

IN SUPPORT OF COMTE-SPONVILLE

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Dedicated to Marie-Louise Nykamp

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A Short Story

When I was a small boy, about two years old, on occasion, I had some nightmares. One morning I mentioned that to my Mother, and she replied, in a most natural matter of course manner, as if it had been about a simple and trivial issue, that next time, when I would again have such a nightmare, I should simply remember that I was dreaming, that all it would only be in a dream, and then I should just wake up ...

Since my Mother's reply came so instantly, smoothly, and without the least emotion, let alone dramatization, I simply took it as such ...

And next time, when a nightmare came upon me during my dream, I simply did, and yes, I managed rather naturally to do, what my Mother had told me to do ...

And never ever I would again have nightmares for more than a mere moment, before I would manage to wake up from them ...

Later, nightmares would, so to say, even avoid me completely ...

On occasion, and sometime even more often, we feel during our waking hours as if we were in the middle of a nightmare ...

Yes, as the saying has it : life is not a picnic !

And it really can get so much worse ...

Well then, is there some way recalling, even if rather vaguely so, the story with my early childhood nightmares ?

Could we possibly wake up - during our waking hours - to the realization that the respective horror does not, and in fact, simply cannot happen to who we really are ?

But then, who really are we ?

Of course, with few exceptions if at all, we always have some ideas about our own identity, about who we are ...

And needless to say, so do people who know us, or rather, believe to know us ...

And so often, we are quite at variance with what such people happen to think that we are ...

Yet, we are hardly at all contesting the validity of what we think that we ourselves are ...

Well, it is perhaps high time that we would have a better look at the whole issue of who we are, who we really are ...

And if we may once in a blue Moon try to do so, well then, where and how would we start it ?

Much More Wrong Than ...

Another short story may, perhaps, help

Decades earlier, when I was still young, I happened to have a lady friend of considerable inborn gifts and distinction ...

And yet, for some years, I had to struggle in getting along with her ...

A main problem would be that she would invest all of her impressive energies in one venture or another, and pursue them as if nothing less than the Ninth Heaven was waiting for her at their end ...

Needless to say, each and every time, she would after some time and the expenditure of a lot of energy give up on the respective venture, and do so upon a sudden intuition that it was not the real thing ...

Having witnessed her on quite a number of such occasions, I could no longer help it, and had to deliver her the following comment :

”My dear X, you happen to have an unusually strong memory of what one may call the Original Bliss ...

Except that your memory of that bliss is far more wrong, than strong ...”

And as you may guess it, and regardless of my intentions, that comment was to be the end of our relationship ...

Good Life ...

Yes indeed : the Original Bliss ...

The bliss we all have a memory of ...

The bliss we so often feel like having fallen out of in some way or another ...

The bliss we all try so hard to re-enter ...

Leibniz, a most remarkable German philosopher, contemporary with Newton and co-author of Calculus, considered that "This is the best of all possible Worlds", and saw this statement as the most important idea he had formulated and cherished ...

Does that tell you anything at all about what good life may ever mean, and be ?

Good life ...

After all, is good life not the topmost aim of everybody among us ?

And as such, has it not been the subject of wisdom literature across several continents and millennia ?

Various religions also have for ages claimed to promote it, and in doing so, still keep competing with their respective narratives in trying to convince us to join in ...

And competing they did indeed, and some of them still do so nowadays, and do so even by extreme forms of violence both to their own, as to the others ...

On the other hand, in our days, and needless to say, so amusingly, a rather universal idea of good life has taken firmly hold of much of humankind. And across the largest possible spectrum, including the

homeless and multi-billionaires, as well as the criminal, we prove to have just about the same idea of what a good life is supposed to be all about ...

Of course, some would like one type of luxury car, while others would much prefer a quite different one ...

And so across the whole range of delights, starting with food, drinks, clothes, house, and all of the rest ...

Yet, except for such differences, the very nature of good life is seen just about being the same by nearly everybody ranging from destitutes to ultra rich, as well as those in between ...

And then, does such an incredible universality mean something relevant ?

And if it may, indeed, happen to do so, then what that may be ?

Could it be that, at last, we humans have indeed managed to identify what good life is ?

Could it be that the efforts in this regard of, for instance, a Plato in his book "The Republic", did finally come to fruition, even if in a rather radically different ways than foreseen ?

Or rather, it may not mean much more than that we human have never ceased to chase good life, and still keep doing so ...

And also, that we do know very deeply - even if so deeply that we do not quite know that we know it - that good life can only be the same for all of us, since in its essence, no matter how elusive to so many, there is indeed only one way of life which is good life ...

And in order to try to give some hint how much we may need some redirecting in our usual vision of good life, here is a Hassidic story which can be seen as a more detailed presentation of the mentioned fundamental idea of Leibniz :

"When God created the World, He consulted with the holly men, and He created the world for the sake of holy men."

And in case anyone may find such a statement shockingly incredible, or incredibly nave, if not in fact merely ridiculous, and as such, noth-

ing but a silly wishful thinking, well, let us add that the same Hassidic tradition sees Creation as no less than a permanent, ever ongoing venture, as a never ending action of God ...

Therefore, according to them, the World is recreated by God each and every moment, and is done so in permanent consultation with holy men, and for the sake of holy men ...

And then, returning to Leibniz, to the extent that one may find this World as not being the best among all the possible ones, well, one may actually do not much more by having such a view, than express the extent to which one may happen to be removed from being a holy man ...

So then, one may ask : what may it mean to be a holy man ?

Of course, we have never lacked in those who were most eager to give their specific answers ...

And such answers, with few exceptions if ever, tended to be about the destination, the final state which, once reached, makes one into a holy man ...

Well, perhaps, any better kind of answer should rather be different, and only be about two issues : first, that one should stand up and start moving in the directions of becoming a holy man, and second, in which directions one should perhaps avoid moving, and in which other directions one may hopefully try to move ...

Of course, many may quite instantly associate the term "holy man" with one or another religion, and thus be thoroughly put off by it ... Well, there is no need for such a reaction ...

Indeed, the more appropriate, even if less frequently used term would be that of "whole man", or even "more whole man" ...

And as so often, the term "man" also includes that of "woman" ...

But now, if we leave all such thought aside, and simply have a look around, we may find an truly extraordinary fact :

Nowadays, by the time one reaches the age of about ten, one - and this means just about everyone - knows absolutely well what good life is supposed to mean ...

And furthermore, one is so utterly and ultimately certain about that knowledge that nothing and nobody could ever arise even the slightest doubt in this regard ...

And is this not but an instance of ultimate justice in the world ?

And ultimate justice which, even if it may not exactly make this into the best of all possible worlds, it nevertheless endows just about everybody right from one's early teenage with the utterly clear and firm knowledge of the world ?

Descartes had some four centuries ago, and before Leibniz, noted that at least with respect to one very important issue there was, indeed, a remarkable justice in the world. Yes, he said, he never met anyone to say that he had enough money, power, influence, or respect, or that he was looking nice enough, he was strong and healthy enough. On the other hand, he never met anybody either who would say that he did not have enough mind ...

Well, nowadays, we happen to live in such blessed time that even young teenagers are already endowed of the most perfect knowledge of what good life is all about ...

The rest, of course, is merely about how to get it ...

And, please, don't you come and tell us that, in fact, we may not quite know what it is, even if time and again so many and many more of us would never get it ...

It may, indeed, be quite amusing to see the human story on our Planet Earth somewhat from the outside ...

A Shakespeare, for instance, wrote dozens of outstanding plays, chose the actors and directed many of them, so that his audience may in some ways have such a look from the outside at the human story, and hopefully learn ...

Well, let us imagine for a moment - even if we happen to confess being atheists and practicing nothing short of a cheerful desperation - that there is God, He made us, and He keeps watching us ...

And if it may, indeed, be so, then is such a God not so immensely better than any Shakespeare at running the human show ?

Just think of it : the only thing such a God ever does is to endow His creatures with quite an overwhelming desire for individual autonomy !

And, lo and behold, then such a God does not have to write one single play, not even one lonely line in such a play. And even less He is in need to direct plays ...

No, not at all !

Indeed, our rather insanely pursued individual autonomy will make each of us keep for ever more writing our own play and doing so all on our own, and o of course, keep for evermore trying as well to direct it all alone ...

On the other hand, if we happen to make one single mistake, well, that God is there to punish us relentlessly ...

Would you - regardless of being gifted as a Shakespeare, or not - not prefer to watch such a show, one in which all you have to do is to endow your creatures with that immense sense of individual autonomy, and then simply sit back and see how they mess through most of their lives ...

And whenever they do, as they will of course not be able to avoid doing, slap a punishment upon them ?

Well, even if you happen to be an atheists of the cheerful desperate kind, you may, I am afraid, hardly be able to avoid the thought that such a ... highly non-Shakespearian play ... could indeed be going on ...

The Poor Shall Always Be with Us ?

Poverty among us humans happens to have many forms and a variety of levels. A most obvious form is that which usually goes with the label of material poverty, and much of the efforts of modern societies have been focused on diminishing, if not eradicating it. Yet, universal literature ever since ancient times is mostly about various other, and no less awful and fatal forms of individual poverty, the victims of which are persons sufficiently privileged to be free from any form of that rather raw and so called material one. And persons who happen to belong to the middle or yet more privileged classes of our own modern societies can, and do show us time and again that freedom from material poverty does so often only open up the doors, and so many possible doors, to a surprising range of more subtle forms of poverty, forms which typically prove to be rather intractable in the individuals affected. Indeed, such more subtle and less raw forms of poverty fall just about completely outside of realms within the range of economic, social or political measures and actions. And in our modern societies it appears that all what the persons affected by them can try to do is to appeal to the services of psychologists, psychiatrists, and in more dramatic cases, of lawyers litigating the resulting unsavoury conflicts. Of course, a large variety of drugs, in addition to the traditional ones, as well as gurus, coaches, and other alleged healers are also solicited to help. Not to mention the ever expanding so called self-help literature on the psychology shelves of bookshops. And yet, the intractability of the myriad forms of poverties more subtle than the material one keeps evermore staring so blatantly straight into our face ...

Traditionally, we have for long ages used a rather simple and also simplifying terminology trying to single out that division between material poverty, and on the other hand, all other more subtle forms of

poverty which can befall a human individual. And often, the more subtle forms have been seen as being to a considerable extent but expressions of what has sometime gone by the term of spiritual poverty. Furthermore, and for a couple of millennia by now, the human institution of religion, with its various incarnations, has been seen as the way to deal with such spiritual poverty.

The Catholic Church, for instance, had found it necessary back in its early days nearly thousand five hundred years ago to list the so called seven deadly sins, among which pride was to be seen as the deadliest, and at the root of all the other ones. However, the quite earlier Book of Proverbs in the Old Testament is already also busy with setting up such a list ...

The effects and consequences of such approaches are well known, and they have proved to be quite a mixed blessing. Altogether, the overall record of religions is not without its major blemishes, and many of them are still there even in our days ...

Consequently, in modern times, a large and growing number of individuals, in particular in Western societies, have simply and quite radically overreacted by totally rejecting not only religion, but the very concept of spiritual poverty, seeing so often in such a total rejection a rather instant and complete solution to all forms of poverty beyond the material one.

“The book of Atheist Spirituality” recently published by Andre Comte-Sponville is a deeply felt and moving appeal for a reconsideration of the issue of spiritual poverty. And it is even more convincing due to the fact that the author himself has for long set aside the ways of religion, yet managed to do so without much of the all too pervasive modern overreaction.

What appears, however, to be a problem with the mentioned book is precisely the effect of a thorough commitment to atheism on the part of its author, a commitment which - rather paradoxically, and certainly in spite of the author’s intention - may in fact manifest itself as yet another form of religion, this time as some sort of a, shall we

say, secular one ...

And then, the following lines aim to present a dedicated support for the intended message of Comte-Sponville, and in doing so, try to avoid any specific a priori commitment which may possibly be construed as some form of religion, except of course for a commitment to approach rationally the issue of more subtle forms of poverty which so often befall individuals privileged enough to be free from its material form ...

As for the structure of the following lines, it may be more appropriate and also useful to avoid that of a free standing text or tractate, and instead, to present them as a succession of commentaries which may arise one after the other, and not necessarily in the order one reads the book of Comte-Sponville. In this way, it may be convenient to have the book of Comte-Sponville at hand, read it before reading the following lines, and then re-read it together with the comments presented in the sequel.

Jesus Christ, according to the Gospel, is supposed to have stated that the poor shall always be with us ...

Well, either that may indeed be the case, or not, it need not mean that nothing at all should be attempted in order to ameliorate the situation. And as so well and so widely documented by now, poverty is not at all reduced to its material form alone. During recent decades, hundreds of millions, if not in fact, a few billions of us humans have been lifted out from material poverty, or are in the respective process. And what so often, and apparently so inevitably happens to such persons among us is that, quite instantly, they become affected by more subtle, yet seemingly intractable variants of poverty ...

Can, then, anything, anything at all be done about that ?

Can one, indeed, try to address what has so far so much escaped a modern thorough going attention, a more serious and possibly effective attention ?

An attention which may at last start to focus on all those countless and more subtle forms of poverty, forms beyond the material one ?

And then, if we indeed try do so, what can be more appropriate than formulate certain questions ?

After all, how can one ever get to answers, let alone, solutions, if not by first asking some questions ?

Hopefully, questions of a more appropriate kind ?

The Approach To Be Followed

One could simply follow the chapters in Comte-Sponville's book, which for brevity, we shall mention as C-S, and present certain comments. Even simpler, perhaps, one could focus on the last brief chapter in C-S, namely, Conclusion Love and Truth, and comment on the various statements there.

However, as always, comments are not emerging from some sort of void. Instead, they are expressions of certain more or less constituted and systematic views. And then, it may be more conducive to the understanding of any kind of possible comments to start by a certain relatively brief elaboration of their underlying views.

We shall, therefore, attempt such a brief elaboration in the next few sections, before starting to comment on C-S, and do so chapter after chapter ...

Let us, however, mention once more that the aim of the following comments is to support the intended message of C-S. And we try to do so by illustrating with the comments to follow that the essence of the message of C-S is compatible with underlying views that are quite different, yet not less credible ...

In other words, the intended message of C-S is not so much in need of an underlying atheism, or for that matter, of any other form of "ism", let alone of an assumed, or rather, alleged cheerful desperation ...

And it may, indeed, be high time that, whenever we may try to deliver an important and fundamental message like that intended in C-S, we may be more careful and relaxed about clinging to some underlying views, views which end up by being so specific and particular, as to keep for evermore dividing us humans in conflicting groups, conflicting often in rather deadly manner, as it has happened time and again throughout our history, and regrettably, still keeps happening in our

own time ...

Three Questions followed by ... another Four Ones ...

A remarkable feature of C-S is to formulate up front three questions that summarize the author's concerns, as well as his pursuit, namely :

1. Can we do without religion ?
2. Does God exist ?
3. Can there be an atheist spirituality ?

An issue which arises with these questions from the beginning is the terminology they use, a terminology that simply takes for granted certain more widespread and traditional views which in fact are a rather confusing and arbitrary mix of various religious, or on the contrary, religion rejectionist positions. Specifically, not a few categories are created in violation of Occam's razor, such as agnostic, atheist, religion, God, spirituality, sacred, supernatural, transcendental, immanent, faith, belief, and so on. Based on that, a sophisticated analysis is given the chance to develop. And the possibility is open for missing a deeper, more fundamental approach, one that, hopefully, is also clarifying by its simplicity.

Here, such an approach is attempted with the help of the following four questions :

1. Do you believe that whatever in Creation which may be relevant to your life is already accessible to your awareness ?
2. And if not - which is most likely the case - then do you believe that it may become accessible during the rest of your life ?

3. And if not - which again is most likely the case - then do you believe that you should nevertheless try some sort of two way interactions with all that which may never ever become accessible to your awareness, yet may nevertheless be relevant to your life ?

4. And if yes - which most likely is the minimally wise approach - then how do you intend to get into a two way interaction with all those realms which may be relevant to your life, yet about which your only awareness can be that they shall never ever be within your awareness, no matter how long you may live ?

And what are we in fact talking here about ?

Simple, very simple indeed.

Just think about the electro-magnetic waves, for instance, which we humans did not at all know to exist until the mid 1800s. Well, today, your mobile phone is essentially using them, and so does your radio and TV, as well as your laptop when connected wireless to the Internet. Yet you as a human being, when without such devices, are in no way directly, physically aware of them, in spite of the fact that they do all the time penetrate your body, and actually, can penetrate thick walls as well, among them those of your house. Fortunately however, and much unlike all our ancestors during countless earlier millennia, we, or at least some of us, can mentally be aware of them. And thanks to those relatively few among us who are so, and moreover, are aware of them in a sufficiently rigorous and scientifically based way, we can easily benefit from suitable devices which make those electro-magnetic waves so useful in our everyday lives.

More generally, modern science, and the technology based on it, keep bringing into our awareness more and more realms which, we, humans, have earlier had absolutely no awareness whatsoever about. Indeed, it is an important feature of our times that by far the vast majority of what is known in various branches of modern science and technology has become known as recently as during the preceding one or two generations. And that process of massive discovery of new realms with

which we can, and do, establish relevant and useful two way interactions keeps going on ...

But then, of course, it would be naive at best to consider that the discovery of ever new relevant realms is strictly limited to those accessible to modern science and technology. After all, for millennia, there have been a variety of human endeavours in which important, and in fact, fundamental roles were played by occasional discoveries of new realms. To mention a few, we can recall the discovery of agriculture some ten millennia ago, or of architecture, not to mention art which may go back, as some cave paintings testify, to tens of thousands of years.

What is new in human experience is the massive process of discovery of ever new and never before dreamt about realms of major relevance which modern science and technology keep bringing forth in our times ...

In this regard, until recently, very few more relevant realms, if any at all, happened to enter the awareness of humans during any given generation. Not to mention that the vast majority of humans have not had any kind of a more formal and systematic education, and spent all of their short and poor lives within a given rigidly fixed set of circumstances which tended to remain quite the same over a number of generations.

It is, thus, not surprising that possible alternatives to such a life could so easily end up being seen as rather transcendental or supernatural realms, realms which did not seem to have much, if any at all, everyday relevance since they could not be directly experienced ...

Such were the ways which would encourage visions of heaven, a realm which could not be anything else but the total, complete and absolute opposite of hell, of that hell suggested by one's rather hellish everyday hopeless life ...

Altogether, the effect was that few, if any truly new relevant realms may ever become a general enough experience during the life time

even of several successive generations. Thus the divide between what happened to be considered as real, true and existent, and on the other hand, what may possibly be seen or imagined as ever becoming so kept remaining just about absolutely and for evermore fixed over generations.

And then, more fundamental questions, when on rare occasions they may at all arise, were not seen within the dynamic terms of an ongoing flux of new realms entering the public awareness. Instead, they were merely confined to a rigidly fixed framework, one that would remain quite the same form many a generation, and then further being reinforced by tradition and authority, and rather as a rule, also supported, or at least not challenged, by a large majority in the respective societies ...

To give an example, let us recall that Giordano Bruno seems to be the first in the more recent Western tradition to come up with the idea that the universe is infinite, and in particular, that the Sun is but one of the infinitely many stars out there, in the sky. And for that idea, in 1600, at the age of fifty two, he was burned alive by the Catholic Church, on Campo dei Fiori, a market place near to Piazza Navona in the central part of the city of Rome, in Italy.

This is precisely why old and traditional formulations of certain fundamentally important questions may nowadays benefit from a reformulation. And the four above questions that follow the three questions in C-S are attempting to do that ...

Now it may be objected that the way those four questions are formulated is too much, so to say, human individual centered, and as such, focused on what in philosophy goes by the names of gnoseology and epistemology, that is, the issue of the ways of knowing, or of being or becoming aware of reality. Indeed, those four questions do not so much seem to focus on ontology which, traditionally, is the first philosophical issue, namely, the issue of what exists, or the issue of what is real.

Well, the fact is that those four questions are even more focused on

pragmatics than on anything at all, that is, on the issue of practical use and benefit to be achieved by the human individual. And in fact, we should not miss to note that a traditional first focus on ontology, followed by one on gnoseology and epistemology, also has a definite ulterior pragmatic aim, unless one is merely involved in the pursuit of a more learned and sophisticated version of a crosswords puzzle game, a pursuit which neither C-S, nor the following lines are aiming at ...

As for placing the human individual at the center of those four questions, well, we happen to think that a strong and viable social pyramid cannot be assembled from weak stones, no matter what approaches may be attempted in its construction and maintenance. And therefore, what may indeed come first and foremost is to try to attain to a state of affairs where a sufficient number of sufficiently enlightened human individuals may be present ...

As for enlightened human individuals, a well known Zen-Buddhist saying may be useful :

“In order to become enlightened, one must be enlightened.”

Well, such a saying may remind one of that mercilessly dour and much disputed Calvinist doctrine of predestination ...

And yet, when it comes to such fundamentals, one may to a good extent be already within realms beyond time and space ...

So much therefore for any kind of predestination ...

And beyond time and space, well, lots of fundamental issues fade away, or at least, take completely different meanings and forms ...

And that may as well regard poverty, poverty in all its possible forms, levels or variants ...

Including the endless forms of individual poverty of not being sufficiently enlightened ...

As for becoming enlightened, well, things are not exactly so bad or so difficult. After all, there is also the saying :

“In order to become enlightened, you have to get from here to here ...”

And if one happened to believe that this would only indicate the spatial proximity of the “land of enlightenment”, one could in fact complete the above saying as follows :

“In order to become enlightened, all you may have to do is to get from the here and now to the here and now ...”

And as may be seen in the sequel, the main difficulty is indeed not so much related to space, as rather to time. To our usual perception of it ...

A Few Starting Propositions

It is hard, if not in fact, quite impossible to pre-empt the message intended in these lines by a small number of propositions which may as well assume the role of a summary or conclusions. And yet, such propositions may, among others, serve as warnings concerning rather customary failures in approaching such fundamental issues as those dealt with in C-S.

The few propositions which follow aim to provide a first and brief background to the four questions above, a background that may help in clarifying their meaning and relevance.

First, perhaps, we should be most careful not to end up in the dead end of one or another belief, no matter how elaborate, learned or sophisticated the process we went through prior to falling for evermore for that belief. Indeed, the history of humanity is full of all sorts of such beliefs often shared for quite long and by so many. And that fact alone should be a most potent warning, since nearly all such beliefs were later abandoned, or even worse, proven to be trivially wrong.

One blatant example of such a belief, mentioned in some detail later, was that our Planet Earth is flat and immobile at the very center of the universe.

When one faces fundamental questions, such as about life and death, the nature and the aim of Creation, the existence or otherwise, of a Creator, and so on, one is indeed facing issues which, quite likely, cannot ever be answered in a more credible manner within the everyday human experience and knowledge. And then, as if to satisfy some psychological urges - among them, to get rid of the discomfort of

living for long with question marks related to important issues - one may fall for the dubious comfort of one or another specific belief. In our own days, the extreme fanaticism, able more than on occasion to drive young privileged people into suicidal terrorism, as it happened on 9/11, appears to be proportionate with one's considerable weakness in living with anything less than the illusion of absolute certainty regarding fundamentals. And the extreme aberrant nature of such cases should not blind one to the fact that far more widespread lesser forms of such a weakness can still push so many into falling for some mere belief which is not, and simply cannot be validated, except for the illusion of comfort it may deliver ...

Second, the dead end nature of any such belief should be obvious. And in our times, when so many relevant new realms are brought to our awareness, festering for ever more in a given belief seems quite ridiculous, even if by not doing so one may place oneself into a somewhat uncomfortable mental and emotional, or altogether, existential situation. And yet, it may be worth trying to live with the minimal courage to do so. And one of the immediate, permanent and main advantages of such a courage is that one is free from the risk of having to abandon one's given belief, with all the upheavals such an event can usually cause. Furthermore, one is free from having to keep justifying to oneself one's specific belief, and one is also free from an ever lingering fear, suspicion or insecurity about the validity of one's belief, even if one may experience all that less than fully consciously ...

