Bentley (1662-1742), the classical scholar.

5. Another very topical example is a new property called super-conductivity, with which a small British firm has suddenly made a big breakthrough



WILLIAM GILBERT, M.D.—ELECTRICIAN.

William Gilbert (1540-1603), physician to Queen Elizabeth I and James I. His work *De Magnete* was the first great scientific book to be published in England.

is really all quite simple. Now, science has been following a kind of story, going down a regress, where one theory is built on the basis of another. And now we have developed all kinds of special devices – cloud chambers and bubble chambers, photographs, etc. – to make the inward structure of atoms and even sub-atomic particles reveal themselves; sometimes, as with the huge thing at Cern, spending enormous sums of money in the process. But there turns out to be a very serious problem. If we do an experiment with sub-atomic particles, electrons say, whilst thinking of them as particles and using a cloud chamber or photographic plate, then every time we do the experiment we get a different result. It is not complete chaos, because they will cluster; there is a certain way in which more of them will fall in to one sort of result rather than another. But if we proceed in a different way, as if the electrons were a wave, we also get a good result. So you can get two sorts of results; particle type and wave type.

Well, why don't we combine these and really discover the way things are? Now I am now going to introduce you to a word of my own – **The Glub**. The Glub is what there really is and I have chosen this kind of word because it implies a gooey, undifferentiated sort of stuff. If I build a wonderful, expensive piece of apparatus to make the Glub appear as a particle, I get pictures of particles and tracks. If I do another experiment and make the Glub shape itself as a wave, then I get wave pictures. The trouble with combining the two is that you cannot build a piece of particle-creating equipment in the same space as a piece of wave-creating equipment. The two pieces of apparatus are complementary.

Could we not, then, just combine them in thought? If we try, we run into an equal conceptual difficulty. If we force the world to display itself in one way, then it loses the properties it would have had, had we not done so; in other words, if we force it to become a spot, it cannot also be spread out over the rest of the universe like a wave.

The trouble all starts because people have asked the wrong question; they are spell-bound by their imagination. The line of thought I started with – that led Tasman to search for Australia and Pasteur to look for bacteria – led us through the world of the 19th century in a very satisfactory manner. Physics just worked like that and the world did seem to be as Newton thought it was, a cluster of atoms in the empty space. But it was all will o' the wisp; what contemporary physics has shown us is that that chapter of the story has now closed. We are into a new chapter in which we can no longer seek for things, we must seek for dispositions and affordances. We are now looking at the world as we would look at people – prodding it to see what it gives back – and we are no longer able to form a picture of what lies behind these affordances.

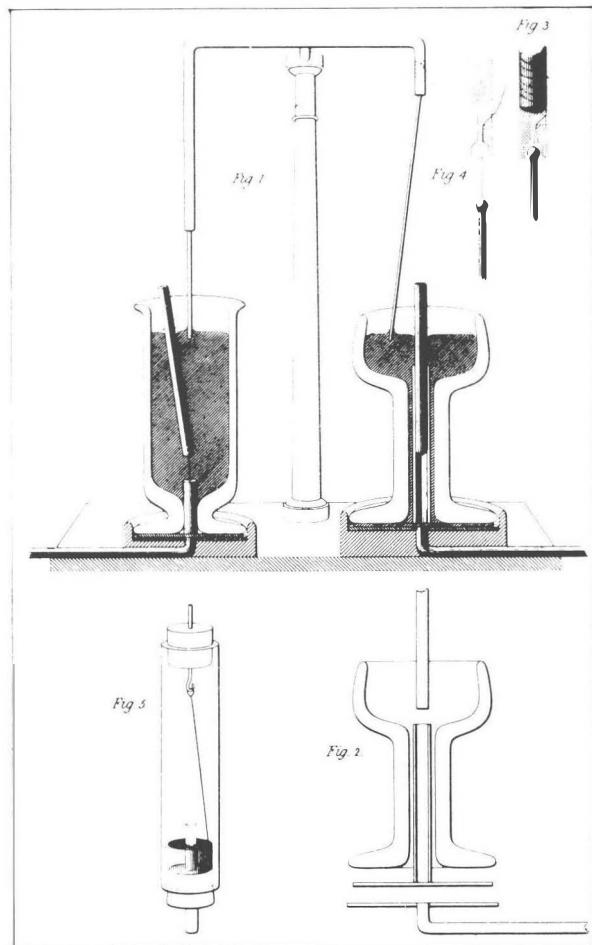
The world, the Glub, is neither a particle nor a wave, but we have made it shape itself as particle or

as wave. If a man were to walk into a baker's shop, and see some nice crusty loaves and some bridge rolls, and asked the baker, how did you get these, the baker would reply that he made them out of dough. If the man then asked, but what is dough? Is it a crusty loaf or is it a bridge roll, he would have misunderstood the nature of the problem, for dough affords both crusty loaves and bridge rolls. He has been misled by a picture.

In the same way, physics has been misled by an old picture. There is still a deep, fundamental mystery which we shall never solve, but there is no longer a philosophical mystery, for we are talking about a familiar problem – about the affordances of the Glub, the dispositions and powers of things to act in certain ways when we subject them to the treatments we have thought up. These are our conceptions, our constructions. I still preserve a romantic concept of there being, on the other side of the universe, other creatures. They are also doing experiments but because they are totally different from us, their picture of the universe is totally different from ours. The Glub is the same, but they do different things to it, and so different aspects of it appear. The only thing we can share is the notion of the Glub itself, which of course is a very undifferentiated stuff.

Now, the last point. What of our familiar things has these properties? Well I have already mentioned it. The one thing that seems to be common to all of this is what physicists call fields – and this leads one

Diagram of the equipment used by Michael Faraday to investigate electro-magnetic rotation.



towards a vast synthetic idea. The one substance is energy, which is just the set of affordances that the world makes available to us. The physicist might say, therefore, that the world is ultimately some form of energy, but if you ask which form of energy, you are asking an illegitimate question, as absurd as asking the baker whether his dough is crusty loaves or bridge rolls.

What we can do as human beings to show ourselves the nature of the universe has come to an end in a very fundamental way. We can continue to do experiments, but we will throw up more and more affordances, not more and more 'things', and we have more and more reason for thinking that the universe is composed of a field of energy, rather than thinking of it as composed of lots of little chunky bits of matter.

Q. Is the *Glub* similar to the Greek idea of the *hylé*, Prime Matter, and if so, do some people accuse you of returning to Idealism in some form?

A. It is a bit like Idealism, but it has a different flavour. Whereas traditional Idealism thinks of the universe as having properties that are essentially mental, it is rather that the mental and physical aspects are more alike than the Materialists thought they were. We still want to distinguish between purely physical dispositions and mental dispositions, but also say that Mind and the universe are essentially the same kind of thing. This idea that human life and the universe are part and parcel of the same thing goes back to Aristotle, and Heisenberg (6) was the first modern physicist to realise that modern physics was in some sense a return to Aristotelianism.

Q. If you cannot talk about what is behind the *Glub*, is it the case that it will never come to an end, but that the horizons have just disappeared? The possibilities of discovery or expression or manifestation are infinite?

A. Yes, only under the Newtonian picture could you have come to an end, when you got to the tiny little bits. Here there is no finitude.

Q. If it is the type of affordance that manifests a particular form, how do you explain the appearance of well-defined things, of the 'common sense' world we live in? Why is a fir tree a fir tree, for instance?

A. That is a very deep question, and one which takes us further into the whole story. I have not yet mentioned the holistic aspect of contemporary physics. There is a great split amongst physicists on this matter and I am not sure whether I am speaking for myself or physicists here. The famous German-Austrian physicist and philosopher Mach introduced an idea of enormous importance, now called **Mach's Principle**. He concluded that we should not take for granted that an object would

have the physical properties it has if it was the only object in the universe; that its mass, inertia, etc is a property that it has because of the rest of the universe.

So we could say that the rest of the universe is like an enormous piece of apparatus which forces the Glub to manifest itself in this particular way. The universe is closed in on itself. And because it is much grander than human apparatus, the things it squeezes out seem to us to be much more permanent and definite than the things we make appear.

Although Mach's idea was not popular when it was introduced at the end of the 19th century – and is still very controversial – a number of things have happened recently to make it more comfortable. There is thought, for instance, to be a very close connection between the charge of something, the direction of time (plus or minus) and what is called its parity (right or left-handedness). Now parity and time are both global properties – that is, they are relative to the rest of the universe – so some people argue, myself included, that charge must also be global. This leads to the idea that not only the mass, but all the properties of an object could be created by the rest of the universe. There are not isolated things; that is another old Newtonian idea we have to drop and we have to move not only into affordances, but into holism as well. The universe is one entity which, because of its oneness, so to say, has all these component parts which would not exist if the universe did not exist in just the way that it does.

Roughly half the physicists of my acquaintance believe this, and half disagree. I confess that I myself am a Machian.

Q. Would this suggest to you that there are a lot of similarities between various parts of the universe?

A. Yes it would. The universe is shaping everything up more or less the same way and it is roughly uniform, so things should be fairly fixed.

Q. What comes out in what you say is that the universe is a self-revealing entity depending on local conditions. Would you subscribe to taking the whole discussion further under the heading 'the anthropic principle'? (7)

A. That depends on how you read the anthropic principle. It seems to me to be perfectly reasonable to say that our slice of the universe is a function of us, but to go on to say that the whole universe is a function of us seems to me to be mistaken, for other creatures in different parts of the universe will be slicing the Glub differently. Nor do I think it right to make all steps to human beings necessary steps, and to say that the universe had to produce people.

6. Werner Heisenberg whose famous Uncertainty Principle is a cornerstone of quantum theory.

7. A current debate within physics, from the greek 'anthropos' meaning Man. See Barrow and Tiplers book *The Anthropic Principle*. Oxford University Press 1986.

Q. *Maybe the mistake is in defining us, as people, as the final product. Perhaps the aim is intelligence and the acquisition of knowledge of this sort.*

A. That is quite a different principle which is not all absurd.

Q. *What seems to be coming out is that what is really significant about things is their quality, rather than their mass or quantity. And as it is intelligence – or awareness – which brings forth and reflects the qualities, one would suspect that it is fundamental: that the universe creates for itself this affordance.*

A. I think that is absolutely right, and it is one reason why I have a good deal of faith in the existence of other intelligent beings. What you say about qualities reminds me of the philosopher Bishop Berkeley, who said that all qualities are secondary, there aren't any primary qualities and that things have no qualities independent of human beings interacting with them.

Q. *Could you say that the whole perception of the universe is created by the way the perceiver acts upon it, so that anything beyond your own perceptual action upon it is, by definition, unknowable?*

A. Yes, but one must beware, as Marx pointed out, of the trap of falling into intellectualism. The universe reveals itself just as much by manipulating with our hands as by thinking about it. It is important that we see this spectrum of things: it is not just how it looks, it is not just how we think about it, it is what we can do with it. The idea of a 'material thing' is a function of people actually shifting things about, cutting things up and banging into them; it is why the notion of 'material practice' is so important. If we could expand your thought in this way, then I think it is quite right.

You could say that we need to combine what Dr. Johnson said about Berkeley with Berkeley. Johnson said "Thus I refute Berkeey" and kicked a stone. He was right, and he was making a point that Marx made later on. (8)

Q. *I wonder how this relates to what you have said about the different anthropic principles, if we do not limit the concept of 'perceiving' to the intellect but to what we might call 'exploratory faculties'.*

A. If we put it that way, then we see that these exploratory faculties are characteristic of life, not just people. If you watch an amoeba under a microscope, you can see it determining the world in terms of its affordances. The anthropic principle is perhaps badly named, it should be something

8. Dr Samuel Johnson said this on 6th August 1763, according to Boswell.

like the biopic principle, because the thing we want to get hold of is that the world is such that it affords life.

