

Arché: evolution and mysticism

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Synoptic map

For present purposes I accept the cosmology of mainstream science (including evolution theory) as given, and turn to a set of presuppositions necessary to make sense of that story. A set of presuppositions such as this may be called an *Arché-type*.

Such an Archetype, such a picture of (*meta-*)*Nature* in and behind 'nature', is essential for an integral understanding of things. Yet this need has largely been forgotten and repressed in our modern epoch. However, one way or another and more or less clearly, such intuitions are still alive in the religious, mystical and esoteric traditions that have come down to us through the centuries. There are also hints of its character in fields completely outside those traditions, such as pure science and mathematics.

The model of meta-Nature or Archetype suggested here consists of three triads: *Unground*, *Infinity* (itself comprising three triads), and *Cosmos*. And then there is a triad, termed *Arche* (I would also call it Spirit), which is a combination of the other three. We are tasting a fruit: Cosmos is the outer skin; Infinity the flesh; and Unground the core. In short, this paper will distinguish between 21 basic categories (see diagram); these are the joints, around which pivots the imagining of Spirit turns. It will also indicate the ancient lay tracks running from one vantage point to another.

Arche/Spirit

- I UNGROUND (1)
 - A END (4)
 - B ABSOLUTENESS (5)
 - C ORIGIN (6)

- II INFINITY (2)
 - A POTENTIALITY (FREEDOM) (7)
 - 1 DREAM (IMAGINATION) (13)
 - 2 DESIRE (14)
 - 3 WILL (15)

 - B REALISATION (NECESSITY, LAW) (8)
 - 1 POWER (16)
 - 2 DEED (ACTION) (17)
 - 3 CONSEQUENCE (18)

 - C REALITY (EXISTENCE) (9)
 - 1 UNITY (19)

	2	PLURALITY (DUALITY) (20)
	3	INTERDEPENDENCE (NON-DUALITY) (21)
III		COSMOS (3)
	A	MIND (10)
	B	SOUL (11)
	C	MATTER (12)

Dynamics of the triads

Before we come to the triads themselves, a general word about the internal dynamics within the triads will be useful. What are the relationships among the various threes in each triad?

The manner in which I present these constituting elements (we may also call them 'powers', 'principles' or 'factors') here is quite linear. Yet all these elements are postulated to be mutually implied. Each element in a given triad presupposes the other two. Each preceding one anticipates, produces and contains – like seed – the next, latent one. Each following one remembers, carries – again like seed – the preceding, absorbed one. That is what makes the sets triadic units. Their unity is qualified by their being three mutually constituting principles. There is movement among the constituent parts, which is not quite identical in the cases of Unground, Infinity, Cosmos, and Arche. The various sets of interactions are not haphazard. However, they are not seen as uniformly structured, for example in the sense of two contradictories, which are then taken up in a higher synthesis. Neither are they seen as simply circular. I would visualise them as a helix, spirals moving forward in open circles. This allows for and includes a dialectic element in the sense of progressing through relative contraries. Yet the process does not culminate in a perfected, stable end. The triad does not reach self-sufficient closure. One way or another there remains an unrest which is never satisfied.

It is like a huge baobab tree, its three basic organs (root, trunk and leaf) distinct yet mutually implied and interactive – a unit, growing upwards, downwards and sideways through the cycles of consecutive seasons. In one sense, root comes first, then stem, then leaf; in another sense, there is no sequence. Were it not for the leaves, the roots would not grow. And then, as a unit, it drops a seed from which a next one-three tree sprouts, just as it had grown from a seed 'remembering' its pasts and 'anticipating' its futures. So the one-threes are connected to others, organically.

Or think of Spirit not as a single thunderous waterfall, but as a series of distinct ones as the great river cascades downwards from its source; each gathering itself in a deep pool before it drops away, having received the same water from a higher one and passing it on to a lower one; circling in its own dynamics even as it links, in a continuous flow, higher and lower, clouds above the mountaintop and ocean below, from which it rises upwards again in a never resting cycle, always the same yet never the same; the whole process starting in eternity and ending in eternity, moving on endlessly.

Reflections of this nature take us involuntarily to the symbolic values of numbers, as explored in diverse (yet interlinked) traditions, such as Pythagoreanism and Jewish and Christian kabbalah, and traditions without a clear esoteric link (e.g. the tradition reflected in Dante's *Divina Commedia*).