However, what is far far more important than any possible advantage resulting from such a minimal courage, is the realism of accepting the fact that human existence is indeed essentially vulnerable. And it is so not only in its physical aspects, but also related to the human understanding of fundamental issues, thus placing us humans in a situation where we must live with quite a number of question marks related to such issues.

And it should be quite clear that human civilization is not mainly about comfort. And it is certainly not even about a physical one, since so many of us who do no longer earn a living by hard physical work are quite aware of the need to do rather uncomfortable physical

exercises, in order to preserve our health. What should be even more obvious, however, is that civilization is not about emotional, mental, or altogether, existential comfort either. Indeed, such comforts indulged in by an individual can and do lead to a slower or faster decay and degeneration, while indulging in them on the level of a whole society is well known to be equally dangerous for the society in its entirety.

And then, what is human civilization all about ?

Well, among others, it is about securing a way of life in which individuals are no longer subject to the fate of animals in a jungle, a fate in which arbitrary, and often deadly physical dangers are most of the time present. Thus when living in human civilization we are not supposed to be enjoying an ever growing comfort covering absolutely all aspects of our lives.

No, we are only supposed to live more and more free from the arbitrariness of dangerous physical challenges. And then, falling for the illusionary comforts of some belief, and clinging to it with an aggressive and intolerant fanaticism that may know no bounds, can be seen as not much more than an immature extreme reaction to one's weakness in living one's life with the permanent challenges, and even dangers, which no human civilization can ever eliminate completely. And among such challenges, or even dangers, are all those question marks which may affect us regarding the fundamentals of human existence ...

Third, in view of the above four questions, falling for a belief is in a way the same with giving a name to it, and then, under the fixity of that name, taking up an ever after mostly static attitude and position with respect to what one decides and accepts not to be able to know about for the rest of one's life. In sharp contradistinction to that, the above four questions keep widely and actively open the doors upon what is not known. Thus instead of the game of naming, and the subsequent game of enrolling oneself for evermore into yet another "ism", one is ready to be more alive, and considerably more so ...

Indeed, one approaches what is not know, what is not in one's awareness, what may never be known to one, what may never enter one's awareness, and one does so without drawing any permanently fixed

boundary between the known and the unknown. And one is even careful not to draw such boundaries without realizing it, by mere default. Instead, one is letting oneself open to a potential, if not even actual, flow of all possible such boundaries, and in addition, tries to get actively involved in a two way exchange across such evermore moving boundaries ...

Comfort ?

Well, let us try to grow up, and realize that, no matter how happy, protected and privileged a childhood we may have enjoyed, the time comes when, even if we do hold for evermore to the eternal child in us, we are by now also the parents of that child ...

And as parents, we may more than on occasion have to face the music ...

The music, and not merely some belief ...

The End of Time ...

The issue of time, and specifically, the ways of our usual perception of time, is in the view of many a person in the know throughout the ages one of the critical, if not in fact, by far the most critical obstacle which may block us on our way to enlightenment. It is indeed highly questionable that a contraption so simple as a few dollars worth of a mechanical watch could in fact capture the essence of time. Certainly, no similarly simple device is believed to come anywhere near to reflecting the full nature of space. And the most powerful microscopes, or at the opposite scale, telescopes, are certainly considerably more complex than a simple mechanical watch.

And what is time like according to such a simple minded toy as a usual watch ?

Well, as we all believe - and do so so very deeply in our awareness that we are not even aware of ever having consciously accepted that assumption - time is simply a past never to return, followed by a fleeting present, and further assumed to be followed by what is called future, and which is still nowhere, not even in one's memory ...

By the way, we may perhaps stop for a moment and ask : where indeed is the future, if it is not even in one's memory ?

But then, similarly, we as well ask : where did the past disappear, if the only place it may be is in someone's memory ?

And if present events are not at all recorded in anybody's memory, or in some other way, where do they disappear ?

Good that we do not so often wonder about such questions ...

If we did, we may get really in a trouble ...
And few among us may find any interest, let alone value, worth such trouble ...

Now, strangely enough, time - much unlike space - seems to be relentlessly moving all on its own. Not to mention that no one, and nothing, seems to be able to stop it, let alone, to reverse it even a bit ...

Well, whatever the sages may have told us about the real time, the time which is not, and cannot at all be captured completely by our watches, the time which is claimed to be so different from that of our usual perceptions, we can by now for no less than one hundred and five years know - and not merely believe, imagine or assume - that, indeed, time, real time is so immensely more different, and in fact, so incredibly more complex and rich. In this regard, it was in 1905 when the young, 26 year old Einstein published his celebrated paper on Special Relativity. And in it, it is proven - based, surprisingly, only on simple, high school Mathematics - that there is not, and actually, there cannot be one unique, absolute and universally valid time.

And to shock all of us out of our many millennia long indulgence in our usual perception of time, it is shown that such a most basic and frequently used concept of considerable practical everyday importance like the simultaneity of two events is in fact not at all absolute, and instead, it essentially depends on the observer's position in space, the observer which records the two events. In other words, for some observer, two given events, say A and B, can be simultaneous, while for some other observer A may happen before B, and for yet another observer B may happen before A. Of course, this relativity depending on observers in the order in which the two events A and B occur is limited to a certain extent. In particular, it does not overrule causality. Certainly, it does not allow one, for instance, to kill one's own maternal grandmother just when she is born ...

However, it most certainly is an absolutely major wake up call regarding the dramatic inadequacy of our usual perception of time. And needless to say, the respective fact, brought to us by Special Rela-

tivity, of the far more complex structure of time has been perfectly confirmed in an immense number of physical experiments, and nowadays it is essentially used in certain everyday applications, such as the GPS devices we employ in our cars, among others.

The significant delay with which such and other major and critically important insights brought to us by modern science enter the public awareness are but further instances of the unfortunate inertia of civilizations. Inertia which make certain changes in fundamental concepts not to be done fast enough in the awareness of society, no matter how many proofs, and among them widely occurring empirical ones, may be there to support them ...

And yet, once one starts seeing time as a far more complex reality, it simply happens that any number of most important human issues may either fade away, or acquire completely new meanings, no matter how critically important, fundamental, or settled they seemed to be earlier ...

As it happens, however, C-S does not seem to be sufficiently concerned with such modern insights into more fundamental aspects of reality, among which time is certainly one ...

And which are the major issues which may simply fade away once we may develop a better perception of time ?

And which are the surprisingly new meanings many major issues may then obtain ?

It is, needless to say, up to the individual to ponder upon such questions ...

And the chance one has in pondering about such questions is that human civilization did by no means start with us - although as not seldom in the past, it may happen to end with the present generation. Indeed, it is our common and extraordinarily valuable human inheritance the fact that continually recorded human civilization can look back to half a dozen, or more, millennia, and over several con-

tinents. And among the outstanding accomplishments achieved some of the relevant are what may be called wisdom literature. And as it happens, not all such literature ended up appropriated by one or another religion. The teachings of Socrates and Plato, for instance, did fortunately for us escape such a fate ...

And such teachings can, needless to say, help a lot ...

Shall we, for instance, mention in this regard the Allegory of the Cave in Plato's book *The Republic* ?

As for the role of modern science, and specifically, of Physics, in opening up to our awareness undreamt of realms of immense relevance, let us note that the above example with Special Relativity teaching us about the considerably more complex reality of time is far from being the only one, or the most impressive as such. Indeed, General Relativity has opened up further realms for our awareness about space, time, mass, energy, motion, and so on, new realms which are so counter-intuitive from the traditional point of view as to be hard to imagine, were it not for the countless physical experiments which clearly confirm them, as well as for their practical applications in a growing number of instances of our everyday lives.

Added to that comes, of course, the effect of Quantum Theory which brings with it what appear to be yet more incredible openings of new realms available to our awareness. And one of the truly strange and rather incredible examples is the well known Many-Worlds Interpretation of Hugh Everett, formulated in 1957. The mere simultaneous possibility of many worlds, worlds which exist and develop independently of one another, is so radically new and different from customary views that its possible consequences have not yet been explored to any significant extent even in Physics, let alone in other human endeavours ...

As it happens, however, the Many-Worlds Interpretation is perfectly sound theoretically, and no one could bring up any well-founded arguments against it, except for its utter and absolutely unprecedented strangeness. Furthermore, that interpretation came about by attempts

of Everett to overcome one of the most contested and critically important issues in the standard interpretation of Quantum Theory, called the Copenhagen Interpretation, namely the Problem of Measurement. And the fact is that with his Many-Worlds Interpretation, Everett did actually overcome in the most simple and direct way the Measurement Problem, namely, by eliminating it, by simply making a non-issue out of it ...

Amusingly, the Catholic Church did not at all take kindly to the emergence of modern science some centuries ago. And the story of Giordano Bruno is but one of the instances of the way emerging science, and the scientists pursuing it, got treated merely a couple of centuries earlier. While still alive, Copernicus, for instance, did not dare to publish his book on how the Earth was moving around the Sun, and not the other way round as had been believed earlier. Similarly, Descartes was very cautious with respect to the publication of his ideas. And Galileo Galilei nearly paid with his life for not exercising such caution ...

As can be guessed quite easily, the mentioned negative attitude of the Catholic Church was caused by their considerable fear that, once human awareness is open to certain new relevant realms, it would become simply impossible to maintain certain basic doctrines of religion, doctrines which had over some centuries become in fact crucial dogmas ...

And in this regard, the Catholic Church proved to be right ...

Similarly amusingly, in our own times, another kind of deep rift, albeit not less pernicious and dangerous, has opened up between hard science, that is, Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, Molecular Biology, Genetics, and a few other similarly precise and rigorous disciplines, and on the other hand, all the other intellectual ventures. Already back in 1959, the British scientist and novelist C P Snow had warned about the emergence of the so called two cultures, namely, that of hard science, and on the other hand, the rest.

One effect is that by far most of those who may ever be involved in

the amelioration of the blight of spiritual poverty happen to come from one side of that widening divide, and that is not the side of hard science. No wonder then that, all too often, hard science is seen as rather coarse and Earth bound in order to have any kind of a more significant relevance in issues spiritual ...

After all, so many of us turn away for evermore from hard science, and we do so early in our school years. And ever after, we remain with a deficient, if not in fact, defective view of it, not to mention of those persons who choose to pursue it ...

Also, one may assume that a certain amount of what is called sour grapes attitude attaches to the general public view of hard science and of the scientists involved in it. It may indeed not be so easy to consider the world of hard science as being merely a strange and somewhat inconsequential venture pursued by equally strange and rather inconsequential persons, when those many impressive benefits of modern technology are supposed to depend on them, and in fact, be simply unattainable by any other means known so far ...

Well, one of the essential features of hard science is precisely that it is hard : it is about most clearly tangible realms, realms easily accessible to direct experience, to scientifically run experiments. That is, experiments which are about objective facts, experiments that can be repeated any number of times by anybody, if done under certain well defined conditions. Experiments which lead to clearly predictable and distinguishable end results easy to verify by one or the other of our five senses. And therefore, they are so clearly not about any kind of subjectivity whatsoever.

What could, thus, be more credible to a larger number of persons than such experiments ? Not to mention the growing number of their practical applications which we already enjoy in our everyday modern lives ?

And it is precisely the existence of that solid credibility, unmatched by any other form of human knowledge, that can help us accept in our awareness as a valid reality those incredible new realms which hard science keeps bringing to us ...

Indeed, it is this double feature of hard science, namely :

- to be precise, rigorous and confirmed by any number of scientific experiments, as well as everyday applications,
- to be so seminal in its ever ongoing research which keeps producing an ongoing flow of revelations of new and new relevant realms for our awareness, relevant both for the further development of science and for applications, both of which are a never before known phenomenon in human history that can inject a new life and a new spirit into the venture of attenuating spiritual poverty ...

Is it, therefore, not the time in the venture of ameliorating spiritual poverty to advance from traditional theological, philosophical, metaphysical, poetic, and other similar rather soft ways of arguments, to arguments which fully benefit from the incredible openings to our awareness of new realms brought about by hard science ?

Twice Unknown ...

There are several unique features of the venture of modern hard science, and specifically of hard science research. And these features regard both the results of such research and the process research follows in order to obtain them. Namely, the persons involved in more fundamental research are facing the unknown to a far greater extent than in any other rational human venture. Furthermore, the process of research is also done mostly on not yet well enough known terms, namely, the terms specific to the unknown which is supposed to become known by the respective research.

A crucially important effect is the essential requirement that a researcher should be able to follow truth wherever it may lead. In particular, the researcher should be able not to inject in the research process personal emotions, interests or biases, except of course for a commitment to succeed, and a readiness to fail. And often, researchers do fail, either due to insufficient knowledge, insight, and in general, ability, or simply because the subject happens to be far too difficult at the given stage of development of science.

Needless to say, not all research in hard science conforms to the above, nor it is required to do so. And certainly, this is often the case with less fundamental research.

However, the fact is that, at its best, hard science research is twice facing the unknown, this being an essential and typical feature of it among all rational human ventures.

Without Precedent in Human History

As mentioned, in modern times, hard science and the technology based on it have opened up a large number of relevant realms to our awareness, and keep doing so in an ever ongoing flow. There are several unique features following from that historical event, an event without precedent in known human history. Let us try and consider these features here briefly, and do so from the point of view of ameliorating spiritual poverty.

At first, we could of course highlight the list of such new relevant realms brought to our awareness, and do so accompanied by the considerable amount of their useful applications in everyday life.

Second, and not less, the importance of hard science is not only in bringing to our awareness all those new relevant realms, but even more so in the very precedent itself it has created in this manner in known human history. Indeed, no earlier period in any human civilization is known to have produced such a fast and massive change by bringing to human awareness so many new relevant realms. And even if due to certain not yet known or foreseen reasons the flow of such new relevant realms would diminish significantly, or perhaps, even stop, the mentioned precedent has already been set by the hard science of the last few centuries, and especially, of the last few generations.

And that precedent quite clearly and loudly - even if not yet heard by many enough - states that human awareness need not be stuck for ages into a dichotomy between a fixed and so called profane or immanent realm, and on the other hand, what appears to be a totally removed, hardly at all, if ever accessible, and an equally fixed so called sacred or transcendental one. Indeed, our awareness can become open

to earlier absolutely unimaginable realms, and can keep being open to an ongoing flux of such realms.

This, indeed, may be by far the most important precedent modern hard science has produced.

And that precedent already shows a never ever manifested quality of our human awareness. A quality which, when considered as such and all in itself, need not necessarily be confined to being elicited by the scientific way of revelation alone, the way which, as it happened, has created such a precedent. Indeed, it need not be inconceivable that it is not only and only the ways of science, and specifically, of hard science, which alone can bring forth such ongoing revelations, bring them forth, and then pursue them further, and build upon them ...

It may, indeed, be a peculiarity of present day humanity - say, a socio-historical or biological peculiarity - that we have not attained to any other way to produce a massive and ongoing flow into our awareness of new relevant realms, and do so in clearly credible, as well as practically useful ways, except by hard science research. Certainly, no other way known to us can compete with the credibility of the realms opened up by such research. And as far as we know, throughout human history, we have never had available any other way with the same kind of fortunate effect.

Third, we may by now note that our bodies and emotions seem to have far more limited ranges of functioning, than our awareness. This is indeed one of the messages brought to us by all those relevant realms opened up by hard science research. Consequently, far more attention and interest should be given to that essential difference, with a corresponding focus on further exploring and widening the ranges of our awareness. And here we are considering ranges which are as credible and practically relevant, as those produced by hard science research. This issue is related to what later will be mentioned as the "abstract" ability of our awareness ...

Fourth, we can of course note that we simply cannot become aware of all realms that may be relevant to our lives. More precisely, we cannot

become, so to say, equally aware. And then, the basic dichotomy between those realms of which we are, let us say, positively aware, and on the other hand, those of which we are aware only as not being aware of sufficiently, or in fact at all, thus we may say, we are negatively aware of, will remain in times to come ...

What can change, however, and hard science research has proved it clearly and massively, is the delimitation between the two sides of that dichotomy.

Also as mentioned, what can change is that our two way interactions would no longer be so much limited only to the first side of that dichotomy, the so called positive side. Indeed, the long existing, yet so much tentative tradition of trying to get somehow actively involved with what may be called the negative side of that dichotomy could, hopefully, benefit a lot from more attention and interest done in the solid credibility spirit pioneered by hard science ...

Be it as it may, we should try to make a far more serious and systematic use of the precedent created by modern hard science research, than we have done so far, when we face the issue of spiritual poverty ...

And in doing so, we should follow the standards established by high science research regarding the solid credibility of the new relevant realms discovered, thus avoiding the plethora of earlier attempts, among them the so called ESP studies which, regrettably, contributed so much to discredit all such ventures ...

Shall we attempt some conclusions which, as so often, risk to simplify things too much ?

Well, hard science research and the technology based on it created two unprecedented and ongoing inputs within the human affairs :

First, and upon which the concern of most focuses rather exclusively is the accumulation of new knowledge, added power upon Nature, and of course, increasing general material wellbeing.

Second, and which is quite unnoticed, is to show that human awareness, even on the level of individuals, has the ability to keep opening up to new and new relevant realms.

Or to put it simple : these two inputs show that it is not only our stomachs which can get filled up with more and more food, but it is also our awareness which can become open to more and more new relevant realms.

And the fact is, that we should better not fill up our stomachs more and more, since it is not healthy ...

On the other hand, opening up our awareness to ever more of the newly discovered relevant realms has not yet produced any ill health, at least as far as the media would know about it, and report it ...

It seems, therefore, that we humans are quite a bit less physical beings, then mental ones ...

And of course, who knows of what other kind as well ...

Most remarkable in this regard is Clement of Alexandria (c 150 - c. 215 AD), a Christian theologian who, as seen towards the end of these lines, was fully aware of the extraordinary ability of human awareness to open up itself and keep expanding ...

Two Aspects of Human Awareness ?

A remarkable feature of human awareness is that, albeit only on occasion, it can be so clearly aware of its own limitations. Indeed, we may sometime say “I have not got the vaguest idea about that” ...

Unfortunately, we do not practice that ability with the honesty and frequency that may be actually required, and do not do so even when alone, and thus only having to face our own selves ...

Yet that ability exists, and in certain situations it comes to the fore ...

The above four questions are, among others, an invitation to practice that ability, and consequently, try to reconsider our own individual human condition right from its very fundamentals ...

St. Augustine may have said that mind is memory, as C-S mentions it ...

Well, mind may rather be awareness of context, hopefully of much of the whole relevant context of one's existence, of one's very being ...

And memory, just as much as one's vision, imagination, expectations, or for that matter, lack of anything of the kind, related to one's future, all are but parts of one's relevant context ...

Thus we may as well try a reformulation of those four questions in the following single one :

1. How do you intend to get into a two way interaction with that

immense part of the context relevant to you, context which the only way you may ever be aware of is that you shall never be aware of it ?

When thinking a bit more about that question, we may hopefully be struck by the extremes of ignorant arrogance and arrogant ignorance we tend to exhibit related to it. Indeed, by never asking that question, or even worse, by simply not being aware of it, not to mention, by automatically rejecting its relevance when we may by some chance be faced with it, we do not necessarily avoid its relevance ...

After all it is not only in matters of laws that the ignorance about a law does not absolve one from its validity, from being in fact subjected to it. No, not at all. And in fact, the ignorance about, or the rejection of fundamental questions and issues relevant to one's life do not absolve us either from being inevitably subjected to them ...

As mentioned above, it may indeed appear that our awareness does happen to function in nothing short but a clearly dichotomous manner : there are some realms we are aware of, and on the other hand, there are immensely many realms we are not aware of, and shall never be, either as individuals, or even as a whole species.

As for the first kind of realms, we may possibly manage to devise certain methods for a two way interaction. Related to the second kind of realms, it may appear that all we can do is to pray ...

But then, of course, we may have to reconsider thoroughly what prayer can actually mean ...

What has, however, happened in modern times, and happened due to hard science, is that such a dichotomy has been seriously challenged ...

Indeed, the boundaries between the two sides of that dichotomy started to move quite fast even during the life time of a given generation. And those boundaries have kept by now moving during the last several generations ...

There are, needless to say, ways of being in which those boundaries

may fade away to a good extent, or simply cease to have such an importance. Indeed, human awareness - while fully sane and awoken - can be in states in which the usual structures of time and space, or even the structures revealed by Special or General Relativity, Quantum Theory, and so on, are but vaguely, if at all present, let alone relevant ...

And such states of awareness, or ways of being, have been known for ages ...

Needless to say, for such states of awareness, or ways of being, distinctions such a theist versus atheist, or qualifications like agnostic, cheerfully desperate, and so on, become simply inexistent, or at best childishly irrelevant ...

Here however, we are rather interested in ways of being in which those boundaries which mark the mentioned dichotomy have a significant importance, even if they keep so manifestly moving during the lifetime of any given human generation ...

Two Way Interactions ...

As it happens, it appears that ever since ancient times there has been some awareness about the second side of the above dichotomy, namely, the side with that immensity of realms we are not - and never in our lifetime become - aware of, except by some awareness of not being aware, let alone, fully enough aware of them. And such various approaches to that second side of the dichotomy proved, indeed, to be rather pragmatic throughout the ages, even if rather as a rule, they have been massively distorted, manipulated and abused as sources of power over the vulnerable and helpless masses of humans.

A large and diverse category of such approaches are constituted by what goes under the name of prayer. And prayers do indeed come in endless forms ...

Some of the more, shall we say, refined ones are such as meditation, silent prayer, contemplation, reverie, and other ones of the kind. And they may be seen as more refined since they are not reduced to one or another specific request. Instead, they may be trying a deeper two way connection or interaction between us, and on the other hand, the relevant realms of which we are not aware, except by being aware that we are not aware of them. Indeed, such forms of prayer may be trying to act according to the saying :

“If you want to enjoy the fruits of a tree, you better water its roots.”

Nowadays, prayers have ended up being mostly confined to religions and their adepts. And the only two way interactions with those immense realms which are relevant to us, yet we shall never become aware of in our lives, tend to happen by chance if at all, and not so

much by our own conscious and more or less competently active initiative ...

The great, and so far unique feature of hard science is precisely its doubly solid credibility. Namely, its methods are objective and rigorous, and then in addition, its results offers so many useful everyday applications through technology.

Clearly, therefore, there is an immense gap or divide between whatever prayer may be, and on the other hand, hard science research.

And then, related to the mentioned two way interaction, one may wonder whether we humans could sometime develop a third approach, an approach not less impressive in its solid credibility than that of hard science, but one with a significantly larger and deeper reach in bringing new relevant realms to our awareness ...

Research versus Development ...

Traditional societies were marked above all by the fact that awareness of new relevant realms came about very slowly, if at all, and hardly without exception, only after a number of generations. What characterized life was the “development”, or rather, routine endless repetition of what had been known for quite a long time. Tradition, authority and the ways of majority were carrying the day ...

And as the story of Giordano Bruno, and of other thinkers who tried to open up new relevant realms shows it, it was hardly at all the case that “research” would be actively supported and promoted in order to find such realms ...

The first time in known human history that such actively and significantly supported “research” is happening is with the emergence of hard science research. And the fortunate feature accompanying it is the remarkable credibility which follows it, not least due to the manifest utility of the resulting technologies and products that can be enjoyed by large numbers of humans ...

And the essential novel aspect of this “research” - that is, of research in hard science - namely, that it is not limited to the traditional “development” only, is precisely its focus on finding new relevant realms for our awareness.

Needless to say, the motivation for such a support for “research” is not exactly the most insightful ...

Francis Bacon, back in the early 1600s, managed to convince important persons that “knowledge is power” ... And so often, it is precisely in the interest of acquiring such power, and power not necessarily in

its more subtle or commendable variants, which makes modern societies support actively “research” ...

Consequently, it should not come as a surprise that the obstacles facing “research” pursued for the sake of the above mentioned essential novelty, namely, for finding new relevant realms for our awareness, are numerous, and seem not to diminish at all, if not in fact, seem to be growing ...

Two aspects may be critically important in this regard.

