by the same author

DOCTRINE AND ARGUMENT IN INDIAN PHILOSOPHY

THE YOGI AND THE DEVOTEE

THE INTERPLAY BETWEEN THE UPANISHADS AND CATHOLIC THEOLOGY

by

NINIAN SMART

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PREFACE

The present book is an expansion of lectures which I gave at St Stephen's College, in the University of Delhi, in December, 1964. A shortened version of these lectures was delivered at Bishop's College, Calcutta, towards Christmas of that year. The lectures were the Westcott Lectures for 1964 under the Teape Foundation. I am deeply grateful for the honour given to me in being elected to do this. I am also deeply grateful to a number of people for their hospitality and helpfulness.

At the time when I went to Delhi, the Principal of St Stephen's College was recovering from a major illness, and was unable to come to the lectures. For this reason they were recorded, so that he could listen to them in his home. Thus he is the main cause of their publication, for a transcript of them was sent to me, and from this transcript I have derived the substance of the book. However, it should be made clear that I have considerably added to and revised what I said, so that those who were good enough to attend the lectures would probably find that the material is very different from what they heard. Nevertheless, everything that is written here is in essence an expression of the thoughts which I attempted to convey then. I am, then, grateful to Dr Sircar, the Principal: though I would have wished that it were not his illness which gave occasion to the present book.

The then Acting Principal and Mrs Shankland kindly invited me to stay in their house during my period in Delhi, and I look back with pleasure to the excellence and goodness with which they looked after me. There were many others too on the staff of St Stephen's who welcomed me, and kept me busy with friendly disputation. I would like also to mention Professor N. V. Banerjee, retired from the Philosophy Department at Delhi University, who discussed many things with me at the time, and whose cheerful acumen made me see the inadequacy of so much that I said.

In Calcutta, I was the guest of Canon Sambayya. He and his wife, together with the rest of the staff of Bishop's College, were most kind. Less so, the brother-in-law of one of the staff, whose bowling in the nets was far too good for me.

The title of this book does not altogether correspond to that of the Westcott Lectures. These were given as *The Upanishads and Catholic Theology*. The terms of reference of the Teape Foundation imply that the lecturer should speak in the general area of the Upanishads and the Catholic Church, and I believe that – as far as those who have given them in India are concerned (for there are also lectures delivered by Indians in Cambridge, alternating with those given in India) – I have so far come nearest to the terms of reference. Yet in a way that title could be misleading for, as the reader will discover, I have attempted to treat the Indian tradition more broadly than the phrase 'the Upanishads' would suggest, and perhaps my idea of Catholic theology is eccentric. For these reasons I have relegated the original titles of the lectures to a subordinate place. If I have used the title *The Yogi and the Devotee*, it is only to bring out a certain polarity – between the life of yoga and the life of devotionalism or bhakti – which has been vital in the Indian tradition, and indeed more widely in the history of religions as a whole. It is in terms of this polarity that I have attempted to show the points of interchange between the Hindu tradition and Christianity and to exhibit the reasons for the variety of theologies within the Indian heritage. Thus I have tried to work out what I call a 'natural theology of religious experience' which will not merely make sense of that polarity but also of Christianity. I have also tried to relate this 'natural theology' to secular and evangelical interpretations of religion in the West, as well as to some other aspects of the current theological debate.

Not being a person of great virtue or insight I cannot pretend that what I have here written is much of a contribution to the spiritual life of Hinduism or Christianity. It is merely an extended argument which will perhaps stimulate thinking about the nature of religion and about the interplay of Hinduism and Christianity in particular. Since we are slowly moving towards an international culture, it is wise, no doubt, to reflect about the future of faiths. I do not myself believe that Western secularism represents the future pattern of men's attitudes. If only for this reason, my argument may be more relevant than some might think.

I have numbered the paragraphs. This is partly for ease of cross-reference in the argument and partly to make the

bibliographical section at the end easier to use. This method also cuts out footnotes.

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CHAPTER I

THE INDIAN TRADITION

1.1. The aim of this book is to explore the relation between Christian belief and the great religious ideas of the Indian, and in particular the Hindu, tradition. The relationship could easily be fruitful; but there are versions of Christianity which would rule out any fecund interchange between these faiths. If the Biblical revelation, and the Biblical revelation alone, gives us knowledge of the divine nature, then Hinduism becomes a mass of fallacies. Fortunately, the Christian tradition has contained within itself a broader vision – one in which it is seen that men can have an apprehension of God even independently of the Biblical revelation. The Church has not been unmindful of Plato and Aristotle. The Catholic wing of Christianity, which is mainly, but not exclusively, constituted by the Roman Catholic Church, has expressed this broader view by the idea of natural theology, as distinct from revealed theology. Thus the belief that men can have some independent understanding of God, even if, in the Christian perspective, the fullest knowledge comes from the acts of God as recorded in the Bible, promises the possibility of an interchange with the Indian tradition. It is true that the concept of natural theology traditionally held has been rather restricted (a point to be argued later: see 1.11). But it certainly represents a point of departure for the understanding of the Hindu contribution to Christianity. For convenience' sake, the belief can be dubbed the 'Thesis of Natural Theology'. The aim, then, of this book is to explore the Thesis of Natural Theology from within the context of the Indian tradition.

1.2. Some people will see this as rather an old-fashioned project. Modern philosophers, after all, are highly sceptical, to say the least, of natural theology. The old arguments for the existence of God are held in low esteem, and it was upon them that the Roman Catholic apparatus of natural theology was erected. Nowadays it is fashionable to try to recast faith in secular terms, and some Christian apologists have gone so far as to steal the atheistic emperor's clothes. Their motives are

intelligible: for in some countries in the West traditional piety means very little. Surely then the luxuriance of Hindu religion will be scarcely attractive. From both sides my project is in question. If natural theology has fallen on evil days and if religious practice is largely disregarded, a rapprochement between natural theology and the Indian religious tradition will result in a barren marriage. The project scarcely appears relevant to our contemporary condition.

1.3. Paradoxically, its very 'irrelevance' is the ground of its importance. The notion, enshrined in such a book as Paul van Buren's *The Secular Meaning of the Gospel*, that 'modern man' (whoever he may be) is a secularist at heart, given to thinking in an empiricist way, and indifferent to myths and rituals, is itself only a latter-day manifestation of the cultural tribalism of the West. It is easy for the contemporary Westerner to identify civilization with Europe and America; it is easy for him to think of history as constituted by Western history, with a dash of colonialism thrown in; it is easy for him to think that the way he looks at the world is the only sensible way of doing so. All this is fallacy. It is both dangerous and ignorant. The real world is otherwise.

1.4. Even in Europe and America it is otherwise. The secularism of many British and American intellectuals is not very perfectly reflected in the life of, say, Italy. Russia and Eastern Europe are dominated by Marxist belief, with its battery of myths and its non-empiricist metaphysics. Further afield, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism retain vast energies. It is nonsense to think of the world as essentially alienated from religion and ideology; and it is doubtful, to say the least, that non-Western cultures will have a Western future. It is as though the West, having once physically dominated the world by empire and trade, now secretly hopes to dominate it by its own brand of secularism.

1.5. But it may be that there is a grain of truth, though only a grain, in this furtive occidental ambition. It is true that conservative religion can enshrine superstitious beliefs which conflict with the methods of science. This being so, the spread of education will make a difference to religion. But the idea that there is a necessary and general conflict between science and faith is itself a myth – a myth moreover that needs examining with an astringent eye. There is no strong rational basis for

supposing that the world-wide ripples of technology will turn men away from their traditional religious and ideological beliefs. If there were such a basis it would have more to do with social changes than with intellectual necessities. Since we are here more concerned with the intellectual than with the social side of faith, we can merely affirm that pockets of secularism in the world afford no good ground for scepticism about the importance of the project of relating the Thesis of Natural Theology to the Indian scene. Indeed, the task of doing so is especially vital in order that people may see that the cultural tribalism of the West is absurd – a tribalism as much apparent in Christian circles as in humanist ones.

1.6. There is something of an irony about the way in which natural theology has been expressed in the Catholic tradition. Plato and Aristotle have provided its framework. Aquinas' great synthesis between Christian belief and the metaphysics of Aristotle has been the main pattern of thinking about natural theology. Yet the Indian tradition is innocent of Aristotle. Do men have to think in an Aristotelian way before they can come to a general apprehension of the divine nature? It is surely ironical that in Roman Catholic seminaries in India incipient priests have to study St Thomas Aquinas in order to persuade themselves and others that there is a natural knowledge of God, when they belong to an Indian heritage which has been partly shaped by a great philosophical and religious tradition of its own. Cannot natural theology be expressed more directly in Indian terms? The Upanishads, as interpreted by such men as Shankara and Ramanuja, may provide a more viable Indian basis for natural theology than thoughts expressed in Greek and medieval Latin. We shall see. Before we can do so, however, it is necessary to understand the variety of Indian beliefs and doctrines and to understand the causes of this variety.

1.7. Much has been written about the Upanishads and it is not my purpose to add unnecessarily to the great mass of commentary and exposition which exists. But perhaps it is wise to repeat one of the passages commonly regarded as summing up the essence of Upanishadic teachings. It is from the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*:

'Just as, my dear, bees collect pollen from trees in various places to make honey and bring it together in a single essence,

and just as the different lots of pollen can then make no distinction, thinking "I am the pollen of that tree" or "I am the pollen of this tree", so too when all these creatures attain reality they are not aware of themselves as having attained it. Whatever they are, tiger or lion or wolf or bear or worm or fly or gnat or mosquito, they all become that: that which is the most subtle is the Self of the universe. That is the real, that is the Self and that art thou'.

These last words – *sā ātmā tat tvam asi* – are perhaps the most famous in all the Upanishads.

1.8. The later systems of Vedānta – Advaita, Viśiṣṭādvaita, Dvaita and so on – represent differing interpretations of this doctrine of the relation between the eternal Self and the divine Being. And this, of course, immediately raises a problem. How is it that such diverse readings of the Hindu scriptures are possible? How is it that Shankara can say that the Self and the divine Reality are numerically identical, while Madhva can hold that there is a plurality of individual eternal selves distinct from one another and distinct from God? How is it that Ramanuja's teachings are explicitly a repudiation of the non-dualism of Shankara? How is it that Madhva felt impelled to interpret the text as though it read *sā ātmā atat tvam asi* – 'That thou art *not*'?

1.9. The answer is in one way simple and in another way complex. It is simple in that any body of scripture needs interpretation. The scriptures speak to and through those who use them. It is thus not surprising that in a culture as rich and long and diverse as that of India the Upanishads have been seen in many different ways. But we need to dig somewhat deeper to understand why these particular – and indeed most striking – divergences of interpretation have occurred. What are the essential *religious* motives for the variety of Vedic interpretations? In order to understand these religious motives, it is necessary to look at the religious experience of India as a whole.

1.10. I shall, then, devote some time to trying to exhibit the reasons lying behind the various systems of thought and life to be discovered in the ancient traditions of India – Jain, Buddhist and Hindu. I want to bring out in my analysis the hypothesis that different patterns of religious experience can in great measure explain varieties of teachings. This hypothesis is rele-

vant to the question of how best to approach the concept of natural theology.

1.11. We have already noted that natural theology has usually been regarded in a somewhat intellectual way – that is, knowledge of God independently of scripture has been conceived typically as the product of reflection. This reflection finds its sophisticated expression in the arguments for the existence of God, from the conclusions of which there is derived a body of affirmations about his nature. But though natural theology can be conceived in this rather intellectual sense, it is important also to recognize the imaginative side of the human being and the deliverances of religious experience. We should ask whether men have not gained an insight into religious truth by means other than those of intellectual inquiry and independently of the Biblical revelation.

1.12. If God reveals himself at sundry times, then surely we can seek in the great traditions of India for insights which will help to illumine the Gospel; and since in great measure Indian religion is experiential (it is, in a certain sense, 'empirical' in its approach), it is perhaps most notably in contemplation and devotion that the knowledge of God can be discovered. To speak thus is, admittedly and of course, to speak from a Christian standpoint: it is to look at India from the perspective of Jerusalem. As we shall later see (4.7), this assumption of a standpoint hardly gets to the heart of the problem of interreligious intercourse. But we must start here, for we are concerned with the relation between Christian belief and the Indian tradition, and Christian attitudes are surely relevant to this concern. Thus if, as we say, God reveals himself at sundry times, we may seek to find this self-revelation in the religious experience of India. Furthermore, it is of the essence of the Christian faith that God does not force himself upon men. Christ came in humility, not with troops of angels in majesty. The Cross is a symbol of love partly because love is incompatible with bludgeoning people. Love, too, must mean that the person loved is an individual in his own right. The way in which he expresses his reciprocating love must be his own way, not something which is alien to him. The same holds for communities and nations. It follows that the Christian theology of India must ultimately be expressed in Indian terms. The Vedantic heritage may well contribute importantly to this

process. As has been said above, a survey of the wider heritage of Indian religion is a necessary preliminary to seeing how this could be so: for through such a survey we may detect the experiential roots of the differing patterns of belief in the ancient traditions.

1.13. Here we must be rather selective. It would be intolerably complicated to introduce a comparison of all the systems of belief occurring within India's long history. Among Hindu systems, I shall concentrate upon the following: the non-dualism (Advaita) of Shankara; the qualified non-dualism (Viśiṣṭādvaita) of Ramanuja; the dualism (Dvaita) of Madhva; Yoga; Sāṃkhya. Among non-Hindu or 'unorthodox' (*nāstika*) systems, I shall concentrate upon the following: the Mādhyamika school of Mahāyāna Buddhism; Theravāda Buddhism; Jainism. To select these is already to exclude a great deal. It excludes, for instance, the once vigorous Materialism of ancient India; it excludes many varieties of Greater Vehicle Buddhism; it excludes some important late medieval movements within Hinduism, such as the theism of Chaitanya, and much else besides. But perhaps it will be recognized that the systems selected are all of considerable importance. If the hypothesis which I am advancing works for these schools it will have achieved a great deal. What I intend to do is to bring out some of the key concepts of these schools, in order to see whether there is a correlation between them and different patterns of religious experience and practice. But first there are two points about method which should be made.

1.14. When we consider religious experience (or indeed experience of any kind), it is important to make some kind of distinction between an experience and the interpretation placed upon it. Thus we need not infer that because the contemplative goal is described differently by different schools, i.e. is interpreted according to differing sets of doctrines, the essential ultimate experiences involved in contemplation are necessarily dissimilar. Admittedly they may be, so to say, affected by the way in which the yogin sees himself and his destiny. Nevertheless, it would be very doubtful procedure to assume radical divergences of experience on the basis of dissimilarities of doctrine. Let me give an analogy. Sexual intercourse can be described, according to the circumstances, as wedlock, adultery or fornication. The distinctions are important from a moral

and legal point of view; but we would be wrong rashly to infer from the diversity of descriptions that there are three different kinds of sexual intercourse. It would be better to say that there are differing circumstances. Likewise, it may turn out that yogic experiences in different traditions are rather similar, though the interpretations placed upon them are divergent. There is, perhaps, a special difficulty in establishing such a point in relation to the Indian tradition. As Professor R. C. Zaehner remarks, the Hindu mystical classics are not autobiographical. This might make it difficult to determine what is actual experience and what is doctrinal interpretation. But fortunately, Indian contemplative literature, though not in general autobiographical, is rich in the description of the various stages and methods of *dhyāna* or contemplation. There is no good reason why such accounts should be without basis in actual experience.