In this model we work with threes. Of course, I am not suggesting that this is the only way of viewing the dynamics of nature 'cosmosophically'. The system of threes shades off into other symbolic patterns involving a numeric component. For example, the whole theogonic, cosmogonic process could also be seen in terms of the numbers one, two, and so forth. Thus Taoism achieved in its system a balance

between the two contradictory-complementary energies of Yang and Yin. Of course, Taoism also presupposed the Tao as the One. The Two symbolise the eternal interplay, the mutual constituting, of the forces of male and female, heaven and earth, heat and cold, positive and negative, success and failure, and so on. In concrete things one or the other may dominate. Yet the involuntary favouring, in principle, of the first of the two poles in Taoist thinking perhaps also reveals a limitation inherent in all dual (I am not saying 'dualistic' – that, from the perspective of our model, is bad) thinking. However, the Taoist concept of *qi* (life force) can be understood as a reconciliation of the two-ness of Yang and Yin, moving into three-ness.

Tibetan Tantric Buddhism also envisions nature as consisting of the interaction of two kinds of energies, expressed symbolically, mythically by two kinds of deities: male and female. Here, too, there was a subtle favouring of the first: the male was the dominant deity; the female was his consort. It must be added that in Hindu tantrism the roles were reversed: the male principle was quiet and acquiescent, the female active and dominant. Yet the involuntary favouring of either one of the two in a pair is apparent. However, Tibetan Buddhists allowed for an erasure of the distinction between male and female: as Buddhists, they cherished the idea of emptiness, transcending duality (symbolised by sexual union). What this means, in effect, is that the twosome is expanded into a threesome.

Such shifting numerical associations are given with the kind of reflection we have embarked upon. So I am not insisting on the number three as elevated above any other. It is simply a convenient manner of understanding and explaining a cosmological perspective, rescuing it from remaining completely diffuse and inarticulate.

The number two, for example, also features in this meditation. Thus our perspective revolves around two complementary, equally important and valid principles (which I do not see as symbolically related to either of the two genders in the sense of one being subordinate to the other):

- the first is the generation and activation of creative, powerful, universal compassion;
- the second is the generation and development of contemplative, intuitive, radical wisdom.

It could also (following the Heart Sutra) be phrased differently, as the dialectics of the principles of fullness and of emptiness.

But enough. We have received, chosen three as our thread, leading us into and out of the labyrinth in which it is easy to get lost. The order in which these principles *are* (essentially, logically), is not the same as the order in which they *become known* (experientially, epistemologically) to human beings. Absoluteness, for example, is not what people know or experience first in their quest for Spirit. It is not the entrance to the labyrinth but its heart. Drawing this map, that is where I will start.

Triad unground

At the root of all things lies – as an axial concept, I assume – a dimension of *Absoluteness*.

Absoluteness is circled by two principles: *End*, falling away into Absoluteness, and *Origin*, exiting from Absoluteness. Together, these three form the first triad, which we shall call the triad of *Unground*, with its own internal structure and dynamics.

Nature is understood as a procession from and a return to Unground, then another procession and another return, and so on, in an eternal spiralling movement. Whatever is, happens in, is part of that eternal continuum of emerging from and collapsing into Unground.

In Unground there is a movement from End, sinking into Absoluteness, and from Absoluteness, from which Origin arises. As the outward movement and the movement back inwards, they are the portals to and from the absolute abyss.

Triad infinity

Around the first primordial triad revolves three further triads. Internally, each of these secondary triads consists of three interdependent, complementary dimensions (forces), adding up to a relative unit with its own internal structure and dynamics.

The first of the secondary triads may be termed *Potentiality*. It consists in what we, at this early and still inarticulate stage, may refer to as the dimensions of *Dream/Imagination, Desire* and *Will*. This is the domain of pure *Freedom*.

The second of the secondary triads (the triad of *Realisation* or *Actualisation*) consists in the dimensions of *Power, Action* and *Consequence*. This is the domain of Necessity, separated from Freedom by a qualitative gap, yet somehow mysteriously linked to it.

The third of these triads (the triad of *Reality* or *Actuality*) consists in the dimensions of *Unity, Plurality* and *Interdependence*. This is the domain of *Existence*, again separated from Necessity by a qualitative gap, yet somehow mysteriously linked to it.