First, very few individuals, relative to the six billion plus humans, are sufficiently aware of more essential aspects of that rather unprecedented novelty, let alone, are qualified enough to be active participants in supporting, furthering and expanding it. Therefore, the sustainability of the mentioned kind of “research” is extremely vulnerable. Indeed, attaining a qualification for such a “research” requires considerable individual and social investment. And both individual and social interest may decay enough, or simply, they may sufficiently weaken due to any number of reasons, in order to make it unlikely that such individuals keep being there in sufficient numbers. The number of present day societies which are manifestly unable to produce such individuals in numbers anywhere near proportionate to their populations is considerable and well known. And that failure most certainly cannot be attributed to the racial or ethnic inferiority of the respective populations, but rather to a general lack of awareness about the sorry situation in which they keep themselves ...

The situation is, therefore, much unlike in traditional and millennia long existing agricultural societies where the vast majority of population managed to learn the required qualifications without any significant social investment, let alone, sophisticated institutional setups. And it is worth recalling in this regard that, even the presently most advanced societies have had more than half of their population working in agriculture merely a few generations ago. No wonder, therefore, that we seem not to have had time enough - time seen on an historical scale - to digest and also assimilate the extraordinary novelty of our “research” based present societies, let alone the reality of their

unprecedented vulnerability ...

Second, and following from the above, the fact is that a very large majority of the population even in the presently most advanced societies has no any realistic idea about the nature and vulnerabilities of our “research” societies. And this is a potentially devastating state of affairs especially in democratic societies, where the explicit and enthusiastic support of majority may not always be necessary for pursuing a certain cause, but certainly, the determined opposition can so easily damage any cause, no matter how worthy ...

The Ways of the Good Old Baron von Mnchausen ...

We can of course set aside God and religion, and just like the baron in that story, try to pull ourselves out of the marsh, by pulling our own wig upwards, and meanwhile squeezing the horse we ride on tightly between our knees ...

And needless to say, so many among us are so taken up by our own ego as to find such an approach most commendable ...

Such are the amusing, or often less so, ways of not considering the above single question ...

As for the existence, or otherwise, of God, it is - when considered without the temptations of fast reactions - a matter of giving, or on the contrary, not giving some name to why it is that the good baron's approach does not really work in so many situations ...

Aristotle, for instance, speaks about the Unmoved Prime Mover, and it does not name it in some other way.

The ancient Hebrews, and still the present day religious Jews, find it necessary to abstain from using the name of God, lest one may end up with the feeling and idea that one can in fact get hold of Him in such a rather simple everyday way, that is, merely by naming it. Indeed, instead, a variety of substitutes are used when referring to God, among them Adonai, Elochim, YAHVE, and so on, each of them being explicitly stated, and widely known among them, not to be God's name. And when it would come to God's real name, the nearest one can come in the Old Testament is in Exodus 3:14, where God tells Moses that His name is "I Am that I Am". Amusingly, the very next

thing what God tells Moses is that he should tell the Children of Israel that "I Am" has sent him, and thus not "I Am that I Am" ...
 Was it that God found "I Am that I AM" to be a bit much for the level of understanding of those Children of Israel ... ?

Well, be it as it may, the fact is that, even nowadays, "I Am that I Am" seems not to be so easily understandable to all sorts of other ... Children ... as well ...

In Islam, Allah is a similarly esoteric entity, if any entity at all ...

Hinduism, on the other hand, keeps emphasizing the name of, shall we say, that all underlying Unmoved Prime Mover ...

Buddhism, on the other hand, makes it a crucial starting point not only not to give any name, but even not to become concerned in any way with that Unmoved Prime Mover ...

And then, who should really care whether there is a God, or on the contrary, there is no God ?

Indeed, it rather seems that ... man created, and keeps creating God ... And altogether, it is a mere side issue ...

It may be of interest in this regard that, in Christian tradition itself, there is a differentiation between God and God-Head, the latter being an underlying entity, or rather principle, of the former, which is mostly the active, creative aspect. One may, perhaps, say that God is the Prime Mover in the Aristotelian formulation, while God-Head is the Unmoved aspect of it ...

By the way, in Hebrew, the expression "I Am" in Exodus 3:14 is one single word, and not two words in which one has a subject and a predicate. The same lack of syntactic structure and single word is used under various forms in Hinduism, when referring to the ultimate, all underlying reality ...

Here we can, perhaps, recall another well known Zen-Buddhist saying :

“You show the fool the Moon, and he is looking at your finger.”

Indeed, God, let alone a name, any name of God, is at most a “finger” trying to point somewhere, while the “Moon”, much unlike in the above saying where it is a well known object, is at best perhaps that immensity of relevant realms of which the only awareness we may ever acquire is that we shall never be aware of ...

So much, therefore, for being theist, agnostic or atheist ...

They are, indeed, rather secondary choices ...

As for religion, but of course, it is a human, an all too human institution ...

And as such, it is not much different from, say, restaurants : some of us like Chinese ones, others among us prefer the Italian or French kind ...

And once we may become more accustomed with the above, we may then try and honestly start wondering about that one question, namely :

1. How do you intend to get into a two way interaction with that immense part of the context relevant to you, context which the only way you may ever be aware of is that you shall never be aware of ?

Now, to the extent that we may grasp some of the points in the above question, we may realize that the following dichotomy is quite likely facing us :

- either we humans - as a society, or even as individuals - are indeed quite sufficient upon ourselves, and thus, we can help ourselves through the Mnchausen method,
- or on the contrary, we are rooted to a relevant extent in realms which for evermore remain outside of our awareness either as individuals, or even as a whole species.

The first alternative - usually associated with various possible qualifications of the label humanistic - is obviously the one which C-S is completely committed to. However, its self-description as atheism, or cheerful despair, seems to miss the point. Indeed, what it happens to reject is not any kind of God, but simply the quite likely possibility that the human individual, and even human society as a whole, is far from being self-sufficient to a satisfactory extent. On the other hand, what so tenaciously - although quite insecurely - tries to hold to is in fact not much more than the Mnchausen method ...

The second alternative in the dichotomy above has seemingly been just about altogether expropriated by religions. And due to a variety of reasons, many of them not quite clear or not so easy to discover, that second alternative got presented to the public in a variety of heavily distorted forms to which all sort of additional irrelevant constructs were associated with any number of dubious ulterior motives. After all, religions are mere human institutions. And we humans are so much prone to mess, and of course, monkey business ...

As for the amusing part, we may note the following.

In Psalm 82:6 it is written :

“I have said, Ye are gods; and all of you are the children of most High.”

And in John10:34, Jesus Christ makes a direct reference to that saying by asking ”Is it not written in your law, 'I said, you are gods'?”

As for Hinduism, in its Advaita Vedanta variant, for instance, each human individual is supposed to be centered upon the very same and unique Supreme Self. In this regard, ancient Hindu wisdom sees the human individual as a carriage, which is the human body, driven by horses which represent the emotions, controlled by a coachman who stands for the mind, and with the Lord sitting inside the carriage, the Lord for the sake of whom all the setup exists, the Lord which so often is not even known to exist by the coachman, let alone, by the horses. Another ancient Hindu statement is that the actor in the human individual is divine, while one cannot say quite the same about his or her

actions, or acting. Also it is stated that we are born nothing short of being pure, perfect and complete ...

And then, as gods that we are, it may appear that, in certain ways, and upon suitable conditions, each human individual may in fact be able to live by the Mnchausen method ...

On the other hand, the way various alternatives of humanism, among them that of the cheerful despair of C-S, see the situation of the Mnchausen method, based upon which they are supposed to function, as being severely reduced and confined to the possibilities of a mere human individual, one who is in fact just about floating somewhere in a chaotic and at best indifferent world ...

Well, is it not quite amusing to see that the two so sharply distinct alternatives of the above dichotomy lead to the very same pragmatic approach ? Namely, to Mnchausen's method ?

Except that in the so called humanistic alternative there is no all powerful God, but only a plethora of rather emasculated, vulnerable, insecure, and at best, cheerfully desperate ...mini gods ...

And if the those two alternatives do indeed lead to the same end, then, is it not worth exploring more thoroughly, and in fact, as thoroughly as possible, whether we are indeed in the situation of, shall we say, merely the "weak" variant of the Mnchausen method, the variant corresponding to that chosen by cheerfully desperate humanists, or on the contrary, we may perhaps be the potential beneficiaries of nothing short of the "strongest possible" variant of that celebrated method, the variant befitting the gods we are claimed to be, we the children of most high, in the words of the psalmist ?

And, please, and by all means, do not allow yourselves to be overtaken here by an excessive bout of modesty. Yes, the meek may indeed inherit the Earth, as Jesus Christ says in the Sermon on the Mount. But if you are by any chance not meek enough, and want to inherit more, much much more, and in fact, just about everything, then you should not plunge yourself with cheerful desperation into accepting so easily,

totally and for evermore the assumption that can only lead to a weak variant of the Mnchausen method. No, not at all. Rather, you should invest a considerable concern in the possibility of the second above alternative being valid. And you should try to benefit in this respect of the long record of sages supporting the veracity of that alternative, a record going back millennia, and known on several continents ...

C-S recalls Montaigne's advice that "There is nothing so beautiful and legitimate as to play the man well and properly." And then C-S adds that "We must try to be worthy of what humanity made of itself - and thus of what civilization has made of us ... Religion can neither guarantee that we do so, nor exempt us from needing to do so ..."

Well, we certainly can try to learn a lot and benefit from millennia of civilization, and not only by reading, say, Kama Sutra, the history of art and architecture, a variety of cooking books, or political philosophy ...

And then, if we do indeed manage to benefit so, we may be able to avoid ending up with a simple youthful overreaction by being so prejudiced that we filter out a vast treasure of wisdom literature - be it of the kind that later got appropriated by one or another religion, or on the contrary, of the kind that managed to avoid such a fate. Certainly, such a filtering out does not necessarily help even in pursuing the limited aim suggested among many other thinkers by a Montaigne, for instance ...

Can we thus conclude that, well, the method of our good old baron von Mnchausen does indeed work ?

But most likely, only and only in its strongest ever possible variants ?

And therefore, that method is far from being for sissies ?

The gap or divide, then, is not so much between persons who are theists, religious, or anything of the kind, and on the other hand, atheists, agnostics, and the like. And the issue is not about faith, fidelity, or on the contrary, the lack of either of them. No, not at all, since such

divisions are but the product of a traditional view, a view marked by its long and strongly entrenched rigidity, a rigidity for which an ongoing flow of new relevant realms entering the public awareness within every generation is simply unimaginable, let alone an actual reality, there in the open, and for everybody to see ...

And nowadays, with the ongoing dynamics of ever new relevant realms brought about by science and technology, and entering a wider public awareness within the lifetime of the same generation, it is hardly credible to further hold to old divisions, let alone, to their traditionally well known regrettable consequences ...

And important such regrettable consequences are there quite a few. After all, all those atheists, agnostics, cheerful desperates and many others of the kind cannot simply be completely wrong ...

And amusingly, they are not, precisely due to the fact that it was the very dynamics in our times of the ongoing flow of new realms entering general awareness which made them question the long established old ways. But then, on the other hand, they seem to have failed to embrace to a sufficient extent that very dynamics which did actually liberate them, and instead, they only allowed it to liberate them in part ...

Sorry, but Belief and Faith Are Good Only for ... Sissies ...

A story from my own childhood may perhaps be useful here.

When I was about ten year old, during a lunch at home on a Sunday, sometime in the summer, one of my parents made the remark that, of course, I knew about the mistaken belief according to which our Planet Earth was flat and immobile at the very centre of the universe, a belief which everybody, including the most learned and wise, had had until a mere couple of centuries earlier. And then, my other parent asked me whether I thought that, ever since we got over that belief, we humans have by now been free from any other such mistaken belief regarding some important issue.

Well, that second question managed to shock me most powerfully, since it instantly occurred to me that we could indeed still be having certain similarly mistaken beliefs, and not merely about some marginal issues ...

But then, before I managed to say one single word, one of my parents further asked when, in my view, was that fortunate moment during the last few centuries, if it ever was one like that, when we humans ceased to believe in nonsense with respect to more important issues ?

Well, needless to say, not yet being recovered from the massive shock of the previous question, that third question was just about to have my mind blocked for longer ...

And then, as if in order to really block my mind for a good few moments, one of my parents continued by suggesting that, perhaps, I should make a list of, say, half a dozen such mistaken beliefs which we humans were still holding to even in the present ...

Fortunately, after a few moments, I managed to recover. And what I felt so suddenly and most disturbingly, I formulated as a question to my parents : but then, how can we humans possibly ever trust ourselves, when we can hold for so long to such totally wrong beliefs in such most important issues ?

Needless to say, it took quite a few discussions till my parents could reassure me that we do have certain methods which can help us avoid holding to wrong beliefs, and do so for a longer time ...

Well, the issues whether the Earth was flat or not, or whether it moved or was immobile, were not merely of intellectual concern. And to add to the debacle, there had for millennia been most elementary facts experienced by countless humans which could suggest strong doubts about the Earth being flat. Indeed, whenever ships left a harbour, quite everybody knew that the lower part of the ship would vanish first from the sight of those on the shore, and the last part of the ship to be still seen was the top of the mast, if there was any such mast. Furthermore, and precisely in the opposite order, when a ship was coming into a harbour, those on the shore would first see its highest parts above water, and only after that would they see the part which was just above the floating line. And such a phenomenon could clearly not happen if the Earth was flat. Certainly, in such a case all of the ship above the water would be seen all of the time, and the only thing to happen would be that all of the ship would look smaller and smaller to those on shore who watched it depart, till it would become a mere point, and then vanish altogether. And when coming into the harbour, those on the shore would first see a point on the water, and the point would grow, but in doing so, it would all the time be the whole ship, and not merely one or another part of it ...

Yet, for millennia, no one seemed to bother to put, so to say, one and one together ...

Needless to say, after that summertime lunch, I have for evermore been quite reluctant to base myself on mere beliefs, no matter how strongly they may have suggested themselves to me ...

And in this regard, my parents had fortunately quite fully attained their intention ...

So then, why do we still fall for beliefs ? And so often, fall so easily ?

And to add to that, why do we fall so easily for so many beliefs which are in fact mere superstitions ?

Of course, beliefs concern what in philosophy is called ontology, namely, what is supposed to be real, what is supposed to exist in fact. And therefore, beliefs may indeed - and do actually - reach to the very deepest and most important constituents upon which our cognitive and affective selves or beings live and function. Such beliefs may, therefore, be seen as the most important among our vital assumptions, so deep in us and so important to us that often we may not even be aware when they command us, or how they command us along the various moments of our everyday lives. And in fact, we simply may not be aware of what they actually are ...

The Interplay Between Our Affective and Cognitive Beings ...

Regardless of being adepts of Darwinism, or not, the presence of animals on our Planet Earth can constitute a most fortunate opportunity to learn about ourselves as humans, and also try to improve who we happen to be. And obviously, four avenues are widely open for such a venture, namely, we can study :

1. In which ways we function better than animals, and do so to our advantage.
2. In which ways we function better than animals, and do so to our disadvantage.
3. In which ways we function less well than animals, and it is to our advantage.
4. In which ways we function less well than animals, and it is to our disadvantage.

As it happens, we very much tend to focus only on the first aspect above, do so with a rather arrogant sense of most obvious superiority, and miss so much to note the other aspects, especially the second of them.

But here, we are interested in other issues than a more thorough study along the above four categories. Namely, we shall focus for a while on the dual aspect of us humans, namely, of being endowed both with an affective being, as well as with a cognitive one.

The affective being is clearly there in animals as well, and quite well

developed at that, especially in the higher animals, among them of course the monkeys and apes. On the other hand, none of the animals seem to have a cognitive being which would come anywhere near to our human one.

And yet, our human cognitive being, that is, the coachman in the ancient Hindu analogy, is hardly without exception but a mere servant of our affective being, a set of rather wild horses, hell bent on as continuous a flow as possible of instant gratifications ...

And the Lord inside the coach, what about that Lord ?

Is he for evermore to be condemned to nothing else but, say, a cheerful desperation ?

Mere Sensation of Truth = Truth, or Is It Indeed ?

A typical and fundamentally unfortunate failure of our affective being, a failure we share of course with the animals, is the extremely strong tendency instantly to take our mere sensations of truth for nothing less than the very truth itself ...

This is, needless to say, a most important and consequential ontological position in one's life, and it is so both in the short and longer term. And in the case of animals it may indeed be - without any other significant choice being there for them - absolutely indispensable for moment to moment survival. Indeed, when out in the jungle, either as a prey or predator, an animal definitely does not have the luxury to sit down and try to sort out which of its mere sensations of truth may indeed happen to be the truth itself. Instead, it must act as fast and with as total a commitment to the action taken as possible, since otherwise it may never ever have a chance to do so again. And then, no doubt, the more strong and instant the sensation of truth, the more it is instantly taken to be truth itself ...

But now, we humans, we who happen to live in some sort of civilization, are we indeed still condemned to the very same sort of ontological approach ?

Of course, if and when we may face a major and imminent danger to life, health or property, and we are caught in a situation we have not been prepared for in any way whatsoever, well, we may indeed feel reduced to the case of animals in the middle of a wild jungle ...

But then, it is precisely one of the features of any a civilization that we are not so often faced with any major and imminent danger to life,

health or property ...

And then, why nevertheless behave like animals in a jungle ?

Why instantly take one's own mere sensation of truth for the very truth itself ?

Well, the most likely answer seems to be that we, so to say, put the horses before the coachman, and even more so before the Lord, if ever we manage to become aware of the Lord sitting inside the coach ...

Yes, our affective being is so easily replacing the actual Lord ...

And for that purpose, is using our cognitive being ...

And in doing so - given the abilities of our cognitive being which abilities, comparatively, animals hardly have - our affective being is of course so much more effective than any animal's could ever be ...

So easily, indeed, do we replace the Lord with our affective being that this phenomenon all alone, and without the need for any additional archaeological or other proof, can rather decisively support the Darwinian claim to evolution, the claim that we humans have evolved from animals, and did so rather recently, with our specific cognitive being not yet properly enough integrated with our earlier and very strong affective one ...

And then, how many decisions do we make, decisions in which, no matter what amount and quality of cognitive input may be present, our affective being ends up so easily carrying the day ?

How many decisions, such as for instance, to approach life through a cheerful desperation ?

Amusingly, the way to avoid that animal like behaviour is very well known, and since time immemorial, it is expressed in sayings like :

“First measure seven times, and only after that cut.”

To be more precise, it is most certainly a blessing to have sensations of truth, and if possible, plenty of them, and quite strong as well. However, one should better try to validate each and every one of one's mere sensations of truth, and do so no matter how strong they may be ...

Validate !!??

Yes, of course, even if hardly without exception it is a painstaking and time consuming venture, a venture that one would most gladly avoid ...

Well, as it happens, only Mathematics, from among all human ventures, has a well and clearly defined validation methodology, called "proof". Other hard sciences, such as for instance, Physics, rely both on Mathematics and experiments in their processes of validation. And in this respect, their validation methodologies are sufficiently credible. On the other hand, ventures like Social Science or Political Science, let alone, Philosophy or Theology, do not, and simply cannot have validation methodologies that may come anywhere near to the credibility of those of Mathematics or Physics. And the reason for that failure is simple and clear, even if so often disregarded, if not in fact, squarely rejected. Namely, in such ventures, and much unlike in Mathematics, the validation methodology cannot be reduced to rigorous mathematical proofs.

As for experiments, rigorous scientific ones, well, how do you do experiments which may involve many years of your own life ? Many years, after which you could still end up without clear answers, or on the contrary, you could still hold so much to a sensation of truth which is actually not truth ?

As for experiments on the social scale, well, during the last couple of centuries, and even more so during the last one, we have been doing such experiments at horrible costs to far too many humans ...

So much for being better than animals, and being so quite often to our own disadvantage ...

Back to C-S, and Starting with Its First Chapter

In its first chapter, the book starts with several admirable statements. Here are some of them : “God, by definition, surpasses us. Religions do not. They are human, all too human ... God, if it exists, is transcendent ...God is reputed to be perfect. No religion can ever be so ... The existence of God is open to question. The existence of religions is not ...”

Of course, an atheist rejects the existence of God, and thus also the need for any religion. And then, what is such an atheist left with to do ? And before doing anything at all, what is he or she left with as a foundation for existence, a foundation which may inform his or her life, thus helping to keep to a life which is not mere nihilism, or simply run by animal type instincts ?

C-S gives an answer with two components : be in communion with certain other humans, exhibit a fidelity to a certain prejudice which in the case of the author of C-S is cheerful despair ...

The communion is, of course, supposed to replace the traditional church going crowd, while fidelity is the substitute for the good old faith ...

An amusing possible consequence along such a path is what in C-S is called a “Christian atheist, or Integrated Goy” ...

At least this is what is likely to follow in “What remains of the Christian West when it ceases to be Christian” ...

Well, altogether, when facing such fundamental issues, C-S exhibits a

marked responsibility both on individual and social level. The trouble is, however, that it is not aware of essential and unprecedented features of our times mentioned above, and related to the ongoing inflow of new relevant realms which are being brought to our awareness. Instead, C-S is marshalling a considerable amount of citations from old masters, old in the sense of having lived in times which allowed the reduction of one's thinking to concepts and categories that tended to stay the same for evermore ...

For instance, when C-S asks "What difference does loss of faith make?", the answers are anchored in such a traditional framework.

One of such answers is that loss of faith does not affect knowledge. Another answer is that morals are not - or rather, need not inevitably be - affected either by loss of faith.

Both these conclusions are questionable. Faith, indeed, can quite dramatically direct one's interests in knowledge, and alternatively, can close as irrelevant or even undesirable whole avenues of enquiry. Examples in this regard abound, for instance, in the history of science.

As for morals, the arguments in C-S are convincing only for good hearted persons, one of whom is so obviously the author of C-S himself. Certainly, it is not so easy to argue against an Ivan Karamazov who says that "If God does not exist, everything is allowed." And citing Kant or Alain does not much impress when the latter, for instance, states that "Ethics means knowing that we are spirit and thus have certain obligations, for noblesse oblige. Ethics is neither more nor less than a sense of dignity."

On the other hand, the two sections in the first chapter, entitled "Nihilism and Barbarism", respectively, "Nihilism and Sophistry : The Two Temptations of Post-modernity" are worth pondering about a lot ...

But then, comes the section "Cheerful Despair", a section which, all alone, may make one write a letter to the author of C-S, in order kindly to inform him about far far more preferable alternatives so

widely open even to atheists ...

That section starts with Kant's question "What may I hope for ?"

Well, having claimed - quite questionably - that the loss of hope does not change knowledge or morals, C-S now admits that it certainly changes to a considerable extent the hope, or for that matter, the hopelessness in human existence.

What C-S does not state, however, is that faith, mere faith, any faith for that matter, is a most sorry prejudice. And as such, it should be avoided, no matter what advantages, be they related to hope or whatever else, may elicit.

Furthermore, C-S does not seem to be aware of the fact that hope, just as much as hopelessness, is but a form of faith, and as such, it is merely yet another prejudice ...

Altogether, cheerful despair is also no more than a mere faith, and thus a prejudice ...

But to put it a bit more blatantly : we humans, just like animals, must face the physical world each and every day all over again, and that means among others, that we have to find enough to eat and drink, not to mention that we have to keep breathing all the time ...

Is there, therefore, any sane human who would like to find such a food and such a drink, let alone, such an air, of which one single intake may suffice for the rest of one's long and happy life ?

And if you happen to answer that, most honestly, you do not in any way whatsoever dream, let alone hope, for such a miracle, then why do you try to find a faith, a belief, a hope, or any other instance of one specific prejudice which - once you subjected yourself to it as a slave who would never ever re-think it afterwards - you do nevertheless expect it to keep you alive during a long and happy life ?

Why indeed are you ready and capable to face physical reality in such

a day after day, one day at a time fashion, while when dealing with ontology, you cannot ever think of anything better than falling for evermore for one single particular prejudice ?

Let us, at the risk of repeating it, recall that the fundamental issues addressed in C-S are above all ontological, that is, are about what exists, what is real, what should we therefore take seriously, regardless of its practical advantages or disadvantages, and either we like it or not. And since the emergence of modern hard science which inaugurated the flow into our awareness of ever new relevant realms, a truly unprecedented aspect of approaching ontology has come into play. Namely, what is even more important, in fact, much more important than all the specific relevant realms discovered by hard science is the enriching mobility - never before experienced by us humans in known history - of what we can consider to exist, to be real ...