1.15. We must further note that experience can always be interpreted from at least two standpoints: from the standpoint of the person having the experience and from the standpoint of those standing outside. My primary concern in the ensuing analysis is with the interpretation which people give of their own experience and not with an interpretation which may be projected onto them from outside or from the standpoint of another tradition. The comparative study of religion is primarily concerned with describing and elucidating religious phenomena, including people's beliefs, and is not a method of doing theology (even if it be a necessary condition of theologizing about religions). Let me give just one example to show why it is necessary to interpret a religion from its own standpoint first of all.

1.16. It has been not uncommon among Western students of Buddhism to say that the Buddha taught a doctrine of the *ātman* – of the existence of an eternal self. Some Hindu students of Buddhism have said much the same thing because it makes Buddhism closer to Hinduism, and this would be important if it were desired to establish that all religions are basically affirming the same thing (a favourite thesis of modern Hindu apologists). In the West, this interpretation of Buddhism owed much to the late Mrs Caroline Rhys Davids, a fine Pāli scholar, but a person also of rather unreliable intellectual judgment. Yet if one theme runs consistently through Buddhist history it is the doctrine of *anattā*, which denies the existence of an

eternal self. Though the school known as Pudgalavādins (Personalists) came close to affirming such a self, it is significant that they could not be so bold as to use the term *ātman*, but used the more innocuous-sounding word *pudgala*. The classical debates of medieval Indian philosophy are shot through with Buddhist arguments against the eternal self. The attempt, then, to interpret Buddhism in a manner which is not only inconsistent with its history but is also incompatible with the beliefs of the vast majority (and possibly the totality) of contemporary Buddhists does nothing to bring about a rapprochement between religions. It would be conversely and equally specious to try to argue that Christianity really believes in reincarnation or that it does not really involve the affirmation of Christ's divinity.

1.17. The reason for Western distortions of Buddhism lies mainly in the way in which Buddhism offended against the presuppositions about religion commonly held in the Judaeo-Christian environment of the West. It was a matter of some amazement for some of those who encountered the Pāli canon that Buddhism did not entail belief in God. For many people brought up in the Christian atmosphere this seemed like a contradiction in terms, that there should be a religion which does not in some sense believe in a personal Creator of the world. Admittedly in the ancient world present to Western consciousness – that of Greece and Rome – there were polytheistic cults, which only affirmed a belief in creation in a fragmentary and mythical form. But at least polytheism could be seen as a kind of incomplete theism: a stage before the supreme achievement of human religion. Moreover, Plato, Aristotle, Cicero and others could be cited as instances of the higher insight represented by theism. There was theism, so to say, within the embrace of a polytheistic culture. These things being so, it was a common assumption that religion must involve belief in God, or at least in the gods. It was therefore a shock to find first that the idea of a Supreme Being is absent from Theravāda Buddhism and second that the gods are irrelevant to salvation. The ironic treatment of polytheism in the Buddhist canon scarcely allows Buddhism itself to be characterized as a sort of polytheism. This shock to Western presuppositions about religion was accompanied by another. Not only is there no God here; but Buddhism even denies the

eternity of the soul. How could such an apparently negative faith (that is, from the standpoint of Western preconceptions about religion) be good news? How could it be a successful Gospel? How could we account for its serene dynamism? One way was by reintroducing the banned ideas – by seeing Buddhism in the image of a reformed Brahmanism. Further, as we have noted, Buddhism is a difficult case for those who seek a formal point of contact between theologies. If it really believes in a soul, it can be assimilated better to the traditional Christian metaphysics: and if it really believes in a supreme self it can be mated with Advaita. Thus apologetic concerns, as well as preconceptions about the nature of religion, have conspired together to bring about some scholarly distortions of Buddhism. This is an object lesson in the principle about interpretation enunciated above (1.14): first of all interpret a faith in its own terms. This is why good exegesis of another faith is best done comparatively. For it is only by honest and explicit comparisons that we can uncover the preconceptions which, if hidden, might lead to a distortion of the other faith.

1.18. The stage is now set for our analysis of the major systems of belief in the Indian tradition. It is convenient to describe them in their medieval shape. For it was in the period from about 700 AD to about 1500 AD that the systems were engaged in their most dynamic debate; and it was also during this period that some of them took definitive theological shape (I am thinking, for instance, of the qualified non-dualism of Ramanuja and the dualism of Madhva, in the middle of the period). Now it is also true that the systems had very ancient roots. We cannot properly understand them without reference to these origins, so far as they can be discerned. But the decision to look at Indian religion and philosophy from a medieval perspective has its advantages.

1.19. It will, for instance, help to dispel an illusion created by many modern treatments of the Indian tradition. It has become almost a commonplace in modern India to hold that all the different systems and schools, all the different forms of religion and scepticism, really add up to a single synthetic whole. Thus President Radhakrishnan's well-known history of Indian philosophy is largely predicated upon this assumption. Even the Materialists, once – but of course no longer – flourishing in Indian intellectual debate, are fitted into this grand scheme.

Were they not describing the material world, while others attended to the spiritual? This thesis, which we may dub the 'Thesis of Philosophical Unity', has an important part to play in the contemporary Hindu ideology. For Hinduism's response to a rather aggresive Christianity was to point to the way in which different strands of religion were woven together in Hindusim. This being so, it was possible to argue that all religions point to the same truth, even if this truth may be apprehended with differing levels of insight. It was but a short step to claim that Hinduism is the great prototype of a coming world religion, in which the different faiths could be woven together in a peaceable whole. This is a noble vision (even if later we shall have to criticize it). It can be called the 'Thesis of Religious Unity'. This latter thesis is complemented, within the history of India, by what I have called the Thesis of Philosophical Unity.

1.20. But the Thesis of Philosophical Unity scarcely looks plausible in the medieval perspective, nor yet in that of ancient India. One thing which is everywhere apparent in the most dynamic period of Indian philosophy is the clarity and liveliness with which the different systems argued against each other. It is also quite apparent that in the earlier period the Buddhists, Jains, Hindus, Materialists and others were engaged in important religious and ideological debates. Supposing one were to get onto a time machine and travel back into the Indian Middle Ages and were to present some of the great figures like Shankara, Ramanuja and Madhva with a copy of one of those modern expositions affirming the Thesis of Philosophical Unity, they would, I suspect, be rather upset. What is the point of philosophical and theological acumen as expressed in debate and argument if in the last resort everyone is saying the same thing? These men treated ideas seriously, and they did so because they saw them as relevant to the way in which we live our lives. It is very difficult, if one accepts the Thesis of Philosophical Unity, to treat ideas seriously, since contradictions between one thinker and another have to be seen as not being contradictions. This is itself typically a way of allowing contradictions into what one is saying. But if we do this, anything goes. If anything goes, then thinking becomes flabby and pointless. And how in that case can we be taking ideas seriously?

1.21. We analyse the systems, then, from the medieval perspective. This is not to say that the modern Hindu ideology – the Thesis of Religious Unity – is not to be taken seriously. As has been noted, we shall in a later chapter (4.3 et seq.), consider the important claims which it makes. But in the meantime we wish to gain an insight into the reasons for the variety of patterns of belief displayed in the ancient and medieval Indian tradition. Perhaps it will be useful to sketch out the main features of the systems. I do so in a certain order, an order which brings out some rather striking similarities. Those systems which are adjacent in the order are more like each other than those more distant in the order.

1.22. Let us begin with Theravāda Buddhism, the sole modern representative of the so-called 'Lesser Vehicle'. In my own view the Theravāda corresponds better than any other Buddhist school to the original teachings of the Buddha. But it does not matter too much whether this historical judgment is acceptable. For what is important is that we do have this variety of spirituality; and we wish to understand why the Theravāda exists even apart from questions about the vexed problem of the original teachings of the Buddha. Now the Theravāda, as we have seen, does not involve belief in a Creator. Does it then have some sense of an impersonal Something underlying the world? Does it hold that there is an Absolute sustaining and embracing phenomena? Does it, to use a piece of theological jargon much in evidence today, thanks to the influence of the late Paul Tillich, affirm that there is a Ground of being?

1.23. It does not. It is true that there is a supreme goal, Nirvana, in which the short-lived states which go to make up the individual are replaced by a permanent state. But this is not a kind of merging with or identification with an Ultimate Reality lying behind the world of our senses. The reason why neither God nor Absolute figures in the Theravādin scheme is partly that the whole notion of substance (*dravya*) is repudiated. The world is analysed as compounded out of impermanent states. Likewise the individual is seen in the same way. There is no permanent self or soul underlying the psychological and physical events which make up the individual; there is no permanent Something underlying the world; there are no permanent substances underlying material phenomena. Whereas

it is common in many systems of thought, both Eastern and Western, to make a distinction between entities, i.e. to contrast a Permanent Entity (God or the Absolute) with the impermanent entities encountered in ordinary experience, the Theravādin dualism is one between states rather than entities. Nirvana as a permanent state is contrasted with the impermanent things and individuals discoverable in the cosmos. Thus the Theravāda is neither theistic nor absolutistic.

1.24. All this ties in with the Theravādin conception of the path to liberation. Liberation is not to be achieved by piety, sacrifices or other religious activities directed towards the gods. The gods are irrelevant to salvation. The way to liberation is through treading the Eightfold Path, which vitally culminates in the practice of contemplation. The cultivation of dhyāna is the key to arriving at the vision of Nirvana. Through it, and its surrounding moral and social life, one can attain to peace and insight. This peace will remove the craving which binds one to the wheel or rebirth; insight will show one the true nature of things and destroy that aboriginal ignorance upon which ultimately craving depends. So one will no more be reborn, and individual existence is replaced by Nirvana. It is replaced in such a way that one can no longer ask whether the individual survives or does not survive after his blessed decease. The basis of the question has been removed.

1.25. If one were to characterize the Theravāda in the simplest possible way, it would be just to call it a form of yoga, using this term in its primary and general sense. It is through self training, both ethical and contemplative, that the goal is reached. We may note for future reference that here the practice of yoga is associated with a non-theistic, non-absolutistic theology and belief in rebirth. We shall find that this pattern recurs.

1.26. In many respects Jainism, though more conservative and archaic in its thought forms, displays a remarkable resemblance to the Theravāda. Like the latter, Jainism has no place for a Creator. Like the latter, it does not have the concept of a unitary Reality underlying the cosmos. It affirms the doctrine of rebirth. It propounds a very austere form of yoga for the achievement of liberation.

1.27. The antiquity of the Jain tradition (going back at least to the eighth century BC), and its evident independence of the

Brahmanical religion which gave birth to the classical Upanishads, give it a special interest in any attempt to trace the early history of Indian religion. Although we now think of reincarnation and karma as characteristic Hindu beliefs, they make their first unambiguous appearance in the Upanishads, and are conceived there as 'new' teachings. This is an indication that the Upanishads themselves constitute a synthesis between the sacrificial religion stemming out of the early Vedic *Weltanschauung* and ideas incorporated from some other tradition. This synthesis was to have its most notable expression in the saying 'That art thou' already quoted earlier in this chapter (1.7). It is not therefore fanciful to see Jainism as exhibiting a pattern of belief and practice central to the non-Vedic tradition. Buddhism too can be seen in this context. The constellation of ideas reflected in both religions is this: yoga (accompanied by varying degrees of austerity), karma, rebirth, liberation. Equally important perhaps is the absence of concern with either a Lord (*īśvara*) or Brahman, which came to be crucial in post-Vedic speculation.

1.28. But even if there is a broad similarity between the shape of Jainism and the shape of early Buddhism, the differences need to be noted. Whereas Jainism was extremely austere in its practices of self-mortification, Buddhism involved a 'middle path' between self-torture and self-indulgence. While Jainism conceived of karma as a material substance weighing down the life-monad or soul, so that liberation brought about by the destruction of karma would mean that the soul rises (as if by counter-gravity) to the top of the cosmos, there to remain inert, karma is treated psychologically in Buddhism. While Jaina liberation is figured as having a spatial location, in Buddhism Nirvana is not. While in Jainism the soul or life-monad is treated as a permanent substance, in Buddhism it is not. These differences in part reflect the undoubted influence of ancient Indian materialism and scepticism upon the thinking of the Buddha; they also reflect the originality and meta-physical sophistication of the Buddha's *dhamma*. It is not therefore surprising that the Pāli canon is at places highly disputatious in relation to the Jains. Those who are close together in ideological descent are often the strongest in ideological dissent.

1.29. Both Jainism and Buddhism are, of course, 'unorthodox' or *nāstika*: they do not recognize the validity of the Vedic

revelation. It is interesting therefore to observe that Samkhya and Yoga, those closely related systems, and ones which (as we shall see – 1.38) betray a broad resemblance to Jainism and the Theravāda, are orthodox. It is quite probable that originally they were not: here we may observe the phenomenon of absorption into the Hindu tradition so characteristic of the latter's evolution. (Eventually even the Buddha came to be treated as an incarnation of Vishnu, despite the Buddha's strictures upon Brahmanism).

1.30. The Samkhya system can hardly by itself be treated as a method of liberation, though it lays claims to being such, which is a main reason why it is coupled, and has been coupled over a very long period, with the Yoga system. The latter borrows its main features, with certain adaptations, from the Samkhya, so that it is not too misleading to treat Samkhya as the theoretical exposition and Yoga the practical account of how to achieve that clarity of consciousness which brings liberation from the round of rebirth and the suffering of the world.

1.31. Like Jainism, Samkhya has no place for a Creator. The cosmos, on the contrary, is seen as a self-subsistent entity, called *prakṛti* or 'nature', which changes and develops according to an internal dynamic. The details of this dynamic need not concern us here, save that we may note that Samkhya cosmology was frequently made use of by other schools. Thus the Vaishnavite schools incorporate Samkhya ideas; and, most famously, the *Bhagavadgītā* weaves into its teachings items taken from the Samkhya system. But these borrowings and adaptations need not mislead us into thinking of the Samkhya system itself as theistic (though it has been argued that originally it was). The system as we have it in the medieval period and earlier is atheistic. When we couple this to the general resemblance between it and Jainism, it becomes plausible to see both Samkhya and Yoga as originating in the same milieu as the unorthodox systems.

1.32. Embedded, as it were, in nature are innumerable souls (*purushas*), coordinated to psychophysical organisms. So long as they remain attached to these the process of reincarnation and suffering will go on. The object of the practical life should, then, be to achieve the detachment of the soul from the organism. According to Samkhya this is achieved by an existen-

tial realization of the essential difference between the soul and the psychophysical organism to which it is attached. In theory knowledge is enough; but since this has to be 'existential' and not just a matter of reading up Samkhya doctrines, a method of liberation is required. This is provided by Yoga, which details the forms of mental and physical self-training conducive to the higher awareness. Upon liberation, the soul exists in a state of isolation, both from the world of nature and from other souls.

1.33. We see, then, the same constellation of ideas which we detected in Jainism and Buddhism: yoga, karma, rebirth, liberation, absence of belief in a Creator or of an underlying Absolute with which one merges in liberation. It is not for nothing that there are traces in the texts of an original unorthodoxy in Samkhya – that is, of an original non-acceptance of the Vedic revelation as authoritative.