Q. *If we put ourselves at the centre, then there is obviously a problem. But if we see the reality of what being human means, then it is far more sophisticated than the amoeba. 'Man', putting the word in inverted commas, seems to have a very significant function in the whole matter, wouldn't you say?*

Q. *'Man' or intelligence could perhaps be the principle which synthesises the diversity of different possibilities encountered by what you call 'prodding the world', of which people are examples.*

A. Yes, as long as 'Man' is firmly in inverted commas.

Q. *You don't want to anthropomorphise the *anthropos*?*

A. That expresses it very well.

Q. *You have described the Glub as rather passive. Is there an active principle?*

A. Certainly. I have described it as passive because I wanted to convey this picture of 'prodding'. But in the example, dough is a very active substance. It has to be, otherwise we, as active beings, could not have emerged out of it.

Q. *It includes us; we are part of the 'apparatus' for its manifestation. I was wondering whether it would be acceptable to say that there is a kind of mirroring going on. Just as the Glub can manifest with any quality, so it seems to have produced localised awareness which, in its extended sense, is capable of mirroring, reflecting, all the qualities.*

A. That's right, and to make that point in a slightly different way: the world must have evolved out of itself. Nothing else evolved it, so it must have had these affordances all along, even though they could not be stated until creatures like ourselves came on the scene. People thought very hard about this in cosmology, asking themselves what affordances must have been there at the beginning or near the beginning, and whether new properties of this general sort came into existence in the first three or four minutes of the universe's existence. Now there is a step beyond all this – vacuum physics. The universe is now thought of as a vacuum fluctuation. A vacuum is no longer nothing, it is full of potentialities and possibilities, of affordances. It is what I call the Glub. This is a very rich notion, and vacuum physics is now a very rapidly developing field.

Q. Sounds like meta-physics to me!

A. Oh yes, it is rich in meta-physics, which is why the philosophers are so interested in it.

Q. What you have been saying points to the singleness of the universe. Does that recommend a new kind of science which, rather than tracing universal laws, which, as you say, cannot be done, pursues in some way the properties of singleness from the centre out, rather than from the outside in?

A. This idea is evident in a lot of modern science, particularly in cosmology, where people are concerned with the properties of this particular universe. You can imagine other universes, but they are no good to you; and there is no sense in having a set of universes.

There is also a new field called *fractals*, which is the investigation of unique, single objects. The idea that we do not need laws of a general kind, but, rather, that we need to understand the particular, has always been around in anthropology and linguistics.

Q. But you can't escape the universal.

A. The universal is a kind of Glub; an undifferentiated medium which each of us shapes up in our own unique way. The medium has virtually no properties. Glub cannot be known. All we can know of it is that it is and that it has affordances.

Q. And we know them only because it manifests them.

A. To human beings, with their own particular way of approaching it. You cannot, as classical physics thought, divide off the human being.

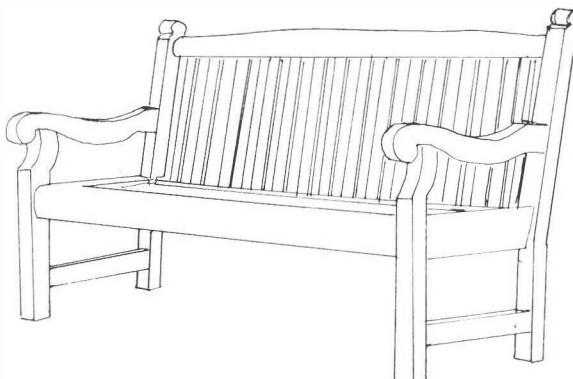
Q. Is time itself an affordance?

A. Whether time and space are themselves affordances poses a very deep philosophical question, which I still have to explore fully. I do not think, myself, that the Glub can exist in space and time; with mathematical tools you can certainly find ways of slicing up the universe which do not come out as *our* space and time. As far as I am concerned, they are affordances, but of a very peculiar sort. Time, you see, is so much to do with our minds.

Q. Can one know that the Glub is infinite?

A. I think that it is hard to use the idea of quantity, even, because quantity is a notion we have brought into it. But certainly from our point of view, it is infinite in its possibilities – at least, we had better suppose that it is.

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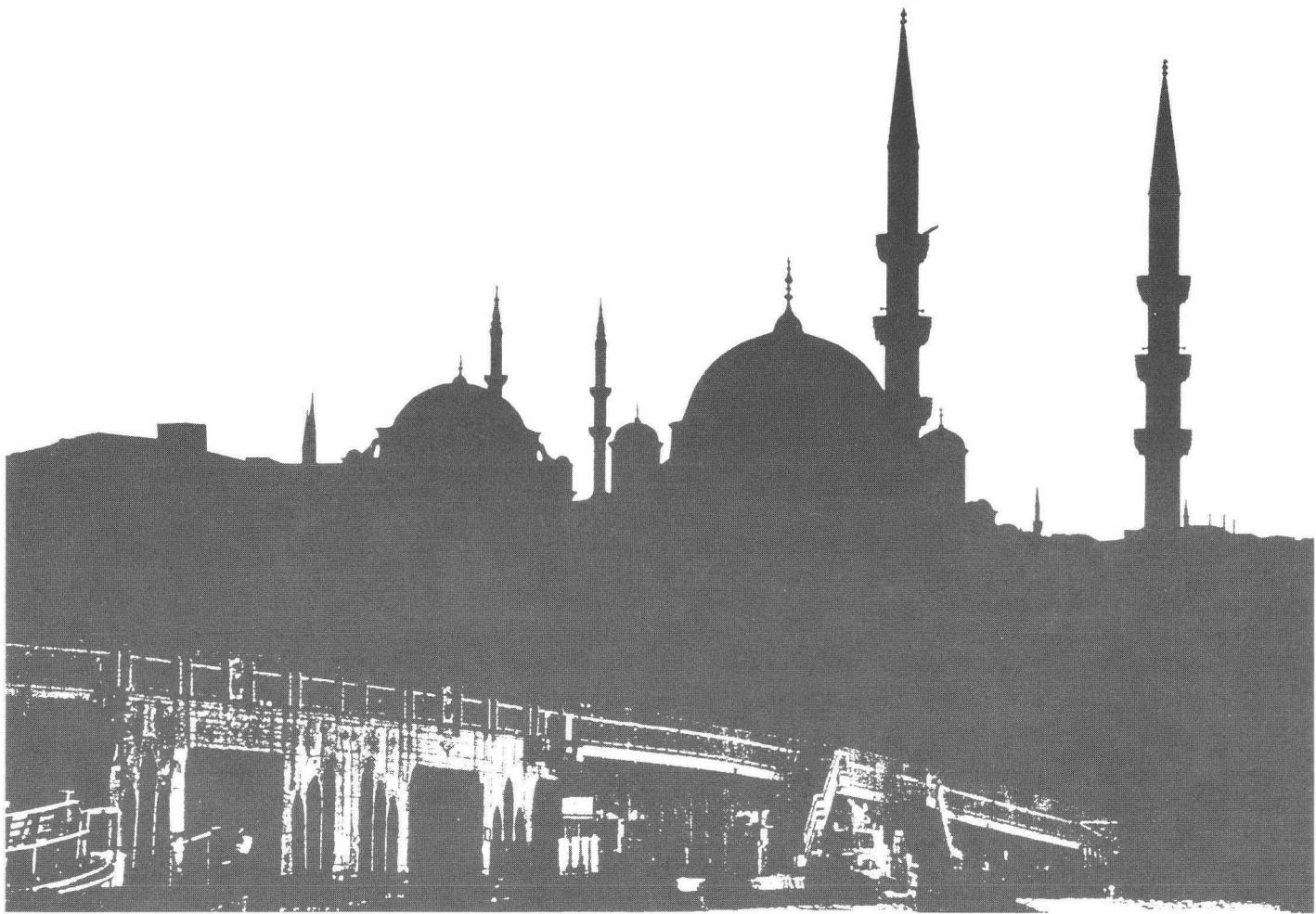
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Photograph by John Farnham

A Journey in Ottoman Turkey

Christopher Ryan

Each summer for the past three years, The Beshara Trust has arranged trips to places of spiritual and historical interest. In May this year, 17 people travelled to Turkey to explore the origins and meaning of the empire established by the Ottoman Turks who, in 1453, conquered Constantinople and began a new era in European history.

"Ah! If we were so happy as to be the conquerors of Konstantiniyeh" (hadith)

The broken walls of Constantinople rose before us in the grey morning light, sombre and deserted, awaiting the attack. Urban's great cannon had done its work and the dust had settled long ago. From behind began the trumpets, pipes and percussion of the martial band; the spirit of the assembled soldiery lifted and their leader proclaimed prayers in ever-increasing pitch. With cannonshot crashing, musket-fire and

cymbals ringing, came the assault. Up the steep bank went the Ottoman regulars. Fearless in their chainmail and bronze helmets they scrambled into the breach, their vast and curved mustachios waving no less menace than their scimitars.

Following came the Janissaries, the Sultan's own guard, parading before them the famous horsetail standard. In their red tunics and gold-braided blue pantaloons, their white wool hats which rose a foot from the brow and draped twice that much behind, they approached the sound of the rattling drum. With them came climbers with ropes and a

huge battering ram. In minutes, it was over; the keep was scaled, the defending garrison fled and the Sultan's army, marching in the most curious fashion, turning alternately on every third step to left and right, made its ponderous exit. We had assisted in the 534th commemorative of the Conquest of Constantinople.

By proximity to the extraordinary characters of this civilisation, to their works in art, government, religion and architecture, God Willing the great drama of the Ottomans might reveal a



Map of Turkey

little of its plot to us. Standing still in our own moment, we may lean a little into past times and, like slipping in and out of sleep, return with a tale – a tale which when presented before taste, imagination's best arbiter, might show things more as they actually were. That was the taste, the scent, which we sought on this trip.

Where does the trail begin? How could we connect between nomads of the Central Asian Steppe, the Islamic Caliphate, and Byzantium, heir to the Caesars and Empire of 1000 years standing, concluding with a young Turkish army officer seizing the moment at Gallipoli and bringing Turkey into the 20th century?

Osman I and his tribe of nomad Turks succeeded where both Chingis Khan and the Crusaders failed. With intelligence and perfect timing, they first established a kingdom at Bursa in 1326. In 1349 they crossed the Hellespont and by 1361 Adrianople had become their new capital, Edirne. On the Asian shore by the Bosphorus, a fortress, *Andolu Hisar*, was built, and later, opposite, another, *Rumeli Hisar*, and thus Constantinople was effectively encircled. Such artistry of preparation and patient strategy was excelled only by the dramatic climax of the Conquest itself.

Our trip was to follow this route, but of necessity, we entered Turkey at Istanbul; and so we began here with an extensive study of the monuments of the Ottoman period: mosques and their appendent schools, orphanages and hostels; palaces and gardens, museums and tombs. It was here, in the architecture, that the particular flavour of grandeur and generosity which is the

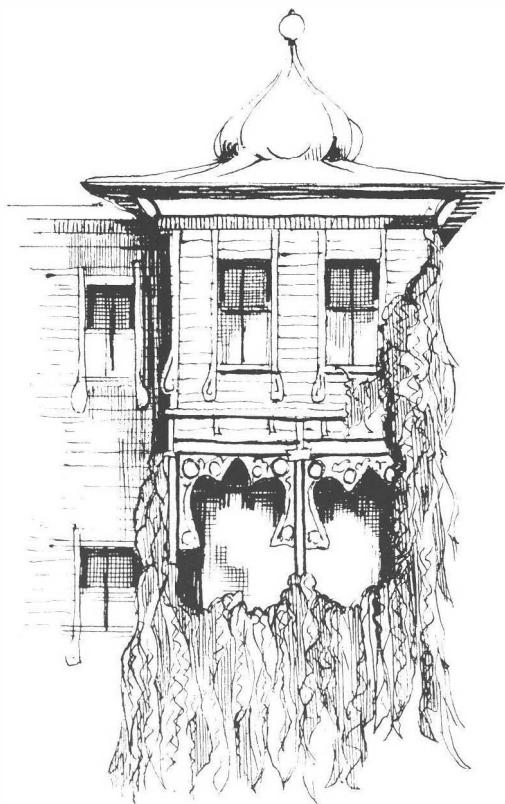
hallmark of the Ottoman experience began to be felt.