Clement of Alexandria could only dream about such a blessing, and then tried to identify it in Gnosticism ...

We, nowadays, do no longer need to dream about it, and one can hardly think about anything more solidly credible than the new relevant realms brought forth by hard science ...

And once such an ongoing expansion starts happening, one should better reconsider accordingly one's earlier and long time established, traditional approaches to ontology ...

As it happens, however, in C-S one can hardly find any such reconsideration ...

What one finds instead is the testimony of a truly good man who, having lost a traditional faith, has tried so very hard over quite a number of years to find an alternative ontology, one single and for evermore saving ontology. And in doing so, he has missed on the unprecedented novelty of the ways ontology can be pursued in our times ...

But to try to get to what may be an important point :

Who said that all approaches to ontology are reducible to language ?

Or, who said that all approaches to ontology are confined to our cognitive being ?

Are there, indeed, other, and possibly yet more fundamental ways we humans may deal with ontology ?

According to a number of well established old traditions human approaches to ontology do indeed go beyond language or our cognitive being ...

No trace of such awareness can, however, be found in C-S ...

On Chapter Two : Does God Exist ?

C-S starts in chapter two with “Now comes the hardest part, or at least the most uncertain. Where God is concerned, two questions need to be raised : that of his definition and that of his existence ...”

Further, C-S states “I am what you may call a non-dogmatic atheist - that is, I do not claim to know that God does not exist, but I believe that he does not exist ...”

Well, honest and intelligent persons also reduced themselves to believing that Planet Earth is flat ...

What kind of foundation can belief, that is, mere belief, give to fundamental ontological issues ?

Now of course, if you set up a definition of God, or at least some sort of partial definition, as for instance one can find in C-S on page 68, then it is not so difficult to shoot down that alleged God, or at least, to end up believing in its nonexistence ...

On the other hand, it is hard to think of any sane person who, for instance, at the present moment, would claim to be aware of absolutely everything that exists, or in other words, who would believe to have completely solved the ontological problem. And then, if one is so determined to give a definition of God, so that it can shoot it down immediately after, well, why not venture the following tentative definition of an aspect of what traditionally is called God, aspect that quite clearly cannot so easily be disposed with :

- The likely infinity of realms which exist outside of one’s present awareness - and about which one’s only awareness seems to be

that they are outside of one's present awareness - can be seen as an aspect of what traditionally is called God, at least to the extent that, possibly, infinitely many such realms are nevertheless relevant to one's existence.

Of course, the gap between knowing, and on the other hand, merely believing or having faith in, is immense. And when and where our knowledge happens to end, what can we do ? What can we do, in order to avoid undue psychological discomfort related to ontology ?

And is it, indeed, in the realms of "doing" that an end to such discomfort is to be found ?

But even more importantly : why should we escape for good all ontological discomfort ?

Well, traditionally, when and where we run out of knowledge, we can hardly help running into the refuge of belief , faith, unsupported conviction, or straight superstition ...

And when it comes to ontology, the easy satisfactions such a run can offer seem indeed considerable. And as we can see nowadays with the Islamic version of suicidal terrorists, such benefits may appear to be extraordinary even to the extent that one is ready to sacrifice one's life, and do so right now ...

This is, of course, but one example where our affective being turns our cognitive being into a rather miserable slave ...

And lo and behold, to be a slave sometimes makes one feel better than to be free ...

Freedom, as is well known, has two sharply different variants : freedom from, and freedom for.

In order to enjoy the first, one need not always do anything at all, need not always qualify in any specific way since, on occasion, one can simply become "free from" by some lucky event ...

Far from being the same, however, with freedom for. Indeed, in order to be able to enjoy it, one must possess certain qualifications, certain abilities ...

And much of the history of humanity, and even more so during the endless varieties of liberation struggles of the last few centuries, is but the story of considerable number of humans firmly believing that ... one is free from having to be free for ...

Hence the rather rapid degeneration and failure of such struggles, a degeneration and failure which, nevertheless, hardly ever teaches many enough that one is simply not free from having to be free for ...

And when it comes to that immense gap between knowledge, and on the other hand, mere belief, faith or conviction, we keep endlessly falling for the illusion that one can be free from the discomfort of not knowing, and be so without being free for anything better than a fixed prejudice, if not in fact, a superstition ...

Strangely enough, even within what traditionally has been considered as essentially a n era of faith, such as for instance, Christianity in Medieval Europe, there had been remarkable approaches to the immense gap between faith and knowledge. One such example is the anonymous book *The Cloud of Unknowing* which was written for monastic novices and gives certain simple basic instructions about how to come nearer to God, how to try to know God better ...

A rather trivial, yet widespread view of such books and instructions is to call them “mystical”, and then dismiss them as rather irrelevant for our modern times ...

And yet, an essential point in the mentioned anonymous book, for instance, a point even if less directly stated, is the stress on knowing, rather than first of all, and above all, on mere blind but most determined faith ...

And the only meaning the label “mystical” attached to such books and teachings can have in a more appropriate manner is that two

fundamental ontological points are being stressed in them time and again, namely :

- The utter unknowable nature of what they call God, or the cloud of unknowing.
- The possibility of a relevant two way interaction with that cloud.

As for the first aspect, nowadays we can quite clearly see that the mentioned unknowable nature is far from being static, and thus given and fixed for evermore ...

It follows that such a “cloud of unknowing” is in fact far from being an absolute lost in its own contemplation of its own splendid and un-touchable isolation ...

Related to the second aspect, what is recommended is not so much in the realms of our affective being, but rather in that of our cognitive one. And a good part of it, as mentioned in the sequel, is detachment, which certainly is not exactly a mostly affective approach to ontology ...

But let us return in more detail to some of the arguments in this second chapter of C-S.

A first debate is about the alleged difference between atheists and agnostics, with the claim that agnostics are some sort of negative atheists, or atheists by default, since they do not deny the existence of God, but only leave that issue up in the air ...

Well, once again, we are not explained why is it so important to take up a prejudiced position, be it atheism or agnosticism ...

If the air which you breathe in is so important that you could not do without it even for a few minutes, then, please, may I kindly ask you : why do you so soon breathe it out ?

Yes indeed, breathing in and out are by far the most important activities in your life. Yet most certainly, you do not dream, let alone, hope

that a nice day may come when, at last, you can once and for good breathe in some very special kind of air, so that you need no longer bother about breathing for the rest of your life, a long and happy life ...

But then, with respect to a far less urgently and vitally important need, namely, an ontological one, you are ready to let yourself fall for one particular superstition, and expect to keep yourself satisfied in this way, and why not, even happy, for a long long time to come ...

Well, if this is how you choose to face and deal with ontology, then please, do not bother, and be an atheist, agnostic, or whatever you may like, including a cheerful desperate ...

C-S, of course, is ways more sophisticated and erudite in order not to dwell for longer on issues such as above. And then, Kant is brought in, among others, with his arguments from his celebrated Critique of Pure Reason. One of them is the three fold discrimination between opinion, faith, and lastly, knowledge. The respective differentiation, according to Kant, is made upon two criteria, namely, objective and subjective sufficiency. Opinion, says Kant, is insufficient both subjectively and objectively. Faith, on the other hand, is claimed to be considered by the beholder to be subjectively sufficient, while the issue of its objective sufficiency, or otherwise, is disregarded. As for knowledge, it is assumed to be both subjectively and objectively sufficient.

Amusingly, the alternative when one holds to a position which is objectively sufficient, but subjectively seems to be insufficient, is not considered. And this is precisely what the so called Greek mind is all about : to be able to follow truth, no matter where it may lead ...

Clearly, C-S is not quite able to stand up to such an approach. Instead, the criterion of subjective sufficiency has an all overriding priority. And then, in order to be able to reach the ... final ontological destination ... in one's life, a destination which makes one no more than a cheerful desperate, C-S is marshalling a considerable amount of arguments, many of them quite astute in their erudition ...

What a great pity, therefore, that when it comes to ontology, C-S sim-

ply cannot take the position which every human, and also animal, for that matter, does when it comes to such a vital and urgent need as breathing ...

And thus the unprecedented opportunities in approaching ontology brought about by the great novelty of our days, when so many relevant realms are continually brought to our awareness, are simply missing from C-S, although this novelty - either we like it, or not - does in fact make us perform a certain kind of permanent breathing regarding ontology ...

But if we are with a German master of the order of Kant, then perhaps, we may as well recall an earlier and not less seminal one, namely, Meister Eckhart, who anyhow is considered to be the first German philosopher, in addition to being a truly remarkable and strikingly original Christian theologian. In one of his many sermons, some in German and other ones in Latin, Eckhart makes the statement, no doubt rather shocking in the Medieval Europe of his time, that he praises one's detachment above one's love of God, since when a person is detached, such a detachment is obliging God to love that person ...

Needless to say, such or similar views of detachment are not unique to Eckhart even within Catholicism, since Saint Teresa of Avila, for instance, had a not much different view. And when we look further afield at various other better known traditions, among them Buddhism in particular, the idea of detachment in realms ontological has an impressive and widely known record ...

And quite clearly, detachment is not in the realms of "doing" ...

Neither is it an instance of our affective being using our cognitive one as a miserably subservient highly qualified and efficient slave ...

So much for the all overriding priority given to subjective sufficiency or satisfaction ...

As for knowledge, C-S seems to have a rather narrow view when it

states that "... no knowledge, either today or yesterday, has come along to decide" between atheism and faith.

Well, do we ever need a more clear knowledge than we have already nowadays about the fluidity of the boundaries between the known and the unknown ?

And what does that fluidity tell us in ontological terms, what else among others, than the sorry nature of a position which is based on ontological prejudice, or even mere superstition ?

But then of course, one can marshal arguments which claim to prove the existence, or otherwise, of God. And C-S is busy with three of the better known ones, namely, the so called ontological, cosmological and physico-theological ones, so as to be able immediately after that to shoot them down ...

This is, of course, good old stuff, going back a millennium, if not more, even in the Christian tradition. And it gave opportunity to some remarkable persons to exercise themselves in arguments which were either in favour of, or opposing those formulated by earlier thinkers.

Yet what is missed in C-S is the ... third alternative ...

The alternative which, from the very start, recognizes the utter futility of any such argumentation. A futility which follows from the fact that relevant aspects - and quite likely infinitely many - of what goes by the name of God are never to be accessible to our awareness, except for our awareness of that very fact of their inaccessibility ...

In short, all such arguments may be seen as breaking the Second Commandment, namely, the prohibition of worshiping graven images. And clearly, arguments in language are - and can never ever be more than - mere graven images ...

On the other hand, what is at stake here is so astutely described by well known Zen-Buddhist saying :

“You show the fool the Moon, and he is looking at your finger.”

Well, so often, such a fool is not even looking at your finger, and instead, is only looking at his own dirty toe ...

And if we may be tempted to take an example from Meister Eckhart’s not seldom daringly striking formulations, we may even see the present day situation as follows :

- The unprecedented fact in known human history that, nowadays, so many relevant new realms are brought to our awareness by science is but a new way God -whatever that mere name may happen to stand for - is speaking to us, to so many of us, to those for instance who are more directly involved in this phenomenon and are able to realize fully enough its significance, a significance which reaches far beyond any specifics or utility.

Certainly, what we came to learn in modern times is the fluidity to which even the deepest and most fundamental theories of science are subjected. For instance, Newton’s physics is a particular case of Einstein’s Special Relativity, let alone of his General Relativity. As for Quantum Theory, it is widely considered among specialists to be underlying all presently known Physics, including the realms of Special and General Relativity, thus also of Newtonian Mechanics, although so far, one could not bring together Relativity and the Quanta into a grand unified theory, and do so in a rigorous manner ...

Thus even the realms of hard science turn out to be subjected to a significant fluidity ...

Why should then not be the same with realms beyond the reaches of science, realms relevant to ontology ?

And how about the very concepts one uses in ontology ?

If religion and faith in the existence of God must be affected by such a fluidity, than how about atheism, agnosticism, and the like be also affected ?

What may so uniquely special about them as to remain ever the same,

no matter how much fluidity one is experiencing all around ?
To paraphrase Karamozov : “If God goes, then everything else must go as well ...”

The presence of evil is another issue debated in C-S at some length. And to give an idea about the extent of concern with that issue, one can mention that C-S manages to enrol even some important teachings from the Kabbalah related to “tzimtzum”, which is supposed to explain why God appears as if withdrawn from Creation ...

Altogether, the touching naivety of the various arguments brought forth over the ages related to the existence of evil is only exceeded by the blindness to the utter insufficiency of the avalanche of such “doing” in language, and thus once again failing to heed the above Zen-Buddhist saying ...

But then, if it is indeed so irresistible to “look at the finger” and merely get lost in “doing” language, then let us try and use one more “finger” in order to try to point to that most elusive Moon ...

Well, evil is of course a highly value charged concept. And as such, it is much dependent not only on a specific culture or civilization, but more generally, on a strongly biased anthropocentrism as well.

To give an example, I remember a story told to me by one of my friends, a South African white man whose roots in the country happen to go back more than three centuries. Well, prior to the advent of the New South Africa in 1994, many people kept asking him whether, being classified as a white Afrikaner, he was not afraid of the ANC black government coming into power. And his answer to that question was simple : “I would rather be afraid of the fish, chicken, sheep, pigs or cows coming into power, since so many of them got killed in order to be eaten by me ...”

Well, for all such animals, we humans are of course evil, and as such, just about the ultimate one ...

As far as we are concerned, however, we are not at all evil, as long

as we kill those animals for food, and do so mercifully. Indeed, one of the seven laws given to the Biblical Noah is precisely about that, and those laws are supposed to apply not only to Jews, Christians and Moslems, but to all humankind as well ...

So much for the manifest relativity of the concept of evil ...

As for what may appear to be its more deep roots, the following may be worth considering.

On our Planet Earth one important feature is that life feeds upon itself. And that holds regardless of what Noah was allowed, or for that matter, was not allowed to do ...

Well, according to the Hindu tradition one is advised to get out of that cycle, and not feed upon life, not even plant life ...

Given, however, the reality of that cycle, a lot of relative evil can, and does happen. For instance, an immense range of bacteria and viruses find us humans, as well as other living creatures, to be a most delicious food. And certainly, they cannot be accused of not having studied the seven laws given to Noah ...

More basically yet, we can note that the realms of biosphere, which include us humans as well, can be seen as existing upon a dynamic equilibrium that has a rather fragile stability. And that equilibrium is manifest both on the level of individuals, as well as of the species, and in fact, of the whole relevant ecosystem. After all, such an equilibrium applies as well to realms other than the biosphere, as for instance that of Physics, thus it should not necessarily be seen as having anything evil in it ...

As for us humans, we are supposed to be not only entities in Biology or Physics. And regarding our role or place in Creation, we cannot so easily reduce it to the expectations of one or another culture, or even to those of one or another civilization ...

Furthermore, apparently so much more than other living creatures,

we may indeed be endowed with the potential ability for a two way interaction with what is, with what is real ...

And needless to say, that ability, if exercised, may tilt the equilibrium to our favour ...

And what “favour” means here is certainly not reducible to what some culture or civilization claims to be ...

And it should not be reduced to the more usual versions of anthropocentrism either ...

And so it comes to pass that the question “Why bad things happen to good people ?” can so easily give major headaches to so many a theologian, philosopher, or even mere atheist, agnostic, or others of the kind ...

C-S presents a number of related views. Freud, for instance, states that “The world is not a nursery.” Alain prefers a more mature looking formulation, according to which “The Earth made us no promises.” And so on, and so on ...

Amusingly, an extraordinary insightful thinker like Leibniz prefers two questions, instead of any sort of statement, namely “If God exists, whence evil ?” and “If God does not exist, whence good ?”

And if we are to further pursue a certain sophistication, we may as well recall Simone Weil’s view : “Creation is for God an act not of expansion but of withdrawal, of renunciation. God and all His creatures are less than God alone. God accepted this limitation. He emptied Himself of a part of being. Already in the act of His divinity, He had emptied Himself - which is why Saint John says the Lamb was slaughtered as of the creation of the world.”

Certainly, such a statement cannot, to use Kant’s criteria, ever be found objectively satisfactory, and all it can do is to give some subjective satisfaction, one that itself feels rather tentative, thus must somehow be renewed or reinforced time and again ...

Thus, willingly or not, either we like it or not, we are back to the ways of breathing ...

Of breathing in and out ...

Of ever having to try to breathe in, since what we had a moment ago subjectively satisfactory may so easily cease to be so simply all on its own, simply due to an ever lingering doubt, and all that no matter how much we would like to hold to it ...

And it is not only that we have to keep breathing in. No, not at all. We better try all sort of “air” to breathe in ...

And if one happens to be as good as a Simone Weil, or the author of C-S, then one may have to struggle to provide such “air” for himself or herself ...

So much for having ever to chase subjective sufficiency ...

So much for having our affective being in the position to run our cognitive one ...

And as one can note, that kind of breathing in is not quite a cheerful venture, since it is imposed upon us by the ongoing vagaries of lack of a stable and reliable subjective satisfaction ...

C-S expresses a deep sympathy for Simone Weil, when writes “Despite the great admiration and tenderness I feel for Simone Weil, this is what I’ve always found impossible to conceive and accept” in reference to the above citation from her. Then C-S continues with “In these matters, experience is more eloquent than metaphysics, and sensitivity may be more important than experience ... There is too much horror in the world, too much suffering, too much injustice - and too little happiness - for the concept of its creation by an almighty, infinitely kind God to be tenable in my eyes ...”

Further C-S cites Pascal’s comment “We must be born guilty, or God

would be unjust”, and decides to cut the Gordian Knot by declaring that “There is a third, far simpler possibility : namely, that God does not exist.”

Well, no matter how much sympathy one may feel for the persons fallen for such views on fundamental ontological issues, one may perhaps has to say it that the whole venture of such argumentations may rather recall the ways of an elite chattering class ...

Elite, both by having such ontological concerns, and being erudite enough in the chattering of those who came before them and were similarly minded and preoccupied ...

Elite which, however, suffers from two important weaknesses :

One is a general typical human one, and it manifests itself since our earliest childhood. Namely, the utter asymmetry how we tend to treat the questions we raise, and on the other hand, the answers to them, as given by others, or even by ourselves. Certainly, we hardly ever, if at all, question the questions we raise. No, they just about always come up in us with such an absolute certainty about their burning relevance that we would not think of questioning them ...

On the other hand, seldom if at all do we feel in the same way about the answers we may get from others, or from ourselves. No, such answers far too often tend to be shadowed by doubt, by some ever lingering doubt ...

The second weakness is, of course, the endlessness of the chattering, internal or external, the members of this elite seem to have to fall into, as if by some necessity ...

As for being involved in not much more than chattering, well, there is all too often a certain awareness among the members of this elite about the insufficiency, if not in fact, inadequacy of such an approach. And to warn against this weakness, C-S writes in this respect that “experience is more eloquent than metaphysics” ...

And what is that experience, an experience which so thoroughly is

missed even by the mentioned elite chattering class ?

Well, let us recall Heidegger who observed that Western philosophy has forgotten about Being, ever since Plato. And we may add to it the yet sharper comment of Alfred North Whitehead, according to whom Western philosophy is but a footnote to Plato ...

Indeed, the experience, direct experience, in fact, about which the mentioned elite chattering class seems to know very little, if anything at all, is that of Being which, of course, must inevitably underlie both Doing and Having, and also Knowing and Understanding ...

And when it comes to Being, all that erudite chattering can at best do is merely to point to the Moon ...

However, in doing so, it should be extremely careful not to end up looking at its own finger, or even worse, looking at some false Moon ...

And needless to say, it is so easy to start chasing some such false Moon ...

After all, Being is not reducible to, let alone replaceable by, Doing, Having, or even Knowing and Understanding ...

Indeed, Doing, Having, Knowing and Understanding are so much within the realms of Time and Space, while Being reaches far beyond these realms, and in fact, it may simply be that the essence of Being is ways outside of these realms ...

And as if this would not be enough in one's venture towards ontological fundamentals, one can recall that Hindu Cosmology considers Being, or Manifest Creation as a particular, special aspect, one that is not all. Indeed, it is claimed that Manifest Creation periodically withdraws into the Unmanifest, where it remains for unknown ages, before it becomes manifest again for a while ...

And, needless to say, Being is even less reducible to such clearly and

highly relative concepts as evil, good, happiness, suffering, injustice, and so on ...

And then, merely for amusement, may we kindly ask :

Who is suffering, who is happy, who feels the injustice, who enjoys the good ?

Is it our bodies, emotions or minds which experience any of the above ?

Or may also other no less important entities related to us be involved in such experiences ?

And can any of that be taken without considering the context ?

The context which is certainly not reducible - and thus as an elementary matter of wisdom, should not be reduced - to one or another individual, cultural, civilizational, or for that matter, anthropocentric set of assumptions ?

The context which, as such, is unique and common to all and to everything, since it is the wholeness, the inevitable wholeness of it, which alone characterizes it ?

In regard of anthropocentrism, it may be amusing to recall that Gurdjieff, a teacher famous in certain Western intellectual circles around the time of the First World War and for a while later, had as one of his more strange ideas that we humans on Planet Earth have the role to feed the Moon ...

So much for any attempt to hold consciously, or not, to any kind of anthropocentric assumption on the context within which good and evil are supposed to be seen ...

It is, of course, highly tempting as a human individual to focus on the immense multiplicity in creation, and thus on the corresponding countless boundaries that separate various entities in that multiplicity. And then, one of the most obvious and vitally important such

boundaries one cannot help seeing is, so to say, one's own skin, with one being inside of it, and everything and everybody else being on the outside ...

And right from our first conscious days, we cannot help noticing that the part outside of our skin is typically indifferent to us. Certainly, it can on occasion be so good to us. However, so often it is simply deadly dangerous ...

So it comes to pass that we have a strong tendency to see the context relevant to our individual existence as defined so much by this separation given by our own skin ...

And then, needless to say, good and evil, and the rest, become quite automatically defined in terms which appear to us as clearly and inevitably obvious. And we do no longer care much about whether, indeed, we were meant for nothing else but to feed the Moon ...

The rest, quite inevitably, can so easily become reduced to an endless chattering of an elite class ...

And chattering, no matter of which kind, is not quite the same as Being ...

Being, of which European philosophy has forgotten for more than two millennia, and instead, produced a rather vast footnote to the teachings of the last philosopher among us who was focusing on it, namely, Plato ...

It was reported that Saint Thomas Aquinas, before reaching the age of fifty, and shortly before his death, suddenly stopped for good his intense and prolific writing activities, and stated that all of it was merely so much chaff and straw, while the glory of God kept shining in all its splendour, a splendour which could never be contained in - and needed not any kind of - verbal or written expression ...

And if by now, in Western tradition, it is so strange and hard to reconnect with Being, then perhaps, we can start to wake up to the

unprecedented fact of the ongoing considerable shifts of the boundaries between known realms and unknown ones, shifts which can, and do, give a completely new and so much more lively perception of, and meaning to Being ...

Saint Anselm considered that one had to believe, in order to understand ...

Not much later, Saint Abelard stated the opposite order of things, namely that, one had to understand, in order to be able to believe. He also taught that doubting leads to questioning, and questioning leads to understanding, a process which, of course, keeps going on, iteration after iteration ...

Well, the erudite chattering of an elite class seems - willingly or not, consciously or not - to oscillate between the approaches of Anselm and Abelard, and does so, however, by trying to eliminate all doubt, although it never manages to do so ...

There is, however, no awareness that doubt simply cannot be overcome as a result from any such oscillations ...

Instead, one should try to go deeper into ontology, and more near towards the roots of Being, and why not, perhaps even further ...

One simply cannot help feeling a deep sympathy when reading testimonies of long ongoing intimate personal struggles, such as for instance in the above citation from Simone Weil, or those found in quite some detail in C-S ...

And it is so much of a pity to see such struggles taking place in our own time, yet constricted to one or another static, rigid, and never seriously questioned ancient type conceptual setup ...