1.34. On the other hand, it must be admitted, looking at Yoga from the medieval perspective, that it has an element of theism in it. To speak of an 'element' here may seem strange. But if we analyse theism, we find two separable aspects of belief in God. These separable aspects are not at all separate in the Judaeo-Christian tradition, as typically understood; and if we approach the phenomena of Indian religion from the Western point of view, we will not be alive enough to the separability of the elements in question. However, if theism is analysed it will be seen to consist of at least two beliefs: first, that the world is created by God; and second, that there is a supreme object of worship. One could worship a Supreme Being without believing him to be Creator; one could believe in creation without wishing to worship the Creator. Indeed, some of the alleged conflict between the God of the Bible and the God of the metaphysicians hinges upon this distinction. The God of the Bible is primarily a God of personal encounter and a God of majesty. He is one who enters into relationship with Israel and reveals himself in Christ. As such he is a focus of worship, adoration and obedience. He is also, it is true, the Creator. But one could use the arguments of natural theology, as traditionally understood, to establish a Creator without getting a sense of the majesty and righteousness of this First Cause. There be in principle (even if there may be no need in practice) the possibility of a split between the God of speculation and the God of history and of religious encounter. This being so, it is

not unreasonable to distinguish between the creative and the experimental aspects of God. And this is very relevant to the situation in medieval Yoga. For here there is expressed a belief in a Lord – the only soul not ever implicated in the disadvantages of empirical existence – though this Lord is not conceived as Creator of the cosmos. He is the luminous Being upon whom the Yogin can meditate and who will assist him in the search for liberation. He is only in a limited sense (as we shall see – 1.38) an object of worship. But he is not the source of existence. He is not the Creator from whom flows the rest of reality including the souls of those who seek release. He is not the Being upon whom the individual feels himself dependent, save in the sense that he will help the individual out of the suffering circumstances into which the structure of the world has thrown him.

1.35. This modified or restricted theism of medieval Yoga could be explained in two ways. It might be that it represents an attenuated version of an original high theism; or it might be that it is a superimposition of theistic ideas upon an original atheism. The second alternative seems the more plausible for a number of reasons. First, the Samkhya system, so closely related to that of Yoga, does not incorporate belief in a Lord. Second, the analogy between Samkhya and Buddhism and Jainism may not be coincidental: they may belong to a common, early, non-Vedic tradition, as we have argued; and if the crucial constellation of ideas of this tradition includes a correlation between yoga and atheism, it is not absurd to see in the classical Yoga system a development out of an original atheistic faith. For Yoga is certainly an expression of yoga. It is an instance of a type. Third, the Lord of the Yoga system does not function in a very strong sense as an object of worship. This is to say, in effect, that the typical motive for theism is weak in the Yoga system. This remark, highly important for the present argument, requires amplification – and amplification which involves a certain digression.

1.36. If we ask ourselves what the concept 'God' is, we surely need to recognize that it occurs in a certain milieu. It occurs in the context of religion; but in particular it occurs in the context of worship. To take God's name in vain is to utter a blasphemy. A blasphemy is an offence against the holiness with which God's name must be treated, in that God himself is holy. But to say that God is holy is to say that one must bow down before him,

that he is deserving of praise, worship, adoration. Of course, 'deserving' may in one way be the wrong word. It suggests that we give praise to God the way in which we might bestow a prize upon a deserving schoolboy. But still worship is due to God, though this deservingness or dueness is not to be interpreted simply by human comparisons. Rather it is that God by his very nature is the proper object of praise. We sing hymns just because hymns are what ought to be sung in addressing the Lord. Intrinsically, then, God is holy, God is an object of worship. This is why (as we observed above) the speculative First Cause seems detached from the God of religion. For I can say without contradiction that there is a First Cause but there is no point in worshipping it. But one cannot without self-contradiction say 'I believe in God but do not believe that I ought to worship him'. To believe in God is already to believe in a supreme object of worship. In short, there is an internal connection between the concept 'God' and the concept worship'.

1.37. The above conclusion indicates that the main motive for belief in theism is tied in with the commitment to worship. Theism as a speculative matter is not of primary religious interest, though this is not to say that the project of natural theology, as traditionally understood in the West, is absurd. It may still be appropriate to adduce arguments to show that the world depends upon a personal Creator, even if the holiness of that Being must be primary in the religious context. Likewise it is not necessarily absurd that arguments to the same effect have been used in the Indian tradition to establish belief in a personal Lord who is Creator. Nevertheless, worship and the concept of God necessarily go together, while speculation and worship only contingently go together. If then worship and belief in God (or the gods, for that matter) go together, we have to examine the status of the Lord in the Yoga system. Is he truly an object of worship?

1.38. The situation in fact is a little ambiguous. The Lord of the Yoga system is mainly an object of meditation, without being the goal of the contemplative life and without being the focus of worshipful activity. Let me explain. As was noted above (1.34), the Lord in the Yoga system is a soul which has never been implicated in the process of rebirth. Further, the liberation to which the Yogin aspires essentially consists, as in Samkhya, in isolation from the world, from other souls and

so *a fortiori* from God. There is no question here of the union with God found in Islamic and Christian mysticism and in certain phases of Hinduism. The Lord in Yoga is an aid of liberation, not a focus of salvation. He is a means, but he is not the end of the religious life. He graciously helps; but he is not the goal of love. By meditating upon him, one can gain advance in the spiritual endeavour; but one does not assign him fully fledged worship, for this would be to imply that he is the focus of salvation. The operation of devotion and the rituals of worship avail little. In short, Yoga has borrowed a concept from popular religion and put it to a special use. It is in this sense, then, that the Lord of Yoga is an object of meditation, without being properly either the focus of contemplation or of worship. This, then, is the third reason for supposing that Yoga derives from the non-Vedic atheistic tradition also represented by Samkhya, Buddhism and Jainism.

1.39. So far, then, we have encountered a cluster of systems which belong together and which, despite their differences, exhibit a remarkable consistency of general pattern. Actually, Buddhism is, if anything, the odd one out, for the others all believe (though variously) in eternal souls, while Buddhism rejects this belief. The analysis of things and persons into short-lived states, and the description of Nirvana as a permanent state, are original to Buddhism and indicate something of the creativity of its founder, who, if the present thesis is correct, belonged to the non-Vedic tradition centring on yoga, and who yet reinterpreted it in a radical and subtle way.

1.40. The contemplation or dhyāna characteristic of these systems is, I believe, very similar to the mystical spirituality of men like Eckhart, St John of the Cross, al-Hallaj – all of whom, however, interpreted the interior quest in terms of theism and consciously sought a kind of union with the divine Being. But this is already a bold claim to make, for it is readily apparent that the terms of the religious life as understood in the Theravāda, Jainism and Yoga do not include belief in a personal Creator, and this is central to the faith of Christian and Muslim contemplatives. Suffice it to remark here that there is good evidence that yoga and dhyāna in the Indian tradition have roots in a *Weltanschauung* not at all similar to the monism which most people think to be characteristic of Indian mysticism. It is common to think of the Upanishadic doctrine of

'That art thou' as typical of mysticism. It is common to suppose that the contemplative life is to be interpreted in terms of union with Ultimate Reality or with God. These suppositions derive, however, from one human perspective – the perspective of cultures which believe in God or Ultimate Reality. Here a simple observation is highly relevant.

1.41. The observation is just this. To interpret the higher achievement of the contemplative life as union is to presuppose that there is something, as it were, to be united with. If one believes in God, then the contemplative attainment will be seen as union with God (though not necessarily as identification with God, for good reasons which we shall come to: see 2.40). If one believes in an underlying Absolute, then the contemplative attainment can be seen as identification with the Absolute. But if one does not believe in God, and if one does not believe in Ultimate Reality, but only in the world and in the innumerable souls or individuals inhabiting it, then there is no X with which to become united. There is the possibility of the isolation of the soul (as in Yoga); there is the possibility of the liberation of the life-monad in the topmost reaches of the cosmos (as in Jainism); there is the possibility of replacing impermanence by permanence (as in Theravāda Buddhism). But there is no possibility of union for there is no 'other' with which to become united. This is of course a very simple observation, but it is of profound importance, for it alters altogether our usual perspective upon mysticism and upon the main stream of Indian yoga. In brief, the typical forms of yoga in the Indian tradition, as so far considered, do not involve the 'That art thou', which is so often taken as the central doctrine of Indian mysticism. As will be argued the 'That art thou' is a synthesis between Brahmanism and the non-Vedic pluralism of the unorthodox systems. Or rather, it is a synthesis between the concept of the sacred Brahman, and all that that stood for, and the constellation of ideas which have been detected in these other systems – that is, the ideas of yoga, karma, rebirth and liberation. It is a synthetic monism; but it is not necessarily the typical or original *Weltanschauung* of the Indian contemplative.

1.42. This conclusion is shocking in two ways. It is shocking for those who see in Advaita Vedanta a universal pattern for mystical doctrine. It is shocking also for those who see higher

mysticism as bound up with union with God. It is shocking for the former because Theravāda Buddhism (for instance) becomes an equally valid (if not more valid) expression of the purely contemplative life. If Advaita represents a kind of synthesis, incorporating elements other than those of contemplation, then there is a case for arguing that Theravāda Buddhism (for instance) approximates more closely to 'pure' mysticism. Of course, purity may not be everything. Some kind of synthesis between different aspects of the religious life might be better. Cakes and ale may be superior to pure cakes or pure ale. Nevertheless it is a point sometimes urged in favour of non-dualistic Vedanta in the modern world that this somehow expresses the quintessence of mysticism. We have such an argument, for instance, in W. T. Stace's *Mysticism and Philosophy*; we have it in the writings of the late Aldous Huxley; it is implicit in the position of President Radhakrishnan; it is part of the platform of the Ramakrishna Mission; it is the theme of Guénon and Schuon.

1.43. The conclusion is shocking for theists, because they are already uneasy at the agnosticism of Theravāda Buddhism. The Absolutism of the Vedanta and of Mahāyāna Buddhism can more easily be interpreted in line with theistic presuppositions. This is so precisely because these systems are syntheses – they already incorporate something important of the religion of worship which, as we saw (1.36), is intrinsically connected with belief in God. But where is the point of departure, for the theist, in interpreting the Buddhism of the Theravāda? Where can one gain a foothold in a faith which is seemingly indifferent to a personal Lord? What is the Christian to say to the Jain? How can he cope with Samkhya? These systems are, at least in theology, rather impervious to theistic preconceptions. Thus the conclusion expressed in 1.41 is shocking on two fronts. But the truth may be shocking. It is not desirable to rewrite the history of religions to defend our prejudices. On the other hand, our conclusion is an hypothesis only.

1.44. So far we have been considering systems which are not theistic and from which belief in an Absolute underlying and embracing phenomena is absent. These are systems which see the world essentially as self-governing, though sprinkled with souls or individuals in principle seeking liberation from the

world. The systems, then, are dualistic, but dualistic as between souls and the world, or as between Nirvana and the world. In varying degrees of sophistication they express belief in a transcendent dimension in which there is, so to say, eternal life. It is possible to escape the temporary world, the impermanence of things, the sufferings of existence, into a state of blissfulness or of absence of pain. This dimension of liberation is already embedded in the world in the shape of souls or of individuals, capable through yoga and/or austerity of attaining liberation. If the next system which we are to consider is dualistic, it is so in rather a different sense. For the Dvaita of Madhva involves not merely a dualism between souls or the dimension of liberation and the things of the world, but also a dualism between them and God. It is called dualistic importantly because there is affirmed a distinction between God and souls (while Shankara's non-dualism is so-called because the soul and the Divine Absolute are identical).

1.45. Of the three forms of Vedanta which we are to consider, Madhva's is, in time, the latest. Like Ramanuja's system, it is Vaishnavite in its mythological anchorage, though it is worth noting that the Shaiva Siddhanta (Śaiva Siddhānta), which expresses the theology of South Indian theistic Shaivism, has in general a very similar structure. That is, the theism of Madhva does not owe all its shape to its Vaishnavism. This is of interest, for the present analysis is, it is hoped, beginning to bring out the fact that shapes of systems are not determined by religious allegiance. Orthodox Samkhya can look very like unorthodox Jainism in theology. Likewise Vaishnavite Dvaita can look very like Shaiva Siddhanta in theology. This is not to say that other differences are unimportant. It is not to neglect the emotional and mythological divergences between cults. But primarily we are here concerned with doctrine and ideology, and it is thus of some importance that similarities cut across religious boundaries. We should not be surprised at this, if the main thesis which I wish to argue is correct – namely that there is some correlation between types of doctrine and patterns of religious experience. For surely religious experience is not the prerogative of some religious traditions and not of others. It is a commonplace in the comparative study of religion that similarities can occur in independent cultures. It should therefore occasion no astonishment that similar patterns of thought

in the Indian context can cut across religious and 'sectarian' boundaries.

1.46. Madva's dualism involves a five-fold set of distinctions: between things and things; between souls and souls; between things and souls; between God and things; and between God and souls. We could state all this in another way: it involves belief in a plurality of souls embedded in a complex world governed by a Creator. There is no attempt here to treat 'That art thou' literally. On the contrary (as we have seen – 1.8) Madhva went completely against the more usual interpretations of the text. He was indeed concerned to emphasize the separateness of God. He was also concerned to show that different souls have different destinies. He individualized souls, while most Indian systems treated them as essentially similar to one another. Madhva rejected any suggestion that, even in the state of liberation, a soul can merge with God. Thus formally he is close to Western theism, which likewise individualizes souls and treats them as distinct from the Creator, even in the highest stages of contemplative union.

1.47. It has been thought for this reason and from other indications that Madhva owed something to Christian influences. The St Thomas Christians live chiefly on the southern part of the west coast of India, and Madhva came from near Mangalore, in the same general area. Madhva also preached that some souls are destined for eternal condemnation in hell, while for the rest of the Indian tradition hells are in essence purgatories: after a long time the punished individuals are restored to a higher state of existence and thus retain the possibility of ultimate liberation. The doctrine of eternal damnation has been ascribed to Christian influences. But there are reasons also to suppose that Madhva's theism has independent origins. The features which assimilate him to Christian theism can be accounted for in other terms. For one thing, the idea of a plurality of souls was not only characteristic of some other Indian systems, including the atheistic ones which we have been considering (it is significant that Udipi and its environs – Madhva's home territory – was one of the strongholds of medieval Jainism). From Jainism too, Madhva may have derived his predilection for categorizing living beings. Jainism had evolved a whole hierarchy of gods inhabiting the cosmos (and as in Buddhism essentially irrelevant to human

salvation). But in any case, Madhva had, like Ramanuja, experimental grounds for his theism and for his dualism between the soul and God. The worship of God implies itself a kind of duality. It is implicit in the process that the worshipper sees and feels himself as inferior to and distinct from the Supreme Being. The non-dualism of Shankara was seen by both Madhva and Ramanuja as a threat to Vaishnavite piety for this reason.

1.48. This Vaishnavite piety was, of course, the outcome of the *bhakti* movement, going back to the Gītā and beyond. The fervent expression of the loving adoration of the Supreme Being, coupled with the sense that salvation depended on the grace of God, was incompatible with the non-dualism of the Advaita. Or at least it was incompatible if it were taken with the utmost seriousness. If the theophany of the Gītā, expressing the profound impact of the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* of God, is to be regarded as a central basis in experience for the worship of God and reliance upon him, it seems inconceivable that the loving worshipper should regard himself properly as identical with that terrible and gracious Person. Ramanuja saw with clarity that a new theology was needed to combat the impressive monism of Shankara and to this end he dedicated his life.