Together, the three triads form a single coherent triad, entering into and issuing from the primordial triad of Unground through the portals of End and Origin.

Let us at this stage call this second primordial triad the triad of *Infinity*. By 'Infinity' I do not mean endless largeness of temporal or spatial extension, but rather the feature of indeterminacy, of 'being' outside the limiting manifold of time, space and causation. In addition to indeterminacy it also means radical openness and inexhaustibility.

Within the three triads of Infinity I do not work on the assumption of contradictions between the first two principles, reconciled in a higher synthesis in the third. In the triad of Potentiality, for example, Dream and Desire are not assumed to be contradictory opposites, reconciled in Will. However, the logic of our analysis of the dynamics of Infinity does assume that there are significant differences, tensions, contrasts, contraries, between the constituting principles. It also assumes forward movement from the first through the second to the third, carrying the whole triad forward. But the triad has not become a closed, perfected unit. It is imperfect, begging to be carried forward into a next triad. This is the movement from Potentiality to Realisation to Reality. Reality itself collapses, through End, into Absoluteness.

Being timeless, there is no temporal order of either simultaneity or sequence among the threesome of Potentiality, Realisation and Reality. Logically, they are taken to be interpenetrating. But even so, I accept a certain logical order of unfolding from Unground and back into Unground: the process moves from Potentiality to Realisation to Reality; thereupon (an inappropriate temporal term) it descends back into Unground. And yet I take Unground to be equidistant from all three manifestations of Infinity (Potentiality, Realisation and Reality). All three are suspended over the abyss of Absoluteness, are shot through with Absoluteness. Within each of the triads of Infinity there is a certain order: from Dream to Desire to Will; from Power to Action to Consequence; from Unity to Plurality to Interdependence. Yet within each triad there is the moment in which the creative power of Absoluteness surges up: Desire, Power and Unity; and there is the moment of falling back into Absoluteness: Will, Consequence and Interdependence.

This eternal spiral movement may be and has been termed variously – such as origin and end, appearance and disappearance, love and strife (Empedocles – see Diels 1992; Kingsley 1995), emanation and return (Plotinus – see Plotinus 1992:283ff, 706ff), integration and disintegration, ascent and descent, procession and recession, evolution and involution, explosion and implosion, explication and implication (Bohm 1981), emergence and hiding.

Let us assume that the basic cosmic functions of (speaking anthropomorphically) 'acting/being', 'sensing/feeling' and 'knowing/understanding' are foreshadowed, at the level of the blueprint of Infinity, as mutually constitutive and interdependent aspects of nature. Since nature is timeless, there is no chronological, temporal order, no actual movement, from knowing to feeling to being. And yet, at that level, the idea of 'knowing' ('consciousness') – however inarticulate, and here roughly called 'Dream' – seems to stir and emerge first from the darkness of Unground. This seems to be followed by 'feeling'-'volition' (roughly called 'Desire' and 'Will'); and then by 'acting'-'being' (Realisation and Reality). Eventually they all sink back into Unground. This process is assumed to lie at the root of nature.

Triad Cosmos

In addition to the dimensions of Unground and Infinity, a third dimension is postulated: the dimension of *Cosmos*. 'Cosmos' is the beautiful, terrible world of nature, from stars in the process of being born to stars dying, from Precambrian protolife to *Homo sapiens*, and all things at all levels of reality, going through the same process, determined by nature. It is 'nature' as a whole, from its very genesis through all time and all space; the sum of all that has been and has happened, which makes up reality everywhere.

Universal Cosmos is the outcome, manifestation of the blueprint of Unground-Infinity.

At the level of Cosmos – that is, of concrete, empirical nature – a temporal and spatial spiral process takes place. This Wholeⁱ came into being, and it will disappear. The process is patterned on and expresses the eternal spiral movement taking place in Infinity. The a-chronic process at the heart of Unground-Infinity takes diachronic shape in the historical, evolutionary process of the coming-into-being and disappearance-from-the-realm-of-being of the many things.

Universal Cosmos, as it develops and unfolds from moment to moment, is an ever changing singularity. It is this specific whole, here, now and thus.

However, as singularity it is, at the same time, an internally differentiated entity – not merely a mechanical sum of parts, but a 'society', a 'concretum' ('grown-togetherness'), an 'organism' (cf. Whitehead 1978). That is, by virtue of its interdependent parts it exists in a manner analogous to human societies and the living things of our everyday experience.