The significant emergence of modern atheism or agnosticism is itself an effect of the deeply - even if often less consciously so - felt inadequacy of archaic conceptual setups, an inadequacy brought about to a large extent by the emergence of undreamt of conceptual and practical

realities produced by modern science and technology. Yet the more true and relevant consequences of these realities do not seem to reach deep and consequentially enough in the awareness of members of the elite chattering class ...

After all, C P Snow's two cultures have during the last half a century only grown further and further apart. And on the scientific-technological side, the chattering is not so much about fundamental ontological issues, while on the other side, science and technology may often be perceived as not much more than a necessary, or rather, merely convenient evil, one that one approaches with feelings like when one must go to a dentist ...

As a consequence, neither of the two sides connects that truly unprecedented and massively consequential departure in modern times, brought about by science and technology, with fundamental ontological issues ...

The side which feels about it like going to the dentist is deeply convinced that science is just about irrelevant with respect to spirituality. And to buttress that view, it tends to look at this unprecedented modern venture with a certain arrogant superiority. And its members seem to do so as if trying to compensate for an ever lingering feeling of sour grapes, feeling caused by the fact that, already back at primary or secondary school, they had to realize that they were not good enough to embark upon that venture ...

Well, it is reported that on the door of Plato's Academy it was written "Those who do not know Geometry, need not enter." And we should remember that Geometry in the times of Plato was by far the most perfect science. Consequently, in our times, the side in the two culture divide which detests going to the dentist, should have the same warning written perhaps upon their own doors, with General Relativity, Quantum Theory, and why not, Mathematical Theories like Category Theory, and so on, replacing the word Geometry ...

And if Plato is seen as being too old to take his mentioned injunction as still being normative, well, we can recall Einstein's related view,

namely that

“Science without religion is lame. Religion without science is blind.”

As for the other side of the two cultures, they simply do not bother much about spiritual issues. And thus again they also miss, this time by mere default, to make the mentioned connection ...

Yes, the unintended, undesirable and unforeseen consequences of more than two millennia of having forgotten about Being, and about the yet more fundamental possible realms, cannot so easily be avoided ...

And it can even less be avoided, as long as one is simply not aware of any such consequences, as long as one is simply ignorant about them ...

There are, indeed, various deeper and deeper levels of ignorance ...

A first level is when, like in the case of a typical Westerner, one does not know, say, the Chinese language, but one is fully aware of that fact, therefore, one can, if one wishes so, get out of that ignorance by learning that language. In this way one is not condemned for ever more to that specific ignorance, and one is free to get out of it.

A second and deeper level of ignorance is when one does not know about something, and on top of it, one does not know about one's respective ignorance, thus one is twice ignorant. Of course, such a state can be an eternal trap, unless somehow one happens to find out about one's respective ignorance, and thus one graduates to the lesser first level ignorance.

Yet so often, one may be in a third level ignorance which is the case of already being in the second level one, to which is added the hostility one manifests towards ever considering that one is already in a second level ignorance. Such a hostility will then prevent one to graduate to the lesser, second level ignorance, even when one may benefit from the good fortune of being faced with the fact of being already in a second level ignorance ...

And one can only wonder whether there may be even more deep levels of ignorance ...

Well, the reality of two cultures seems to have pushed us into at least a second level ignorance, and an ignorance about nothing less than Being ...

And how to reconnect with Being, and furthermore, with possibly yet deeper realms ?

Detachment will oblige God to love you, says Meister Eckhart ...

And what is, then, that miraculous detachment ?

Well, certainly it is not only, and not even mainly, about detaching oneself from all that happens to be outside of one's own skin ...

On the contrary, it may be even more, and first of all, a detachment from what a Freud would call "Id, Ego and Super-Ego" ...

In Hassidic teaching, for instance, that detachment is called in Hebrew "bitul", or "nullification", or perhaps, "emptying oneself" ...

A medical doctor, for instance, when faces a patient and tries to establish the diagnosis, has to do so on what may be called absolute terms, that is, in such a way as to be as near as possible to the real situation of the patient, and as such, unrelated to anything or anybody else. And then, it is of course so much better if such a medical doctor does not bring in that process any personal aspects of his or her own, except of course the best of his or her knowledge, experience and understanding, and in addition possibly may also consult another medical doctor.

Such an approach may, therefore, assume quite a lot of "nullification" ...

And in the proper pursuit of so many other professions the same may, needless to say, be useful ...

Whatever the meaning of such "nullification" may be, one thing is

quite clear : Meister Eckhart's detachment has very little to do with any kind of erudite chattering of one or another elite class ...
And such chattering may at most serve as the finger pointing to the Moon ...

Extended Harmony, and Growing Up at Last ...

It is a rather unique, and at the same time widely spread inborn human gift to be musical. More precisely, most humans instantly, and quite unpleasantly notice when in some melody even one single false note occurs. Of course, what is found to be melodious may differ in various cultures. And yet, certain successions of musical sounds are just about universally found to be out of tune, so to say ...

In this regard, it would be quite instructive to embark upon a research involving infants across various cultures, and see whether before they may be influenced by the specific ways of musical harmony of their cultural background, one may find with them an inborn more universal sense of such musical harmony ...

However, what we are concerned here is a rather more extended, in fact, one may say maximally extended sense of harmony, one that goes far beyond the usual merely musical one.

Now, if and when wondering about the meaning of detachment mentioned by Meister Eckhart, for instance, and even more so, about the ways one may ever reach such a state of Being, one first step may perhaps be an ability to attain to an extended sense of harmony. One that it is not circumscribed and conditioned even by an anthropocentric position, let alone by cultural or civilizational ones ...

But, is there indeed any possibility for such more extended sense of harmony ?

Well, one of the extraordinary and unprecedented aspects of hard science is precisely in the fact that it does represent such an ever ex-

tending harmony. As they say, music is a universal language. Well, Mathematics, Physics, and other hard sciences are all equally, if not in fact, far more universal. And in fact, in their very essence, they are supposed to go far far beyond any anthropocentric positions. This is, after all, that very essence which makes hard science so universally valid, far beyond the specifics of humanity, Planet Earth, the Solar system, the Milky Way Galaxy, and so on ...

The problem with hard sciences is that they concern themselves with rather limited aspects of reality, aspects in which anthropocentrism does in fact have not much, if any at all, place. And this is precisely one of the main reasons in the unfortunate emergence of the so called two cultures. In short, one of these two cultures tends to be as much disjoint of anthropocentrism as possible, while the other one is so insistently - if not in fact, proudly - keeping itself arrested not only in anthropocentrism, but within far more narrow, so called, cultural or civilizational camps, not to mention various, political, religious, ethnic or racial ones ...

As for Meister Eckhart's detachment, clearly, it is beyond that of hard science as well ...

And needless to say, it is beyond the two cultures as well ...

Thus it is no wonder that it cannot significantly be accessed based on any way practiced by the elite chattering class ...

And then, what are we left with, what are we facing here ?

Well, one reason for the difficulties involved in reaching detachment - a reason no doubt, extremely hard to consider, let alone, accept by many - is that we may have a rather wrong concept about being grown up ...

Indeed, while growing up, most individuals tend strongly to see it happening with themselves at an earlier age than older persons who know them may acknowledge it. And so often, growing up is reduced by both sides merely to sexual maturity in its strict biological sense, plus the ability to earn a living, and thus be able to live on one's own. In

this regard, in our times, there are tendencies to further claim younger and younger ages at which individuals can be considered grown up. For instance, in parts of the Western world, there are advocates of giving the right to vote in political elections to persons of younger and younger age ...

Well, as it happens, and becomes quite obvious at a more careful consideration, sexual maturity in biological sense and the ability to support oneself materially are significantly less than indeed being grown up in a sufficiently reliable sense ...

Now, one may object that a more demanding sense of being grown up would leave a vast majority of humanity outside, and quite likely, for the whole of their lifetime. Such an argument, however, is not quite serious, since it is nothing else but moving the goal posts, so that we may claim to have a vast majority of humans grown up, say, by the age of twenty, or certainly, thirty. Well, if it would come only to voting in political elections, perhaps the issue would not be so critical. However, the immaturity of vast numbers of individuals - considered nevertheless to be old enough for being grown up according to custom - can manifest itself in serious consequences not only once in a couple of years, when they may vote in political elections ...

And then, what should one consider as represented by the description of being grown up in more genuine ways ?

A first idea which can come to one's mind is that one should be wise enough ...

Well, this does not seem to clarify much the problem, since the definition of wisdom recalls that of a good wine : I cannot tell you what a good wine is, but certainly, I can recognize it when I drink one ...

Let us, therefore, try a more effective and less empirical definition of wisdom. And in this regard, we can start with a simple and well known analogy. A person trained in martial arts can easily defeat anybody else who may be far more strong, but is not similarly trained. This is well known for ages, and it is one of the reasons martial arts, and

persons trained in it, elicit such an interest among large numbers of people.

And what is martial arts training all about ?

Simple, very simple indeed : Do not use your physical power just as it may come to you instinctually, and do not think that your success in fight is proportional with your inborn and untrained physical power. Instead, use your physical power as intelligently as possible. And such an intelligent use is quite different from what your instincts may tell you. Hence the need for special training, one that may free you from the manifest ineffective use of your physical power when left alone to your instincts.

Well, the conclusion is that an intelligent use of physical power is a considerable multiplier of that power, when it comes to effects ...

And then, how about an intelligent use of one's intelligence ?

Amusingly, it appears that among intelligent persons fewer seem to be aware of the immense advantages in using their own intelligence intelligently, and not merely as it may come to them upon instincts, than may be aware of the advantages of being trained in martial arts when using one's physical power. Thus being aware of the multiplier effect of using intelligently one's physical power is far more widely known about than the same kind of multiplier effect when using intelligently one's own intelligence ...

No wonder, being born physically strong can lead to considerable pride, confidence and other forms of ego trips ...

Nothing to compare, however, with the pride, confidence and all sorts of ego trips, when born intelligent and knowing about it ...

It is, therefore, so often that the more intelligent one considers oneself to be, the less one cares about anything else than using that intelligence just as it may come. And so it happens that intelligence ends up so often becoming in fact the mere obedient slave of emotions ...

Well, if one is ready to give some consideration to the above, and specifically, to the possibility that most of us humans do not really grow up before we die, then it may be quite appropriate to try some sort of mental experiment by wondering about stories in the Old Testament, for instance, where certain individuals are mentioned who had lived hundreds and hundreds of years, before God decided that humans should not live longer than hundred twenty years.

Indeed, just imagine what kind of understanding of life one may possibly attain after living in more or less normal conditions for, say, five hundred years ?

And it may not even be necessary to live so long for that purpose ...

The story of Enoch, for instance, is remarkable in this regard. He was merely three hundred odd years old, when according to Genesis 5:24, in the Old Testament, he went to Heaven : “And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him.”

And then, how does the issue of evil may look, as well as many other issues, including the issue of whether God - whatever the elite chattering class may throw up as a definition - exists or not, when one has attained enough detachment, wisdom, and possibly, also a more extended sense of harmony ?

So then, when one asks why an assumed to be perfect and loving God allows so much evil in Creation, one may as well recall in the Old Testament the verse in Deuteronomy 30:29 :

“I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing : therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live.”

The assumed perfection and love of God is, in His own words, in the very potential given to us humans, the potential to choose life ...

And if it happens that, much unlike Enoch, we do not manage to bring about a proper choice within the time given to us, then who is

to blame ?

When we look around at the living creatures on our Planet Earth, when we look at plants and animals, we see that individuals do matter less than the whole of the species to which they happen to belong. It is, indeed, only with us, humans, that individuals start to matter, that each and every individual does so ...

It is again in the Old Testament, in Genesis 1:26-28, that no less than four times, and one after the other, it is written that humans were made in the image of God. This is the only statement made four times in the whole of the Old Testament. On top of it, it is repeated one after the other. And furthermore, it is made up front, as soon at the very beginning of the book, as humans are mentioned to be created in the sixth day. It may therefore be seen as by far the most important statement in the whole of the Old Testament, except for the name of God in Exodus 3:14, and possibly, the mentioned statement about Enoch in Genesis 5:24.

A consequence is that all humans are equal before God ...

And yet, if we humans can raise a major objection against the Bible, be it the Old or the New Testament, or against other old holy books, is that none of them goes further to state that we have individual human rights as well ...

Individual human rights, and in particular, equality not only before God, but before the law as well, before the humans made laws, is a relatively new development brought about in the last few centuries in England, America and France ...

So that, the human project, so to say, is clearly far from being completed to any satisfactory extent ...

And then, why stand up and complain - even if with an assumed cheerful desperation - and then take ill founded major ontological decisions and act upon them, just because we got born at a certain time and in some place, and we do not happen to live long enough, in order to

reach better stages in the grander scheme of the human project ?

And if you happen not care much about that human project, well then, do you have no any other conceivable choice than to jump straight to the opposite, and like a good solipsist, see absolutely everything centered around yourself, or even reduced to yourself ?

Or in case you may happen to be more generous, to see everything focused on, and reduced to the human generations that existed so far, and those whose similar future you may claim to foresee ?

Perhaps, you may also conceive of the choice when you may have already reached a certain stage in detachment ...

And you may, therefore, be detached enough of time and space as well ...

And if not, then certainly, you should try to be so, and first of all, be detached of time, of your usual concept of time ...

And once you may manage that, well, try to see then how all those fundamental issues which so much trouble you now will feel ...

And try to remember that, some of us have been, and are like the good old baron von Muenchausen, and can indeed pull ourselves out of troubles ...

Or even better, simply avoid getting into them ...

Remember Pope John Paul II, who passed away recently ?

In the quarter or so of century of his tenure, nearly five hundred Catholics were declared saints. Several related aspects are remarkable, and totally unprecedented in fact, although few Catholics of any rank have managed to become aware of their true significance. First perhaps, all, or nearly all those declared to be saints lived in recent times, and there were quite a few Catholics still alive who knew them well and could testify on their behalf. Further, the number of those

declared saints is larger than those declared so by all popes over the previous five centuries. Also, Pope John Paul II did set up a permanent committee which was in charge with the selection of candidates for sainthood. And that committee has, among others, distinguished lay members, some of them well known medical doctors, for instance. Last, but not least, several serious commentators, some of them not Catholics, who analyzed the workings of that committee found that, in fact, the committee was rather severe, and that, given their declared criteria, they could have accepted perhaps twice the number of candidates they did.

Well, the message is so simple and direct, indeed : saints do live in our own times as well, and quite a few of them ...

And if one considers those over one thousand three hundred who were beatified, which is the preliminary stage to sainthood, plus those over four hundred eighty who were canonized, that is, declared saints, then it turns out that, among Catholics in our own days there may be more than one per a million who could end up being, after their death, declared a saint according to the criteria of that committee ...

And needless to say, it is not only Catholics who can count among their own ranks such, shall we say, fully grown up human beings ... Certainly, persons not only dead but also still alive, adepts of any of the other religions, denominations, and so on, not to mention persons not belonging to any of them, may qualify according to the criteria of John Paul II ...

The only other, even if only most vaguely comparable, such process of recognition is that by which the Queen of England hands out titles of nobility in each year. Unfortunately however, the respective selection is heavily influenced by political and other considerations which, needless to say, have absolutely nothing to do with any more commendable human quality ...

And what are the criteria of that Catholic committee which selects saints ?

One of the more important ones is the ability of the candidate to produce miracles, among them, miraculous healing.

As for miracles, one should be clear - whether one happens to be religious, atheist, agnostic, or of any other conceivable a priori fixed and prejudiced position - that there are only two possible alternatives :

- Either everything is a miracle, or on the contrary, nothing is a miracle !

After all, the concept of miracle is obviously essentially relative. Relative to what we happen to consider normal, that is, natural, and thus not at all miraculous. Just think about the way your great-great-grand parents, for instance, would feel in your own house today if they were to come back to life suddenly, and live there: electricity powering all sorts of devices, not to mention radio, television, computers, mobile phones, and so on, and so on ...

There is also a second most important aspect of miracles, namely, assuming that they do indeed exist, we humans keep being unaware of any number of miracles which do actually happen to us in our day to day lives ...

Well, miracle healings are also not miracles, and they are indeed not, precisely to the extent that they manage to deliver a genuine and lasting healing. What may happen in such cases is that the respective healer has access to, or contact with sources and methods we, as of now, do not yet know about, just like our great-great-grand parents did not know even about electricity, not to mention many other things which we do not at all consider miracles ...

There is, thus, not much point in talking about supernatural phenomena, effects, and so on. After all, either nature contains everything, or not. And by its proper definition, nature is all, absolutely all that exists. And this is supposed to be even more so for atheists, agnostics, and other of the kind of persons who enjoy - or for that matter, do not quite, like for instance those cheerful desperates - being fixed for

evermore into a prejudiced ontological position ...

Anyhow, either we like it or not, the most likely alternative regarding miracles is none of the above two, but the following third one :

- Everything, and at the same time, nothing is a miracle ...

After all, the very fact that you have been born is - from probability point of view - a miracle. And related to it, just consider the following most basic ontological asymmetry :

- You are born, and you are aware of it.
- On the other hand, had you not been born, would you be aware of not being born ?

And to add to it, one may as well ask :

- Being born as a usual human being, and being aware of it, does it mean that one is born to absolutely everything that exists, that one is aware of absolutely everything that exists ?

Certainly, throughout the ages, there was an awareness that one should rather answer “no” to the above question ...

And as we do not so much like to live with such a rather unsettling answer, all that we were not supposed to be aware of was attempted to be neatly packed away into an awesome and miraculous concept of God ...

At least, so it was done by monotheists ...

But then, we started to mess with the situation, and ended up with any number of confusions, problems, and even disasters like religious wars, or the present emergence of Moslem terrorism ...

For instance, it was not so easy to disregard completely that assumed to be utterly separate and inaccessible entity called God ...

No, we were tempted to relate to It in some ways, ways possibly convenient for us ...

And then sacrifices and prayers were invented, and later theologies, till more near to our own days, we have the elite chattering class ... The class which can only define itself by some sort of negation of that age old initially attempted solution : a-theist, a-gnostic, nihil-ist, and so on ...

But then again, what kind of definition can be given by a mere negation ?

And even if it could be given, well, how come that you are happy to define and identify yourself merely by negating what you do not like ? How come, indeed, that in the name you choose for yourself, that what you do not like is essentially present ?

Strange are the ways of the Lord, one could say, recalling a saying from those good old times which you now so much claim to have left behind ...

But let us return to the ability to produce so called miraculous healing. What may, indeed, be involved in it ?

Medical science has for long been aware of the phenomenon which goes by the name of placebo. And it is worth recalling the cases of it when neither the medical doctor, nor the patient is aware that an inert substance is administered under the pretense of being a genuine medicine, yet the effect is a manifest healing.

In such cases one is left to assume only that the personal belief of the patient in the healing effect of the alleged medicine, and that belief alone, is the cause of the resulting healing.

By the way, in the New Testament, Jesus himself, whenever he elicits such a miraculous healing, makes the remark to the respective patient that “your faith has healed you”, as can be seen in Mark 5:34, 10:52, Luke 8:40-48, 18.42, for instance. In such cases, it appears that the respective patients were not even given any sort of genuine or placebo medicine. And it was only their own belief or faith, as elicited by Jesus, which produced the healing. And in fact, such healing can take even more strange and yet more indirect forms, Like for instance, when Jesus heals the servant of a Roman officer, a servant who is somewhere faraway, and thus the healing happens through that officer

who requests it from Jesus.

Amusingly, the typical human reaction, even in our own days, to such healings is to see them as being indeed miraculous, and then, to drastically displace and misplace their cause which becomes identified with the person who elicited them, or with the so called holy place where it happened, a place that often becomes the destination of pilgrimages by masses of people seeking miraculous healing ...

But then, it is but one of the typical human failures to tend to identify the message with the messenger, the process with the one implementing it, and so on ...

And we are so often ready to kill the messenger that brings bad news ...

So then, what is so surprising about seeing the one whose mediation led to a miraculous healing as being the healing agent himself or herself ?

And needless to say, various religions are only glad to use and abuse such a widespread tendency to thoroughly misunderstand what actually takes place ...

Then, of course, come the atheists, agnostics, and their kind, and further ridicule religions and the religious, without however trying to look more carefully into what may actually be going on ...

Yet, does anybody really care to try to understand what may indeed go on during such a process ?

Of course, hardly at all, since just about everybody already assumes to know perfectly well the answer, or alternatively, dismisses the whole thing as yet another silly superstition ...

The problem with saints, or rather, with sainthood, is that, unfortunately, the leaders in Christianity, and even more so in Catholicism, have been very much afraid of living saints. And this fear is certainly not there in Hindu, Jewish, Buddhist, or Moslem traditions. The Hindus and Buddhists use for their living saints the term "enlightened" or

“seers”, while the Jewish term is “righteous”, for instance. And such persons are seen to be more important for their communities while they are still alive. The reasons Catholics, in particular, accept for sainthood only persons who are dead already may be several. One of them, quite obvious however, comes from the highly hierarchical structure of the Catholic Church. And advancement in that hierarchy, as two millennia of history shows it, is hardly ever related mainly to qualities which may be essentially appropriate for a saint. Therefore, a living saint may, even unwillingly and simply by his or her very way of being, pose a manifest challenge to the authority of the existing hierarchy.

And it should be noted that such wise, or rather, more truly grown up humans can be quite young in years, can be endowed with very simple minds and souls, can be uneducated, and in short, can come from just about every walk of life ...

Be it, as it may, the potential for becoming a person who in the case of Christians is called a saint, and in the case of other religions has certain other names, is clearly there in each generation, including in our present one ...

This is most likely the main message Pope John Paul II intended with his promotion to sainthood of such considerable number of persons who had lived in recent memory ...

And just as the Catholics are not the only ones, so to say, to produce saints, in the same way, it is of course not the monopoly of religions as such to be the only human ventures to facilitate the emergence of wise persons, persons whom one can indeed consider to be more truly grown up ...

After all, neither Socrates, nor Plato belonged to any more important known religion, and fortunately, none of the two started one, or was expropriated by one ...

And then, when it comes to issues such as the existence of evil, or the existence or inexistence of God, whatever that may be supposed

to mean, perhaps, the proper approach is to wait quite a bit longer than merely reaching sexual maturity from biological point of view, or reaching the ability to support oneself materially ...

And if one may happen to die “young” from the point of view of a more proper meaning of the concept of being grown up, well then, one may remind oneself that with us humans, although the individual counts, it is still not that each and every individual must do so ...

As the saying goes “Man knows how many seeds are in an apple, but only God knows how many apples are in a seed ...”

And each of us humans is given a seed when we are born ...

Do we take care of it properly ?

Well, so far, it appears that in far too many cases God only can tell ...

And yet, in this regard, we are ways ahead of animals, where the species as a whole counts far more than any individual, although even the whole species does not count for much in the scheme of the biosphere. However, this does not at all mean that each and every human individual is supposed to reach his or her perfection in life. After all, even the human species as a whole does not seem to have a guarantee for reaching such a perfection ...

And contrary to what many may think, and especially those who in one way or another are religious, there is nothing wrong with understanding and accepting the lack of such a guarantee given on the level of the whole human species ...

By the way, in the Old Testament, after the Flood, God promises not to visit upon humans another such Destruction by Waters. But God never promises not send a no less deadly Destruction by Fire ...

And in the Talmud it is written that God made the world about forty times, and each time had to destroy it, since He made it upon Law only, and thus it turned out not to be good. This time, that is, with the world in which we are, He decided to make it upon both Law and

Mercy. And then the Talmud comments as an kind of afterthought :
“Let us hope that it will stand ...”

The practical everyday, and in fact, moment by moment issue, as well as the fundamental ontological one, therefore, seems to be how to balance the detachment suggested by Meister Eckhart, with an involvement which Simone Weil and the author of C-S, for instance, are so generous by their nature to pursues with a manifest dedication ...

On Chapter Three : Can There Be an Atheist Spirituality ?

It is indeed amusing to see C-S start in its third and last chapter with : “Let us conclude that what, to my mind, is most important of all - not God, not religion, not atheism, but spiritual life ...”

Well, the comments presented so far in the above lines may perhaps give a certain indication about likely answers to this third question raised in C-S from its start, namely, the possibility, or otherwise, of an atheist spirituality ...