1.49. Ramanuja's system of qualified non-dualism is rather more faithful to the Upanishadic texts than is Madhva's dualism. For Ramanuja wished to show the close relationship between the world (and souls) and God. This was intrinsic to his strong sense of dependence. A mere dualism between the world and God, though formally clearer at bringing out the otherness of the divine Being, was less effective in explaining the creaturely dependence of all things upon God. And in terms of religious experience, the felt joy of the grace of God could well be expressed by the doctrine that God stands to the soul as the soul to the body. Likewise the cosmos was seen as God's body. Through it God expresses himself, and thus all events can be seen as his activity. Even karma, so often treated as an independent law of nature in the Indian tradition, loses its self-subsistent power, to become instead the operation of God's justice in leading living beings from one life to another and ultimately (often) to liberation, where the soul lives in close communion with the divine Reality.

1.50. Both Dvaita and Vishishtadvaita treat God as both

Lord and Creator. Here is a full theism, in contrast to the attenuated theism of the Yoga system. Both Madhva and Ramanuja emphasize rebirth, karma and liberation, like the non-theistic systems we have hitherto been considering. But now there are profound differences. Karma, as has been seen, becomes the will of God. Liberation is not isolation, but life with God. It is not Nirvana, but individual dependence in blessedness. Moreover, it is no longer yoga that holds the central place. Admittedly Ramanuja was kind enough to allow that Advaitin and other yogins who pursued the path of contemplation might gain an inferior form of liberation. But the highest happiness comes through the work of God's gracious activity in response to the devotion or bhakti of the faithful. Dhyāna as the means of salvation is essentially replaced by bhakti. It is this polarity in the Indian tradition between dhyāna and bhakti which will serve to explain, in large manner, the differing patterns of theology.

1.51. Dhyāna involves a purification of consciousness, a kind of higher emptiness. It involves turning away from the world of perception, eliminating mental images, stilling discursive thought. It can occur in the context of belief in God, and it can (as we have seen) occur by itself, within the pattern of the constellation of ideas constituted by yoga, karma, rebirth and liberation. Bhakti, on the other hand, feeds on the imaginative apprehension of the numinous. It is directed to an object. It involves fervid reliance upon the Other, while dhyāna can be self-sufficient. Bhakti expresses itself in worship and adoration, and makes no sense except as directed to a Lord. It is not surprising, then, that Vaishnavite bhakti should throw up the theologies of Ramanuja and Madhva. To the world and the multiplicity of individuals seeking liberation which we find in the non-theistic systems there is added the personal Lord. If the latter systems are intelligible as correlated to the yogic pursuit of liberation through contemplation, the theistic systems of Madhva and Ramanuja are intelligible as correlates of the bhakti that gave them their origins. The real problem comes when we start to consider the Absolutism of Advaita and of the Mahāyāna.

1.52. Though the non-dualism of Shankara is well known, it is useful to recapitulate briefly its main features. For Shankara the 'That art thou' is to be taken in the starkest, clearest sense.

It means that the eternal self within the individual is identical with Brahman, the Absolute or Ultimate Reality. Since there is but one Brahman, it follows that there is but one Self, but one ātman. Thus every living being contains within himself (so to say) the divine Being. This rigorous insistence on the non-dualism between the soul and the divine Reality is paralleled by an equally uncompromising monism in relation to the world. If Brahman alone is real then the multiplicity of the world as presented to perception must be deceptive. The world, considered as a reality distinct from Brahman, is an illusion.

1.53. This monistic emphasis in Shankara has consequences about truth. Clearly it is not enough to say that the world, as commonly understood, is illusory. For ordinary purposes we distinguish between true and false affirmations about the world, between genuine perceptions and hallucinations. Thus Shankara evolved a doctrine of levels of truth. At the higher level, we can affirm 'That art thou' and other sayings which signify the single existence of Brahman. At a lower level we can speak ordinarily about the world. This doctrine of levels was useful to Shankara's exegesis of the Upanishads – some of the texts could be ascribed to the higher level, others (those, for example, that conflict with the monistic interpretation) could be assigned to the lower level. Religiously, this means that statements about the Lord – about Brahman as Creator – belong to the lower level; for if the world is illusory, then the divine Being as Creator of the world is infected, so to say, by the same illusion. Hence there is a double-decker theory of religion to be found in Advaita (other decks being added sometimes in modern interpretations). On the one hand there is the higher level of realization of one's essential identity with the one Reality. On the other there is the cult of God the Creator. This latter cult is good for the ordinary man still implicated in that aboriginal ignorance which accounts for our being separated from reality and plunged in illusion. The ultimate aim, though, of the religious quest must be to transcend the worship of a personal God in the existential awareness of the Self. In this awareness all distinctions fall away. This is a state corresponding to Buddhist Nirvana and Yogic liberation, but it is seen as the realization of oneness with the Ground of being, the sole Reality, the Brahman.

1.54. The brilliance of Shankara's presentation, its near

correspondence to the central ideas of the Upanishads, its synthetic power – all these have been factors in the success of Advaita. In modern times, however, the success has an added cause. The theory of levels of spiritual apprehension can be adapted to the task of expressing the Thesis of Religious Unity (1.19). A modernized Advaita has indeed become the principal religious ideology of contemporary Hinduism.

1.55. As in the non-theistic systems, the means of liberation in Advaita have to do with dhyāna. It is in the inner, existential realization of the Self and its unity with the Brahman that the bonds of ignorance and illusion are broken. Orthodox piety and the worship of the Lord belong to the lower level, and do not themselves bring liberation. They provide a context, it is true, within the realm of *māyā* for the spiritual quest which must, to be effective, transcend them. These facts, as we shall see, provide a clue for the understanding of Shankara's Absolutism. Dhyāna and bhakti both have a place in Shankara's writings, but bhakti is rigidly subordinated to dhyāna.

1.56. Advaita itself owed something to Mahāyāna Buddhism. Shankara's illusionism in part derived from the Void Doctrine (*śūnyavāda*) of Nāgārjuna. It was not for nothing that Shankara was accused by his opponents of being a crypto-Buddhist. It is useful therefore to compare and contrast the Absolutism discoverable in the Mahāyāna with that of Advaita. To understand the Mahāyāna Absolutism, it is necessary to make a short excursus into the history of the development of Mahāyāna ideas and practices.

1.57. Though in the Pāli canon the Buddha does not appear as an object of worship, even though he be superior to the gods, there was a slow growth in the first centuries of Buddhism of veneration for the Buddha. A Buddha, having passed away into Nirvana, is beyond empirical reach, and thus cannot respond to adoration. But this doctrine did not prevent the development of the worship of celestial Buddhas, like Amitābha, and of great Bodhisattvas, like Avalokiteshvara. Popular devotion was thus given a fairly central place in the Greater Vehicle, and linked to the discovery or rediscovery of a crucial ethical insight in Buddhism. From the point of view of the Mahāyāna, the Lesser Vehicle ideal of sainthood, in which the monk pursues his own liberation, is narrow and selfish. How can it square with the Buddha's insistence upon compassion?

Surely compassion should imply that a person should be willing to sacrifice his own spiritual welfare in the pursuit of the welfare of others. Hence we have substituted for the ideal of individual sainthood the ideal of the Bodhisattva, who sacrifices himself through a myriad lives on behalf of other living beings and who puts off his Nirvana until their salvation is assured. Coupled with this conception there evolved the belief that celestial Buddhas could create paradises for the reception of the faithful, where conditions for the attainment of Nirvana would be especially propitious and which were desirable in any event in themselves. Thus the otherwise unworthy individual who could call upon the Buddha in faith would be given something of the immeasurable store of merit accumulated through the self-sacrifices of the Great Being through countless lives.

1.58. This dimension of bhakti in the Mahāyāna did not, however, alter the fundamental concern with dhyāna. The ideal still remained the practice of contemplative yoga, so luminously exhibited in the life of the historical Buddha. Even if lay folk could gain salvation, the Sangha still stayed as the central social manifestation of Buddhism, and one in which men were dedicated to the contemplative life. Something too of the contemplative focus of the Mahāyāna can be seen in philosophical developments which paralleled those of popular piety.

1.59. The greatest and most influential of the Mahāyāna thinkers was Nagarjuna. It is possible to treat his system as a form of nihilism, and some opponents did just that. But it is to be remembered that Nagarjuna was explicitly writing within the context of the Buddha's religion, and against the background of the changes which we have sketched in the preceding paragraphs. As will be seen (1.62), the 'Three-Body' doctrine of the Mahāyāna provided a synthesis between Voidism and bhakti. Voidism itself – a critique in which all things are shown as insubstantial or 'void' – is connected with the emptiness at the heart of meditation – the emptiness in which one is free of perceptions, mental images, discursive thoughts and so on (1.64).

1.60. Nagarjuna sought to show that all theories about reality are self-contradictory. In doing this he conceived himself to be following the Buddha Gautama, who declared himself free of all theories, and who condemned certain questions as

unanswerable because wrongly put. Extending the fourfold negation ('Not thus, nor not thus, nor both thus and not thus, nor neither thus nor not thus') used by the Buddha in relation to these unanswerable questions, Nagarjuna sought to show that *all* theories are misleading. Thus, for instance, Nagarjuna took the standard theories of causation and tried to show them to be self-contradictory. If, as one theory implies, events are short-lived or momentary, then they cannot have effects, for event A will have gone out of existence before its effect, event B, comes into existence. So how can that which is non-existent have any effect? In this, Nagarjuna was criticizing Buddhist theory, and he was not afraid to show that even theories which were taken as expressing the Buddhist view were in no better case than non-Buddhist ones. If, then, all theories about reality break down, reality cannot be characterized. At the heart of ordinary language there is a hidden contradiction. Hence the best we can do is to indicate reality by such terms as Voidness and Suchness. These indicate the indescribability of reality. Nevertheless, we must, for ordinary purposes, speak. Hence Nagarjuna and his school postulated a double-decker account of truth, like that of Shankara. At one level, the lower, there is ordinary language; at the higher level there is the experience of the Void, which can only be pointed to in words, not described.

1.61. But if we cannot characterize the ultimate (which is so much as to say that we cannot characterize the world, for the Void is the real stuff of phenomena, though shielded from our ordinary gaze by the illusions of language and conceptual thought), how can it be connected in any way with the Buddha and his teaching? An attempted solution to this problem is provided by the notion that the Absolute, the Void, phenomenalizes itself in a special way in the Buddha. He, as it were, displays in his person the Voidness at the heart of things. It was he who, through his teachings, pointed the way towards the transcendence of all theories and who showed the path whereby through yoga and insight one might reach the Void in inner experience.

1.62. This attempted solution to the problem of the manifestation of the Void tied in with the doctrine which was to become the formal account of the relations between the Absolute, the celestial Buddhas, and the historical Buddha. This doctrine is known as the Three-Body (*trikāya*) doctrine, so-called because

it delineates and coordinates the three aspects or bodies of the Buddha. At the human level, the Buddha is conceived as possessing his transformation-body. It is, so to say, by a kind of magical transformation that the Buddha conjures up a human person through which to teach men and set them again on the road to liberation. At the celestial level, the Buddha manifests himself in his enjoyment-body. Buddhahood here is free-ranging, joyous, powerful to heal and help, the object of worship, the focus of bhakti, the creator of paradises. Here the Buddhas function as Lords. Finally, at the deepest level of all, the Buddha is identified with the Absolute in his *dharmakāya* or truth-body. Although to the imaginative and mythologically oriented eyes of the faithful Buddhas may appear as numerous (as numerous ultimately as the sands of the Ganges, for everyone is a candidate for liberation and liberation is now conceived as nothing short of Buddhahood), the Buddhas are united as one single Buddha-essence in the heart of the Void. The doctrine thus does not merely coordinate popular and philosophical Buddhism and bhakti and dhyāna, but it unifies the manifestations of Buddhahood. Though vastly different from the Christian Trinity doctrine in flavour and meaning it does have a like effect, of preserving the unity of Ultimate Reality. Yet, as will be seen (1.64) there is a further and deeper reason for the idea of unity, as discoverable in the truth-body of the Buddha.

1.63. It might be complained that the account we have given of Voidism and of its connections with piety and the Mahāyāna tradition has been unjust to its central core. For surely the whole point of Nagarjuna's critique of theories is to banish all theories and concepts? This being so, the description of the Void as the Absolute (a kind of underlying and embracing unity at the heart of phenomena) is to erect Nagarjuna's conclusion into a sort of doctrine. Have we not tended to speak of the Void as Ultimate Reality? Is it not more like ultimate unreality? The complaint is up to a point well-founded. But on the other hand, it is impossible to treat Nagarjuna's position as simply one of nihilism, as was argued earlier (1.61). If it says that we can say nothing, then it has no real connection with Buddhism or with the Buddha. If on the other hand it is saying that Ultimate Reality is void, ineffable, but open to inner immediate experience, then there is no substantial

injustice in drawing a parallel with the Absolutism of Shankara. That this latter is the best course is clear once we observe the practical role of Voidism. It is an intellectual elaboration of what has to be performed in yoga, the expulsion from our mental system of the concepts and ideas which make us look upon the world as substantial and multiple In dhyāna we can banish discursive thoughts and perceptions, and Voidism is an intellectual adjunct to this process. It is itself an intellectual yoga.

1.64. This brings us to the extra reason why we find a unity in the dharmakāya. This reason is tied up with the nature of mystical experience. In the contemplative state, as has been seen – and one could cite many instances also from outside the Indian tradition – discursive thought and mental images disappear. This is one cause of the difficulty of describing it in a way which ties in with ordinary perceptual experience. If the contemplative experience is void of images, etc., it is also void of that sense of distinction between subject and object which characterizes everyday experience. For here we are aware of ourselves as doing something to something, or of seeing something, or of speaking to another. Even in daydreams, when we are folded in upon ourselves, we imagine ourselves as doing this or that, in relation to things and persons other than ourselves. We can, it is true, see ourselves by looking in a mirror, or we can glance at parts of our bodies. Here the other is not separate from ourselves; but still the experience is of 'me' looking at 'that'. It still retains what may be crudely called a subject-object structure. But this disappears when the materials of perception and thought are banished in dhyāna. It is true (as we shall see anon – 2.40) that the contemplative experience can be seen as an experience of an Other, namely God. But this presents problems with which we are not immediately concerned at this moment. Suffice it to say that there is wide testimony to the lack of the subject-object distinction, as commonly found in experience, in the higher states of contemplation.

1.65. This gives us a clue to the unity expressed in the notion of the truth-body of the Buddha. The experience of the Void is such that it no longer appears as 'me' experiencing 'that'. No distinction can be made between the subject and the Void. It is, so to say, a merging with, an identification with the Absolute. Thus the Buddha, in his enlightenment, is one with

the Absolute. The core of Buddhahood thus is Suchness itself. Consequently, Nirvana is no longer just the replacement of impermanent states by a permanent state: it is the realization of oneness with the Absolute. It follows too that there can be no multiplicity of Buddhas. If one Buddha is in essence one with the Absolute and if another Buddha is in essence one with the Absolute there is an identity in essence between them. It further follows that if I am, like other living beings, capable of and destined for Nirvana, I am potentially a Buddha. I am at heart a Bodhisattva; and when the time is ripe I shall consciously tread the path of Bodhisattvahood, an ideal held (as we saw – 1.57) in higher esteem and honour than the narrower ideal of individual sainthood, as in the Lesser Vehicle. The whole doctrine of unity, then, synthesises religious practice with the ethics of self-sacrifice and compassion, though it has important roots in mystical experience itself.