The Ottoman 'Golden Age' was the age of Süleyman the Magnificent (1520-1566) and is best mirrored in the prolific work of the architect Sinan. Incomparable in his ability to unite man's best aspirations with the architectural environment which that aspiration required – be it a mosque for a sultan or an orphanage for a caravanserai – his work set the standard, unequalled, and was the perfect measure and complete response to the era of greatness in which he lived.

It was certainly an age of bounty and great expansion. It is said that when the kitchens attached to the Suleymaniye Mosque were opened for the feeding of the poor of the area, such was the general affluence that only 38 needy people could be found; and when twice the required tribute was sent one year from Egypt as an honour to Suleyman, this extravagance was reprimanded and the surplus was ordered to be returned, accompanied by the Grand Vizier who personally saw to its distribution among the poor.

S. Lane-Poole writes (1) "The Sultan's claim to be called 'The Great' rests not merely upon his undoubted wisdom and ability, and the splendid series of his successes, but upon the fact that he maintained and improved his grand position in an age of unsurpassing greatness."

Civilisations are measured by the strength of the spiritual force which nourishes them at source. The outward display of Caliphate (The Divine Viceregent) is a charade if the land is not



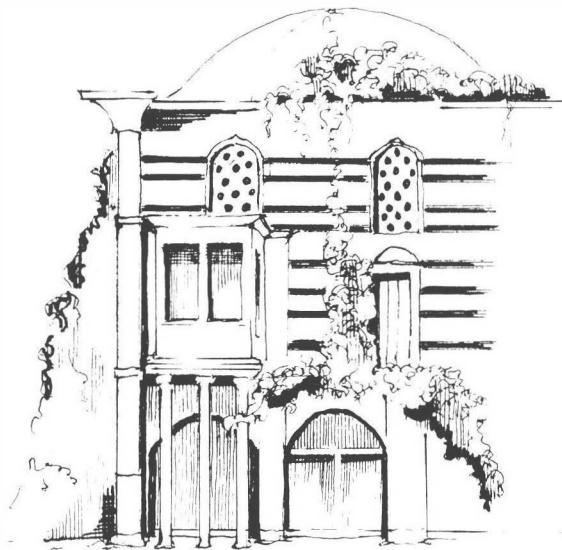
Overgrown Ottoman wooden house, Istanbul

led from within by those who serve the true originator of lordly qualities. The Ottoman lands with Istanbul as their centre were the focus of a great spiritual inflorescence and the great saints of Anatolia – Hajji Bayram, Hazreti Uftade, Aziz Mahmud Hudai Effendi, Osman Fasli, Ismail Hakkı Bursevi and their kind – were the real pivots upon which this civilisation turned.

Here is an illustration. Sultan Ahmet I, for whom the Blue Mosque was built, and his mother Valide Sultan, were pupils of the Jelveti Sheikh Aziz



Kiosks, Yıldız Park, Istanbul



Corner of a mosque, Rumeli Hisari, Istanbul

Mahmud Hudai Effendi. One day, during an intimate dinner from which the servants had been dismissed, Hudai was washing his hands, with the Sultan pouring water and the Sultan's mother drying his hands. They asked him to perform a miracle. He replied "*What greater miracle can there be that I, the Sultan's subject, am having my hands washed by the Sultan and his mother!*".

On a wet and misty Sunday morning we made a visit to the tekke of the Jelveti order of Dervishes in Uskudar. Above the entrance is written:

*"Oh Heart, if you want to learn of the Divine Taste
Surely you will receive your portion if you enter by the gate of the Hudai."*

Here we paid our respects at the tomb of its founder, Aziz Mahmud Hudai Effendi. The keepers brought us water to drink from the Ayazma (spring) and we sat a while in the small mosque where Sultan Ahmet's mother used to come and listen to the sermons of Hudai. Red roses bloom in profusion and the view over the Bosphorus from this sprawling hillside enclave is of one perfect setting to another.

All that day was spent on the Bosphorus, our first port of call being Beylerbeyi Palace on the Asian border. Here the deposed Sultan Hamid II (1876-1909), the last proper sultan, saw out the sad end of his days in a small back room, unable to bear the view of

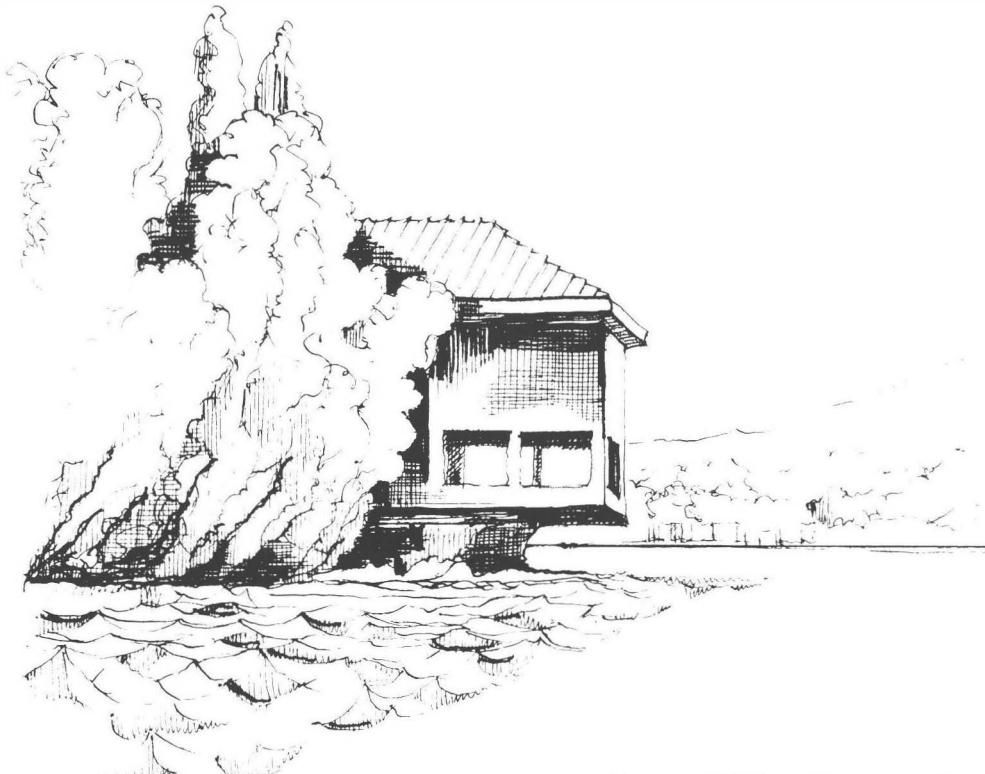
Istanbul and his former palaces over the water. Its interior is a rather over-the-top interpretation of the late European baroque, and certainly does no justice to the earlier glories of classical Ottoman architecture. It is a grand operatic stage, without even the echo of a lingering aria to sweeten this dusty requiem to passing grandeur. Seen from the water, however, behind its long quay, it has a certain elegance. There is a sequel: the next day when visiting the Dolmabaçe Palace on the opposite shore (another 19th century monument of man's self-aggrandisement) we saw the room facing the water where Atatürk, the founder of modern Turkey, died in 1938. Here all the clocks are stopped at just past 9 o'clock.

For lunch we were guests of Mme Munever Ayasli, a true Ottoman in her 'yalı' (waterside residence, a few of which remain on the Bosphorus shore). Her gracious hospitality is an enduring reminder of an age when generosity and gratitude were the rule; and manners, whether in the poorest or the most noble, were the hallmark of a civilised society.

The following afternoon, drinking Turkish coffee in the rose garden

of his newly restored Khedive's Palace, we met Mr Çelik Guleroy, a charming man and the architect responsible for saving many of the neglected monuments of old Istanbul from the voracious designs of the city planners. In reference to the proliferation of concrete in modern Turkish architecture, he said that in Istanbul the east has departed and the west has not yet arrived.

Eating in Istanbul is a sultan's choice. At Kadir's Place in the fish market of Pera, one suffers formica tabletops and television blaring to eat turbot steaks from the charcoal grill, fresher, more succulent and generally tastier than have been found in London in recent years. This is also the season for artichokes; cooked with olive oil and diced vegetables, and served cold as a salad, there are few things finer. Strawberry compote with kaymak (thick clotted buffalo cream) completes a meal worthy of Lucullus. At Hajji Baba's restaurant near Taksim Square, we had aubergine salads, grilled king prawns, chicken breast with pilaf stuffing – an endless menu of delights. However, it is sipping raki on a balcony of the famous Pera Palace Hotel, and nibbling pistachio nuts with the sun setting over that unbelievable skyline beyond the Golden Horn, that holds the



Ottoman Yali (seaside mansion), Istanbul

quintessential flavour of the bounty of Istanbul.

A sunny morning saw us in a small plane flying low over the sea of Marmara, skirting the Princes Islands (the place of exile of many a deposed Byzantine emperor or empress) and hedgehopping the remaining 25 miles to Bursa.

Bursa has been a spa town since Roman times and has worn many cloaks since the early days of its eponymous king Prussias (hence Brusa, Bursa). Under the Ottomans it flourished as the centre of the silk trade with caravans from Persia bringing this luxurious fabric to the agents of the great trading houses of Renaissance Europe. Like Istanbul, its story may be read in its mosques and tombs. Many of the early sultans were buried here, and their lovely tiled mausoleums and the mosques which they had built, begin the transition from Seljuk and Arab influences to a purely Ottoman style. The Ulu Camii – the Great Mosque c.1400 built by Bayazit I – is the centre of the town. Its many columns are painted with the most beautiful calligraphy, and beneath an opening in the roof is, unusually, a fountain for ablutions. The Yesil Camii – the Green Mosque, built in 1420 – also has a fountain and the most beautiful tiles.

Humility is the garment of true grandeur and certainly the humble tomb of Hazreti Uftade discloses palace gates. Wandering east out of the town, bearing left up the hill, a little street opens out onto a small square, set with plane trees and bounded by a Qu'ran school, a mosque and a simple square building. This is Uftade's place. It is quiet but its peace is rich. 'Uftade' means 'humiliated in Love' and he was the teacher of Hudai.

Different yet with the same announcement – like diamonds cut each in their unique way indicate and reflect the same light – is Ismail Hakkı Bursevi, the Jelveti Sheikh "noted for his erudition both where the Turkish language of his time is concerned and his indisputable mastery of the finesse and intricacies of the Arabic language". (Bulent Rauf).

"Those whom neither buying nor selling distract from the remembrance of God" – Qu'ran.



Market stall, Bursa

Down through the market, past the fruit sellers, their baskets overflowing with produce, the spice merchants with their multi-coloured mounds and the olive man surrounded by buckets of gleaming black fruit – just round the corner and a hundred yards is Ismail Hakkı's place, a rose garden in full bloom, and a shady corner away from the storm of the world. On the green painted iron work surrounding his simple tomb is written:

"Only those who have burnt into their hearts the love of Tawhid (Unification) bring light to the tomb of Ismail Hakkı Bursevi".