And most certainly we would wish to mention again that all these lines presented here are aimed in support for the intended message of Comte-Sponville, a message which can be seen as highlighting the widespread deficiency in present Western society, a deficiency that may be called spiritual poverty ...

But let us once again try to follow some of the more important points in C-S, and this time in its last chapter ...

With its very first sentence, cited above, C-S is again falling for a long established and rigid terminology, one that, among others, injects a most dramatic separation and quintessential difference between realms and ways assumed to be, so called, spiritual, and on the contrary, those which are clearly supposed to be not ...

Taking one step away from such a way of thinking is, perhaps, facilitated by the concept of spiritual poverty. Indeed, poverty is a rather well understood concept which has quite clear possibilities to ascertain it. And no doubt, there are many realms in which poverty can occur, realms beyond the material one. It follows that the only somewhat

vague entity in the suggested concept of spiritual poverty, is that assumed to be described by the adjective “spiritual” ...

Well, this is certainly true, and one may proceed with the respective clarifications later ...

The advantage of the concept of spiritual poverty, however, is in the fact that poverty is a concept which naturally admits some gradations. In other words, it does not correspond to any one single, given and rigidly fixed chasm between two incompatible realms or ways of being.

And then, as a further step, this time towards the clarification of the adjective “spiritual”, we may suggest that one important aspect of spiritual poverty is the poverty in one’s awareness of context, of the context which is in fact truly relevant to one’s existence and wellbeing.

For the time being, therefore, let us talk not about spiritual, spirituality, or even spiritual poverty, but about the extent of one’s context awareness, or simply, about one’s context awareness ...

In C-S, what follows the above cited first sentence, is an attempt to define spirituality, or the adjective spiritual. And it is quite amusing to see the rather puerile way this is done in quite a number of ways ...

There are, of course, classical time honoured attempts aiming to do that, attempts which may be worth considering instead. One of the remarkable ones is in the New Testament, in John 3:8, namely, “The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.”

And by the way, if we are at remarkable attempts to define more subtle fundamental concepts, here it is worth recalling that of faith, given in the New Testament, in Hebrews 11:1, according to which “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”

Back to C-S, several statements follow which are quite edifying. For instance “Today ... when people talk about spirituality they are usually referring to a rather limited part of our inner life ... the part that

involves the absolute, the infinite and the eternal ...”

But then C-S follows with old and petrified, rather hopelessly extreme dichotomies, such as “... we are finite beings who open onto infinity ... we are ephemeral beings who open to eternity, and relative beings who open on to the absolute ...This 'openness' is the spirit itself ...”

The next statements are, however, remarkable, namely “Metaphysics means thinking about these things; spirituality means experiencing them, exercising them, living them ... All religions involve spirituality, at least to some extent, but all forms of spirituality are not religious ...”

Well, the example of Socrates and Plato does most obviously confirm the above ...

Somewhat later, C-S writes “Everyone is free to choose their own vocabulary, and know of none that are faultless ...”

But of course, we are quite free when it comes to vocabularies, especially those which we happen to use in our own private, inner thinking ...

However, such a freedom does by no means come without unexpected, undesirable and unwanted consequences ...

And when it comes to the spirit, to spirituality, we better recall John 3:8, which tells us that being born of the spirit is being like that wind which one can feel and hear, but cannot tell from where it comes, and where it goes ...

And certainly, vocabularies are in this regard far less than ... spiritual ...

Well, the awareness of the relevant context of one's being can far less be confined to any vocabulary ...

Far less than one may hope for ...

On Mysticism and Mystery : For How Longer Are We to Be Bound to Unfortunately Misplaced Words ?

C-S states on page 141 that "... at its outmost, spiritual life verges on mysticism ..."

Fortunately, after describing in some detail the intimate personal struggles of its author, related to mysticism and mystery, C-S comes to the conclusion that "The real mystery is not in words but in the world."

Well well now, is this not about anything else but that most simple and obvious fact that none of us humans as an individual, and quite likely, neither our species as a whole, may ever become aware of everything which may in fact be relevant to our existence ?

What is, then, there to ... philosophize so much about ?

Why give funny and misleading names, like mysticism or mystery, to what seems to be so obvious ?

Why not simply state the following simple identity : mysticism is the recognition of the human situation mentioned above ?

Namely that, by far most of the realms that may be relevant to the existence of a human individual, or of the humans species as such, will remain a mystery to us ?

And then, once we cut the nonsense of inadequate and misleading vocabularies, we may simply come to the conclusion that a mystic is none other than a human being which is aware of the above, and nevertheless still tries to establish a two way interaction with mystery, that is, with all those realms that may be important to him, to her, or to humanity as a whole, yet about which none of us shall ever have any other awareness, except that we shall never become aware of them directly enough, if at all ...

And to the extent that one may indeed allow the unprecedented spirit of our times to enter and dwell in oneself, the spirit of ever new and undreamt of relevant realms which are brought by hard science into our awareness, well then, one may indeed start to realize that, no matter how eternal and inevitable mystery may remain in the whole life of a human individual, or even during the whole existence of the human species, the fact which we can know by now quite clearly is that the realms of that mystery can move, and do in fact move significantly, and they keep contracting quite a bit, and do so under our own eyes ...

Therefore, mystery is not something utterly fixed and inaccessible for ever more ...

And thus a mystic is in some ways less and less a mystic, although he or she is inevitably bound to remain so for the rest of his or her life, just as the whole of humans kind is, shall we say, condemned to such a fate ...

Sic transit Gloria mundi ... would say a Latin commentator ...

And such a commentator would only in part be right ...

And he or she would be wrong precisely to the extent that some of us humans, like for instance, the saints, the enlightened, or the righteous ones, have all along known - and do know in our own days as well - that the real glory is in the fact that, nevertheless, one may enter into a two way interaction with mystery, and thus avoid the above mentioned condemnation ...

Here, it may perhaps be good to recall that in Jewish tradition it is stated that God made the world for the sake of the righteous ones, and consulted with them before He made it ...

Whatever such a statement may be worth, one thing is clear, namely, it may be worthwhile contemplating on it for somewhat longer ...

Just imagine for a moment how such righteous persons may see the world, how they see, for instance, the issue of evil, or for that matter, that of whether or not God exists ...

After all, the world was not only made for them, but they were consulted when it was made for their benefit ...

Can such persons ever be indulging themselves in views anywhere near to those of the elite chattering class ?

Can such persons reduce themselves to the position of a cheerful desperation ?

Can they be like some confused and rather spoilt whingeing infants when it comes to the fundamental issues of ontology ?

What may, indeed, be the nature and level of maturity, of being properly grown up of such persons ?

Do we ever care enough to try to find some answers to such questions ?

Yes indeed, it seems that the saints, the enlightened, or the righteous ones reach a state of being grown up in which their awareness, their usual awareness, their moment to moment awareness is at least as different from that of the rest of us, the so called grown up humans, as is the awareness of the latter from that of our infants ...

So much for the problem of evil, or for the issue of the existence, or otherwise, of God ...

But now, do we, in fact, have any kind of evidence, let alone proof, that what is at present considered to be the normal standard of being a grown up adult is anywhere near to what is maximally available potentially to individuals in the human species ?

The ravages which various cultures produce in limiting and polluting, if not in fact, poisoning the awareness of their supposed to be adult and fully grown up followers is an open book not only to anthropologists, but to anyone willing, ready and able to see it, and do so without being unduly conditioned by the alleged equal value and validity of all cultures.

And to consider just one example, and not from some backward part of the world, let us recall the way nearly all prominent Western scientist, who at the time, towards the end of the 1800s, happened to represent just about all of existing modern scientists, saw the state of hard science. Namely, they considered that nearly everything important had already been discovered, and that what was left was mostly the further refinement, and of course, application of the already ex-

isting scientific knowledge. An example, and a rather shocking one at that, of that general Western cultural mentality is the suggestion at the time by the head of the American Patent Office, suggestion made to the Congress, to close that office, since there were very few new things left ever to be discovered in the future...

In Physics, for instance, all the leading scientists considered at the time that there had been left unclear on two rather minor issues, namely, the so called black body radiation, and the fact that the Maxwell equations of electro-magnetism, and unlike the Newton equations of Mechanics, were not invariant under the Galilean group of transformations ...

And then, in a most surprising manner, within the first half decade of the 1900s, these two issues, considered earlier as rather unimportant ones, suddenly and literally exploded into the two most important pillars of all of modern Physics, namely, the Quantum Theory of Planck, and the Special, and later, General Relativity of Einstein. Here, by the way, it may be mentioned that in one of his four celebrated papers of 1905, Einstein gave the first application of Planck's quanta introduced in 1900, namely, the explanation of the photo-electric effect. And it was this contribution, and not Relativity Theory, for which Einstein would later, in 1921, get a Nobel Prize for Physics.

So much for what a culture can do even to its top or elite members ...

By the way, Einstein never got a Nobel Prize for his Relativity Theory. And the reason seems to be that the various Nobel committees consider that theory highly controversial for quite a long time to come ...

Certainly, they could have at any time given Einstein a second Nobel Prize for Relativity Theory, after his 1921 prize, as there was already a precedent for such a second prize in the case of the Polish lady physicist and chemist Marie Skłodowska-Curie, who got Nobel Prizes in 1903 and 1911.

Yet for the people in the Nobel committee, the Relativity Theory kept being controversial for quite a while longer ...

And so it comes to pass that the illusion of being really grown up, added to which come the curses of any given culture, keep us under a

glass ceiling ...

And who is there to see that glass ?

And who is there to get beyond it ?

These are, of course, just instances of second level ignorance, or perhaps, even worse, namely, of a third one ...

And if you do not much mind, please, you may be the judge of it ...

As for C-S in its third and last chapter, it launches itself into a sequence of citations from celebrity authors, punctuated by short comments, with all of that managing only to have a mostly ... further mystifying ... effect ...

There are, of course, some occasions when, so to say, the nail is hit on, or at least nearer to its head. For instance, Wittgenstein is cited with what in essence is his seventh and last sentence in his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, namely "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent." And C-S comments that such a statement brought the mystics nearer to the book's author ...

Somewhat later, C-S comments that "We are prisoners of the false self-evidence of common awareness, everyday life, routine, 'been there, done that' our claimed or real familiarity with everything - prisoners, in a word, of ideology or habit." And then recalls the remarkably insightful view of Max Weber, according to whom "The world has been disenchanted." Further C-S states that "Not the Word, but silence. Not meaning, but being. This is the field of spirituality or mysticism, when they break free of religion. Being is mystery, not because it is hidden or because it hides something, but, on the contrary, because self-evidence and mystery are the same thing, because the mystery is being itself."

And so on, and on, goes the never ending chattering of the elite class, a chattering which is so proficient at further mystifying the mystery and the mystics ...

That mystery which, as mentioned above, is nothing else but the straightforward recognition of the simple, elementary and obvious fact that human individuals, and the whole of the human species as such,

will never become aware of all the realms which are relevant to our individual or collective existence ...

And that mystic who, nevertheless, tries to enter into a two way interaction with that fact which some like to call mystery ...

Immanensity ?

C-S recalls that the poet Jules Laforgue coined the term “immanensity”, in order to bring together the concepts of immanent and immense, as related to Creation.

And C-S gets quite lost in being overcome by the silent immensity and immanence one can experience by looking at the stars during a night, say, somewhere in the countryside ...

Well, it seems that the ancient fundamental statements “As above, so below” and “One can find the whole world in a grain of sand” have been all but forgotten ...

Indeed, spirituality, mysticism, and anything of the kind is not about having some more unusual experience which may cause you to feel as if lost, by being overwhelmed ...

After all, there are so many other ways to be overwhelmed to the extent of being lost to one’s usual ways of awareness ...

And as is well known, so many fall for that confusion, and end up believing to have genuine spiritual, mystical, and so on, experiences simply by taking certain drugs, or using some strange methods for merely ... altering ... their awareness ...

By the way, would you ever like to eat some altered food ?

And is it not that the concept of “altered” is merely a negation ?

And a rather vaguely inept, or if you prefer, an ineptly vague negation, one which ends up without being able to provide any kind of specific affirmation ?

Thus, either you like it or not, it opens the gates to absolutely everything, except the one thing which it happens to negate ?

After all, it is an elementary fact of Logic that one cannot give a definition merely by a negation, since it does not specify anything from among the infinity of alternatives left open, except the unique thing which happens to be negated ...

But never mind, immanence plus immensity, that is, immanensity, can certainly give one an ... altered ... state of consciousness ...

And by all means, try and have a good rest after it, so that you may recover from being so lost in being so overwhelmed ...

Yes, there are ways out of that poor dichotomy of either being lost in one or another, shall we say, un-saintly, un-enlightened, un-righteous immature chattering of no matter how elite a class, or enjoying for a short while some experience of altered state of overwhelmed consciousness ...

And how to find such a way out ?

Well, the Hindus, Jews, Buddhists or Moslems may have some advantage in this regard over, say, the Catholics. Indeed, the latter simply can never ever have the chance to talk to a saint, a genuine and living saint, instead of some allegedly all knowing and all understanding psychologist or psychiatrist ...

So much for prostrating oneself to immanensity, instead ...

Lost on an ... Ocean of Feeling ... ?

Yes, there seems to be no end to the view according to which spirituality is just about the same with spiritual experiences which, on their turn, are just about getting lost into feelings of being overwhelmed in certain ... altered ...ways, of course ...

Tantric, and other ancient and similar ageless methods, are quite direct about being overwhelmed in altered ways : they say it upfront, and then, on top of it, they use one of the most, if not by far the most, powerful and tempting ways available to animals and humans, namely sex. As for the effectiveness of it all, well, the long existing record can, of course, speak for itself ...

But let us go back to that oceanic feeling which, clearly, is not anywhere near to Tantra ...

So then, here we go, and C-S tells us how Freud borrowed the term from the French novelist Romain Rolland ...

And that it is all but about the ... dissolving of the ego ...

Well now, the poor ego ...

Did it again do some pranks ?

And so nasty ones that, simply, it should be dissolved ?

And if yes, then for how long it should be attempted to be kept in such an awful state ?

After all, no one seems to have been able to keep it dissolved for any longer period of time ...

Well, we humans are quite good to manipulate with the logical op-

erations of “and” and “or”, but contrary to what we believe, we are quite poor at doing so with the logical operation of “no”, that is, with negation ...

And needless to say, the reason is that in the latter operation far more emotions get usually involved, than in the former ones ...

And of course, emotions, operating under emotions, under stronger emotions, can - and do so often - make us prone to errors ...

And with dissolving the ego we are back to one such emotionally charged negation where we cannot avoid trying to overdo, quite thoroughly overdo in fact, a good thing ...

Fortunately, one’s ego is well known not to be such a pushover, and simply, it cannot be gotten rid of so easily ...

So that, all we may eventually manage is to dip sometime our ... spiritual toe ... into that oceanic feeling ... and do so for a while ...

The rest, well, we may leave it to personages in novels or books of the kind written by a Romain Roland, Michel Hulin, Marius Favre, Richard Jefferis, Margaret Montague, Albert Camus, and so on, and so on ...

Oh again ... a Mystical Experience ...

The author of C-S starts the section “A Mystical Experience” in chapter three, with the recollection of an occasion in his younger adult years when, somewhere in the middle of nature, he was overcome by a feeling of peace, simplicity, serenity, delight ...

And then comments that the latter two words may sound incompatible ...

Somewhat later, C-S states that “This is what Spinoza meant by eternity ...”

Sweet talking is, indeed, a charming human ability ...

And it may be quite irreplaceable in a romantic situation ...

However, sweet talking oneself into some state is quite another issue ...

C-S then continues in its third chapter with quite a number of sections, with the titles “Is It Possible to Speak About Silence?”, “Mystery and Self-evidence”, “Plenitude”, “Simplicity”, “Unity”, “Silence”, “Eternity”, “Serenity”, “Acceptance”, “Independence”, “Death and Eternity”, “Mysticism and Atheism”, “The Absolute and the Relative”, “A Spirituality for Everyday Life”, and ends with a section on “Interiority and Transcendence, Immanence and Openness” ...

All of them a sweet talk, with lots of citations from older or newer celebrities ...

It is as if C-S tries to come up with as much additional persuasion as possible, in order to be able to hope that the ever lingering doubts may be put somehow to rest ...

And as a kind of last chapter, C-S offers a Conclusion entitled Love and Truth, with lots of further sweet talk ...

And it ends with :

“Here is where all our different themes converge without conflating.

Fidelity to truth : rationalism - the rejection of sophism.

Fidelity to love : humanism - the rejection of nihilism.

Fidelity to a separation between the two : atheism.

Truth is not love, if truth loved itself, it would be God.

Rather, love can be true, and it is absolute only in so far as we love truly. Such is the atheists’ Pentecost, or the true spirit of atheism : not the Spirit which descends but the spirit that can open us up to the world, to other people, to ever-present eternity - and rejoice. The absolute is not love, rather, love can open us up to the absolute.

Thus, ethics can lead to but not replace spirituality, just as spirituality can lead to but not replace ethics. Here, perhaps - at their culmination - is where the wise and the saintly agree :

Love, not hope, is what helps us live. Truth, not faith, is what sets us free.

We are already in the kingdom. Eternity is now.”

Well, as much as about the whole book, and as well, many books with similar aims, C-S as a whole, and its above closing lines, are presenting , suggesting, or even stating certain relationships between a number of important concepts, or more precisely, between aspects of life, creation, being, and so on, we may find important, and then try to capture them by concepts ...

Among such concepts are, of course, fidelity, truth, rationalism, love,

humanism, absolute, spirit, spiritualism, eternity, ethics, hope, faith, kingdom, and so on, just to mention some of those in the above citation ...

And then, what is the problem ?

How come that most one can achieve seems to be sweet talking ?

Well, one problem is that the very, shall we say, bricks which one uses, that is, the concepts, are already failing us dramatically ...

And it is not only that the respective aspects which we conceptualize are rather hard to press into the inevitable constraints of any concept. But also, the semantics which we shall associate with such concepts, once we somehow managed the respective conceptualizations, are not only not well defined. No, in fact, they inevitably end up like the concept of beauty which, as the saying goes, is in the eye of the beholder ...

And then, the bricks which we use in building edifices like C-S, become, when read, just about anything the eyes of the semantic beholder makes them look ...

Well, and once past the bricks, what about the edifice ?

Simple indeed : even if the semantics would be fixed and universally shared, the initial difficulty in conceptualization may make any relationships between those bricks multiply problematic, since none of those bricks happen to embody the real meaning of what they are supposed to represent ...

And then, thank God, we can still achieve something often quite useful, even if only for a while, namely, a sweet talk ...

Gnosticism, a Rather Irresistible and Better Human Temptation ...

When using above the term elite chattering class, one may perhaps found it to a certain extent derogatory ...

That was, however, most definitely not the intention ...

And to try to explain, and hopefully, also excuse its use in the case of such a possible perception, let us make an appeal to the way Hassidic Judaism, for instance, may help in clarifying the issue.

Well, according to their teachings, Creation has as its four lowest levels the mineral realms, the vegetal realms, the animal realms, and the realm of the “medaber” ...

And who are constituting that fourth realm of “medaber” ?

Simple, it is us humans, the whole of humanity. Indeed, the word “medaber” has - and can have - only one clear meaning in Hebrew, namely “the speaking creature”, or rather, “the one who keeps speaking” ...

And the remarkable fact in speaking, at least as the Hassidic tradition sees it, is that it is a more subtle and sophisticated form of action than all the other ones available to the denizens of lower realms ...

Yes, in other words, when taken in its best possible meaning, the fourth realm in Creation is that of the elite chattering class ...

Quite amusing, indeed ...

Above that level, needless to say, are supposed to come the various realms of the righteous men, of angels, and so on, and so on ...

Well of course, there is also another possible interpretation, one that sees the elite chattering class and the Gnostics as being in certain connection, in a certain relationship ...

We can try to elaborate somewhat more in this respect, and do so as a further commentary on C-S ...

By the way, let us mention again that all the above lines, as well as the following ones, are indeed meant as a support for the intended aim of the author of C-S, no matter how these section may seem at first sight to less attentive readers ...

And such a support is the same for, and is equally deserved by, any better Gnostic text ...

Traditionally, Gnosticism is associated with religion, and even reduced to being merely another form of religion. However, this is a similarly superficial, thus erroneous, view as is the reduction of mysticism, or in general, spirituality to religion.

In fact, Gnosticism can accommodate secular tendencies, which may in fact include atheists or agnostics as well. Harold Bloom, of Yale University, a remarkably prolific and most distinguished writer and literary critic, considers himself to be a Gnostic. And if one reads his books related to religion, one may easily see that he would rather belong to the category of, shall we say, secular Gnostics, than to that of the religious ones ...

But then, C-S is also a secular book, and to a good extent, a Gnostic one as well ...

Here, therefore, is where the issue of Gnosticism may arise in these lines, and as a kind of conclusion to our comments on C-S, we present a few related comments ...

Well, for a start, the issue of defining what is, and what is not Gnosticism has for long proved to be less than facile. And quite likely, as with other important concepts related to human life, like for instance

happiness, such a difficulty may in fact be quite unavoidable. At the same time, when dealing with such deep concepts, it is often not so important to start up front with a definition. After all, we all know about the saying : “I can’t tell you what a good wine is, but certainly I recognize it when I drink one ...”

An important feature of Gnosticism is the sharp and relentless hostility which various organized religions have always manifested against it, since they simply cannot but consider it a most dangerous form of heresy. Such a view has been maintained, for instance, by the Christian religion, ever since the earliest times, nearly two millennia ago.

Of course, as always with such matters, the situation may be considerably more involved and complex ...

Let us just recall the case of Valentinius (c.100 - c.160 AD), one of the most remarkable Gnostics during the last two millennia, and who nearly became Pope.

The Church, throughout the times, had indeed a tough fight to avoid Gnosticism to take over. And the Gnostics could hardly be accused in public with any other credible capital sin, except for being heretics. Not to mention that such an accusation could too easily hold, since Gnosticism is an extraordinarily prolific and protean approach which keeps endlessly producing new and new visions ranging from Apocalyptic Hells to Most Glorious High Heavens ...

And then, so many see all of that as being an ever renewing theology ...

On the other hand, any Church that wishes to become established, expand and survive can, obviously, take only so much renewal at a time ...

Protestantism came up with having as one of the fundamental principles “Semper Reformanda”, that is, Perpetual Reformation ...

And as seen in the perspective of nearly five centuries by now, they themselves had to slow it down considerably ...

The early church fathers had also another major concern with Gnosticism, namely, it required persons who were not only quite educated, especially given the situation of the general population at the time,

but in addition had a spirit which was more attracted by the ever on-going exploration of the spiritual depths of being, than merely settling down for ever more into some given and rigidly held doctrine ...

And needless to say, there had been preciously few such persons at the time, or for that matter, at any time, much fewer than any church would need for massive expansion and consolidation ...

However, a most important concern of the early church fathers could have been the following one.

The Gnostic approach to spirituality is based, as its name tells it, on one's cognitive being which is supposed to fulfil, to keep happy, one's affective one ...

And as it happens, that approach can, indeed, bring about miracles in this regard ...

The problem - and a fundamental one at that - is that one's affective being, although can be fulfilled and even overwhelmed, it does not remain in that state for long ...

And like one's stomach, it starts asking for new and new such fulfilment ...

But then, the really great Gnostics, Valentinius among them, can put up with all that, and bring forth new and new visions which may again and again amaze one's affective being ...

Well, every better church father could not help realizing that such an approach would quite likely degenerate and end up being more of a show, than substance ...

In the New Testament, in John 4:13-14, Jesus Christ tells a Samaritan woman who draws water from some well : "Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again . But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life."

And this is indeed the main problem with Gnosticism : it can give one plenty water of the kind the Samaritan woman could herself draw for the well, but it can hardly ever give anybody of the other kind of water, of the "living water" ...

And so it comes to pass, that the Gnostic visions, be they secular or religious, keep ever multiplying ...

Theology is so often but, shall we say, a religious version of Gnosticism, and a rather pale one at that ...

What the modern elite chattering class is doing is, on the other hand, a secular version of theology, and so often, not much more bright or fascinating ...