1.66. The conjunction between the religious developments of the Mahāyāna and the philosophy of Nagarjuna provides us with a complex Absolutism which in general terms parallels that of Advaita, which owed much to it. In both there is a non-dual experience of the ultimate, bringing liberation; in both there is the distinction between levels of truth; in both there is a lower-level cult of the Lord and a place for bhakti; in both there is the notion that phenomena, taken as self-subsistent realities, are illusory or self-contradictory. The myths and rituals, of course, remain different. The focus of bhakti in the one is Shiva, in the other the Buddha; the scriptures of the one are not the scriptures of the other; the practical ethics of the one are Hindu and Bralmanical; of the other they have the flavour of the Buddha's teaching; the pious Advaitin is still observant of Vedic ritual and of Hindu temple worship, while the pious Buddhist has available to him another complex of sacraments. Yet there remains, as we have said, the general similarity of structure, and to both dhyāna remains the key, while bhakti has but a lower place.

1.67. The similarity has to be accounted for. At one level it might simply be said that there is an historical connection between Nagarjuna and Shankara. But this account is unsatisfying for a number of reasons. First, Shankara was by no means implausibly commenting upon the *Brahmasūtras*, which themselves represented an interpretation of the central teachings

of the Upanishads. Thus Shankara owed something to the ancient heritage of Upanishadic Brahmanism, and to this extent there is a measure of independence between Advaita and the Mahāyāna. It could be counterargued that the latter may have been influenced by the Upanishads. This is doubtful, and it is both possible and plausible to give an account of the development of the Greater Vehicle (as has been done above – 1.57) without reference to the Upanishads. Second, there are parallels between Indian Absolutism and doctrines found in other cultures. For instance, Eckhart's theology (itself much influenced of course by contemplative experience, as well as by the Christian tradition of worship) has some remarkable analogies to that of Shankara. Nor was Absolutism absent from Sufism, and probably without any direct influence from India. In brief, religious Absolutism itself needs to be accounted for, and the analysis which will shortly (1.80) be offered will attempt to perform this task.

1.68. In the meantime it is necessary to say something in more detail than previously (1.8) about the classical Upanishadic synthesis between Vedic and non-Aryan religion. The 'That art thou' itself expresses the central aspect of this synthesis. Consider the background of the ideas worked out in the Upanishads. The hymns of the Rig-Veda had exhibited a strong ambivalence about the polytheistic structure of Indo-Aryan mythology. Though there were many gods to celebrate, a god could be celebrated, within the context of a particular hymn, as having the attributes of all other deities – as being, within the context, the supreme deity. Such kathenotheism paved the way for the belief that there is but one Reality, though men call it by various divine names. Thus already in the early Vedic literature there is to be detected a drift towards monotheism (a drift observable in some other cultures, notably in ancient Israel). At the same time, there was an elaboration of ritual ultimately to result in the chief question posed in the Upanishads: what is the inner meaning of this complex sacrificial observance? There is clearly a tendency towards inwardness in the Upanishadic treatment, a dissatisfaction with the fussy externals of religion. But there is also a speculative element in these writings which owes a great deal to the traditional cultus. For speculation tended to centre on the identity and nature of Brahman, the Holy Power implicit in sacrifice and manipulable

by the Brahman priesthood. If the power within the sacrifice was so efficacious, then it became a good model to satisfy questions about the whole cosmos. What sustains it? What gives it the capacity for change and transformation? What is the ultimate source of the powers of nature? Was not the cosmos itself a kind of sacrificial activity? Could it not be that the Holy Power informing and controlling all things was Brahman? It was as a result of such thinking that we have one main side of Upanishadic thinking: that the world has Brahman as its inner essence, that it emanates from Brahman, that Brahman is the underlying Reality behind the things we do and see and live amongst.

1.69. It should be noted that Brahman is the *Holy* Power. It is informed with the numinous. It is a *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*. In so far as it is conceived as a personal Creator of the world, Brahman is the object of worship. Here is the Supreme Being, even if there are strong overtones of impersonality in the Upanishadic treatment of Brahman. It is then Holy Power, with a kind of will. It is powerful and creative. This is the one Reality behind the multitudinous deities of the earlier Vedic tradition. This is the One which sages name variously, using such names as Agni, Matarishvan and so on.

1.70. If the concept of Brahman as the Ultimate Reality lying behind and within the world of sense-experience is one main aspect of Upanishadic religious thinking, there is another of equal importance. This other aspect is, unlike the concept of the cosmic Brahman, not of Aryan and Vedic provenance, so far as we can tell. It is the concept of the Self, the ātman or self lying within. It is not a concept in isolation. For it belongs to a cluster of ideas which we have already noted as being characteristic of the non-Aryan tradition – yoga, karma, rebirth, liberation. There is evident in the Upanishadic texts an increased preoccupation with the inner meaning of sacrifice, as we have seen (1.68). This is correlated to a preoccupation with the inner man – with techniques of uncovering the eternal self lying within man and other living species. There is evident in the Upanishads a concern for yoga which is absent from the Vedic hymns. Here a new dimension is added to Brahmanism, a dimension deriving from sources other than those incorporated in the religion brought into India a millennium previously by the Aryan invaders. Here is a strand of religious thinking which

is clearly new to those who composed the Upanishads. We are present at the birth of a synthesis, and we can read its development between the lines.

1.71. If we postulate that the other element in the synthesis was the constellation of ideas apparent in Jainism and Yoga and the other non-theistic systems of early India, we arrive at an intelligible solution of the problem of interpreting the 'That art thou'. The constellation of ideas in question involved, as we have seen, belief in a plurality of individuals or souls implicated in rebirth through the operation of karma, and capable of liberation therefrom through the practice of austerity and yoga. This is the milieu of the ātman, destined to be identified with the Holy Power, Brahman. Imagine that the synthesis sees a connection between the Brahmanical cultus and the practices of the recluses and teachers who dominated the non-Aryan cult. Imagine that the authors of the Upanishads see a need to reconcile the underlying and impressive religion of at least part of the non-Aryan culture which the Aryans had half-absorbed. Imagine these things and you see the solution to the interpretation of the 'That art thou'. The ātman within, which is capable of being uncovered and clarified by yogic practices (through which at the same time liberation from the process of rebirth is achieved), is the same as the Holy Power sustaining the world. The inner meaning of the sacrifice is identical with the inner aim of yoga. The religion of rebirth coalesces with the religion of sacrifice. The Aryan deities are symbols of one Reality which also is the focus of eremitical endeavour. Meanings are doubled, and yet simplified. This is the great Upanishadic synthesis.

1.72. It follows from this synthesis that there is but one ātman. The multiplicity of selves discoverable in the non-theistic systems centring upon yoga and rebirth cannot survive the identification. The synthesis is not a simple coalescence between different views. It involves an alteration to each. Hence the many souls of the non-theistic systems are united in the one Self of the Upanishads. They are so united because there is only one Brahman. On the other hand, Brahman is changed because it is no longer just the *mysterium* sustaining the cosmos: it is also the inner essence of man. By turning inward one can reach that which is manifested outwardly. One can gain the inner secret of the whole sacrificial technique by

another path. One can penetrate beyond phenomena by withdrawing from within phenomena. The stuff of reality is psychic.

1.73. This, it seems, is the great synthesis of the 'That art thou'. But it would be wrong to suggest that this is the only doctrine taught in the Upanishads. They indeed are documents of multifarious origin and expression. We have also among them such writings as the *Kaṭha Upanishad* and the *Īśa* which present a rather more theistic picture. Here the personal aspect of ultimate reality is stressed. Here we find the Lord (Īśa). It was partly because of this apparent discrepancy in the Upanishadic teachings that Shankara evolved his theory of levels of truth. From an exegetical point of view this was a stroke of near-genius. It allowed Shankara to assign the theistic (and many other) elements in the Upanishadic teachings to the lower level, while retaining the full import of those texts, including the 'That art thou', which point to the unity of Brahman and ātman. Still, it must be confessed that the Upanishads are by no means homogeneous, and if we have here concentrated upon the 'That art thou' it is only because this has so often been regarded in the Indian tradition as the quintessence of the Veda.

1.74. The account given above of the origin and import of the great Upanishadic synthesis is relevant to the explanation of the Absolutisms of Shankara and Nagarjuna. For it implies the coalescence and synthesis between two forms of religion. In the Upanishads it implies the coming together of the sacrificial ritualism and (rather undeveloped) worship of the Brahman on the one hand and the yogic quest on the other hand. This foreshadows the later synthesis between bhakti and dhyāna. On the one side there is no need to enter into much explanation, for dhyāna is the legitimate and natural consequence of the practice of yoga, Self-training is a means to the higher contemplative states. But on the other side things are perhaps a little more complex.

1.75. Bhakti is highly personal: it is fervid: it is committed. But though it has characteristics like these which differentiate it from the formalism of much early Brahmanical religion, it has connections with the latter. For Brahmanism moved in the ambit of the numinous, and the numinous experience typically goes beyond ritualism in the direction of theism. Thus it is not surprising that already in the Upanishads there are some

tendencies towards a personal theism, for instance in those writings cited in an earlier paragraph (1.73). Again, the religion of the Vedic hymns treats the gods as personal. If there is a transition from multiplicity to unity in the conception of the divine world, as between the early Vedic hymns and the Upanishads, this has its natural outcome in a personal view of Brahman. We might say: ritualism, when humanized, moves into bhakti, just as we might also say: austerity (*tapas*) when it becomes humanized moves into dhyāna. The higher states of contemplative consciousness are the typical outcome of yoga: likewise fervent adoration is the development out of ritual formalism. Sacrifice becomes worship. (There are, of course, examples of such a trend outside the Indian tradition). My last aphorism, no doubt, can be attacked, in that it exaggerates: for sacrifice would not make any sense unless there were already some worship. But that reinforces the point being made.

1.76. The Upanishadic synthesis, then, is relevant to the later syntheses to be found in the Mahāyāna and the non-dualistic Vedanta of Shankara. For these indeed consist in a bringing together of bhakti on the one hand and yogic religion on the other. Thus, as we have seen (1.57), the Mahāyāna incorporated a strong element of bhakti through the growth of the cults of Bodhisattvas and Buddhas. These cults were by no means irrelevant to salvation, while in the Pāli canon on the other hand the Vedic gods, Brahmā, Indra and others, were swallowed up into the cosmos and treated as quite incidental to the quest for spiritual liberation. The gods become mere supermen, a concession to the mythologizing fancy of most folk in the culture. They are not proper objects of the religious life. Yet in the Mahāyāna the great celestial Buddhas like Amitabha and the great Bodhisattvas like Avalokiteshvara are foci of piety and helpful in salvation. Through them one could gain great favours and a long push forward in the stretching road to Nirvana. Bhakti had a place, then, in the Mahāyāna scheme of liberation (and was to become the central attitude in the Pure Land School, which especially in its Japanese manifestations was to approach very closely to the theism of Reformation Christianity). But in the type of Mahāyāna belief now being considered – which is one that can justly be considered the central philosophy of the Mahāyāna even if not of Buddhism as a whole – bhakti is important, but not dominant. Still the

yoga leading to the higher stages of dhyāna stays dominant. It is possible, then, to see the Absolutism of the Mahāyāna as a synthesis between dhyāna and bhakti, but with the former staying the stronger.

1.77. The same analysis can be given of Advaita. It was not for nothing that Shankara himself composed bhakti hymns. It was not for nothing that he strenuously pursued the goal of the reform of popular religion. It was not for nothing that he based his message on the sacrificial sacramentalism of the old Brahmanical faith. Shankara was not one to turn his back upon popular and traditional faith. Yet at the same time he did not regard it as the key to liberation. He did not assign it the highest priority. He did not conform to an ordinary orthodoxy. He saw popular and traditional religion as an element in the fabric of faith; but he saw the contemplative realization of oneness with Brahman as the higher goal. True liberation came, not from sacrifices and bhakti, but from the yoga which could give one an existential realization of the inner truth. Dhyāna ruled over bhakti in Shankara's system.

1.78. These remarks about the two Absolutisms pave the way for a description of the underlying logic of Absolutism in the context of religion. It is not as though contemplative religion itself need give rise to it. We have observed (1.38) that typically early Indian yoga involved a pluralistic view of the world – one in which nature is indeed seen as a whole but containing innumerable souls on the way through the round of rebirth to the possibility of liberation beyond or at the summit of the cosmos. This is not the religion of merging with the Absolute. What needs to be added to the prescription before we get the Absolutistic result? What is it basically that is absent from the soul-pluralism of Samkhya-Yoga and the non-theistic Theravāda? The clue is already with us, for we have seen that both in Advaita and in the central philosophy of the Mahāyāna there is some emphasis on bhakti and on traditional sacramentalism. The mystic cannot be united with Ultimate Reality unless there is an Ultimate Reality to be united with (1.39): this is why the religion of contemplation in the Theravāda and elsewhere does not posit a merging with God or the Absolute. This is only a way of hinting that contemplative union requires something beyond contemplation. Or to put it in another way: a purely contemplative faith has no need for anything more than eternity

within the individual (whether this be conceived as Self or as Nirvana). In brief: the secret of Absolutism is the presence of a non-contemplative element in the religion in question. This non-contemplative element is supplied in the Upanishads by the speculative sacrificialism which threw up the concept of Brahman as the underlying reality. In Shankara it is supplied by the Upanishadic concept plus the bhakti which directed itself at the personal God Shiva. In the Mahāyāna it is supplied by the bhakti directed at the celestial Lord Buddha, as unified ultimately in the truth-body. In all these cases we notice the presence of bhakti and the religion of the numinous, in conjunction with the practice of contemplative dhyāna. But the latter remains dominant. If it were not dominant we would find the theism elsewhere expressed by Ramanuja and Madhva.

179. Both Ramanuja and Madhva, indeed, offer the opposite evaluation to that of Shankara. They do not deny the importance of dhyāna, but they emphasize more strongly the practice of worship, of bhakti. Actually, Ramanuja is more emphatic in this than Madhva. Those, as we have seen (1.50), who practice dhyāna in order to seek isolated union with Brahman are assigned a lower form of liberation. On the other hand, Madhva thought well of the contemplative life and assigned it high esteem, though he placed it firmly in the context of bhakti. Those who lead the contemplative life do so on the assumption that it leads to a closeness with the God of worship. This means that worship remains the determinative factor in Madhva's theology. Both theologians then, incorporate the two forms of the religious life, but they emphasize bhakti at the expense of dhyāna. They are Shankara upside down.

1.80. We could put the present analysis in the form of some crude equations. These are not meant to suggest that such analyses can with any propriety be accurately quantified. But they may serve to bring out the effect of various syntheses and the shape of various systems. Our present analysis of Absolutism amounts to saying this:

2 dhyāna + 1 bhakti = Absolutism;
2 bhakti + 1 dhyāna = Theism;
2 dhyāna + 0 bhakti = Non-Theistic Pluralism (Samkhya, Jainism, Theravāda, and so on)

As far as Absolutism is concerned, we can contrast it with

non-theistic pluralism by saying that it incorporates bhakti and the religion of the numinous. A *purely* contemplative faith would have no need for a unitary Absolute that can, admittedly at a lower level, manifest itself as an object of piety and worship.

1.81. This then is our brief survey of some main systems in the Indian tradition, together with an analysis of the main factors in religious experience accounting for their several shapes. We have seen that the similarities cut across the boundaries of scriptural and mythological allegiance. The analysis which has been given, resting on the polarity between contemplation and worship, or between dhyāna and bhakti, between mystical religion and the religion of the numinous, will serve to illuminate our later discussion of the possibility of an Indian natural theology.