How generous that such an eminent disciple of Ibn 'Arabi should be so accessible, there among the buying and selling.

We journeyed on by coach via the Gulf of Edremit where for a while we became lotus eaters, swimming in the crystal blue waters and lunching on kofte and salad and yoghurt in a remote little seaside locanta.

To Troy – a dusty wind blowing in the afternoon heat, sweeping over the dereliction of three thousand year-old crumbling walls, a mass of stones layered in centuries of toil and myth – where blood red poppies spring up among the fallen rocks and wagtails search for water in the dried up wells.

Next morning on the anniversary of D-Day we crossed the Hellespont and landed on the Gallipoli peninsula. There on the hillside, written in white stones are these words of Necmettin Halil Onan:

*Stop O Traveller
This earth you tread so unaware
Is where an age died
Bow and listen to this quiet mound
Where beats the heart of a nation.*

Seven miles before Edirne there appeared, as if a mirage, the Selimiye Mosque, its dome and spiring minarets barely anchored upon the Thracian plane. This is Sinan's greatest masterpiece. Later, sitting in the cool of its interior it seemed that in the equation of its appearance, its mass resembles light and its volume infinity, to the point of complete identity; a unity inclusive of all the figures under its canopy. Its dome, even higher than that of the Ayia Sophia in Istanbul, is so light and free that birds fly there, mistaking the sky. Through dozens of windows perforating the cupolas and arches light streams in upon the pale sand-coloured stonework. The details of its architecture are defined by little more than a simple calligraphic frieze of tiles, a continuous prayer running at midway height around the walls, and the stones of the arches picked out in alternating red and white.

Sinan demonstrates in this perfect space a unity and conformity to an order which includes and surpasses man's mortality. Here, where centuries before both Hudai and Bursevi spent time as students, and no doubt also wandered and wondered within this grandest of icons, a little of the Ottoman meaning became evident. It was not in the trappings of religious appearances, nor in the sultan's riches, nor in his glorious victories. It was here in this singular building where the particular of the civilisation transcends itself, and man finds himself simply as a lover of Beauty.

The writer wishes to express sincere and heartfelt thanks to Mr Bulent Rauf, especially for all his help, encouragement and direction in making this journey, and to Mr Peter Yiangou for his unstinting good humour in arranging and conducting this tour.

(1) History of Turkey by S. Lane-Poole. London 1888. Chapter 10.

Letters to the Editor

Issue 2

Sirs,

Your editorial in Issue 2 was exemplary in tone and meaning, with one exception – the use of the ‘acknowledge’ in the context of ... “*and acknowledge the ego-centricty which is implicit in much of our modern (particularly scientific) thought*”.

To acknowledge means to recognise the existence, truth or reality of something. Egocentricity has no existence, truth or reality and appreciation is due to that which raises one from the level of such non-existent activity – ie. to the True Self, not the imaginary self. It is this which must be recognised before understanding – and real usefulness – can ensue.

*Mark Temple
East Grinstead, Sussex*

Sirs,

May I congratulate Mr Pawloff for his excellent and informative review of **The Living Economy** (Summer 1987).

What this book seems to highlight is the need for us to completely re-appraise what we call wealth and to ask difficult questions, such as – does it enhance the wealth of the world more to extract the earth’s mineral substances to build a million television sets or to cultivate within oneself the quality of, let us say, compassion.

Economic progress has been seen almost entirely in terms of quantity rather than quality. Those of us who wish to demonstrate the unity of existence through the economic sphere must prove what we know by our achievements. It is not a question of dismissing conventional economics, but of placing them within a wider context – rather as relativity theory did with Newtonian mechanics. This does not involve looking at isolated environments, but of developing within ourselves the capacity to witness all environments and contexts within a singular context, which is the collective result of the whole-as-a-whole.

From this perspective, material wealth can find its appropriate place and we will feel free to develop the qualities

of compassion as eagerly as we now feel free to develop our ‘taste’ for the useless.

*Michael Litherland,
Edinburgh.*

Sirs,

Having recently been fascinated by Dr. Sheldrake’s articles in the first two editions of the magazine, and in particular his descriptions of the working of termites, I was struck by a recent article **Colonial memories in the ant world** in the New Scientist (2nd July 1987, page 33). This article describes the work carried out by Deborah Gordon of the Museum of Comparative Zoology at Harvard University, who examined the behaviour of Harvester ants when subjected to interference. She intriguingly found that the older colonies were more tolerant. To quote the last two paragraphs:

These results, intriguing though they are, raise more questions than they answer. Ants performing one task seem to monitor their own numbers and numbers involved in other tasks. Does this involve a central source of information inside the nest? Do they keep track of how many of them are working on a task, or how much of the task is being done? When there is a commotion, do ants who were doing other tasks become patrollers, or do ants who were idle within the nest decide the start work? Most puzzling of all, why do older colonies differ from younger ones?

Gordon estimates that her older colonies were about five years old, compared with two years for the younger ones. But the average worker ant lives for a year or less, so the different responses of workers in the older colonies cannot be the result of learning by individual ants. There must be some change in the organisation of the colony as it grows older, but what that change is remains a mystery.”

One answer to this puzzle is the type of ‘nest consciousness’ proposed by Dr. Sheldrake as an extension of his

morphogenetic field theories, in which the individuals are “inside the plan”. Looked at from this viewpoint, the ability of the *plan itself* to learn and evolve has a double significance. First, that such consciousness is independent of the particular individuals that make it up and secondly, that the success of the nest does depend on the experience of its individuals to evolve.

Here also is an example of the way in which knowledge is identical with the thing known, since the two (the individual and the nest) are only separable in thought, not in fact (without the individuals, the nest would not exist). As long as this is kept in mind, what appears as a puzzle is indeed quite natural.

*Frances Ryan
Cambridge*

Non-Locality

Sirs,

On perusing the back copies of the New Scientist, I came across an interesting article on the curious quantum effect of Non-Locality by Nick Herbert (**How to be in two places at one time**, August 21st 1986). The author concludes with a question “*Why...does nature need to deploy a faster-than-light subatomic reality to keep up merely light-speed macrocosmic appearances?*”

Perhaps the answer to this lies in punctuation, as follows:
Question: *Why...does nature need to deploy a faster-than-light subatomic reality?*

Answer: *To keep up merely light-speed macrocosmic appearances.*

QED.

*Richard Twinch
The Beshara School of Esoteric Education, Scotland.*

Please send letters to: *The Editor, Beshara Magazine, 24 Sidney Street, Oxford OX4 3AG.*

Poverty and Self-Sufficiency

**Two Poems from Ibn 'Arabi's 'Revelations at Mecca'
Translated by Dr R. W. J. Austin, with his commentary.**

A talk given at The Beshara School of Intensive Esoteric Education in September 1986.

On Poverty

Poverty is something common to all creation, both essentially and effectively.

Properly, however, it denotes that state of contingent potentiality which the divine Names vie with one another in seeking.

The strong are only strong predispositionally; likewise the weak in their weakness, so that in effect the two are in accord.

All realities flow in their (appointed) courses, the course of each reality being innate within it.

The poor one whose destitution dominates him in everything is clothed in creatureliness.

In every state one sees him as if thus clothed layer upon layer.

This does not hide him from the eye of his Creator, strewn as his life's path is with calamities and attachments.

Poverty is a rule (state of createdness) which none truly grasps save he who has risen above the concerns of family and offspring.

Poverty is the universal and inexorable rule of all becoming, nor do I exempt a single one of the Essences.

That is because all of them fundamentally seek it (poverty) and it seeks them out intrinsically, wherever they are.

All of them are a matter of number and all of them are evens apart from the one called the Unique.

All other essences are, as we have indicated, names like the Bestower, the Beneficient, the Eternal Resource.

Exalted be He Who is far beyond any comparison, unbegotten as He is in intellect or body.

On Self-Sufficiency

Self-sufficiency is a negative attribute whose rank and dignity is quite distinct from the relationships of Names.

Its rule is special to Him, even the essence being abstracted from it in a state of non-existence. It does not come into existence and thus cannot be described.

All evidence of its realisation is totally hidden to one who would talk of it, although the intellect confirms its truth.

Thus, in the Sura of the Spider He speaks of Himself as beyond all need of the realm of becoming.

Study this matter well and you will find (experience) the negation I have mentioned, namely, that no proof is given of it.

None knows of these things save he whose mark is of this world and the Hereafter and which is confirmed by the Holy Dispensation.

On Poverty

Let us look at this very important concept of poverty, *al faqr*. As usual with important Arabic words, it is impossible to find a precise English word to convey everything that Ibn 'Arabi undoubtedly intended. *Al faqr* properly means poverty in the sense of not having very much, of needing. So a better translation of the word *faqr* might be need, or indigence; not being able to do without something; dissatisfaction. If you like, it is a raw, vulnerable, open, passive state — a state of receptivity.

In Arabic the root meaning of a word is very important, and it is interesting that one of the other meanings of the root of the word *faqr* is a hole that has been dug for things to grow in. It therefore means a receptive space, and in that sense poverty, as it says in the second line of the poem, is a state of contingent potentiality. I think that Ibn 'Arabi means very much the raw, vulnerable, totally receptive state of matter at the moment of creation. To put it in classical philosophical terms, it is the receptivity of Prime Matter to the creative act of the Universal Intellect.

The idea of need is very important here, for by definition we are all in need of God. In other words,

poverty is very much to do with the notion of servanthood. Poverty in this sense can be expressed by defining our identity as 'reference identity', and the Divine Identity as 'core identity'. Our sense of self and identity is dependent on outside reference — our relatives, surroundings and achievements; laboratory experiments have shown that people deprived of virtually all stimulation hallucinate and go mad, for we need stimuli and references and history to give us identity. In contrast, God the Divine has 'core identity'. He is Himself, in Himself, without need of reference to anything else. Ultimately, of course, in the philosophy and teaching of Ibn 'Arabi only His Identity exists. Our identity is therefore marked by this word *faqr*, need.

This is our essential condition. It is the essential condition of everything. As he says in the first verse, '*It is common to all creation*'. I use the word *creation*, but the Arabic word, *kan*, means all that is in a state of becoming, or in other words, all that is in a state of change. Birth, decay, death, things which are constantly on the move, constantly changing form, shape and function — this is the world in which we live, the Cosmos, *al-alamin*.

Had we a much wider scope of vision, even the things we regard as stable, fixed and eternal would appear to flow and change like everything else; had we galactic, rather than planetary vision, we would see mountains, oceans and continents changing shape very quickly. It is only because we live in such instantaneous time that we do not see all that happens in the universe, all becoming, as part of the great outpouring of the Divine in Self-manifestation to Himself of His infinite possibility. Being part of the outpouring, we are totally in need of the One who outpours.

Without His power of imagining Himself, we would not be here at all. A sufi sheikh once looking over a beautiful mountain scene turned to his companion and said, "But for the Beauty of God none of this would exist. But for His wish to enjoy Himself, none of this would exist at all".

This brings us to another very important point made by Ibn 'Arabi: that in certain aspects, God Himself is also in need. "*I worship Him and He worships me*". (1). Many of the great mystics in the Christian, Islamic and other traditions have pointed out that there cannot be one who is worshipped unless there are worshippers. Ibn 'Arabi builds up an enormously fascinating notion of the mutual polarity between the Lord and the Lorded, *rabb wa marbub*, or between the God and the 'Goded', *ilah wa ma'luh*. If anything is in a polar relationship with anything else, then there is a mutual dependence between them. Hence God in the aspect of being separate from the creation is also in need.

"Poverty is something common to all creation, both essentially and effectively."