We see the large Cosmos as consisting of innumerable small singularities, each of which is a society, a whole, a concretum. Put differently, the cosmic All is made up of many beings, each both an individual singularity and a society containing individual singularities, linked upwards and downwards through many ontological levels (cf. Wilber 1996), from the simplest elements of nature at the bottom of the ladder of being, to higher than common human beings, up to the totalistic All.

Every singularity/concretum, from the minutest to the largest (Cosmos), reflects the underlying blueprint of all. It is shot through with Infinity and Unground.

Everything that is manifests 'concretely' (in the sense of empirically real) in another triad: the three functions of *Acting/Being*, *Sensing/Feeling* and *Knowing/Understanding* (speaking structurally: *Energy/Physicality/Matter*; *Soul*; *Mind/Consciousness*). At the level of concrete, empirical nature, this perspective sees every singularity/wholeness, from the smallest to the All, as partaking in Being-Feeling-Knowing. The conventional definition of life is here, analogously, extrapolated to the cosmos as a whole. Cosmos is a living 'organism'. There is an analogy (an *analogia entis* – but not in the theological sense of an analogy between God and his human creatures) between the great cosmic context and the small context of plant, animal, and so on. In the order of our human knowledge the small context comes first. It is our starting point. But in the larger ontological order it is the other way round. Cosmic Being, source of life and consciousness, is 'alive' and 'intelligent'. This view was developed early in Western philosophy in incomparable

manner by Plato in his *Timaeus* (cf. e.g. Archer-Hind 1973), and picked up again often enough, among others by Giordano Bruno (1962). Evolving biological life participates in that cosmogonic process, which in turn participates in the theogonic process of Arche.

At the level of nature (Cosmos) we may postulate that, in the process of cosmic evolution, the functions of knowing, feeling and being emerge simultaneously. But they are not equally manifest at all times in all cosmic events, such as in the various species of life emerging over time. In this historical process of evolution, 'feeling-sensing' (from merely physical to mental) seems to have made its manifest appearance only gradually and, in a long process of refinement, culminating in the sublime sensitivity of some human beings. Likewise, only later, 'knowing' seems to have become manifest in the process of life. Going back in time through the process of cosmic becoming, we humans tend to make clear-cut distinctions between humans; other primates; other mammals; less complex forms of life going back to mindless prokaryotes; even lesser inorganic beings; and so on, right back to the blind chemical forces raging in the bellies of stars. The implication of this perspective is that mind/consciousness arose out of non-mind, just as life is assumed to have arisen out of non-life. However, ultimately such reductionism runs into serious difficulties, and amounts to nihilism: blind matter, assumed to have spewed out with a big blind bang, blindly produced feeling and knowing. From the perspective of this meditation, such an assumption is inadequate. To think that we can save ourselves by a blind leap of faith to supra-naturalistic divine intervention in this blind process of nature, at its beginning and along the way, is equally unconvincing.

This meditation explores an assumption antithetical to reductionism or supra-naturalism. It assumes that feeling ('soul') and knowing ('mind') emerged, concomitantly with matter, from the depths of a mysterious Potentiality, exiting from Unground; and that it is heading towards End in which it will eventually be submerged. The entire process is permeated with responsive feeling and adaptive, creative intelligence, manifesting themselves in the finch's untutored weaving of its nest, the crocodile's instinctive nurturing of its young and myriad other miracles, as much as in the human's self-conscious design of all sorts of things. The human being's existence and achievements are at the surface of a depth of feeling and knowing spread throughout the realm of being, working themselves out in various ways through the diverse species and individuals in those species – whether the individuals are aware of it or not.

I realise that this kind of postulate is – well, a kind of postulate, and that ultimately such a (essentially idealistic) scenario itself drops away into the annihilating darkness of Absoluteness. However, this kind of speech has a performative possibility that reductionism lacks. That is to say, this scenario can provide a basis and a motivation for values and attitudes of solidarity with, and service to, all things that reductionism cannot. It has a utopian quality: it is a not descriptive, realistic speech but transformative speech, inspiring people to follow 'good' courses of action even if the imagined result may never be realised. It has a creative quality: it brings about what it is talking about. Ultimately the ideas of the cynic and the idealist may be equally unprovable, but the two sets of ideas work out very differently in the actual living.