CHAPTER II

THE NATURE OF NATURAL THEOLOGY AND THE WESTERN TRADITION

2.1. If the analysis in the previous chapter is at all correct, it implies that religious experience plays an important role in the formation of the Indian systems of belief. This is, in any event, a thesis likely to appeal to many students of Hinduism and Buddhism, whether they belong to either of these faiths or not. For both seem to lay great stress on the existential realization of the truth, and this is but another way of claiming to focus upon experience. The Buddhism, for instance, of the Pāli canon affirms that the Buddha's faith is *ehipassiko*, a 'come-and-see' faith. Of course, the seeing is not literal seeing; but it stands for a form of experience. The emphasis upon experience itself is reflected in the practical psychological teachings of much in the Hindu and other Indian traditions – yoga is a nest of psychological techniques (and since the mind and the body are interwoven, of bodily techniques also). But though it is in yoga that we more easily recognize the stress upon existential experience in the Indian religion, bhakti too importantly emphasizes the possibility of communion with God and the dramatic impact of the Lord in human experience. Thus the great theophany of Vishnu in the *Bhagavadgītā* is a memorable expression of the *mysterium* through which God presents himself to the human psyche.

2.2. Before we can estimate properly the significance of religious experience for the mutual understanding of religions, and of Christianity and Hinduism in particular, it is necessary to set it in the wider context of religion. For after all, religion does not only consist in religious experience: it consists in many other things besides. Moreover, even if we can see in the experiential roots of the Indian systems the possibility of an interplay with Christian faith, we must also recognize that

natural theology has been traditionally conceived in the West as a rather intellectual thing. There is thus a certain lack of correspondence between that aspect of Catholic theology (in the broad sense previously outlined – 1.1) which promises most for an understanding of Hinduism and the actual basis of so much of Indian spirituality. Natural theology tends to speak of arguments: Hinduism tends to resort to experience and intuitions. Natural theology is a rational account of the world; but religion so often is an imaginative apprehension of the world. Natural theology seems theoretical; so much of faith is practical. It appears, then, that a gap is fixed between the outward reach of Western natural theology and the universal themes of Indian existence. The way forward is by a broader conception of natural theology. But this in turn presupposes a proper account of religion.

2.3. Hitherto our analysis of systems has been on the one hand doctrinal and on the other hand experiential. On the one hand we have singled out beliefs such as the unity of Brahman and ātman or the doctrine of Nirvana; on the other hand we have looked to bhakti and dhyāna. To some extent the analysis has also included, in a broad sense, ritual: for the practice of bhakti includes worship, and is sometimes predicated upon a background of sacrificial ritual, as in the Advaita of Shankara, and the achievement of dhyāna is consequent upon the practice of yoga. Now admittedly yoga is not worship; and it is not sacrifice, though it can be interpreted (as in the Upanishads) in sacrificial terms. Yoga is not what we might ordinarily call ritual. But it has analogies to worship and sacrifice, for it is the practice of a spiritual activity. It is within the ambit of religion, and it is directed towards a religious end. Perhaps, then, we may be permitted to count it under the general head of ritual. If we are allowed to do this, then we can claim that our analysis has included reference not merely to the doctrinal and experiential dimensions of religion, but also to the ritual.

2.4. But this still leaves out much that is of importance for getting a full-bodied view of religion. For one thing, little (though something) has been said about the mythological aspects of the various theologies under consideration. Though, say, Ramanuja's system may bear a close resemblance to Christian theism, its mythological substance remains very different. While Christian theism focuses upon the events of

Christ's life, death and resurrection (and much else besides), Ramanuja, in the daily practice of his faith, concentrated upon the figure of Vishnu, replete with the incarnations through which he manifests himself to men in scriptures and temples. The mythological anchorage of Ramanuja's religion, then, is highly diverse from that of the Christian's faith. It might here seem a little strange to treat the events of Christ's life, death and resurrection as 'mythological', and a word about this general topic is necessary.

2.5. Myths are in essence, as the name implies, stories; and they are stories about the gods, or about men in so far as they stand in relation to the sacred or divine world. It is characteristic of mythological thinking that truths are not conveyed by metaphysical affirmations, but by a kind of poetry. In this respect, myths are like parables, though parables are more self-consciously pointing beyond themselves. Parables hint at an underlying truth conveyed pictorially; myths encapsulate the truth in their own substance. They are generally treated seriously in themselves – they do not demand a further interpretation. Or at least this seems to be so as long as religion simply stays at the mythological level. But when doctrines are propounded, then the myths are often treated as pointing to the doctrines. They take on the form of parables. Thus in recent times it has become fashionable among Christians to look on the story of Adam and Eve as a parable of the human condition, rather than as an explanatory myth.

2.6. If myths are stories about God or the gods, then in one important sense the account of Christ's life, death and resurrection as contained in the Gospels is a myth. The Gospels are about God: they are not just a bit of history-writing. They tell a story, then, about God, which is, as it happens, an historical story. It is a matter for later discussion as to whether it is better for myths to be historically founded (as is the case in Christianity). But the analogy between the historical myth of Christ and the largely unhistorical myths of so many religions (including Christianity itself, for the account of the Creation must fall into this category) may justify us in using the term 'myth' to describe what is recorded in the Gospels. The term, of course, does not imply anything either way about the truth of the Christian story.

2.7. We have, then, a great diversity in substance between the

mythology incorporated into, say, Ramanuja's religion and that of Christianity. Similarly the mythological flavour of Buddhism is very diverse from that either of Christianity or of Hinduism. Again, the Jain picture of the world contains its own particular myths. About all this little has hitherto been said. Suffice it at the moment to note that we must add to the doctrinal, experiential and ritual dimensions of religion the mythological.

2.8. Ritual is one kind of practice. But it can tie in with the ethical demands of a faith. Thus for the Christian good conduct, love, compassion – these can function as a form of worship. Worship is extended beyond the boundaries of Sunday and the doors of churches to practice of the holy life. The ethical side of religion has been touched on in the previous chapter, in relation to the development of the Bodhisattva ideal as expressing the heart of compassion. But it is clearly more important than such a rather passing reference would suggest. Alongside the doctrines and the myths, then, we must place the ethical dimension. Naturally the capacity of men to follow the ethical teachings of a faith may fall far short of what is required. What for our purposes is important is not so much the actual effects of faith on conduct as the ideals enshrined in faith. Thus the ethical dimension can be regarded as co-ordinate with the doctrinal dimension. Both represent the teachings of a religion, as also do the mythological stories which give colourful and imaginative substance to the *Weltanschauung* and values expressed in those teachings. Thus doctrines, myths and ethical teachings can be seen as a trinity of dimensions representing the beliefs of a faith. Experience and ritual can be seen as expressing the manifestation of religion in life.

2.9. But that manifestation is not just a matter of these two dimensions. Religion is a social phenomenon, having both social causes and social effects. It works itself out in communities. It may fall short of ideals, but that very falling short is a manifestation of its operation. Likewise if it rises beyond its ideals. The social side of faith, then, has to be added to the experiential and ritual dimensions as part of the manifestation of religion in practice. We now have a further trinity – religion, so to say, in manifestation is comprised of the experiential, ritual and social dimensions.

2.10. Naturally, the contrast drawn between the two trinities is too simple. For people's beliefs are as much part of

the manifestation of religion as their ritual practices. But the first trinity does stand for the concepts which give meaning to religious activity; while the latter trinity delineates the nature and fruit of that activity. If there is a crudeness in the contrast it will be moderated by our analysis of the further problem of the relationship between the six dimensions. For they have, severally and together, an organic connection.

2.11. Let us consider first the connections between the members of the second trinity – the social, ritual and experiential dimensions of religion. We have seen in the preceding chapter that the practice of yoga culminates, or can culminate, in the higher states of dhyāna. This is one instance of where a ritual practice (in the broad sense indicated above – 2.3) provides the context for the existential knowledge of the focus of belief and endeavour. Similarly the practice of worship provides the setting for the numinous experience of a divine Being. For instance, Isaiah's famous vision of the Lord in the Temple occurred in the context of an ongoing religion of worship. This is not to deny that prophetic experiences can be revolutionary and so lead to a transcendence of the tradition in which they were born. This is, indeed, a crucial aspect of the more significant religious experiences in the history of religion. Often they have precipitated widespread changes. One has but to think of Paul on the road to Damascus, the Buddha's enlightenment, the prophetic visions of Muḥammad. But the point remains: that these occur in a certain context.

2.12. The contextual relation between ritual and religious experience cannot simply be interpreted as a kind of causal relation, as though it is the practice of worship or yoga which causes the experiences in question. This may sometimes be so, although it is extremely hard to suppose that one could perform effective experiments in this field in a controlled way which would establish such a connection, or its absence. More importantly, the nature of the experience is seen in relation to the contextual activity. What Isaiah perceived in the Temple hinted at the Lord, and the Lord is the supreme object of the contextual cultus of worship and sacrifice. Indeed it is intrinsic to the concept of God that he is deemed holy, worthy of worship. That is, the concept 'God' itself is partly defined by the ritual context. This already broadens the scope of the organic connection between the dimensions, for it implies that worship

itself ties in with the doctrinal or the mythological dimension, or both, as we shall shortly see (2.13).

2.13. The contextual relationship between ritual and experience can be illustrated by an example drawn from sport. It does not make proper sense to speak of scoring a goal save in the context of a certain game, let us say football. It is true that a boy may be playing an imaginary game by himself and may shoot the ball between the posts, thinking 'I have scored'. But this case is itself parasitic upon the prior institution of football as a game played in reality and not in mere imagination. Thus the set of rules governing play constitutes the context of the concept 'goal', and instances of goal-scoring occur in the context of play.

2.14. If ritual and religious experience have this kind of connection, then the third member of the trinity, the social dimension, must be brought in too. It is in the community that the ritual is performed, and it is through participation in the community that a person learns what worship, etc., mean. These are in a sense public activities even when performed in private and alone. For example, the practice of eremitical yoga in early Buddhism by members of the Sangha had a certain setting: that setting was constituted not merely by the institution of the Sangha itself, conceived as a body of persons devoted to the continuance of the way of life prescribed by the Buddha, but also by the wider community of those who respected the ideals and the practices involved, and who were the catchment area for recruitment to the Sangha. A person outside the Sangha could yet have an understanding of what the Path consisted in, for they themselves were already participating in the broader life of the Buddha's religion. We may thus say: the experiential dimension has as its context the ritual, and the ritual is learned and nurtured in community.

2.15. It has already been noted (2.10) that the ritual dimension presupposes something of the upper trinity of dimensions. For it is necessary to ask ourselves what is meant by worship. We cannot answer that it is a matter of (say) kneeling and shutting one's eyes. Certainly these items of behaviour express adoration, for they are given this meaning in certain communities. But to express adoration more is needed than kneeling, etc. A person who is kneeling and keeping his eyes shut may be thinking of cricket; or he may be thinking what a waste of time religion is. He can be thinking all sorts of things

which have nothing to do with adoration. We would say about a person in this condition: he gave the appearance of worshipping, but he wasn't doing so really. For the activity of worship has to be *directed* in a certain way. It is an activity with an object. Worshipping is worshipping God, or a god. In short, to give a proper account of ritual one has to introduce something of the doctrinal and/or mythological dimension. One has to make reference to Vishnu or Ganesh or Christ or Allah or Jupiter. To put the matter crudely: the inner meaning of worship is supplied by doctrinal or mythological belief. More generally: ritual, for its interpretation, has to be referred to the upper trinity.

2.16. If ritual is the context of religious experience, and if ritual is intrinsically connected to doctrinal and/or mythological conceptions, then religious experience is so connected. The experience is seen *as* that of the Lord; it is seen *as* involved in the attainment of Nirvana; and so on.

2.17. We now turn more directly to the upper trinity – doctrines, myths, ethics. What relations do they possess? The connection is close, and for that very reason not too easy to state clearly. We defined (2.5) myths as stories about the divine or sacred. Included in them, for convenience, we count the stories of historical events treated as manifestations of the divine or sacred. The relationship between myths and doctrines can be illustrated by reference to the development of the Trinity doctrine. The latter is scarcely a story about God's nature: it is an attempt to delineate its eternal structure.

2.18. The Trinity doctrine has a certain basis and it has certain aims. Its basis consists chiefly in the events of Christ's life and of Pentecost. Here the divine Being manifests himself in a special way to men and among men. But also as part of the basis there are the earlier acts of God in the history of Israel. There seem then to be three phases of divine activity: that of the Father, that of the Son, that of the Holy Spirit. This then is the mythological basis of the Trinity doctrine. As for the aims of the latter: these were at least two-fold, to preserve the essential monotheism claimed by Christianity while also expressing the triple richness of the divine activity, and to demarcate orthodoxy in the face of doctrines tending to lower the status of Christ. The Church worshipped Christ. This would be idolatry were not Christ God. These aims were achieved by

the somewhat abstract vocabulary of Nicea. The phases of divine activity were seen not just as modes of God's operation, but as revealing three Persons. Behind the mythology lay an eternal and triple substance.

2.19. This example helps us to understand something of the interplay between doctrine and mythology. Doctrine helps to define and clarify the suggestions implicit in mythology. It helps too to prevent the myths from degenerating into simple stories. In the case of Christianity, doctrine emphasizes the transcendent aspect of reality, so that the history of Jesus or of the ancient Jews is not mere history, but revelatory of what lies beyond. Myths point beyond themselves, but we are driven to ask: 'To what?' Doctrinal affirmations are a way of bringing out the What.

2.20. But since doctrines concern the Transcendent, and the relation between that and the world, they would remain merely theoretical in the absence of some way of locating the self-revelatory activity of the Transcendent. A merely transcendent God would have no connection with human affairs. It could theoretically be the case that God was like that, or that Nirvana was like that: there, somehow, but totally unattainable. But it is the universal testimony of actual religions that the Transcendent is somehow revealed or seen in the experience of the inhabitants of the cosmos. This notion becomes important for understanding the connection between doctrine, myth and religious experience. But first we have to say something about the ambiguous concept of revelation.

2.21. There are at least two main ways in which the Transcendent is conceived as being revealed or seen in human experience. One is by some earthly manifestation, such as the acts of God as described in the Old and New Testaments, or in the figure of the Buddha as according to the Mahāyāna Three-Body doctrine (1.62). Another is in religious experience, as in Paul's dramatic confrontation with Christ and in the Buddha's enlightenment. For the sake of exposition, we may provisionally call these modes of revelation 'mythological revelation' and 'experiential revelation' respectively. This way of distinguishing them can only, however, be provisional, in view of the connection between mythology and religious experience already (2.15) mentioned. Thus, for instance, the marvellous theophany vouchsafed to Arjuna is replete with

mythological symbolism. Arjuna's vision is, so to say, clothed in fragments of stories about Vishnu. Nevertheless, we can draw a rough and ready line between the concretely conceived manifestation of the Transcendent through earthly acts, lying, as it were, in the public domain, and the existentially conceived visions and inner contemplative states through which the Transcendent can appear to individuals, lying, so to say, in the private domain.

2.22. Without one or other of these modes of manifestation the Transcendent becomes a barren concept; or to put the matter in a different way, the doctrinal dimension has no basis in experience if it is not connected to one or other of these forms of manifestation.