He means that we, even in our eternal essences deep

in the mind of God, need something else — a state of poverty — in order to become manifest. Here poverty is a very positive quality. Without poverty, without need or desire, without the reaching out and striving which is implicit in poverty, nothing would become. This is why Ibn 'Arabi says in the **Fusus al-Hikam** that caprice, whim, desire, *al-hawa*, is such an important part of the Divine method. In a sense, the Divine splits Itself, like the fertilisation of an egg, to create a new creature. By this Self-dividing into that which creates and that which is created, there is established need not only on one side, but also on the other. The essences which we are *in aeternis* need the creative process in order to manifest themselves, just as the creative process needs the essences in order to bring into being.

This mutual poverty ultimately stems from that which is the subject of the second poem — the Divine Self-Sufficiency, the Divine Completeness, which I always refer to as the Self. In the Divine Self there are no oppositions, no needs. All need is implicit in a total Self-satisfaction.

"Properly, however, it denotes that state of contingent potentiality which the Divine Names vie with one another in seeking."

Here again is the notion of a sort of screen which is begging to have a form projected onto it, of a hole into which a tree is going to be planted, of an emptiness. *Faqr* in this sense very much relates to what the Christian mystics call *vacare Deo*: to be empty for God, to be ready and receptive to the Divine commands and to the Divine imprint. That is what makes *faqr* such a precious quality. It is a very difficult attitude to properly cultivate, but it is such an important quality to learn for anyone interested in the spiritual life.

As Ibn 'Arabi has said, the Divine Names are essential relationships. They are the hidden essences in the mind of God. The Names require the mutual need of essence and creation to operate, and so they are in a sense a bridge between God in Himself and God as Self-realised in creation. The Names also fulfil a microcosmic function in that Man himself is the bridge between the Divine latency and the Divine manifestation.

"The strong are only strong predispositionally; likewise the weak in their weakness, so that in effect the two are in accord."

Here he is making what to most people would seem an amazing statement: that strength and weakness, indeed all of the opposite things which are manifest as characteristics of created beings are nothing but creative effects which give manifested form to things latent in the Divine possibility. The whole universe, all the things that worry us from one life's end to another, all are but a part of the great bursting of possibilities.

When he says that the strong are only strong

predispositionally and that the weak are only weak predispositionally, he indicates that they are in one sense the same. This relates to what Ibn 'Arabi says in 'The Fusus al-Hikam' (2) about the roles of Pharoah and Moses. Pharoah, the great archetypal tyrant, is playing an essential role with respect to Moses, the servant and apostle of God seeking to free the Jewish people from the yoke of slavery. Ibn 'Arabi suggests that Pharoah knew in his heart of hearts that he was only playing a role, and that he was not totally identified with the tyranny he represented. Moses was also aware that he was playing a role with respect to Pharoah.

In other words, strength and weakness, tyranny and freedom, are all part of the release of predispositional effects. They are all part of what the Hindus call the *Lila*, the play of the universe. Even things that appear to be despicable and evil are an essential part of the wholeness of the universe. Ibn 'Arabi says that it is an essential part of the perfection of the universe that there is imperfection in it. The strong are just as much in need as the weak, but in a different way.

"All realities flow in their (appointed) courses, the course of each reality being innate within it."

This again relates to the previous verse, but in terms of 'destination'. By reality he means essence and manifestation as a single entity — that we are here and an essence in the mind of God together. The realities have their own peculiar destinies which are laid down, so to speak, in what they are in eternity in God. However, they have a freedom in that they provide God with the knowledge of what they are going to be, so that He ordains their destinies according to what they, in eternity, give Him.

In other words, he is saying that all realities are intimately dependent in one way or another, whether as manifested beings or as essences, and that dependence underpins their destinies. And as I have indicated already, there would not be any destinies without the experience of need.

"The poor one whose destitution dominates him in everything is clothed in creatureliness.

In every state one sees him as if thus clothed layer upon layer.

This does not hide him from the eye of his creator, strewn as his life's path is with calamities and attachments."

In these three verses we have Ibn 'Arabi at his most subtle, for he is playing on many different levels. There are three possible ways of understanding his use of '*the poor one*' in these verses. The most obvious is the person who is totally dependent on God or on other people; then there is '*the poor*' in the spiritual sense of the metaphysical poverty discussed above; and then there is the much more subtle sense in which, because the poor are ultimately nothing other than He; the poor can be thought of as He, the Divine. The Divine wanting to be complete must also

be poor; poverty regarded as imperfection must be a part of His Perfection and Wholeness.

So in these lines he is alluding not only to the poverty of the human condition, but to the fact that God, deeply buried under all the layers of creation in us and in everything else, is ultimately not hidden from Himself in origin. God knows Himself through all the layers of becoming and when God sees through all our layers of poverty, He sees into our heart and meets Himself again there.

Ultimately these lines are saying: however poor, however non-entity, however miserable and ridiculous a person is, God's eye will penetrate through to Himself in that person. However poor, the richness and self-sufficiency of God is ultimately there. As with a hologram, where every piece contains the whole, so each of us contains the whole. Each is, in essence, the Divine Itself, with all Its richness and self-sufficiency deeply buried under the layers of poverty and creatureliness.

"Poverty is a rule (state of createdness) which none truly grasps save he who has risen above the concerns of family and offspring."

This is a very important line, for when he says '*family and offspring*', he means the whole business of being desperate about security, of being involved and busy with the world and building our own little universes for ourselves; that is, of making ourselves like God. One who is busy with this cannot understand real poverty. That person can only see poverty as something negative, to be avoided and hedged against as much as possible. Real poverty is something you can understand only when you are free of that self-deification process which is involved in being secure.

"Poverty is the universal and inexorable rule of all becoming, nor do I exempt a single one of the essences."

The Arabic word I have translated as essences, *a'yan*, can mean either one of the essences in the Divine Essence, or it can mean important people in a community. So here is another double meaning: that he exempts from this rule neither the essences latent in the Divine, Eternal Being, nor the most important of people, not even the greatest sheikhs and saints. Even they are inexorably poor, no matter what they seem to have achieved.

"That is because all of them fundamentally seek it (poverty) and it seeks them out intrinsically, wherever they are."

Here he refers to the rule that poverty is an essential experience for anyone definitely seeking truth and insight into the way things really are. The experience of oneself as totally insufficient must be part of any spiritual advance for, as Ibn 'Arabi has said twice in the poem, it is an essential, fundamental, unavoidable law of being and becoming.

(2) Chapter
on Moses.

"All of them are a matter of number and all of them are evens apart from the one called the Unique."

Here he rounds off the poem by bringing it back to *al-Ahad*: the Unique, the Incomparable, the Alone with whom nothing can be compared, who has no notion of creating anything other than Himself. This is the touchstone of the poverty discussed above, for it is in relation to That that all is needy.

Whereas *al-Ahad* refers to He who is One without second, the Name *al-Wahid* means the One which is the First of the infinity of numbers. All things which are 'products' of whatever creative process are a matter of number and evens. They are all part of the polarities, and hence are all in a state of need.

"All other essences are, as we have indicated, names like the Bestower, the Beneficent, the Eternal Resource".

All other essences are looking to become created in the universe. The Names are, if you like, the media through which God creates Himself as God. The Names of God include such Names as the Destroyer and the Ravager, for in that outpouring of Himself He is all possibility; He is all the things that are essential to the completeness of the Divine.

Ibn 'Arabi completes the poem with a dedication to the Unique One before whom we are all in dire poverty:

"Exalted be He Who is far beyond any comparison, unbegotten as He is in intellect or body."

On Self-Sufficiency

Self-sufficient, *ghani*, is often translated in English as 'rich', but as with the poem on Poverty, it has nothing to do with possession. It is the state of being able to do without, of not needing anything: it is the opposite of *faqr*. As such it is essentially beyond our experience, and so the less said about it the better. However, through our constant attempts to deify ourselves, we aim at a self-sufficiency which is a delusion, whereas our poverty is not a delusion.

I would like to use this poem, therefore, to talk about two things which are rather important in the spiritual life: the need for mystery, and the need for silence.

"All evidence of its realisation is totally hidden to one who would talk of it, although the intellect confirms its Truth."

In this third verse Ibn 'Arabi points out that, although one may come to know through grace or effort or divine inspiration certain things about

spiritual matters, and although these may be confirmed inwardly, to talk about the most important things in the spiritual life is a dangerous practice and not to be recommended. This is why silence and reticence are such an important part of all spiritual disciplines, and why, within religious traditions, those whose prayer and contemplation are the most valued are those who say as little as possible. In silence, things may be known and experienced which are quite beyond words to explain.

Moreover, as Ibn 'Arabi has said on other occasions, you cannot tell someone else about the taste of honey until he has eaten it for himself. Spiritual experience and being admitted into the truth of great realities is something which is peculiar to the person who has it. Grace works in a miraculous and mysterious way, its wonders to perform. Trying to tell someone else about it, however innocent the enthusiasm, may be trying to communicate about that experience to someone who is not ready for it. Although one may perhaps talk about it in later years when other experiences have overlaid it, I think that in the immediate aftermath of any such experience, it is best to savour it inwardly. We have as an example of this the famous line in the Gospels referring to the Incarnation, '*and Mary kept all of these things and savoured them in her heart*'. (3)

So the message of this little poem on Self-Sufficiency is partly a message of silence, for it concerns *al-Ahad*, the Unique, which is never realised in manifestation.

"Self-sufficiency is a negative attribute whose rank and dignity is quite different from the relationships of the Names."

No creature can experience *ghina*, self-sufficiency, in the proper sense of the word. This illustrates another message which comes out of this poem, and I am, after all, sharing with you my own feelings and interpretations about this poem: the need in spiritual matters for great mysteries, great unknowables, ineffables, indescribables. There is a tendency in modern times to want to make all of religion vernacular and comprehensible to the people. There is a certain truth in that, for if one becomes too secret and obscure then one begins to remove religion from the people, and a certain amount of opening becomes necessary. However, it is absolutely vital in religious matters that God the Divine remains ultimately incomprehensible, a mystery. Without mystery there is no vision, and people perish. And this precisely relates to these lines: that God in His Self-Sufficiency, in His Aloneness and Incomparability, is a mystery which cannot be fathomed.

Whilst in his writings Ibn 'Arabi unravels for us the innermost mysteries of the Divine and the relationship between the Divine, Man and the universe, he himself would be the first to caution that these are ultimately a matter of grace and inner discovery. However many books one has pored over, it will be the decision of God as to how much of that

any one of us can absorb, and there will remain mysteries which cannot be explained. So I think that one of the things this poem is telling us, and which should be borne in mind by anyone spending a lot of time studying the works of Ibn 'Arabi, or of Rumi, or of any other spiritual path, is that one must leave room in one's heart and mind for great mysteries.

It says on Muslim tombstones, '*Huwa al-Baqi'* — He is the One who remains. After all the talk and study and writings and great volumes, after all the centuries of spiritual efforts to understand, after all the realisations of the great saints and sheikhs and gurus, '*Huwa al-Baqi*': He remains and His Mystery remains untouched. In other words, He is *Ghani* and Self-Sufficient in His *Ahadiyyah*. He does not need our study, devotion, worship and aspiration. From the point of view of the Unique, all that is a total delusion. But what is then perhaps the greatest mystery involved in the notion of *ghina* is the chasm leaped from the Unique One to the Great Creator, with whom we are all involved and of whom we are all ineffably a part.

"Its rule is special to Him, even the Essence being abstracted from it in a state of non-existence. It does not come into existence and thus cannot be described."