Saint Thomas Aquinas, before dying, seems to had a revelation about all that, about how much what he had earlier written was not "living water" but merely chaff and straw ...

And here, therefore, we are lead back to the Zen-Buddhist saying about the finger pointing to the Moon ...

Yes indeed, so many of us, probably nearly all of us, may need some such finger at a certain stage in our life ...

And the more such fingers may indeed point to the Moon, quite likely the better ...

But then, so clearly, the issue is not in more and more such pointing fingers, but in making that leap, in making that incredible flight from fingers, any number of fingers, to the Moon ...

Let us now go back for a moment to the history of Gnosticism ...

In view of long ongoing accusations of heresy, the perception can often emerge that there is indeed such a thing like "Gnostic Religion" ...

In this regard, however, an essential aspect of Gnosticism - and one which indeed seriously threatens usual organized religions - is that, most definitely, Gnosticism is not merely another religion.

Gnosticism, instead, and as briefly mentioned in the sequel, is a typical development of the Eras of Myth, eras that followed the earlier Eras of Magic of many millennia ago. The immense novelty of the Eras of Myth is that now, we humans, would start bringing into religion our minds as well, and do so on a scale and depth that would, among others, lead to such massive and comprehensive texts relating to human affairs like the Vedas, the Bible, the Greek Mythology, or the Koran, among other ones ...

That passing into the Eras of Myth, however, proved to present a major and imminent danger to any attempt for setting up organized religions. Indeed, those who at that stage, or for that matter, ever after, took up the Gnostic ways were those whose mind was quite prolific at coming up with a potentially unlimited variety of new and new religious visions. And needless to say, such a protean production of visions could not be accommodated in any way whatsoever by an organized religion. Certainly, any organization, including in religion, is essentially in need of some stable, well defined basic setup. This is why in usual organized religion such a setup is its respective foundational dogma, and it indeed becomes a dogma, since it is not supposed to be changed anytime soon, if ever. Consequently, any variation on such a foundational dogma, let alone of the prolific and ever ongoing Gnostic variants, can only be seen as a most dangerous heresy.

It follows that the Gnostic ways - and it is essential to understand that there is not only one, but on the contrary, an ever ongoing flood of them - were in fact the ones which took a fuller advantage of the opening brought with the Eras of Myth. Indeed, organized religions were each only able to take one step into that new era, and then, immediately after, nailed themselves down to their respective positions given by their specific dogmas. And they did so since, among others, they were terribly afraid that no organization could be kept up in any other way.

The Gnostic ways, on the other hand, were ready, willing, and above all, able to take any number of steps ahead within the Eras of Myth ...

As for the basic limitations of the Gnostic ways, it is important to realize that the Eras of Myth as such are but one stage in the human venture towards the Divine. And the Gnostics themselves may fundamentally have to go beyond their own ways, even if from the start they have proved to be so much better pioneers, than the pursuers of organized religions.

There is, of course, also the issue of the individual who may come up with a vision outside of organized religions, or simply, may follow someone else with such a vision.

The deeper such a vision may be felt, the more likely the individual would hold to it for longer. In this way, such a vision may in fact become a kind of dogma, and as such, constitute yet another organized religion, even if all of that on a very small scale of one single individual, or of a few followers.

Needless to say, Gnosticism at its best is not about such a venture. No, at its best, a Gnostic is the one who is making full use of the dynamic ability of human mind to produce visions. And when it comes to approaching Divinity, such a venture is of course not supposed to be within the ability of human mind to be brought to its full completion, be it by one single, or by any number of visions.

Here is precisely one of the basic limitations of the Gnostic ways.

And yet, as Sartre noted “To be religious means to have a good imagination” ...

Let us now consider several relevant details.

From the start, we can note that, rather inevitably in human affairs, there may be a variety of Gnostic ways, each considered valid by their respective pursuers, yet not all of them of the same authenticity, genuineness, depth, consequence or value. In this regard, with the passing of time, various lists of criteria, conditions or specific features have been drawn up, each attempting to give a means by which one may sort out the alleged, or hoped to be right, or proper Gnostic ways. Along such attempts, in more recent times, the Gnostic ways have in some manner or other been connected, among others, to what is nowadays called “depth psychology”.

Also, and quite naturally, even within one given specific Gnostic way various individuals may find themselves at different stages. And such individuals may possibly experience oscillations regarding their respective stages, with the setbacks often eliciting on their part a variety of strong negative reactions.

Regardless of all that, there may hopefully be a far simpler and clearer

approach to the issue of bringing us nearer to a definition of Gnosticism, one which is more direct and straightforward. Here we shall present such an attempt, and do so in two stages. We shall start by trying to single out what may actually go on with a Gnostic person. Then, we shall consider the issue within its larger historic, and in fact, anthropological framework.

Gnosis, or knowledge, be it of any kind in us humans, is but one aspect of the functioning of our awareness. Consequently, let us rather try to deal with awareness as such, which is the very matrix of gnosis.

Here however, we should note three facts.

First, much of our awareness springs in us from deeper realms, realms of which we are often not quite fully aware.

Second, we have to consider the often strongly interacting affective and cognitive processes in our awareness. And in this regard, knowing and knowledge, and in fact, the very knower in us, is supposed to be more about the cognitive, than the affective, even if our processes of cognition may have important affective implications, as well as two way interactions with our affective processes.

Consequently, here, related to Gnosticism, when we are concerned about our awareness, we mainly mean the human ability of having conscious knowledge, that is, both of knowing and being conscious about it, an ability which can function in us even in the absence of an immediate or ongoing more significant emotional or affective process.

Third, we can further note that our normal, usual, everyday human awareness can function on several levels of increasing or deeper subtlety.

One of the least subtle levels of awareness, for instance, is that activated by some direct physical sensation, provided by one or more of our usual five senses.

A more subtle level is that of an awareness not provided by any such direct physical sensation. For instance, for more than a century by now, we are aware of the existence of electro-magnetic waves, and in particular, radio and TV, and lately, mobile phone waves. Those

among us who are trained in Physics, can of course have access to a whole range of scientific arguments, supported by a variety of most clear and convincing experiments, which make us aware of the existence of electro-magnetic waves, and do so in a large number of ways, be they theoretical or empirical. And many such experiments can give us direct physical sensations, even if not of the electro-magnetic waves proper, but of some of their physical effects which can act directly upon our usual senses. The rest of us can have it even simpler : we just switch on our radios, TV-s or mobile phones and, similarly, have the direct physical sensation of some of the effects of electro-magnetic waves, even if not of the very electro-magnetic waves themselves.

A yet more subtle level of awareness is clearly involved when studying, let alone researching and bringing forth, various ideas and results in modern abstract Mathematics, or theoretical Physics, for instance.

And if we want to go beyond the realms of modern scientific precision or rigour, with its hard and objective ways of validation, then much of Philosophy or Metaphysics, or for that matter, Theology or Gnosticism itself can give us further realms where our awareness may function on subtle levels.

When it comes to our awareness relating to the Divine, we may, needless to say, need yet more subtle ways of its functioning.

Certainly, when looked at more carefully from this point of view, it turns out to be a rather trivial contradiction in terms to say that one has - or for that matter, can have - a "religious experience". Indeed, by definition, the Divine is - and must by necessity be - far beyond the direct grasp of any of our usual senses or awareness. After all, even mere electro-magnetic waves are so ...

Also, the Divine cannot as such be within the realms of many of our more subtle or deeper levels of awareness. In this regard it may be useful to recall that even much of modern Mathematics or theoretical Physics, for instance, happens to be completely outside of the awareness of so many of us humans ...

Yet, in certain more subtle ways, we can nevertheless become aware of the Divine.

And this is where the Gnostic opening may happen ...

By the way, C-S also writes often about opening up, and does so specially in its ending lines cited above ...

As mentioned, and seen below, Clement of Alexandria was also talking, even if in other less direct terms, about the same ability of our awareness, ability mediated by gnosis ... However, the elite chattering class, as much as the Gnostics, have shown two critically important shortcomings :

- They never come anywhere near to the solidity in credibility which modern hard science offers when bring up all those new relevant realms and presenting them to our awareness.
- They miss noting the above unprecedented fact, and even more, miss taking advantage of it.

And it is, indeed, not just about any kind of awareness which may open us to the Divine. And quite likely, it is rather about more subtle levels of our awareness, levels at which the interaction with our affective ways is less relevant.

Perhaps we can try to use the term “abstract” to indicate the kind of subtle and pure awareness which may bring us towards, and above all, beyond any kind of Gnostic opening. Certainly, the term “abstract” suggests setting aside many features which, with their endless specific varieties, usually populate our less subtle levels of awareness. It may also suggest a setting aside of many of our more usual emotional processes.

In modern philosophical literature we may find a certain analogy for such a concept of “abstract” in the term “bracketing” which is fundamental in the Phenomenology of Husserl. However “bracketing”, even if it aims to discard a lot of the customary contents of our awareness, and as such it is indeed a process of abstraction, it is nevertheless still supposed to stop at what are hopefully the remaining deeper “intentional” structures of our own awareness, thus it is not exactly meant to open us up to the Divine, but rather to aspects of Creation only ...

Certainly, the concept of “abstract” is to a certain extent self-referential, that is, it is quite “abstract” in itself. This makes it highly nontrivial, since it is much unlike many of our usual concepts. For instance, the

concept of “blue” is definitely not “blue”, thus it is not self-referential. And as is well known in Logic, self-referentiality can easily lead to paradoxes ...

Consequently, much of the difficulty in defining Gnosticism comes from the less than usual kind of awareness which can open us up to the Divine, a kind of awareness for which the term “abstract” may be suggested.

And in order to try to diminish the possibility for misunderstandings, one can list a number of states of awareness which need not be included among those called “abstract” in the above sense.

For instance, traditionally, it has been observed that being in a group which at a given moment in time aims to reach an opening to the Divine, can have a facilitating effect on the participating individual. Also, the performance in such a group of certain rituals, ceremonies, sacraments, and so on, can have an enhancing effect.

When alone, the individual may also initiate a number of specific procedures in an attempt to open up to the Divine. And such an opening up may in fact happen occasionally, as if in an accidental manner, and as if all by itself, or rather, as an act of what may usually go by the name of Divine grace ...

Here however, one should be particularly careful to distinguish between two fundamentally different phenomena.

The various procedures, practiced in a group or individually, can at most “switch off” the individual from the levels of awareness which occupy our everyday lives. And so often, the experience of such a “switching off” may pass as a “religious experience”. This, as mentioned however, is simply a contradiction in terms. And the fact that such a “switching off” may appear to us as being so extraordinary, so immensely valuable and desirable, has much more to do with its relatively elevated or subtle position when compared to our everyday awareness, than to its nearness to the kind of “abstract” awareness which may lead us to a Gnostic opening, or even beyond ...

Certainly, if we stop with such a “switching off”, with such a so called “religious experience”, and consider it as the “non plus ultra” in Gnos-

tic, or for that matter, any kind of opening, then we simply fail to realize that it was merely one of the possible preludes to an eventual “switching on” towards an “abstract” awareness which would hopefully be the one to take us further along the road to an opening up to the Divine ...

And needless to say, one may eventually simply leave aside such “switching off” procedures or stages, as being unnecessary. After all, as we can see, they are in themselves not sufficient for a Gnostic or any other more genuine opening ...

William James, in his 1902 classic book “Varieties of Religious Experience”, mentions four characteristics marking and setting aside such experiences, namely, that they are :

- ineffable, thus defying expression in language,
- noetic, by their revelation of most relevant knowledge related to existence as such,
- transient in their rather ephemeral duration, and
- passive in the sense that they appear as simply happening to us, while we are completely taken up by the respective event as mere witnesses.

Clearly, the above qualities are more about a “switching off” from our usual awareness under the effect of what appears to us as a most relevant event, than they may - all alone in themselves - represent a more lasting “switching on” towards the Divine ...

And to further point to the misunderstandings surrounding such issues, we can recall the various long persistent views and practices which, with the use of all sorts of drugs, claim, hope and try to help the individual to reach a “switch off” or a “religious experience”, and do so based on the ill-conceived view of having thus attained actually nothing short of an opening up to the Divine ...

The fact is, of course, that our usual ways of awareness are not particularly conducive to a Gnostic opening. And then, an ignorant and

careless use of negation in Logic makes so many believe that the whole issue, and in fact, the only issue, is to reach “alternative” or “altered” forms of awareness ...

Indeed, as mentioned earlier, it is a rather elementary fact of Logic that one cannot give a definition by a mere negation. After all, by negating something, one does not do anything more than to open the door to absolutely all the other possibilities. And this is certainly not a meaningful, let alone, operative definition.

And in the case of a human brain which has billions upon billions of highly interconnected and interacting neurons we can, of course, bring it into an unimaginable number of “altered” or “alternative” states, corresponding to a similarly unfathomable variety of forms of awareness.

And then, how can we imagine, let alone know for sure that just about any of such “altered” or “alternative” states of awareness, any which we may happen to elicit, are but perfect for a Gnostic or any other kind of more genuine opening ?

Merely playing rather arbitrarily with the immense variety of possible “altered” or “alternative” states of awareness can only show the rather hopelessly superficial and misdirected approach of those who believe in pursuing it ...

Does not the above recall the ridiculous situation of a compulsive liar who believes that, by simply telling just about whatever lie, that would rather automatically benefit him or her ?

Quite likely, on our way to a Gnostic opening we should at least at the beginning “switch off” our more usual ways of awareness. But then, the main issue still remains, namely, how to “switch on”, and above all, what to “switch on” to ?

And to the extent that here we may simply and inevitably reach the realms of the ineffable does in no way mean that we have also reached the rather murky realms of whatever some arbitrary “altered” or “alternative” states of awareness may ever happen to mean ...

No wonder that Timothy Leary, so much prone to strange ways, formulated his “gospel” to enlightenment in the simple formula “tune in, turn on, and drop out” ...

And needless to say, quite a few ... dropped out ...

Out, and far far away from any kind of enlightenment ...

To “switch off” is like becoming “free from”. And as mentioned earlier, it is well known that by merely being “free from”, one is not automatically qualified for being “free for” as well ...

And to “switch on” is, of course, rather like being “free for” ... Not to mention that, when it comes to approaching Divinity, it is about ineffable realms ...

The difficulty of the situation we face here, however, is not reduced alone to the ineffability we encounter. No, here we may come face to face with what, after all, and so seldom realized, may in fact be by far the greatest and most unfortunate poverty ever oppressing mankind :

- Namely, the poverty in the variety of our known and practiced forms of religions. The poverty that we do not have at least over six billion, or more, of religions. The poverty that not each and every human being - who happens to have his or her uniqueness expressed even on the level of mere fingerprints - can, and does have, his or her own religion. And why not, several such individual religions over one’s life time of development and enlightenment ...

In short, one simply cannot know God. In particular, one simply cannot experience God, no matter what one’s so called “religious experience” may happen to be ...

On the other hand, our more “abstract” types of awareness can help us know not only about electro-magnetic waves, and know about them for certain, even if at the moment we do not experience them in any direct or indirect way. Yes, our more “abstract” types of awareness can help us in knowing that God exists.

To know God we cannot.

But to know that God exists we certainly can ...

And this second type of knowing - which is open to us - is the Gnostic opening at its best ...

And now, a few historical, or rather, anthropological remarks.

Several millennia ago, we humans went through what anthropologists call the Axial Age, when most of the present day major religions originated. One way to see that period is as a transition from the earlier Eras of Magic to the Eras of Myth, to which we still mostly happen to belong. The German philosopher Karl Jaspers appears to have originated the terms Axial Age, and first dealt with the issue in depth.

The Eras of Magic kept us in the merry-go-round of “doing-feeling”. Some such archaic stages in human development can still be witnessed with a few less developed tribes living outside of civilization, or for that matter, with the practices of certain rather backward groups in the New Age movement.

The Eras of Myth came later, following the Axial Age, when the cognitive abilities of many enough of us humans reached certain higher levels. At that stage, we entered a new merry-go-round, namely, that of “knowing-feeling”, with the “knowing” component being supplied by our various myths. Of course, a strong element of the earlier “doing-feeling” merry-go-round has remained as an important component. However, what post-modernism, for instance, likes to call with a clear disdain as “mega-narratives”, namely, the newly emerged myths following the Axial Age, they were to be ever after the essential component. And they proved to provide a long lasting centralizing and unifying power within their respective human realms of influence.

Indeed, it was not easy just for everybody to come up with a myth large and sophisticated enough in order to be able to claim to explain all the more important issues in human life, let alone in the universe. Also, in order to become relevant, and let alone, operative, such a myth had to be accepted by many enough of the humans. And following that, it also had to be guarded from the myriad of possible “heretical” alterations, not to mention, simple forgetting or disregard. What would, however, work in the favour of such myths was the pow-

ers of authority, tradition and majority, as well as the fact that the alternative of refusing the given myth, and thus suddenly having no myth at all, often seemed a bleak one which would among others leave the individual with a diminished social relevance, let alone, individual guidance. Here, by the way, we can again note the fact that one cannot obtain a definition by a mere negation. And by negating a given myth, one simply risks instantly losing any deeper definition of one's identity and social position ...

Just as the Eras of Myth make use of the earlier "doing-feeling" elements, so does Gnosticism makes essential use of "knowing-feeling", even if by doing so it may often lead no further than a mere "switching off" of one's more usual levels of awareness.

Where Gnosticism goes beyond the usual ways of the Eras of Myth is in its distinctive and manifest protean ways of producing ever new myths. In particular, it does not see itself as being bound by any given specific myth raised to a form of established and most jealously guarded dogma. This, as mentioned, may, after all, be one of the main reasons why Christian Gnosticism, for instance, was treated with so much hostility ever since the early days of the Church.

The typical and essentially protean ways of Gnosticism in ever coming up with new myths is a clear, even if possibly less than conscious attempt not to stop at the stage of "switching off" our usual levels of awareness, and instead, to prod us towards those more "abstract" levels of awareness which may eventually lead us to an opening towards the Divine ...

Zen Buddhism, which is only about a millennium old, is the other better known attempt to go beyond our Eras of Myth. And in certain ways it is yet more radical in doing so than the various Gnostic approaches. Indeed, by its sustained practice of meditation and koans it clearly aims to help one move towards more "abstract" forms of awareness.

In the early part of the 20th century, Ernest Holmes, with his Science of Mind, made another attempt to go beyond our Eras of Myth. The

way his attempt ended up with the various churches of Religious Science can be seen as a testimony to the difficulty of such an attempt even in our modern times, and in particular, of the difficulty in clarifying enough what a more “abstract” level of awareness may, after all, mean ...

With the emergence of modern science during the last few centuries, and even more so during the last half a century, we may have yet another opportunity in understanding the nature of our more “abstract” levels of awareness. Indeed, modern science has made it abundantly clear that realms in Creation which earlier were totally outside of human awareness can usefully be brought into its direct or indirect grasp. And the story of the electro-magnetic waves is but one of the many many such instances.

And then, one may be led to the following rather inevitable four earlier questions :

1. Do you believe that whatever in Creation which may be relevant to your life is already accessible to your awareness ?
2. And if not - which is most likely the case - then do you believe that it may become accessible during the rest of your life ?
3. And if not - which again is most likely the case - then do you believe that you should nevertheless try some kind of two way interactions with all that which may never ever become accessible to your awareness, yet may nevertheless be relevant to your life ?
4. And if yes - which most likely is the minimally wise approach - then how do you intend to get into a two way interaction with all those realms about which your only awareness can be that they shall never ever be within your awareness, no matter how long you may live ?

Well, one way to see our more “abstract” levels of awareness may perhaps be given by a proper consideration of the last question above ... So much for trying to reach in our awareness towards the Divine ...

Of course, the above four questions try an approach from the point of view of the divide “to be aware of - not to be aware of”.

And as any approach based on one or another point of view, has its own limitations ...

What is important, however, is the suggestion of approaching these questions with a more and more “abstract” level of awareness ...

And this in particular means, with less and less involvement of our affective being ...

Including less and less affectivity, that is, emotions, about having or not having emotions ...

After all, just like our bodies, our emotions are an inseparable part of us. And just as it is not necessary to dispose of our bodies completely when trying to open up our awareness to the Divine, so it is not necessary to get rid of all our emotions ...

But then again, when trying to open up to the divine, the results are in no way proportional to the extent and intensity of involvement of our bodies ...

And similarly those results are not with the involvement of our emotions ...

Amusingly, desiring to open up to the Divine is seldom, if at all, a desire of our bodies ...

On the other hand, it can often be a desire of our emotions ...

Yet that does in no way mean that it is, therefore, our emotions which have to be massively involved in the process of reaching such an opening up ...

Even more amusingly, however, the above distinctions are seldom clear enough to many enough among us humans ...

The view of human consciousness as a mere epiphenomenon emerging from the functioning of certain more complex physical or biological system, in particular, the billions of neurons in our brains, has been with us ever since the dawn of modern science about three centuries ago. Needless to say, in earlier times, no one among the more learned and wise was so foolish to fall for such a simplistic and simplifying reductionist view. Instead, it had for ages been assumed that human

consciousness, soul or spirit, are entities which do not belong to the palpable realms of physics, chemistry or biology.

More recently, a certain awareness in this regard has started to re-emerge connected with the issue whether “mind” and “brain” are the same, or rather, they are different. And here the issue is not merely whether “mind” is simply the functioning of “brain”, that is, an epiphenomenon of “brain” ...

Clearly, whatever may be beyond the palpable realms of Physics, Chemistry or Biology, it may require more “abstract” ways of thinking and awareness. At least as abstract as the world of ideas of Plato, so vividly described in his parable of the Cave.

And human consciousness or awareness may after all belong to such realms ...

A Finger ...

As an attempt to illustrate that concept of “abstract”, let us consider the following simple, yet rather subtle exercise :

One sits down comfortably, relaxes, and comes to a state of sufficient inner rest and peace. And then, for no special purpose at all, one simply decides to move one’s, say, right index finger ...

And lo and behold, the finger moves !

But now one can ask : who or what did really move the finger ?
Who or what in him or her did decide and then move the finger ?

Most certainly, it was not only the respective muscles involved in the movement ...

Of course, so often, one immediately jumps and says : “I decided and moved my finger.”

And with that, the issue is simply set aside ...

If ever was considered even for a brief moment ...

It is, indeed, taken so much and so naturally for granted that we do know the obvious and perfect answer to it, that no one ever bothers about it, at least not as long as one can move one’s fingers ...

It reminds one of the fact that we see through our eyes, yet we do not see our eyes through which we see ...

And thank God that we do not see our own eyes in the process of seeing ...

At least not, as long as our eyes are healthy enough ...

But can we leave the above issue with the finger in the same way ?
And leave so for evermore ?

Oh, that I, ... Problems with I, New and Old ...

It is incredible how many problems have been caused by that “I” ... Quite likely because it appears to each of us to be so obviously us, and only and only us, thus nobody and nothing else ...

Where would, for instance, Psychology, modern or ancient, or for that matter, Psychiatry be, without that “I” ?

In this regard it may be instructive to consult the 1981 book “Maps of the Mind”, of Charles Hampden-Turner ...

But if we are here involved with issues called spiritual, then it may be worthwhile in this regard to recall the immense problems which accompany Christianity for more than two millennia by now, problems related to the confusion which, in their usual reading of the New Testament, indentifies “I” with the very person of Jesus Christ ...

In John 10:30, for instance, Jesus says “I and the Father are one ...”, where the “Father” stands of course for God ... And certainly, this is quite hard to interpret if one assumes, as it is typically done for more than two millennia by now, that the “I” in the above statement is the very person of Jesus ...

In John 14:6, Jesus says “I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

And the usual interpretation it has had in Christianity is that Jesus is the saviour, and the only one as such. Therefore, all those who do not believe in Jesus are condemned to Hell ...

In addition to Jews, this of course goes for Moslems, Hindus, Buddhists, and needless to say, for atheists, agnostics, nihilists, and the

whole similar lot ...

Even in our own days, more fundamentalist Christian Churches have that interpretation as one of their basic dogmas. And some of these churches are quite influential, among others, in America ...