Standard popular evolution theory assumes that the various forms of life evolved through an inanimate, deterministic, aimless, blindly opportunistic process of competition, resulting in the chance survival of the strongest and the elimination of the weak in a cold, hostile natural environment. This kind of worldview does not provide motivation for serious ecological concern; in fact, it played – and plays – a significant role in creating and aggravating the present ecological crisis.

The standard popular view assumes a reductive view of reality, according to which everything that is has been collapsed 'downwards': consciousness, in the sense of mind (thinking), is regarded as a by-product, an epiphenomenon, of primitive ways of reacting to the environment (we termed that 'soul'), which is in turn regarded

as a by-product, an epiphenomenon, of matter. Life, feeling and mind only emerged later from chemical processes, utterly devoid of consciousness in any sense (cf. Seager 2007:11 ff). My line of argument is very different, in fact the direct opposite. Instead of 'reduction', let us rather think in terms of 'transduction' ('trans' = 'beyond'): the 'lower' (what is conventionally considered lower, with matter right at the bottom) must – in the final analysis, our argument goes – be understood and explained with reference to what is 'higher' – that is, what we have simplistically termed 'soul' and 'mind'. Ultimately, everything that is, is a manifestation of Spirit.

Triad Arche (Spirit)

We have now arrived at the first and final, most basic and overarching, all-inclusive, all-determining triad: Unground-Infinity-Cosmos. As a three-ness in oneness, a oneness in three-ness, it underlies, encloses and determines everything that is. It is arche-ic, primordial Nature.

Everything that exists, exists as an expression or a manifestation of Unground-Infinity-Cosmos. Every such concretion – be it large or small – can and must ultimately be understood and explained with reference to that triadic Arche, that arche-ic triad. Any understanding and explanation of empirical phenomena that does not take Unground, Cosmos and the dynamics of Infinity into account must, in the final analysis, be deemed inadequate.

At the level of understanding I am aiming at here, the song of a single bird – as much as every individual human person and every human society, large or small, every work of art, and so on – is to be understood in relationship to every other thing, to the cosmic all, to the infinite, and to absolute emptiness. From that vast network the concrete thing – again, single or collective, small or large – derives both its relativity and its dignity.

Infinity with its nine elements or primal forces, grouped in three threes, 'is' outside space, time and causality, interlocked as if in a chain reaction, flashing forth from the impenetrable depths of Unground; and cooling, as it were, in the concrete things of space, time and causality making up Cosmos.

The arche-ic triad of Unground, Infinity and Cosmos, each exhibiting a triadic structure of its own, we term *Spirit*. Empirical nature and all it entails is part of Spirit. But Absoluteness is the hole, the edge, the ultimate and uncrossable horizon, receding and dropping away even from this *Arche*.

What has been sounded as *Spirit* and *Arche* here are just sounds, signs, names for the Unnameable, belonging to the same category as other unnameables such as the Tao, Original Nature, Buddha-Nature, and God.

Spirit is not a Being ontologically separate from the world of beings. Infinity 'is' not something separate from that world. Infinity 'is' the master-plan conjectured to be operative in it. That is its ontological and epistemological status. And Unground is the conjectured Origin-End (underlying even Infinity) of all that is.

There 'are', therefore, the Three 'existing' (so to speak) in three ways, at three levels: the real being of Cosmos ('real' in the sense of empirically observable); the relative not-being of the Infinite; and the absolute non-being of the Absolute. (The End and the Origin of Unground, linking the Absolute with Infinity, have a foot in both the second and the third levels: on the one hand they are sucked into Absoluteness; on the other hand they have the same ontosophical and epistemosophical status as the dimensions of Infinity.)

So the empirically 'real' world as a whole – from top to bottom, beginning to end, inside to outside – consists of matter, soul and mind, and is a manifestation of Spirit, which is suffused with Infinity and Unground.

In Arche the principle of Unground refers to the abyss as source and termination, wholly incommensurable with our experiential world, yet accepted as a necessary postulate. Infinity, arising from and sinking back into Unground, takes concrete shape in the form of Cosmos and its innumerable manifestations subject to

time, space and causality. Together the Three is a movement from Absoluteness to Cosmos and back. Cosmos with all its concrete manifestations is the outside of Nature, Spirit. Cosmos is the self-evolution of Spirit.