In relation to the Divine Self-Sufficiency, not even a notion of our individuality or separateness in the eternity of Divine latency operates. There can be no breath of another for Him, not even the merest suggestion that we might be in some way other than Him, even in the depths of His own Being. One of the greatest teachings of Ibn 'Arabi is the notion of the essences of created things deep in the eternal being of God, but in the context of the Self-Sufficient, Unique One, even that principal, conceptual distinction ceases to exist. This again reinforces the mystery of the aloneness and unrelatability of God. It does not come into existence and thus cannot be described. Occasionally I cannot resist a wry smile when one thinks that the great mystics are always telling us how indescribable things are, and then spend years writing great volumes!

"All evidence of its realisation is totally hidden to one who would talk of it, although the intellect confirms its truth."

Thus in the Sura of the Spider He speaks of Himself as beyond all need of the realm of becoming".

It says in the Sura of the Spider in the Koran that He is beyond all need of the worlds. The root of the Arabic word used, *al-alamin*, also means to know, to indicate, to learn something by finding clues and, of course, the clues themselves. So one might say that He is beyond the need of all proofs, indications and evidences. Here again is another aspect of the mystery of Uniqueness: that all evidence, all clues, which are such an important part of religion and of the spiritual

path, are redundant and obsolete, because there is nothing beyond the Alone which can point to Him,

"Study this matter well and you will find (experience) the negation I have mentioned, namely, that no proof is given of it."

The Self-Sufficiency, the Aloneness, the Uniqueness is an abyss which can be compared, although in a very different way, to the emptiness of poverty. It is an abyss of unknowing, and if one strives to understand it too much, it becomes an abyss in which one is totally dissolved.

Another thing one might say here is that, in spiritual matters, one should take heed of obstacles. Sometimes obstacles are not just indicators that one is not working hard enough or that one has not understood something, rather that at the moment, or perhaps for all one's life, one is not intended to understand such things. Sometimes obstacles beneficially bar the way to things that are not to be understood, except by those for whom it pleases God to unlock them. So looking for proofs, evidences and explanations for everything is a mistake.

"None knows of these things save he whose mark is of this world and the Hereafter and which is confirmed by the Holy Dispensation."

Here Ibn 'Arabi is saying that only the Perfect Man really understands the implications of God's Self-Sufficiency. '*this world and the Hereafter ...*' points to life and death, body and spirit; '*which is confirmed by the Holy Dispensation*.' points to that which is exoterically as well as esoterically authoritative. Thus the great prophets and saints, as functions or operations of the Perfect Man, are among those who may be said to understand or know something of the implications of this great mystery of the Divine Self-Sufficiency.

If one were to draw from this poem a single message, one might say it is a message of great spiritual caution: Beware, you are on Holy ground. You are before mysteries which are not for the profane, and which are only for those who are elected by Grace to know them.

I think it is important to accept that, in the spiritual quest, all of us have some limits. All of us are made in such-and-such a way, and there are certain things we are going to be capable of knowing and others which we are not. I think that realising our own qualities is, paradoxically, part of beginning to understand the mysteries of Self-Sufficiency. In the poem by Rumi, (4) the aspirant who comes to adore God knocks at the door and the voice within asks, "*Who is it?*". He answers, "*It is I.*" The response is, "*I know not an I.*" Ultimately the man at the door answers, "*It is Thou*", and is let in. Self-sufficiency demands the complete effacement in poverty, the admission of the inability and inadvisability and incapacity of even the greatest aspirant before such mysteries as these.

(4) From *The Mathnawi of Jalaluddin Rumi*.

Beshara Trust News

Reaffirmation

A course at Chisholme House during the summer of 1987

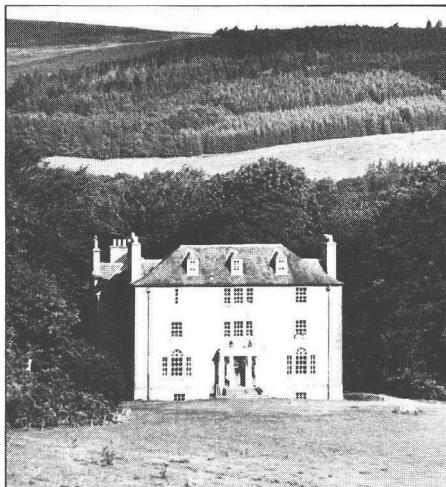
Elizabeth Roberts

In the last issue of BESHARA, an article entitled 'What is the Difference? A Reaffirmation' began by quoting a conversation known from tradition in which the One and Only Unique Lord addressed His own Essential possibilities with the question "Am I not your Lord?" Our unequivocal and most spontaneous answer was "Yes, indeed".

This conversation takes place in our pre-existence, 'before' coming into being in this world, though not in time – for eternity is not subject to the limits of relativity. So, equally, in the Divine domain of Oneness, distance has no effect. There is no separation in terms of distance between the questioner and the answerer. The answer is spoken in full light of the self-evident truth of the situation. At the same time, there is a very clear distinction made between the two positions.

It is in the light of this original affirmation of His Being alone, demonstrated in the submission of all else beside Him, (for the Essences have never smelt the breath of existence), that the reaffirmation course at Chisholme this summer takes place. Here, we are pointed to our place of origin, where we are already established in perfection in the Divine knowledge, as the true starting point for our education in this life, which is potentially the superlative place of progress in education.

Following the sense of the dialogue just quoted, the necessary ground for individual progress must be conceived of in terms of submission, for without this pre-condition we are in the realms of relative imagination and there



Chisholme House, Scotland

is no real expression or individuation at all. Servanthood and dependence are the means given to mankind for drawing close. In choosing to make himself servant, a man must observe the inclination and take his cue from the one served. To do this, it is necessary to adopt the point of view of the one served towards all matters, including himself, until the servant's being is in the lord, not in himself. In this way, service leads to identification with the lord, which is union.

To put it another way; if something is so dependent on another that it simply cannot exist without it for anything at all, then what being or identity can it be said to have apart from the one on which it depends? None. This is real intimacy, not of two but of one.

Outwardly submission often appears as abstinence, as self-denial. Inwardly however it is the giving of oneself so completely to the object of one's desire that nothing of oneself is left to remain behind. So the inner meaning of submission or servanthood is love, and its purpose closeness.

In the translation by R.W.J. Austin of Ibn 'Arabi's book 'The Sufis of Andalusia' is recounted a story of a woman sage in her nineties, Nunah Fatimah Bint Ibn al-Muthanna, who used to say "*Of those who come to me, I admire none more than Ibn 'Arabi.*" On being asked the reason for this, she

replied, "*The rest of you come to see me with part of yourselves, leaving the other part of you occupied with your other concerns, while Ibn 'Arabi is a consolation to me, for he comes to me with all of himself. When he rises up it is with all of himself and when he sits it is with his whole self, leaving nothing of himself elsewhere. That is how it should be on the Way.*"

To return to the aim of the course; in the introductory paper which all students find by their bedside when they arrive, it is stated that "*The cause and predicate of reaffirmation is the underlining and stressing of the constancy and quality of the service of love, which can only come about in total awareness*".

The reason why the awareness must be total is because the love referred to here is not that of a particular or partial point of view; rather it is the love of the Whole for Itself, as in the *hadith qudsi*

"I was a hidden treasure and I loved to be known....." This love is the Essential love of God, conceived in transcendence from the plurality of qualification and name, to witness that total image of His perfection which is privately treasured in the Unknowability of His Essence. And yet it is to precisely this degree of love that Ismail Hakki Bursevi, in his introduction to Ibn 'Arabi's 'Fusus al-Hikam' (1), invites us to intiate our intention, when he says "*And you, if you want to observe the Beauty of the Real Beloved, initiate your intention to the Love of God according to "I was a hidden treasure and I loved to be known....."*"

This matter is of such height and majesty that even to find in oneself a taste for it is already cause for praise – for it is beyond any individual capability even to conceive of it. At the same time, it is the cause and purpose of all existence, but particularly of human existence. Such knowledge does not happen to people as a result of their application, their good works or their ability to receive it. Even the receptivity for it has to be given, for it is His

knowledge of which He alone is the knower and its effusion, from the point of view of the servant, is pure Divine Beneficence.

This again points to the unconditioned poverty of spirit which characterises the real lovers of Beauty beyond form. As Meister Eckhart says concerning the reception of God in the hearts of men, “*True poverty of spirit requires that man shall be emptied of god and all his works, so that if God wants to act in the soul he himself must be the place in which he acts.... for God is one who acts within himself. It is here in this poverty that man regains the eternal being that once he was, now is and ever more shall be.*” (*From ‘The Sermons’, No 28, Blessed are the Poor’*)

We began with reference to the eternal being that once we ‘were’. The use of the past tense here is to point inwardly, not behind. We are all, without exception, of His Essence, and it would be a pity on us if we were to squander our possibility and fail to reach our portion. Still it remains that, if there is any oppression, “*Indeed, it was I who was the oppressor and You who are the most Merciful of the Mercifuls.*” (*From The Wird of Ibn ’Arabi, Wednesday morning prayer*).

May He clarify our intention, purify our motivation and strengthen our resolve that we may find Him as He is. And may He make of us His expression, as He chooses.

1. Translated by Bulent Rauf. Muhyiddin Ibn ’Arabi Society, 1986. See Page 1.

Beshara Israel

In the past year, a Beshara study group has been started in Israel and three Israeli students have attended the first six month course at the Beshara School of Intensive Esoteric Education at Chisholme House. This marks the beginning of a new and exciting development which, it is hoped, will eventually be able to provide courses in the country itself. Groups have been meeting regularly, first in Tel Aviv and now at a more permanent base in Jerusalem, and lectures have been given in several different towns and communities. For further information and addresses, please contact the Secretary at Sherborne.

Ecce Homo An Homage to the Bishop of Gloucester

Some while ago, we were very kindly received by the Bishop of Gloucester, of whom we had solicited an audience concerning matters of Cathedral and ex-Cathedral addresses.

During conversation, mention was made of Beshara, with whose intentions and writings the Bishop was already familiar, and he had the grace to refer to them as they were concerned with high matters and, humbly, that his task was to do with the multitude.

What emerged from such a converse was the great humility of the vocation and his deep understanding of mankind – that because it did not fit in with his scheme of things he did not discard but seemed instead to tolerate such discrepancy of approach as laudable, allowing those who wish to emancipate

through the complexities of his cathedral and his Pasture to reach towards the sublime Christian quote: “*Be ye perfect as your Father is*”.

It takes depth of passion and learning, tempered with humility, to refrain from shutting gates which lead to further glories.

It is rare to see, in the finesse of devotion to task, a greatness of soul, an equal admittance of the presence of other concepts of elation permitted and attractive to man, and yet not interfere.

Our gratitude to the Bishop of Gloucester is as infinite as his unhindered vision to horizons where “*stands erect the Man*”, as Giordano Bruno once wrote.

Arthur Martin

Beshara Australia

There have been major developments recently in the movement to establish a School of Intensive Esoteric Education in Australia. A suitable property in Victoria has come onto the market and funds are being negotiated to purchase it. If the sale goes through, there could be courses running in Australia within the year.

The intention to establish a School in Australia along the lines of Chisholme House in Scotland was set over a year ago. It came about in response to the need of people in Australia and the general level of interest there in the type of education offered by the Trust, reflected in the number of Australian students on courses at Chisholme in recent years.

The aim is to start a school where a strong foundation in esoteric knowledge can be established; it will run short courses and a six month introductory intensive course. Richard MacEwan, who has spent many years at Chisholme as Estate Manager and course co-ordinator, has agreed to act as the Trust’s agent in the matter and he and his family will be moving to Australia in July 1988; a special fund, which attracted generous donations, was set up last year to cover their legal expenses

and cost of passage. Grenville Collins is the Trust representative co-ordinating all these different aspects and the Beshara Trust is in the process of registering as a foreign company in Australia.