By the way of the bumper sticker "Jesus saves." In John 6:44, Jesus says "No man can come to me, except the Father which has sent me draw him", while in John 6:65, along the same lines, he says "... no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father." Indeed, as known in many traditions, salvation is an act of grace ... Therefore, it is not in the power or ability of anyone to bestow it upon somebody else, and not even upon himself or herself ... Yes indeed, it seems that ... you have to be enlightened, in order to become enlightened ...

As it happens, however, the gravely misleading interpretation of "I" did not start with the Christians. In John 8:58, Jesus says "Before Abraham was, I am", and those who happened to hear it reacted violently to it, threatening Jesus with stones, since they could not accept such a statement, given that Abraham had lived about two millennia before Jesus ...

Further, in John 14:12, Jesus says "He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father." And in view of his assumed godly status, this is clearly not supposed to be true, in case "I" in this statement is merely his person ...

And to add to all that, in the New Testament, in Hebrews 6:20, his ascension to Heaven is described as follows : "... where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek ..."

And needless to say, this sound immensely strange if "I" is indeed the person of Jesus, thus Jesus being "I" is the same with the Father, who is God ...

Also, it clearly conflicts with the Nicene Doctrine of Trinity, established in 325 AD ...

Needless to say, in Catholic churches one does not give a sermon com-

menting on the New Testament, so that it can never come to having to comment on citations as those above. On the other hand, an important feature of Protestant church ceremonies is precisely the performance of such commentaries during many sermons. Yet, hardly a Protestant can ever remember that any of the above citations was commented upon otherwise than with “I” being identified with the person of Jesus ...

As far as the last above citation, namely, from Hebrews 6::20 is concerned, for instance, are there many Protestants to have ever heard any comment upon it during a church sermon ?

And now, as a background, we can recall that in the Old Testament, in Exodus 3:14, God tells Moses that His name is “I Am That I Am”. Thus it may appear that, again, we are being faced with that “I”, the Divine “I”, and not just that of anybody around ...

However, the original Hebrew formulation of that statement only contains three words, and not five ones, as above. Indeed, and perhaps quite surprisingly for some, there is absolutely not reference to any “I” in that Hebrew formulation which, with some transliteration, reads “Ehie Asher Ehie”. And the Hebrew word “ehie” means “to be now and for evermore”, that is, it is about being now, and being in the eternal future.

So then, what happened to that “I” ?

By the way, in the Old Testament one can also find written “I” in the original Hebrew text. For instance, the first of the Ten Commandments starts with “Anohi ...”, which is a form of “I” in Hebrew ...

So much for some of the ever ongoing problems caused by that “I” ...

And Again, the Same Finger ...

Well now, even at a slightly more careful analysis it becomes quite obvious that it is not so easy to identify that "I" which moved the finger ...

Indeed, let us mention a few related instances in this regard in connection with the finger that moved ...

Latest, state of the art medical science may identify a rather small bunch of neurons, or perhaps, even a single one, in one's brain which - just like the respective finger muscles - have essentially been involved, that is, whose involvement is sine-qua-non, since without them the respective finger would remain at rest.

However, as far as present medical science happens to know, that bunch of neurons, or for that matter, single neuron, is a mere tissue, that is, a biological mass of matter. And matter, as the modern atomic theory in Physics or Chemistry tells us, is mostly void, and only and only functioning according to certain impersonal laws.

So then, who really moved the finger ?

Who excited those neurons, or that single neuron ?

Needless to say, modern medical science has no answer to that question ...

And of course, is glad to consider such issues completely outside of its realms of interest ...

As for modern Psychology or Psychiatry, well, there is, among others, the ego, or if you prefer, the super-ego, or on the contrary, the Id, which can be thought as originating the movement of that poor lonely finger ...

Well now, if that finger happened somehow to pull the trigger of a gun, and somebody got killed, be it intentional or not on the part of

the one to whom the finger belongs, then the Police, for instance, may arrest that person, the whole of that person, and not only the finger, and start a tedious process of investigation.

Thus the Police assumes to be perfectly clear about ... who, or what moved the finger ...

However, if that unlucky person happens to employ a good lawyer, then that lawyer can argue in a court of law that, so sorry, all that happened during a temporary short period of insanity of the ... owner of the finger ...

And some lawyers can, and do, get away with it ...

And in such a case, so does of course, the finger ...

Therefore, who, or what did, indeed, move the finger !!??

Well, sitting there, relaxed and peaceful, one may try to contact or connect with that most subtle and elusive entity which may have in fact decided, and then moved the finger ...

And in the process, one may come to the realization of a “trinity” to which one is so essentially and ultimately connected, and connected so, just about all of the time : the “Father” underlying it all, the “Son” who can decide and move the finger, and the “Holy Spirit” which is observing it all ...

Coming to such a realization of a “trinity” from that simple exercise of moving one’s finger may be an illustration of an instance of “abstract” thinking and awareness ...

As far as Aristotle is concerned, he would simply put the whole story on the account of that unfathomable ... Unmoved Prime Mover ...

And for some Christian theologians the term would be God-Head, which is supposed to be the eternally ever the same Principle behind God, the active and creating God ...

And where is all that leaving us from a more practical point of view ?

We humans happen to have at least three rather different beings in us : the physical, the affective, and the cognitive.

Our lesser brothers, the animals, as well as our small children, are mostly endowed with the first two.

As for our physical being, to the extent that we are privileged enough socially, we do not face insurmountable difficulties.

On the other hand, no matter how privileged we may happen to be, our affective being can still end up feeling a long ongoing and rather hopeless hardship ...

The human novelty of a significant cognitive being can come and help our physical and affective beings in having it better in life.

Yet there are severe limitations in this regard. Indeed, each of our mentioned three beings tends to be happy in rather different ways, and the happiness of one, or even of two of them, does not necessarily imply the happiness of the remaining one as well ...

Unfortunately, this very simple and basic “fact of life” is not adequately well known, understood, or taken into account ...

Consequently, all sort of often sterile but considerable and sustained efforts are made to keep one or another of our three beings happy by implication, that is, as a hoped for effect of the happiness of another of our being ...

And typically, our affective being is the hardest to keep happy ...

And if we are lucky enough not to experience unhappiness in our physical being, and on top of it, we have a well developed cognitive one, then so often, all we can think about is to make our affective being happy by the happiness which we hope that it may “trickle down” from our cognitive one ...

Indeed, those among us who happen to be blessed with “knowing about infinitely better” than they feel in life, can easily be tempted to try to impact that gift of their cognitive being in a positive manner upon their affective one ...

And much of the venture of Gnosticism can be seen as having - even

if often less than consciously - such a source, motivation and aim ...

Yet, for the individual, this is, in the medium and longer run, but ineffective ...

And then, if the ways of happiness of our mentioned respective three beings happen to be so different from one another as not to be easily and sufficiently convertible from one into another, what can we do ?

One possible way, again through the offices of our cognitive being, but not necessarily through a Gnostic detour as well, may be the following :

Realize that there are two immense gaps, or divides, which we tend not to know about :

First, between the Unmanifest, and on the other hand, Manifest Creation.

Second, and within Manifest Creation, between Being, and on the other hand, Knowing, Understanding, Doing and Having, and so on ...

And overlooked, these two gaps have been, and continue to be ...

Related to the second, and as mentioned earlier, the German philosopher Martin Heidegger points out as a fundamental feature of Western philosophy that, for more than two millennia by now, that is, ever since Plato, it has forgotten about Being ...

With respect to the first gap, needless to say, the ignorance is even more pronounced. And in the available literature, one has to go back to the ancient Hindu Cosmology, to be able to read about the fact that Manifest Creation withdraws cyclically into the Unmanifest, and it remains there for no one can know how long periods ...

And yet, the Mother of all Manifest is the Unmanifest ...

And when our affective being is yearning for happiness, and cannot find it, it should perhaps remember all of that ...

Clement of Alexandria, in his *Stromata*, writes about the irresistible call of the Gnostic way in some of us :

“I will dare aver that it is not because he wishes to be saved that he, who devotes himself to knowledge for the sake of the divine science itself, chooses knowledge. For the exertion of the intellect by exercise is prolonged to a perpetual exertion. And the perpetual exertion of the intellect is the essence of an intelligent being, which results from an uninterrupted process of admixture, and remains eternal contemplation, a living substance. Could we, then, suppose anyone proposing to the Gnostic whether he would choose the knowledge of God or everlasting salvation, and if these, which are entirely identical, were separable, he would without the least hesitation choose the knowledge of God ?”

And yet, temperance is clearly in order as Tennyson brings it to our awareness in his poem “The Ancient Sage” :

“For nothing worthy proving can be proven,
Nor yet disproven : wherefore thou be wise,
Cleave ever to the sunnier side of doubt,
Cling to Faith beyond the forms of Faith !”

The great and, until modern times, rather unique charm of Gnosticism has been its immense propensity to come up with ever new and yet more impressive visions of Creation ...

Since the advent of modern hard science, we have had going on a second such protean human venture ...

The shortcoming of hard science is that the new realms it keeps bringing in such abundance into our awareness are definitely far below of, or far lesser than, whatever may be called or meant by spiritual, divine, or any of the kind ...

Added to it, hard science is also an elite venture, since very few humans are attracted to it, or capable of pursuing it properly ...

On the other hand, it can keep delivering ever new and quite formidable

practical applications of significant everyday use ...

And needless to say, the credibility of these new realms brought to our awareness by hard science is incomparably more solid than that of the visions of Gnostics have ever been ...

However, and as mentioned earlier - and so long time ago, and so wonderfully suggested by Clement of Alexandria in the above citation - the major and unprecedented novelty brought to us by modern hard science is that the traditional dichotomy between the known, and on the other hand, the unknown, a dichotomy which for ages has kept our awareness, and especially on the individual level, fixed so rigidly in what appeared to be given for evermore, is by now clearly but an illusion of times past ...

Coupled to that comes the fact that modern hard science is essentially about more and more "abstract" ways of awareness, which however, are clearly not mere imaginations. Indeed, no matter how practically useful its application are, it is developing within realms which are less and less intuitively accessible to many, and instead, are more and more counter-intuitive, and in fact, sheer un-intuitive ...

And then, who knows, one day, we may even find ... who, or what moves the finger ...

But even if that may ever come to pass, it would quite likely happen not so much along the ways of hard science, or for that matter, of Gnosticism ...

Meanwhile, are you not afraid to remain alone, especially during the dark of the night, with that which moves your finger, and about whom, or about what, you happen to know just about nothing at all ?

Let me tell you honestly, and please, keep it confidential for my own sake : sometime I myself prefer to sleep with the lights on, just in case ...

To Bring, or Not, Forth What Is Within You ...

So then again, who, or what moves the finger ?

An “abstract” enough mind may go quite far along finding that ...
And of course, finding it not as a mere answer ...
After all, Gnostics, as well as the elite chattering class, have for evermore been most creatively busy with giving such assumed answers ...

However, if we are here now in the realms of writing, and not of, say, painting, sculpting, singing, dancing, praying, or other such ventures, then let us try to end by one of the most impressive Gnostic citations, a saying of Jesus Christ in the Gospel of Thomas :

“If you bring forth what is within you, what you bring forth will save you. If you do not bring forth what is within you, what you do not bring forth will destroy you.”

Yes indeed, we should better consider that there are dichotomies in life which simply cannot in any way whatsoever be negotiated by some clever give and take type manipulations ...

And instead, we have to go along one, and only one of the two ways ...

Go along, and eventually face the consequences, if we made the wrong choice ...

And that which moves your finger is quite likely in you, as much as in anybody else, and also in everything else ...

And then, the above dichotomy may indeed be worth considering for a while longer ...

A Question ...

So often, we tend to decide or act quite instantly, and we definitely seem to like it when we do so ...

It is, after all, but the ... eternal call of the jungle ... in us, the remembrance of how we did things when for millions, if not billions of years we were animals in the jungle, in case Darwin is indeed right with his theory of evolution ...

Certainly, we do not like questions, and especially those kind of questions we do not seem to find a satisfactory enough answer for, and then have to live with them for longer ...

Well, a question which we could hardly do better than live with it all our lives is :

“What does it really mean to be human ?”

Amusingly, a typical and rather instant reaction to this question can be to consider it all too trivial, since it is so easy to roll out a long list of qualities we humans alone have among all creatures known to us here down on Planet Earth ...

And yet, this question is not at all about any such list ...

No, not at all ...

Indeed, it does not take a human to see that we are in many respects so much different from animals. After all, animals themselves, like for instance, our pets can, and do, see that ...

So then, what does indeed mean to be human ?

Let us try and start nearer to home, that is, with what goes by the name of Western tradition. In the Old Testament, up front, and as soon as we humans are mentioned for the first time ever, that is, in the very first chapter called Genesis, and in verses 26-28, it is written no less than four times, and one after the other, that God made us according to His image.

As such, needless to say, that statement can be by far the most hard to understand one in all of that book ...

After all it contains no less than a double mystery : about God and about man ...

Yet it is precisely that very fact which should make one try to understand it better, even if it would most likely take one years upon years ...

After all, and quite likely, the statements made by Leibniz and a few Hassidic masters, mentioned in the first section of this book, are related to Genesis 1:26-28. Indeed, by what Leibniz said, he merely tried to elaborate somewhat on what that Old Testament statement may indeed mean. And the Hassidic teachers merely tried to further such an elaboration, even if they were not familiar with Leibniz ...

But let us not pass so easily upon Genesis 1:26-28.

According to one of the learned important ways regarding the interpretation of statements in such books like the Old Testament, the importance of a statement is evaluated by how upfront in the book it is made, how many times it is repeated, and whether it is emphasized by being made one after the other. Well, in this regard, the statement that man was made in the image of God happens to take the top place : it is made as up front as possible, it is made four times, while very few other statements in the Old testament are made even three times, and it is made one after the other ...

But now, what on Earth may really mean to be made in the image of God ?

Well, let us have a look at what the very same book says about God.

In Exodus 3:14, when Moses ask God to tell His name, so that Moses may communicate it to the children of Israel, the answer of God is : “I Am that I Am”.

And one of the remarkable facts about that answer is its self-referential nature ...

Here, of course, it is worth recalling what anthropologists tell us, namely that the tree major themes found in ancient pre-literate human cultures are change, self-reference and infinity. And clearly, today, we are not anywhere near to a satisfactory understanding of them. Quite on the contrary, they still fuel much of philosophical discourse, and the corresponding countless differences of view ...

As for self-reference, ever since the ancient Greek celebrated Liar’s Paradox, we tend to do our very best in avoiding it ...

Yet the even more ancient Hebrews found it to be not only unavoidable, but in fact, the very name of God ...

Amusingly in this regard, in the last couple of decades, theoretical computer science found it useful to develop logical approaches which do essentially involve self-reference. Needless to say, however, that such a venture is still strictly limited within rather small circles of specialists ...

And not less amusingly, instead of self-reference in its name, the strange term “vicious circle” is used ...

Yes indeed, the dread and fear of ancient Greeks when facing self-reference still lurks deep in human emotion ...

But now, what has self-reference got to do with us humans ?

And if it has got anything at all, then in which way it may indeed indicate that we are made in the image of God ?

Well, here, I am afraid, we are back again to Darwin, in case his theory of evolution of species has enough validity ...

Indeed, it is a most obvious and essential trait of animals, as well as of our own small children, to become totally involved in the situations in which they participate. In other words, they are simply overwhelmed

- and amusingly, love to be so, since this is the only way they know to be fully alive in the here and now - whenever a situation affects them, or is created by them.

And whenever that happens, nothing in them remains - or is supposed to remain - uninvolved ...

Therefore, they cannot be aware of anything else except that situation which becomes one with them, with all of them ...

And as it happens, most of adult humans tend to function in similar ways ...

There are, certainly, less involving momentary situations, or situations which extend over some longer duration which makes it difficult for us to keep being totally involved all that time ...

And then, perhaps, one may be able to step back for a moment, and find in oneself the space, the ability, the possibility to see one's whole involvement, and see it as an outside and rather detached observer may do ...

An observer, an outside and detached observer ...

An observer who is not interested in any way whatsoever in what is going on, let alone to get involved in it even by a mere opinion, evaluation or judgment ...

An observer who, precisely due to that detachment, can and does observe everything ...

Is that observer in any way related to what is that which moves your finger ?

Is that observer, and even more so what moves your finger, eternally the same in you ?

Do they, indeed, feel being the same, without any change in any of them, right across all of your life ?

From your earliest childhood you can remember, till your very last days ?

Hindu and Buddhist tradition are quite explicit about such an ability in each of us humans ...

And quite clearly, it is but part of the self-referential ability of human

awareness ...

Part of that self-referentiality which in Exodus 3:14 is told by God to be His name ...

That God which in Genesis 1:26-28 made humans in His image ...

Well, this is, therefore, quite likely but about one of the more important features which happens to make us be human ...

What else may be there to make us be human ?

And who or what may stop you to start wondering about that !!??

Is it a Mystery ?

In the Western tradition all sort of terms got some kind of monopoly to label certain truly important concepts, and in doing so, often misrepresent them rather copiously ...

Two of them are the terms “saint” and “mystic” ...

Of course, terms such as “religious”, “atheist”, “realist”, “pragmatist”, and quite a few other ones of the kind, do equally little justice to what they claim to label ...

And the use of human language in human thought being what it is, here we keep digging ourselves in a variety of holes, and do so for millennia by now in a happy go lucky manner ...

But let us not open too much such an awfully large can of worms, and instead, try to focus only on one such term, namely, that of “mystic”.

Well, the fact is that even at a most cursory look, there is simply not much - and in fact, there just cannot be much - mystery about being, or on the contrary, not being a “mystic” ...

Indeed, one of the greatest miracles of life, and therefore of human life as well, is that it can go on and on with so little right kind of knowledge, and against what appears to be no less than an infinity of what is not known, yet may be relevant to life, not to mention the mistaken kind, or simply false knowledge ...

After all, it is one of the major novelties brought to human awareness by our times of prominence of science research that what we do know is always but a finite amount, and what we do not know, and shall never ever know, is on the other hand nothing short of an infinite

amount ...

So that, one may have any number of PhD, DrSc degrees, Nobel and other prizes, yet one will only have a finite knowledge, and an infinite ignorance ...

In other words, one will always face the mystery of that infinite amount of what one does not know ...

And then, here we are : we humans are, each and every one of us, but ... mystics ... !

And to add to it, we are so, either we like it, or not ...

And in fact, we do not have to do anything about it, since from the moment we are born, and until the moment we die, we are mystics ... And the real aggravation is that we cannot do against it anything either ...

Now, certainly, some of us may be quite a bit more of a ... mystic ... than others ...

Yes indeed, some of us have a PhD in, say, biology, or much more frighteningly and intimidatingly, in mathematics, or not to mention, quantum physics, for instance ...

Yet, what can all of that ever do to abolish that infinity of knowledge which we do not have, and shall never have !???

And then, coming back to important practicalities : do you want to have a good life ?

And how do you want to have a good life if you did not give enough thought to what good life is really supposed to be ?

And how could you ever find out what good life is, if you did not first find out what is supposed to mean being a human ?

Mystery is the bottomless ocean in which we all swim and must swim ...

Yet certain things can help us do so ...

And in the light of seven or eight millennia of continuously recorded civilization on a few continents, we do not have to discover just about

everything for our own selves, and do so for the very first time in human history ...

No, not at all ...

And instead, we may try to study more carefully, a lot more carefully in fact, what may go by the name of wisdom literature ...

That literature which not in its entirety ended up being appropriated and misrepresented by one or another of the so called great religions ...

Therefore, try, and have a nice day ...

And you may at last even manage to know what a good life means, and then, have a good life ...

Conclusions ?

Conclusions ?

What conclusions !!??

As long as one is alive there are not, and there cannot really be conclusions ...

And yet, albeit we may know that, the fact is that more than on occasion we do feel the need for certain conclusions ...

And what can you do when your affective being, the feelings in you, those relentlessly urging waves upon waves of feelings, happen to demand quite urgently and categorically one or another thing to be satisfied ?

Anything at all ?

Yes, this is the very root of far too many troubles we humans face : the inappropriate integration and interplay between our affective, and on the other hand, our cognitive beings ...

Just think about all those who, for instance, know very well that smoking is damaging to them, yet cannot give it up ...

And they cannot, even if they happen to be outstanding medical doctors, and have already tried to give it up quite a number of times ...

Well, the presence in us of our affective being we share with just about all living creatures, including possibly plants ...

And if there is even the slightest truth in the theory of evolution of

species, well, then, our affective being is indeed most deeply embedded in us ...

On the other hand, certainly, we as humans cannot say anything of the kind about our cognitive being which appears to be a rather recent endowment ...

Is, therefore, so surprising that in so many situations our cognitive being ends up mostly like a mere hit-man in service of our affective being ?

Is indeed so surprising that related to a variety of situations, many of us happen to know about infinitely better than they feel most of the time ?

That we do indeed know about heaven, know that it may exist somewhere, and hopefully, also sometime later even for us, and yet the way we feel at the time rather reminds one of the purgatory, if not in fact of some sort of hell ?

This massive disconnect between our affective and cognitive beings is that which causes in us the failure to agree with Leibniz that ... this is the best of all possible worlds ...

And how, indeed, can we agree when we do not share that immense gift of grace Leibniz enjoyed in having a far more perfect integration and interplay between his own affective and cognitive beings ?

Let us therefore try to have once more a better look at our cognitive being ...

And try to do so, as if instead of some conclusion ...

A most remarkable ability of our human cognitive being is to know about, to be aware of the existence of the unknown, the existence of what one does not know at any given moment in time ...

And in fact, one can also be aware that the unknown is far far larger

than what one happens to know about ...

Far far larger, you would say ?

Well, how much larger ?

Say, infinitely so ?

Needless to say such an awareness can be rather pure, and as such, without having us venture into any of its specific consequences, let alone getting us flooded by too many emotions.

And yet, one can hardly avoid in such a case the awareness that the immensity of the unknown may be as much relevant to oneself - if not actually far far more so - as are the realms which one happens to know about ...

This is thus one way to see ... God ..., The Kingdom of Heaven ..., and so on ...

This is one way one can know about God, one can know that God exists, even if one may never know God ...

After all, we may never ever know that immensity of the unknown ...

Well, in simpler terms, that immensity of the unknown may strike our awareness not only as being relevant for us, but as being the true home of our soul and spirit ...

Of course, that need not at all mean to abandon in any way the known ...

And it only means that the known will now become of a completely changed relevance, a relevance no longer including any kind of more dramatic feelings ...

Yes, the known, the world of our every day, the world of our usual dreams may by now have such a secondary relevance as to make us realize and understand why some of those alleged heretics who were burnt alive on the stake by the Church could take it as just another of those painful moments in one's life ...

Yes, a more proper integration and interplay between our deeply embedded affective being, and on the other hand, that rather unique cognitive one - unique as far as we know, at least on Planet Earth - means that we feel about the immensity of the unknown as our true home ...

And even if so often we do not quite manage to feel in this way, well, we can always remember that we know about all that ...

And remembering often enough that we do indeed know about all of that, may slowly slowly help us better integrate our affective and cognitive beings ...

Yes, it was said a long time ago that behold, the Kingdom of Heaven is in you ...

And that, seek ye first the Kingdom of Heaven with its righteousness ...

If God does not exist, everything is allowed ...

Everything is allowed, including not having everything allowed ...

Everything is allowed, among others so is playing out of tune ...

And we can blissfully choose being in harmony ...

Anyone else can choose in any other way ...

Freedom of choice is but an opportunity to be able to choose properly ...

...
And choose we do, either we like it or not ...

Freedom has its true value in “freedom for”, after one has become “free from” ...

“Free from” is only a necessary condition ...

Its fulfillment is in being able to be “free for” ...

When one makes a choice, there are consequences ...

And one is not “free from” them ...

Thus being “free for” means not only being already sufficiently “free from”, but also not further diminishing one’s being already “free from”

...

Tough game, isn’t it !!??

We are the great ignorers of ignorance ...

We ignore the immense role in our life of what we happen to be ignorant of ...

And we do so by focusing on, collapsing upon, and becoming intoxicated by the growing amount of what we happen to know already ...

In the last few centuries, it is indeed for the first time in known human history that the realms known to us started to increase dramatically even during the relatively short lifetime of each generation ...

And we were simply caught not prepared to deal with that bonanza properly ...

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