2.23. Conversely, myths without doctrines easily degenerate into mere historical tales or fairy stories, while experiences without doctrines are mere items of psychology. I am not here arguing that therefore religion must be true. The question of the truth of religion is not here at issue. What is being attempted is an analysis of the thought-forms and practices of religion, and in this context it is correct to note that myths and experiences are conceived as revelatory of something (so to say) beyond themselves. They are seen as manifesting the divine or as constituting the Transcendent, etc.

2.24. Religions can differ in their emphases upon mythological revelation and experiential revelation. Thus modern Vedanta, reflecting the doctrines of Advaita Vedanta, puts its chief weight upon experiential revelation. It is the existential realization of the ātman that counts and that makes sense of the higher truth. On the other hand, Christianity places great emphasis upon mythological revelation – God is revealed through his historical acts, through the incarnate Lord, and so on. Sometimes experiential revelation can itself be a central point in mythological revelation. Thus Muḥammad's whole ministry turned upon the revelations he received from Allah. His basis of action was in a very crucial way experiential. But he was the Seal of the Prophets. For the Muslim, the possibility of further revelation of this kind is ruled out. For the faithful, God's act in revealing himself in Muḥammad's prophetic period is the central point in history. It is the supreme moment in the unfolding of God's mythological revelation. One could point to other variations and combinations of emphasis.

2.25. The present argument, then, has as its conclusion that the doctrinal dimension has a basis in the mythological and experiential dimensions of religion. Here are two further organic connections between dimensions. We now turn briefly to the ethical dimension. This has to be understood partly by reference to the doctrinal dimension, but partly in relation to the two types of revelation which we have been considering. For the shape of religious ethics is in some degree determined by the focus of belief. Thus for the Christian, its shape in part derives from the figure of Christ. The way in which he acted, his display of humility and love – these are the sources of the Christian concept of *agape*. By contrast, Theravādin ethics, as incorporated into the Eightfold Path, is seen as a means for the attainment of Nirvana – a stage in the process of self-training. This means that the practice of the moral life tends to be incorporated into the ritual dimension of religion: the imitation of Christ becomes part of the worship of Christ; the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; morality is a form of yoga; the cult of the Bodhisattva includes the self-sacrificial and compassionate attitudes of the Bodhisattva himself. It is true that morality can exist indepedently of religion, and it is surely true that ethical insights have tended to modify and change men's beliefs about the divine (this is part of the story of the Old Testament Prophets). But in so far as ethics is treated as part of the substance of faith, and all the great religions in one way or another do this, morality acquires a certain flavour and meaning which has to be unfolded in terms of the doctrinal, mythological and other dimensions of religion.

2.26. The foregoing attempt at a general analysis of religion paves the way for a new account of natural theology, which breaks away somewhat from the over-intellectualistic conception thereof in the Catholic tradition (2.2). For natural theology, conceived as an enterprise which has its basis in intellectual arguments for the existence of God, turns out only to be a means of establishing part of the doctrinal basis of faith in a manner in principle acceptable to any intelligent person. But the substance of religion is much richer than the doctrinal dimension. Of course, this last point is appreciated in a certain degree in the traditional conception of natural theology, for the latter turned upon a distinction between it and revealed theology. Thus the Trinity doctrine is something

which, according to the traditional account, cannot be established on the basis of reason, but must be derived from revelation. Nevertheless, it is worth considering whether there cannot be a richer kind of natural theology which extends beyond the dimension of doctrine towards some at least of the other dimensions we have been describing.

2.27. Now it has been argued that the Transcendent in religion means virtually nothing unless it is manifested either concretely, through the mythological dimension, or existentially, through the experiential dimension. This would appear to imply that natural theology, in so far as it traditionally has given grounds for the assertion of a set of 'theoretical' propositions about Ultimate Reality, must remain essentially empty, unless it attaches itself to the forms of manifestation of the Transcendent. This in turn implies that if we are to seek a broader-based and richer natural theology it will have to do with either myth or experience or both. Yet there seem to be insuperable obstacles to a kind of 'natural theology' of the mythological.

2.28. For firstly, revealed theology as traditionally understood and as contrasted with natural theology, has been based upon the concrete historico-mythological manifestation of the divine activity. It would look as if there is something so irreducibly particular about historical revelation that it would be useless to seek in it a 'general' revelation of God's activity. This is a point, however, which needs further clarification. What we have, as between Christianity and Hinduism, is two sets of myths – the one embodying the divine activity in history culminating in the life of Christ, the other clothing the imaginative apprehension of the divine in Hinduism. We can hardly expect a parallel to the Christian set in Hinduism precisely because the mythological dimension of Christianity concerns unique and unrepeatable historical events. For there to have been a very similar salvation-history working itself out in the Indian tradition would be to conflict with the essence of the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation. The latter is, and must be, unique.

2.29. Yet on the other hand, there ought to be some way in which the religious imagination of different traditions finds a point of contact. It seems somewhat preposterous to hold on the one hand that human reason points, independently of the acceptance of a particular revelation, towards belief in one God,

and yet on the other hand the imaginative side of human religion is barren of such insight. It might indeed turn out that attention to the imaginative aspects of human thinking and feeling would be more fruitful than attention to the supposed universality of human reason in these matters. For as a matter of fact, there is not a widespread agreement, even among religious people, about the power and validity of human reason in achieving knowledge of the divine. This is partly because some religious systems have no real place for the idea of God. It is partly because within theism there is conflict about the propriety of natural theology. Thus, in the Indian tradition, Ramanuja set forth a considerable battery of powerful and subtle arguments against the supposed proof of God. His argumentation parallels that of Hume, but his motives were somewhat different. His faith in grace and emphasis upon utter dependence on God left no important place for intellectual arguments for God's existence. Here was a sentiment not unlike that of Karl Barth in the present century, whose strongly evangelical theism can brook no 'salvation by works', and natural theology comes into that category. It does so because Barth's premiss is that all knowledge of God is saving knowledge; if then natural theology is a valid process it can bring saving knowledge by the work of ratiocination.

2.30. On the other hand it must also be confessed that the imaginative side of the human apprehension of Ultimate Reality is not very consistent. Again, the mythological dimension of the non-theistic systems is a powerful counter-example to any claim about the universality of the mythology of a celestial Creator. But this does not entirely rule out points of contact. There may be aspects of the mythological dimension of the Hindu tradition, for example, which echo the insights of Christian symbolism, and conversely.

2.31. To take a famous instance: who can read the following lines without hearing in them a reverberation of the power of Prophetic experience?

'I behold thee of many arms, bellies, faces and eyes, on all sides endless: I behold in thee no end nor midst nor beginning, O all-sovran of forms; I behold thee bearing diadem, mace and disk, massed in radiance, on all sides glistening, gleaming round about as gleaming fire and sun, immeasurable . . .'

2.32. However, there is not much profit in selecting points of resemblance where they occur without tackling the deeper questions presented by the confrontation and interplay between different religions. If we assume the truth of Christianity, we can easily point to 'Christian' manifestations within Hinduism, as in the *Bhagavadgītā*, quoted above. Conversely if we assume the truth of Advaita Vedanta, it will be possible to point to 'Vedantin' manifestations in the Judaeo-Christian tradition. Such pointings are, in a limited degree, useful. But by themselves they are deficient in at least two important respects. First they do not give us any insight into the underlying reasons for similarities; and second, they assume the truth of one faith or another without penetrating into the grounds of making truth-judgments in this field.

2.33. This is where we can begin to make use of the analysis of the systems of the Indian tradition presented in the previous chapter. This may help us to penetrate to the grounds underlying certain similarities in the Judaeo-Christian and Hindu traditions. It will also, as we shall see (2.55 et seq.), throw up some important questions about any appeal that might be made in defence of the truth of religion to religious experience.

2.34. The analysis turned, it will be recalled, on a broad distinction between bhakti and dhyāna and between the types of religious experience respectively encapsulated in these two phases of the religious life. The distinction can be made a little more precise by reconsidering it in the light of the idea of dimensions of religion elaborated in the present chapter. Strictly, bhakti, as loving adoration, belongs to the ritual dimension: but within the context of the tender devotional worship of bhaktism there is the possibility of the experience of God. It can be taken that the vision vouchsafed to Arjuna, a few lines from the description of which were quoted above (2.31), was a profound experience of the Lord. It occurs within the context of the cult of Vishnu. Thus bhakti is the context of what may be called bhaktic experience. Similarly, in samadhi, reached through the higher stages of dhyāna, there is what may be dubbed the dhyānic experience. On the one side, the general ritual context is that of worship; on the other, the general ritual context is supplied by yoga.

2.35. The analysis suggests that, enfolded within different forms of the religious life, there occur experiences of the

Transcendent. If the analysis is to have a high degree of persuasiveness, it will have to apply outside the Indian tradition, even if it has been evolved in that context. And it is not difficult to see that there are analogies between bhakti and some of the religious life of the Judaeo-Christian tradition. Thus Ramanuja's followers, it is well known, were divided about the operation of grace – some holding to the cat-principle (in which the mother cat, standing for God, transports the kitten, standing for the worshipper, from one place to another, that is to salvation, by the scruff of the neck); and others to the monkey-principle (in which the little monkey has to cling on to its mother – it has to make some effort). These two views of grace parallel remarkably Reformation discussions of salvation. They are a symptom of the power of a certain form of experience of God, as gracious, holy, sole cause of men's welfare, author of salvation. We have also cited the Gītā as expressing a vision not dissimilar from that of Prophets. It may be that in a wider context there remain divergences – the Prophetism of the Old Testament stressed a certain ethical view of God's nature which is not that of the Gītā. But it is scarcely necessary to mention the great line of saints and teachers in the Indian tradition, Chaitanya, Kabir, the bhakti poets of Tamilnad, Ramanuja himself and many others, who have expressed themselves in strongly devotional and theistic terms, and who evidently reflect an experience similar to that of devotional Christianity.

2.36. When we come to the contemplative, dhyānic experience, matters become a little more complicated. For there is, naturally, a very powerful predisposition in the West to think of mysticism in terms of union. But as we saw earlier, union implies union *with* Something or Somebody. If that Somebody is supplied, so to say, by a theistic tradition of devotionalism and prophetism, then the contemplative sees in his experience a union or communion with the personal Lord. If sacrificial religion has supplied the concept of a Holy Power, Brahman, sustaining and pervading the world, it is possible to see, in the clear depths of the ātman, one's identification with Brahman. But, as has been argued at some length in the previous chapter, there is no *a priori* reason why the contemplative life should occur in such contexts. For early Indian contemplation, there was a non-theistic non-absolutistic constellation of ideas which

virtually ruled out the idea of contemplative union. Before, then, we can have a proper appreciation of the role of dhyāna we must rid ourselves of the Western predisposition to think of mysticism in terms of union. For that matter we must rid ourselves of the equally fashionable modern Hindu view which sees mysticism in terms of the Brahman-ātman monism.

2.37. All this is not to say anything about the truth or otherwise of the theistic and absolutistic interpretations. It is only to say that from the standpoint of religious experience, dhyāna can occur independently of devotionalism and of sacrificial religion. Now it might be counterargued that perhaps after all the experience of theistic mystics is qualitatively different from that of, say, the Theravādin contemplative. Is it correct to oversimplify by equating non-theistic dhyāna and theistic dhyāna?

2.38. The chief exponent at the present time of such a counter-argument is Professor R. C. Zaehner, in his *Mysticism Sacred and Profane* and *At Sundry Times*. He argues that there are three main forms of mysticism: panenhenic mysticism, in which the mystic feels a rapport with nature and with the totality of existence (hence the term 'panenhenic' – 'all-in-one-ish'); monistic mysticism in which the contemplative realizes the oneness of his soul – this is exemplified by Shankara, Yoga, etc.; and theistic mysticism, in which the contemplative feels his communion with a personal God. The first of these three forms need not much concern us here, for it is clear that nature-mysticism (to adopt another term used by Zaehner for the phenomenon in question) is not specially connected with contemplative techniques, nor is it the interior kind of 'vision'. To put the matter crudely, the panenhenic vision of Wordsworth or Richard Jefferies occurs with the eyes open. Nature is seen as united with the individual. One somehow seems merged with, or close to, the spirit in everything. This is an important kind of experience, but there is no special reason to classify it with the other types of contemplation, except for two (as it turns out, unpersuasive) reasons.

2.39. The first is that the panenhenic experience involves a sense of unity with everything. Since some main examples of mysticism have incorporated a sense of union it is easy to confuse panenhenic rapport with the interior sense of identification. It is easy to suppose that Richard Jefferies is close to the

'That art thou'. But the latter has to do with the ātman as well as with the Brahman. It means that in the interior reach of the Self one gains identification with the Holy Power. Yoga and the numinous Spirit behind the sacrifice somehow coincide. This is far removed from the rather naturalistic, but moving for all that, experience of Richard Jefferies, lying on the grass. The Spirit behind and in nature detected by Wordsworth may have some analogy to the Brahman, but there is no reason to think that Wordsworth's highly articulated and external vision at all corresponded to the formless void of the Indian contemplative or the inner bright obscurity of the Cloud of Unknowing. Consequently, it seems reasonable to neglect the first of the three types of mysticism delineated by Zaehner.

2.40. The second reason why the panenhenic misleadingly is dubbed 'mystical' is to do with the origins of the latter term. Now two features of English usage are worth commenting on in this connection. First, the term 'mystical' is often equated with what the Catholic tradition calls 'contemplative'. The great mystics are men like St John of the Cross, St Teresa of Avila, Bonaventura. These men are commonly, in the Catholic tradition, called by the less misleading name of contemplatives, for theirs is the life of interior contemplation. However, it remains true that mysticism, as commonly understood, centres on such figures. They are the prime instances of mysticism. In this usage of the term, mysticism is Christian yoga. But secondly, the term 'mystic' has a provenance in the mystery religions of ancient Greece, and meant an initiate. St Paul, partly drawing upon these associations, referred to the 'mystical body of Christ'. Here was conveyed a sense of the participation of the Christian initiate in the invisible substance of Christ, which mysteriously comprised the body of the faithful though it stretched far beyond it into eternity. In being a member of the mystical body the faithful Christian was a participator in the life and glory of the Lord. This context of the use of the term 'mystical' suggests unitedness. The unitedness of one Christian with another had its outreach in the unitedness of each with God. Hence it was not altogether inappropriate to use a Greek term which had its origin in the 'pagan' mysteries – for here too the initiate gained a kind of identification with the god and thereby the assurance of a share in the immortality of the god. Thus the term 'mystical' has over a very long period

been connected with the idea of union or participation. This being so, it is not surprising that when the term has come to be applied to the contemplative life it has been assumed that here also there is a sort of union or participation. In turn this assumption has been rendered the more natural (or supernatural) by the very fact that God and the soul have been so clearly distinguished in the Christian tradition. This distinction has meant that there is the concept of two entities in the transactions of contemplation. These two entities somehow mutually participate, or are in a state of union or communion through the higher reaches of contemplation and in the subsequent life of dedication. Hence we have the idea of two who are yet nearly one. We have an idea somewhat corresponding to the ideology of the ancient mysteries and to the provenance of the term 'mystical'. Psychological participation becomes the counterpart of the sacramental participation of the initiate in the mysteries of the god. Or to translate into the terms of the Christian liturgical experience, so much present to the minds of those who actually engage in the Christian contemplative life: psychological union becomes the inner counterpart of the sacramental union between the communicant and Christ. Of course, one must enter a caveat here against treating union too strongly. For Christianity inherited from the Jewish tradition a powerful sense of the Otherness of God. The holiness and uniqueness of the divine Being could not properly be compromised by the experience of the contemplative. Nor could it be compromised by sacramental theology. It was correct to say that the communicant received the substance of the Lord Christ; it was correct to say that Christ was God; but it could scarcely be right to infer that somehow the communicant became God. The gulf fixed between God and man cannot be crossed. Even if the Eastern Orthodox Church can speak of 'deification' for the faithful, a correct and firm line is drawn between this state and the essential divinity of Christ. Consequently, Christian mysticism also (that is, the Christian form of the contemplative life) was not permitted to speak of full identity or union with God. There always, so to say, remained a hand's breadth between the communing soul and God. It is true that Christian mystics sometimes came very near to overstepping the limit. Eckhart, indeed, actually overstepped it (at least so far as the formal decisions of the Church were concerned).