Since the intention was first set, activity has been concentrated on looking for suitable properties. Several have come up – either on the open market or offered for Beshara’s use – but circumstances have prevented their acquisition. But in July this year, a 53 acre working farm at Yackandandah, in the State of Victoria, became available and it is this which is now under consideration.

Yackandandah is well-located, being accessible from the most densely populated part of Australia, within easy reach of Melbourne, Sydney, Canberra and Adelaide. The property has an existing farmhouse and numerous outhouses which could be easily converted for use as a school, and there is great potential for future expansion. It comes up for auction on October 10th and by the time this magazine appears the outcome will be known. If you would like to know more about this venture, or about Beshara courses in Australia, please contact: PO Box 1474, Sydney, New South Wales 2001.

Reviews

Meister Eckhart. Sermons and Treatises, Volume 3.

**Translated and Edited by
M. O'C. Walshe**

Element Books 1987 £9.95

Reviewed by Adam Dupré

This is the third and final volume of a complete translation of the German works of the great teacher and mystic, Meister Eckhart. The first two volumes were published in 1979 and 1981 but the publication of this last volume was delayed and it has finally appeared this year.

Meister Eckhart, born around 1269 in Thuringia, Germany, is among the greatest of the Christian mystics. As a Dominican monk he rose in the hierarchy to the level of Prior of Erfurt and Vicar of Thuringia. His teachings have been clouded for some Christians by the fact that, after his death, some of his ideas were declared heretical by the Catholic Church, but his writings have been a great source of inspiration to non-Catholic Christians – and to non-Christians, since his stature transcends the boundaries of particular religion, springing from the Universal.

His German works consist mainly of sermons, most of which were included in the first two volumes of this series. In this third book, Walshe offers us three Treatises (Tractate) (culled from eighteen attributed to Eckhart) which are now considered to be genuine. They are the **Talks of Instruction**, **The Book of Divine Comfort** and **On Detachment**. The book also contains translations of two shorter works – **The Nobleman**, which is possibly an appendage to the Book of Divine Comfort, and a **Fragment of an Unknown Sermon**.

Eckhart's time, historically, was one of great social and religious disturbance. It was marked by an increase in the number of nunneries, possibly due to a decimation of the male population as a result of the upheavals. The inhabitants of these were in many cases widows and daughters of aristocratic extraction, with some

intellectual and educational standing, whose spiritual needs, as Walshe puts it, "rose above elementary levels". The Dominicans were entrusted with the instruction of the nuns, a job for which Eckhart was particularly responsible. These were some of the factors which contrived to create a situation which demanded of Eckhart that he articulate something of his extremely refined spiritual understanding.

The first of the three Treatises', the **Talks of Instruction**, is a series of talks given to novices, possibly given in 'question and answer' sessions to novices under his charge. The second (**Divine Comfort** and **The Nobleman**, taken as one) was reputedly written by Eckhart to console Agnes, Queen of Hungary, on the murder of her father, Albrecht of Habsburg. The circumstances in which the inspired **On Detachment** were written remain unclear.

This is a scholarly and painstaking translation, following the definitive text of the German professor Joseph Quint (1898-1976) who performed the Herculean task of weeding out the genuine Eckhart from the mass of attributed works. Maurice Walshe taught medieval German at the Universities of Leeds, Nottingham and London and recently retired as Deputy Director of the Institute of Germanic Studies at the University of London. He is interested in Buddhism and has made several translations from the Buddhist Scriptures.

This three volume translation is only the second complete rendering into English of the totality of accepted genuine works, and Walshe himself sees it as replacing the two volume work of Miss C. de B. Evans of 1924 and 1931. It is set firmly in the tradition of Eckhart scholarship that finds its particular origin in the pioneering work of Franz Pfeiffer in the mid 19th century. Where earlier renderings were deemed correct, they have been retained and the reader is thus presented with the cumulative fruits of Eckhart scholarship and translation with a solid pedigree.

Scholarship, like art, should be invisible. The aim of both is to allow the reality that underlies them to shine through unobstructed, unimpeded and in its full glory. Scholarship is not invention and there is no room for personal opinion or interpretation. The translator bears the responsibility for introducing his author to a new culture, which will judge the original by the quality of his work.

With the writings of a man like Eckhart, there is an even greater challenge. There are some who say, with some justification, that only one who has, himself, the vision of a mystic can hope to translate the works of a mystic. This is because translation in this case does not simply mean the horizontal replacement of a term in one language for an equivalent term in another. Where the writings of a mystic are concerned, translation is ideally the re-expression, from the same original source, of an essential and universal meaning which lies beyond words.

The purpose of mystical communication is clear – to help people with a taste for such matters to come by whatever means to perfection. Hence, a great responsibility lies on the head of the translator of a mystic – he is responsible for those who follow his author through his translation if any deviation or misleading arises through a fault in the translation.

Maurice Walshe has therefore taken on and completed a daunting and awesome task in this translation. However, the discipline of scholarship is a form of servanthood; its concern is to give passage to meaning not contained or containable within itself. The true scholar is self-effacing, and here lies the only circumstance in which a 'scholarly' translation can hope to render a mystical writing. The intention not to obstruct or deform the original, even if it goes beyond one's own knowledge, if faithfully carried through, can remove the potentially distorting presence of the translator and allow the original to shine through.

Walshe's rendering is, on the whole, in lively, expressive and direct English, though the language perhaps suffers slightly from the pedestrian quality of all completely faithful translations. If it is not entirely translucent, it is very far from opaque and one can read it with confidence in its accuracy and with mind free from the fear of reading works of doubtful attribution.

There is so much in these works – the immediately practical advice in the Talks of Instruction, the startling paradoxes of On Detachment, the intensity of the Book of Divine Comfort. All we can do is offer some quotations to illustrate the elevation, refinement and universality of Meister Eckhart's understanding.

In the Book of Divine Comfort he speaks of "*being transformed in God and estranged from all multiplicity, from anything at all which even in thought or name permits the merest hint or shadow of difference; and is entrusted to the One, bare of all number and variety, wherein God-Father-Son-Holy Ghost loses all and is stripped of all distinctions and properties and is One alone*" (page 85).

And – "*Heart to heart, one in one is how God loves. Whatever is other and different from that, God hates. God entices and lures to the One. All creatures, even the lowest, seek the One, and the highest perceive the One. Caught up above nature and transformed, they seek One in One, One in Itself*" (page 89). These have to suffice to give an indication of the awesome beauty and elevation of the point from which Meister Eckhart's experience arises, and its relevance to those whose taste is for the highest spirituality.

Translation is 'making accessible' and this book offers an invaluable entry, for those ignorant of 14th century Middle high German, into understanding one of the world's greatest mystics. Not least, it affords the opportunity of closing the review of a notable and estimable translation of a work of extreme value with Meister Eckhart's own prayer, with which he closes the Book of Divine Comfort (page 22):

"May the loving and compassionate God, the Truth, grant to me and to all who read this book, that we may find truth within ourselves and become aware of it. Amen."

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Temenos 8**Editor Kathleen Raine.**

Distributed by Element Books. March 1987

Reviewed by Arthur Martin

Temenos, a review devoted to the arts of the imagination, is aptly named as it concerns itself uncompromisingly with a perspective which sees the arts as having their origin and finding their highest expression within the 'precincts of the temple' (*the temenos*).

From time immemorial the arts have been the medium for the expression and spreading of the multi-faceted vision of the beauty and sacredness of life. Temenos was founded in the face of what was felt to be an increasing tide of secular and even profane criteria and has been concerned to re-affirm and re-define the spiritual ground from which all imaginative work must grow.

When in 1980 the editors – Kathleen Raine, Philip Sherrard and Keith Critchlow – approached established publishing houses with their plans for Temenos, they were told that it was not a good time to launch such a review, that there was no demand for it, nor could it make a profit. Undeterred and even encouraged by the opinion that such a publication would not meet the taste of the day, they resolutely went ahead. The first three issues were published by Robinson and Watkins, but the editors decided to publish subsequent volumes themselves, having built up a small list of faithful readers and friends who were willing to help with editorial expenses.

The standard of production is extremely high, it being the belief that the making of a book is itself an art form. From the outset it was intended not to continue indefinitely, and only ten volumes will be published. After the first three, the editorship passed into the distinguished hands of Kathleen Raine, who is currently preparing for publication of the ninth, penultimate, issue.

The scope and variety of material in the first eight volumes has been enormous, covering the whole panorama of imaginative arts and originating from the four quarters of the globe. Yet the

highest criteria for accepting contributions are maintained and Kathleen Raine has said, "We are fortunate in being able to publish work by artists of renown who have demonstrated in their work and affirmed in their statements the highest spiritual intent". Numbered amongst the international list of contributors are some of the finest creative minds working in the arts today, including S. H. Nasr, Keith Critchlow, Marco Pallis, David Gascoyne, Joscelyn Godwin, Santosh Pall and Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay.

The current issue, TEMENOS 8, includes, to mention just a few items in the 294 pages, essays on the work of the great Russian film-maker Andrei Tarkovsky and on the theatre director Peter Brook – the latter culminating in a review by Jean Mambrino of Brook's *magnum opus*, the great Indian myth and epic 'The Mahabharata', currently running in Zurich. There is a review of the work of the Welsh poet Vernon Watkins, whom many consider to be the true successor of Blake and Yeats: excerpts from a new work by the Russian novelist V. S. Yanovsky; poems by Wendell Berry and philosophical works by E.W.F. Tomlin and the great French Islamic scholar Henri Corbin (on 'The Theory of Visionary Knowledge in Islamic Philosophy'), both of whom write within the perspective of the perennial wisdom. Peter Lambourn Wilson reviews Corbin's latest book 'Temple and Contemplation' whilst Kathleen Raine herself considers the paintings of Winifred Nicholson, who currently has an exhibition touring the country. The volume includes beautiful colour illustrations of Nicholson's flower paintings and there are also four striking calligraphic paintings by Ameen Ahuja, illustrations to Attar's Conference of the Birds.

A theme which seems to run through this volume is Tradition – and one could say that Tradition is the very ground and source which has inspired the ethos of Temenos. Here it is taken in its highest spiritual connotation – not in its usual sense of '*a custom or habit long established and generally accepted*' but in its profound and original meaning derived from the Latin *tradere* meaning to hand over, or

deliver. In this sense, it is concerned with the transmission of a body of knowledge about man's immutable spiritual reality and is, as Basuab Nicolesco says in his article 'Peter Brook and Traditional Thought' "eternally present, here and now, springing eternally within each man". Indeed, Brook has said that for the theatre to be alive and communicative, it "must be continually reborn" and that often, regrettably, tradition degenerates into an attempt to preserve at all costs the outward forms.

The source of Tradition cannot be other than metaphysical, and because it addresses itself to what is essential in man, it possesses immediate reality. It emerges through these articles that both Brook and Tarkovsky believe that genuinely inspired work transcends the boundaries of time and culture. So, Brook moved from the contemporary theatre to produce the thirteenth century poem 'The Conference of the Birds' by Fariduddin Attar, and even further back to the ancient vedantine epic 'The Mahabhabata' of which the universally revered Baghavad Gita is the heart. So, too, Tarkovsky's greatest film remains his beautiful evocation of the life of a medieval icon painter in 'Andrei Rublev'. Before his death earlier this year, he had been preparing films on the life of St. Anthony and a version of Hamlet. Both Brook and Tarkovsky are careful in not believing that the experience of film or theatre can become a substitute for a spiritual way of life but feel that they can provide privileged moments of meaning and self-discovery.