This conceptual space admits the echoes of many ancient teachings, such as Neoplatonic notions, elements of Gnosticism, Jewish and Muslim mysticism, the Christian teaching of the trinity, the Yogacara Buddhist teaching of the triple body of the Buddha, the Hindu *Trimurti*, and Advaita Vedantic distinctions. A few brief glances sideways may illustrate the point.

The idea of Unground links up with the idea of God-above-God: of God 'above' (even as 'It' is 'in') the trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, as found among Christian thinkers like Meister Eckhart (c 1260-1327), John Ruusbroec (1293-1381) and Jacob Boehme (1575-1624). The idea of Infinity may be presented, in broad terms, as a functional equivalent of a cosmological implication of the teaching of the trinity. The ideas of Origin and Potentiality (dream, wish and will) would then, at least partly, move into a comparable field of associations as the notion of the Holy Spirit; the idea of Realisation (power, creative action and consequence, growth, preservation) would touch on the notion of the Father, the Creator; and the idea of Reality (and End), with its associated notions of unity, estrangement, reconciliation and death leading to an eventual new beginning, would overlap the functions of Christ, the Son. Here the notion of the cosmic Christ comes into sight. While distancing itself from the mainstream Christian view of a duality of Creator and creation, the idea of the cosmic All would move into the terrain covered by the doctrine of creation. This is also the terrain where the human Jesus of history is located.

More clearly, the triad Arche seeks an alliance with – more, is a contemporary restatement of – the Buddhist teaching of the *trikaya* (the 'three bodies' of Buddhahood). Here the idea of Unground, centring in the Absolute, is the equivalent of the notion of *Dharma-kaya* ('essence' body); the ultimate, essential *Buddha* as radical truth is nothing less than the notion of radical emptiness. The idea of Infinity seeks to operate at the level of the *Sambhoga-kaya*, lying between, and linking, the heart of emptiness with the world of the senses out there, enabling the external world to be. And the idea of the concrete cosmic All links up with the notion of the *Nirmana-kaya*, the historical, empirical Buddha – surrounded by, part of the empirical world of sensory experience.

At a mythological level the popular Hindu notion of the *Trimurti* (Brahma the creator, Vishnu the preserver, and Shiva the destroyer, clearing space for new creation in the cycle of birth and death) expresses the basic understanding of the cosmic cycle.

Taking into account the divergence and strange convergence of traditions such as the ones cited above, I sense that what is required is to open up a mystical space – referred to here as Absoluteness – underlying and transcending all those traditions. From that Absolute Emptying at the heart of all things, at the heart of Arche itself, such religions may receive a relative endorsement. But that Absoluteness will also undercut the pretence to any absoluteness on the part of any one of these religions. Absoluteness is the absolute Origin and the absolute End.

Somehow struggle, conflict and suffering – in short, evil – must be located on this map of N(n)ature. Somehow we will be aware of the dark shadows in the valleys as the sun rises and travels and sets over the contours of the landscape, in the course of the rhythms of day and night, winter and summer, the cycles of climatic change and all other cycles such as the emergence and disappearance of species arising from and returning to Absoluteness, which takes place everywhere in physical nature. Darkness and cold, evil and suffering, negative as we humans may see them, are also – somehow – part and parcel of nature itself – so one may suspect.

Arche, this field of forces, is not a closed circle, but an open process, a spiralling continuity, the movement of Spirit.

The human being

The human being, we accept, emerges from, constantly hovers above, sinks into Unground. As a microcosm it carries the blueprint of Infinity in itself and expresses that eternal movement. Body, soul and mind, it is part and parcel of the process of the originating and ending of All-encompassing Cosmos; on the other hand, it also has a certain unique position in the All, as witnessing eye and voice. It is spirit, participating in and reflecting Spirit. It harbours the seed of cosmic ennoblement in itself. That is its responsibility, the intention of its exceptional intelligence and its freedom. To discover its relationship to Spirit is to break through the encasement of *ego*, standing over against a world, and to mature into *ipse*, realising that it is part and expression of Spirit. Yet somehow the human being is also the prime instance of evil in the world.

The upshot of the argument of this meditation is that the self-centred human being (*ego*) is empowered to mature into a Spirit-centred *ipse*: thinking, feeling-willing, acting with wisdom and compassion towards oneself; towards the individual other human; towards human groups from small and intimate, to large, strange and seemingly impersonal, to humankind as a whole; towards animals; towards plants and sub-vegetative life; towards the cosmic All.

This process of maturation occurs at the levels of individual existence as well as species development. With *Homo sapiens* a qualitative change, a leap, took place in the process of evolution. It is not only the single individual who may develop to higher forms of insight, feeling-willing and action. Among humans as a biological species such individuals are the vanguard of an upliftment of the species as a whole towards a clearer manifestation of Spirit. More than that, such individuals are the growth points of Cosmos as it spirals ahead in its eternal cycle of emergence and return, like a tree growing upwards through cycles of winters and summers, seasons of drought and abundant rain. Even as they enter the realm of death such creative individuals drop seeds, which sprout and grow and pull the entire species forward. An analysis of the history of humankind reveals the thin annual growth rings of spiritual drought and the thick rings of spiritual abundance.

So where are we now in the large movement? Is humanity, life, on the way up or down? Our vantage point is too small and peripheral, our perspective too narrow, our vision too myopic to make any grand pronouncements. Yet even in a scenario of the end of life on Earth (partly as a result of human folly and greed, whether it be in small, large or overwhelmingly large measure), we may assume that Spirit is unfolding itself, spiralling forward in a process that incorporates disintegration.

Status of our understanding

The first triad (Unground) and the second triad (Infinity) are not part of empirical, observable nature. They constitute what one might call a blueprint of nature, which we may write with a capital as Nature, suggesting the 'deeper nature' of nature. These two triads can neither be observed nor derived from experience. They have a hypothetical quality, required in a deductive argument – needed, alongside inductive reasoning, to understand the world of experience. They are not descriptive categories but constructions, as it were a priori, postulated as useful, perhaps even necessary, to make sense of nature (with a small 'n'), that is, of the empirical cosmos and history. And they have no supra-natural backing whatsoever. In this way we may seek a connection with the language of science.

There is another tempting connection, namely with the anthropomorphic mythic pictures of religions and their various cosmogonic stories, projected to a realm outside time. These are evocative categories with existential, moral implications, useful to live an understanding, compassionate life. They are also intended to provide a 'map' on which the most important religious and metaphysical cosmological positions in various cultures can be positioned.

Yet this extraneous model is really at home in the mystical mode. It is presented as continuously happening, in every moment of time, in an eternal moment including time.

Our human understanding and speech – while always partial, limited to our narrow perspective, and imperfect – participate, I postulate, in the Arche-Spirit and its manifestations. Therefore, seeking the company of the great visionaries of our species, we may take the liberty to see as widely and deeply as our short-sightedness permits, and to say what we see and extrapolate speculatively as far as our limited abilities allow, realising full well that Unground, Infinity and the totality of Cosmos cannot be expressed in thought and word, and that, whatever we think and say is in the final analysis annihilated in darkness. That includes models, toys, such as this essay. Any verbal description of any landscape has to begin somewhere and end somewhere, but the landscape itself is inexhaustibly varied and allows for many intersecting perspectives, many criss-cross journeys and many accounts of such journeys.

It would be a mistake to reify this instrument and others like it – that is, to treat them as if they pretend to copy factual reality, and to separate and harden the categories. It is merely a fleeting, fluid perspective. As a form of idealism not for a moment forgetting its own constructivist nature, it wants to be distinguished clearly from any form of scientific positivism (i.e. reduction of valid discourse to mere registration of facts and low-level theorising) and religious positivism (i.e. dogmatic repetition of traditional doctrine, immunising it against critical discussion). It seeks to be synthetic, allowing a meaningful meeting of all the great religio-metaphysical-mystical traditions evolved by humankind to take place: among themselves, and between them and the great edifice of science.

True, we should not attempt to say what cannot be said; and yet we cannot *not* attempt to say what cannot be said. That is given with being an inquisitive, puzzled, awestruck human being.

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Endnotes

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- 1 Ken Wilber, speaking of *holon*, attributes the term to Arthur Koestler (Wilber 1996, 20). In its modern sense the idea was, however, used before Koestler, e.g. by J C Smuts (*Holism and evolution*. London: MacMillan, 1927:100ff, referring to A N Whitehead).

Smuts was not referring to the latter's *Process and reality* (which only appeared in 1929), but to his *Science and the modern world* (which appeared in 1925).