One of the treats of this volume for me was to be introduced to the work of Vernon Watkins and to learn something of his ideas through 'Selected Letters to Michael Hamburger'. Watkins was a deeply religious man, a poet steeped in Greek philosophy, Christian mysticism and the ancient Celtic legends preserved in the Mabinogion. For him, art was not an end in itself but an instrument of the "secret law" of love, serving to reveal the divine symmetry. His images are always created with rigorous precision, with the total respect due to the holiness of all creation. Poetry for him was required to align itself to a spiritual knowledge and in a letter to Michael Hamburger he says "*In true poetry metaphysical truth transfigures aesthetic ideas*". Speaking of prayer, he says in the poem 'Taliesin and the

Spring of Vision':
*"In time of darkness the pattern of life is restored
 By men who make all transience seem
 an illusion
 Through inward acts, acts corresponding
 to music
 Their works of love leave words which
 do not end in the heart."*

Temenos' *raison d'être* has been to cleanse the imaginative life and to re-align the creative impulse to the spiritual well-springs which are its true source. This volume furthers this great endeavour, and in a climate where reductionism is so fashionable, it shines like a beacon illuminating the ever-present sacred precincts.

On Time
An investigation into Scientific Knowledge and Human Experience
by Michael Shallis
 Pelican Books, 1983, 208pp.

Reviewed by Stephen Hirtenstein

"Time has always fascinated man and yet it is so slightly understood. Time is perhaps the most elusive yet familiar phenomenon we experience. So how can we try to pin it down? This book examines the descriptions of time that emerge from the modern sciences of physics and astronomy as well as from those areas of experience that modern science finds either too awkward or too ephemeral to encompass. This quest is scientific in approach, rather than philosophical, but scientific in its more ancient meaning: a search for knowledge, wherever that search goes, ignoring boundaries or taboos that present custom upholds." (Page 13)

It is extremely refreshing to read a book that sets out to bridge the apparent gulf between the scientists' viewpoint and our human experience, and this short paperback is full of stimulating and thought-provoking material. The titles of the first and last chapters, 'The Elusiveness of Time' and 'The Paradox of Time', are evidence of the slipperiness of the subject matter, and this is partly due to Dr. Shallis' attempts to cover so many different facets and descriptions of time.

The book falls basically into two parts: the first deals with time as a quantity measurable by change in the physical universe and discusses the operation of various kinds of clocks, the implications of Einstein's Theory of Relativity, the arrow of time in quantum theory and cosmology, and so on. The second part describes the quality of time as a meaning which is essentially symbolic, and is more anecdotal, looking at the experience of timelessness, precognition, divinations and prophecy.

As Staff Tutor in Physical Science in the Department for External Studies at Oxford, Dr Shallis is admirably qualified to explain the intricacies of modern science, and the first part of the book is an excellent guide for the non-specialist, with a comprehensive bibliography. Some of the most interesting sections come from the analysis of the connections between time and light, a thread to which Dr. Shallis returns again and again throughout the book.

"It is strange that light to an observer has a finite, measurable speed, when to light there is no time and no space. Light seems to interpenetrate the whole universe as if everywhere and every time was 'here and now', and yet to the human observer it travels and it travels at a finite speed. That is one great puzzle of time. The other is the individuality of time that has emerged from relativity. Each person carries his own time and it will not necessarily be the same time as for other people." (page 62).

Concerning the directionality of time (the three arrows of time — thermodynamic, cosmological and electromagnetic), many tantalizing questions and observations are raised which are very much under discussion in contemporary science. For instance, there is a very close connection between the arrow of time and the Second Law of Thermodynamics, which states that energy — the capacity to do work — tends to be expended. This is spoken of as an increase in 'entropy', and is essentially a decrease in the inclination to change, a process of ageing which is regarded in modern science as an increase in 'disorder'. In a recent article in *New Scientist* (9th July 1987), the leading theoretical physicist Professor Stephen

Hawking asks, "why is disorder increasing in the same direction of time as that in which the Universe is expanding? A well-defined thermodynamic arrow is necessary for intelligent life to operate".

Dr. Shallis is not concerned solely with a narrow definition of time in any cosmological sense, since he feels that the spatialisation of time in modern science is a kind of detemporalisation, '*analogous to the dehumanisation that occurs when human qualities are denied in a quantification of personality*'. (page 109). In Chapter 7, on coincidence and meaning, he clearly demonstrates the different approaches that scientists can use, which he calls descriptive science and instructional science. In descriptive science, the question being asked is "What do I actually encounter?" It is concerned with the search for the whole truth about a thing of interest. There is no limit to the investigation since whatever is uncovered will always be a part of the whole picture, and not the whole picture itself.

The second approach is concerned with finding explanations for phenomena and therefore general laws, such as Newton's Laws of Motion, which provide idealised instructions for producing effects. Naturally the instructional method as embodied in Probability Theory and statistics has powerful applications in this world and has dominated western thought for the past few centuries, but it cannot describe the uniqueness of an event, and it leaves out the acausal aspect of nature. This, as Dr Shallis observes, is 'our loss', since it denigrates meaning to a quantity. He clearly favours a recognition of time as a multi-faceted phenomenon, with causal and acausal elements, which has meaning in *all* its aspects.

As he says on page 198: "*Clock time is invented time, but man has been too gullible, he has ended up believing that his invention has an objective existence separate from the way he designed it to be. Objective time has gone. It has gone in relativity, gone from the quantum world, gone in cosmology, where scales and redefinitions of time are almost arbitrary. Objective time has vanished in the paranormal. The time we think we inhabit is neither simple, linear nor objective. We are immersed in pools of*

time and timelessness, in a sea of causality and acausal connections. We are flooded by light that brings us time and banishes it."

Meister Eckhart has said that "*Time is what prevents the light from reaching us*". This intimates that anything which brings us closer to understanding the nature of time clarifies our closeness to the light of truth, and this book is therefore to be warmly welcomed.

Dr. Shallis will be visiting Beshara Sherborne in November to give a weekend seminar. See page 29 for details.

Contact by Carl Sagan

Arrow Books 1986 £3.95.

Reviewed by Khalil Norland

Contact is a good read. It is science fiction written by a scientist whose vision goes beyond the facts of present day science and which therefore becomes the medium by which he expresses his aspirations. It is intelligent and well-crafted, so that each chapter leads the reader on to hope for at least a partial resolution in the next, with a development of human character of greater depth than one would necessarily expect from a scientist.

The heroine, an astrophysicist who begins life in the 20th century, embodies the author's beliefs and is a representative of the 'scientific spirit' in action. She becomes instrumental in making an amazing discovery – of the existence of an extraterrestrial intelligence far beyond that found on Earth. As a member of a team which deciphers, and then carries out, coded instructions sent to Earth, she is enabled to make contact with this intelligence and thus take humanity a step towards inclusion in the universal community which guides and regulates the life of the universe.

The book takes the reader from the familiarity of the present into the world of the next millennium by gradual, believable and well-informed stages. The final denouement promises to return a depth of meaning to human existence on this fragile and seemingly insignificant planet – a meaning which was once

embodied in religion but which the scientific approach, by regarding the religious view of the significance of human life to be the result of prejudice and superstition, has all but banished. Thus the author offers the reader the hope that the human spirit, in the form of science, will reach out (with a certainty which, in his view, religion can never offer), and discover an ultimate in the form of intelligence beyond the human which rules and informs the very structure of this universe. This universal intelligence waits patiently for life forms to grow within it and discover, comprehend and perhaps one day become at one with it.

At this point I must reveal the surprise ending – which would be an inexcusable lack of good form were this simply a review to recommend a romance or a thriller. However, as the ending is the crucial conclusion of the author's aspirations, it is necessary to discuss it in order to see how near and yet how far these are from a complete understanding. At the very end of the book, the heroine is able to verify that the meaning of universal intelligence has been hidden in the very structure of mathematics: that deep within the inviolate order of number, in the seemingly meaningless and infinite progression of digits which represent a transcendent number such as π , lies a message which, like the voice of God, will speak to all life forms capable of understanding it.

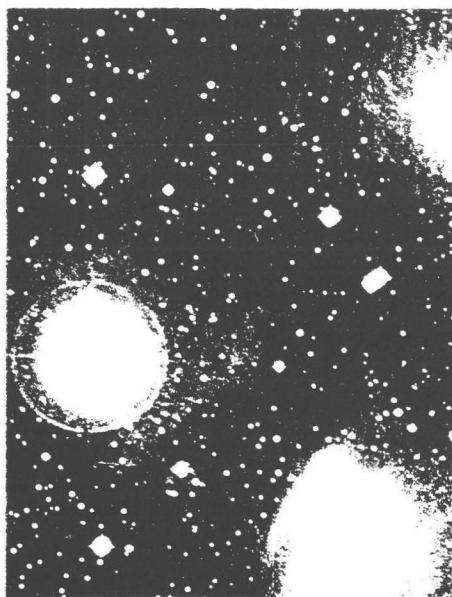
Now I feel that this vision, coming as it does from the pen of an astrophysicist, should be regarded as one of the emerging concepts underlying present-day science. It exposes the brink upon which science stands – one vital jump away from abandoning the 'solid' ground of objectivity and its traditional picture of the universe as lifeless matter whose nature intelligence seeks to discover. According to this traditional view, intelligence can only be understood as growing, in some way, out of dead matter and meaning can only be introduced by something which lies beyond the material; thus we are presented with two poles – the one pole being material reality which physics seeks to study, the other being a spirit of intelligence which does the studying.

The closest such a conception can

come to a unified vision is to suppose that the most certain and objective knowledge which we have – namely the mathematical structure by which order in the universe is revealed to us – could be seeded with messages from an intelligence which lies beyond it and which is somehow able to create and inform it. Thus, Sagan attempts to unite the two poles by a conceit of fiction.

I believe that there is a real striving, as yet largely unconscious, to unite these two poles within the development of science. But the reality is that science, of itself, cannot unite them; it can only acknowledge that they are in any case a unity and base all its theory upon this truth, which lies beyond any 'objective' science.

It could then be seen that the quality of living intelligence which we acknowledge subjectively within ourselves is nothing other than 'the living' in expression as the universe. The universe is intelligent, and the intelligence which comprehends this as a mathematical order is discovering aspects of itself. It does not need to construct complicated machines to communicate with other intelligence, (though it may choose to do so), because the universe is alive and life communicates with life through the quality of 'the living', of which it partakes. Thus we may be able to throw lumps of metal around the universe in order to make contact with intelligences outside ourselves, but in truth we already contact that same intelligence and those same intelligences within ourselves.



Notes on Contributors

Dr. Rom Harré

is Vice-Principle of Linacre College, Oxford. He is also adjunct Professor of Philosophy and Sociology and Behavioural Sciences at the State University of New York and holds several other visiting Professorships. He is the author of several books, including "The Principles of Scientific Thinking" and "Great Scientific Experiments", published by Oxford University Press.

Christopher Ryan

has been a restaurateur in Cambridge for the past ten years and is a Director of the Chisholme Institute. He became deeply interested in Turkey – the country, its people, its history and cuisine – when he first visited in 1970 and has returned at least once a year ever since.

Dr R.W.J. Austin

is a lecturer in Arabic at the University of Durham. He graduated from the University of London and researched at the University of California. He is an internationally renowned scholar, and in 1980 published his own translation of 'Arabi's 'Fusus al-Hikam' as 'The Bezels of Wisdom'. Dr. Austin has been a regular guest lecturer at the Beshara School of Intensive Esoteric Education for more than 10 years.

Elizabeth Roberts

studied English at St. Anne's College, Oxford. She has worked as a teacher of English as a Foreign Language in Indonesia and in England, and has completed both courses at the Beshara School of Intensive Esoteric Education. She now lives in Scotland with her husband and two children and has acted as a co-ordinator on a number of courses at Chisholme House.

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