The reason why there might be a 'temptation' (though that is assuredly an inept word) to overstep the line lies in the lack of the sense of the distinction between subject and object in the mystical experience to which we referred earlier (1.64). This makes it very difficult to say 'Here am I and there is God'. It is not altogether surprising that Muslim mysticism fell into troubles of this sort. Al-Hallaj could say: 'I am the Real' – an epithet reserved for Allah. Here he was expressing something both of his inner experience and of his milieu. Believing that Ultimate Reality was Allah, to be worshipped and prayed to; believing also that one could come to an immediate acquaintance with Allah through the practice of interior contemplation; and finding that in that higher experience it was hardly, if at all, possible to distinguish between subject and object; he expressed himself through that blasphemous (or seemingly blasphemous) utterance. He is, then, an illustration of the strong sense of union in the contemplative life, where that is lived out in the context of a prior belief in God or an Absolute. So, then, mysticism goes with identification, where there is a sense of two entities (soul and the Other) to be identified. This ambience of ideas is sufficiently close to the original pagan and Christian notion of the communion between the adherent and the divinity, to reinforce the tendency to think of mysticism somehow in terms of union or participation. This helps too to account for the degenerate uses of the word. An idea is 'mystical' if it involves the notion of the organic unity of a nation, or if it involves the racialism apparent in the thinking of a Hitler. These degenerate uses depend vaguely on the sense that a supernatural or magical unity is, obscurely, mystical. But against all these presuppositions we set our face. It is genuinely less misleading to use the term 'contemplative'.

2.41. There are reasons, then, for excluding panenhenic mysticism (so called) from the present discussion. It may be that this kind of experience helps to reinforce the Absolutism of the Upanishads, Shankara and the Mahāyāna (indeed the nature-mysticism of Zen seems to tag on naturally to the Absolutism of Nagarjuna and also to that of the *Vijñānavāda*). But our present main concern is with dhyāna and its analogues, not with religious experience in general. We can thus concentrate our attention upon the two main types of contemplative experience distinguished. We can remind ourselves that

the aim of the present argument is to consider whether it is correct to lump contemplative dhyāna, whether theistic or not, under the same category or whether it is correct to make a strong distinction between theistic contemplation and the rest.

2.42. Now there is a strangeness about the monistic category as described by Zaehner. The strangeness consists in the fact that he brackets together Shankara, Samkhya-Yoga and Theravāda Buddhism. He is quite explicit that Yoga involves a concept of liberation quite different from that of Shankara; he is clear that this 'isolation' means the isolation of the individual soul (purusha). Here there is no question of merging or identification with the Holy Power, Brahman. There is likewise no question of being united with the Lord, Ishvara. As far as Buddhism is concerned, he argues – with great lack of persuasiveness – that it involves belief in an eternal self (see 1.16), and so can be assimilated to Yoga and Shankara. But even if for the sake of argument it were conceded that Buddhism involved such a belief, this would still leave us with at least two categories of theology through which the contemplative life is interpreted – the many-soul, non-theistic interpretation and the doctrine of monism (of the identity of the eternal Self within, and the Holy Power standing for Ultimate Reality). As it is, Buddhism refuses the ātman-interpretation, and so we have three sorts of doctrine. These three doctrines through which contemplation is interpreted all go, according to Zaehner, into the monistic basket. Theistic mysticism goes into a separate basket. But why nominate such sizes for the baskets?

2.43. It is alleged that the difference between theism and the rest is so great that it is reasonable to draw the line there. But there are two objections to this procedure. The first is perhaps no more than a debating point, though I think that it is an important point in dialogue none the less. It is this: that this procedure seems to presuppose the centrality of theism in the history of religions. It seems, that is, to take up a position *a priori* in favour of Christianity, in so far as Christianity is orthodoxly theistic (which the Jew or the Muslim might dispute). Now whatever we may affirm about the truth of religion – however committed we may be to the Christian faith – we must surely recognize that an equal dialogue between Christianity and Hinduism, and between Christianity and Buddhism, cannot presuppose in advance the superior uniqueness of theism.

2.44. A more general word here about uniqueness is in order. It is not unfashionable among Christian missionaries and apologists to urge that theism is unique in appraising the world in a certain way (or whatever) or that Christianity is unique in its valuation of history, and so on. It is sometimes naïvely supposed that uniqueness is in itself and mysteriously a virtue. In part this attitude stems from the rational consideration that if you have nothing original to say you might as well keep your mouth shut. It is important to preach *news* (whether good or not is a further point). It is therefore natural enough to stress the uniqueness of Christianity. But uniqueness by itself cannot be a recommendation of the faith, for all faiths are unique in one way or another. To say that Christianity is unique is merely to announce that it has left limbo to enter the ideological league. Similarly with theism. It is one thing to underline the teachings, etc., which render Christianity, and Christian contemplation, unique; and quite another thing to show that Christianity is true or that Christian contemplation is the highest form.

2.45. The second objection to the way in which Zaehner and others have divided the field is that the differences within its so-called monistic part seem as great as the difference between it and the theistic part. Thus within the 'monistic' category are to be found the following three rather different sorts of teaching: that there is only one Being (Brahman), and that Brahman at the lower level of 'illusion' enters religious experience as the personal Creator of the world; that there are innumerable souls and that liberation consists in the isolation of the soul through yogic practices so that it is no longer attached to a psychophysical organism (and therefore no longer subject to rebirth); and that there are no eternal souls, but only individuals capable of attaining that peace and insight called Nirvana (and therefore no longer subject to rebirth). The differences between the three positions are great. Why should theism be selected as the odd man out? It would be as reasonable to select the Theravāda on the ground that it does not believe in an eternal soul; or Advaita on the ground that it believes in God, but only at the lower level; or Yoga on the ground that it believes in a plurality of eternal souls implicated in the process of reincarnation. As was said in the previous paragraph (2.44) every religion is in one way or another unique, and here three

importantly different uniquenesses are grouped in the same category.

2.46. It could be argued that here we have in effect four different types of contemplative experience – theistic, Advaitin, Yogic and Theravādin (not to mention some other doctrines, such as the Mahāyāna). But on what grounds do we suppose that there are four types? On the ground of differences in doctrine? But would it not be equally plausible to ascribe the divergences of description to differences solely in interpretation, rather than in experience (1.14)?

2.47. It would not be an unreasonable thing, *a priori*, to set up four distinct categories of contemplative experience. What is here being argued against is *two* categories, simply because theism is viewed as being somehow 'fundamental'. Naturally it appears fundamental to Christians, for they are theists. It is natural to see faith through one's own eyes. But it is one of the effects of the interplay between cultures and between religions that it is no longer possible in any very easy way to see things as they were seen before. Theism is by no means the natural or regular religion of the great mass of men. The truth is that quite a number of men belong to non-theistic religions, such as the Theravāda. Many belong to Advaitin Hinduism. It is therefore important to recognize that the division of the religious world into theism versus the rest is no more justifiable *a priori* than the division of religions into Christian and non-Christian. Admittedly this is *one* way of making the division. But anyone who thinks that it is the only way has failed to see the significance of the plurality and diversity of religions. All this does not make the task of the Christian or the Hindu apologist any easier. But the whole logic of apologetics is that one confronts the facts of the real world in order to commend the faith. And the facts of the real world imply that the division between theism and the rest is by no means the only rational division.

2.48. Against the possibility of four (or more) categories of contemplative experience mentioned in the preceding paragraph there is the vastly simpler one of a single category. Could one not account for the varieties of mystical experience in terms of interpretation and environment? This would be in line with the analysis of Indian tradition attempted in the previous chapter, where it was suggested that the Absolutism of Advaita and the Mahāyāna, for instance, resulted from a

coalescence of two forms of religion, with dhyāna dominant. It was suggested too that theistic mysticism can be accounted for by supposing that worship and bhakti stay the overriding elements, and contemplation is seen in the light of these other activities and attitudes. If that analysis has any plausibility, then it would seem reasonable to suppose that the four categories can be replaced by one. This is so much as to say that experience remains essentially the same, though it occurs in the context of very different theologies, rituals and so on. In any event, the simpler hypothesis is the one now being suggested. If one is, moreover, willing to concede that prophetic and devotional experience cuts across *mythological* boundaries, then it is not absurd to think of contemplation as cutting across *doctrinal* boundaries. Therefore it seems more plausible to think that there is in essence a single type of dhyānic experience, though it occurs in differing contexts, ranging from the theism of Christianity or Islam to the soul-pluralism of Yoga and the non-soul non-theism of the Theravāda.

2.49. But still there will be some (just) dissatisfaction with this hypothesis. For, it will be argued, the experience itself will be profoundly affected by the way in which it is conceived. To take an anology: suppose that I spit in order to get rid of some phlegm, that is one thing, but suppose that I spit in order to insult someone present, that is quite another thing. The crucial difference between the two episodes lies in my intentions, in the way in which I view the respective actions. Could it not likewise be (to pass from the distasteful to the sublime) that the experience reached in the interior of the soul (so to say) is profoundly affected by the quest or path which I conceive myself to be following? Could the experience not mean one thing to the theist, another to the Theravādin? And does not this meaning enter into the very fabric of the experience itself? If this were so, then the rather facile distinction between experience and interpretation urged earlier (1.14) and implicit in the discussion of the contemplative experience in the preceding paragraphs would be seriously and shockingly astray.

2.50. It is useful here to be explicit about the issues which might turn upon a decision of this question. It could naïvely be assumed that if it could be shown that there is a distinctive theistic experience, then this shows that there is an interior experience of God. That this assumption is naïve can be

demonstrated from two different directions. First, it does not at all follow that, because an experience is described as being of God, or is thought of by the participant as being of God, this guarantees its validity. Whether we are correctly to describe it as an experience of God depends upon a whole lot of things, only one of which is the character of the experience itself. To say that X has had an experience of God is to say far more than that he has had a theistic experience. It is to presuppose that there is a personal Creator of the world (manifested in history or experience). That there is such a Being cannot be inferred from the experience itself, even if the experience may be highly relevant to the claim. (But in any case one should not worry about the gap between experience and truth, for a like problem afflicts us in the context of induction – what we profess to base upon perception cannot be inferred from the premisses describing perceptions which we actually have: our claims about the world happily and imaginatively outrun our experiences, or otherwise we would be back in the forests, swinging from trees). Thus, on the one hand, the occurrence of theistic-type experiences is no guarantee of the existence of God.

2.51. Second, and on the other hand, the *intentionality* of an experience or event is not a bar to its being a self-revelation of God (if one may now speak from the Christian point of view). Though the Buddha, for instance, had no place in his teachings for a personal God (so impressed was he with the problem of evil, so disillusioned with the cults of his time), it does not at all follow that his enlightenment was not a mode of God's self-revelation. The fact that a good man is an atheist does not by itself show that his noble acts are not God-given. The fact that many failed to recognize divinity in Christ does not show that Christ was not divine. In brief, there is a gap between what people may see and the truth. There is no need, then, to think that the present hypothesis about the basic similarity (given the diverse flavours conferred by intention and context) of contemplative experiences necessarily threatens any theology. It neither threatens nor favours theism; it neither threatens nor favours Buddhism; it neither threatens nor favours Advaita Vedanta.

2.52. Some further expansion on the very last point may be useful, for it is very commonly assumed that the present

hypothesis, which may be dubbed the 'Thesis of the Unity of Mysticism', points to the truth of Advaita Vedanta. It is a commonplace among exponents of modern (Advaita) Vedanta that the mystical experience is everywhere basically the same and that it essentially consists in the realization of the Self which is Ultimate Reality. The underlying assumption of this Vedanta, as we shall see (4.2), is that contemplative realization – mystical experience – is the high and central point of spirituality. It is therefore easy to think that the Thesis of the Unity of Mysticism also favours the Thesis of Religious Unity (1.19) which is dear to the heart of this Vedanta. But of course the Vedantin position involves a theology, a doctrine of the Self. This is neither favoured nor threatened by the Thesis of the Unity of Mysticism, precisely because the latter is an hypothesis about mystical experience, not an hypothesis about the shape of the reality which, it is believed, mystical experience brings one into contact with. Certainly it should be emphasized that there is no direct connection between the Thesis of the Unity of Mysticism and the Thesis of Religious Unity. The former is a descriptive thesis; the latter is a theological thesis. The former has a place in the phenomenology of religion; the latter has a place among the varying ideologies of the world. The one is debatable because the facts are hard to evaluate; the other is debatable because it has powerful rivals.

2.53. It may, then, be concluded from the foregoing rather circuitous discussion that the hypothesis of a single basic form of dhyānic experience can make sense of the facts, and that this is to be contrasted with the devotional or prophetic type which is so central in the experience of theism. This is of course in no way to deny that theistic mysticism can be highly significant: it is just to say that theistic mysticism only has a chance of being theistic as a result of the context of worship and bhakti surrounding and pervading it.

2.54. This contrast between the two forms of religious life and experience – essentially between two aspects of the experiential dimension of religion – is important for any development of a 'natural theology of experience'. If we are to penetrate deeper than an intellectualist contact between Christianity and the Indian tradition, one desideratum must be an appreciation of the central experiences of the two faiths.

Now admittedly, as has been argued earlier (2.27), the mediation of the Transcendent to man may come either by way of the mythological or of the experiential dimension. In so far as Christianity is tied up with the historico-mythology of the Old and New Testaments it is irremediably particular. But the salvation-history of Israel also incorporated importantly the experience of the Prophets; and Christianity has always stressed the devotional experience of the faithful centred on the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Christianity is a religion of worship, and out of this worship there is born an intimacy between the worshipper and the divine Being. Though Christianity in an important way is not *based* on experience, for it is based upon historical events, it must give a vital place to experience. For it is through bhakti and dhyāna that traditionally men have seen God.

2.55. The polarity between bhakti and dhyāna presents an opportunity for the evaluation of theologies and doctrines in accordance with the ways in which they express these two forms of the religious life. The fact that here we offer no doctrine of a single core of religious experience may be held to be a disadvantage. It would be a simpler matter to appeal to religious experience if it had a single core – just as preachers in the West like to say that all cultures 'essentially' have a belief in God (as though – which is false – there is a single core of belief running through the different human civilizations). We shall argue that there are grounds for holding that an adequate theology is one which does adequate justice to both bhakti and dhyāna. Yet this is in one respect a heart-breaking argument, for me at least, for it stacks the cards against Theravāda Buddhism, a gentle and penetrating faith which is such a great glory of the Indian tradition. But what else is to be said? We shall see that the dialectic of religious experience seems to militate both against the 'dhyāna-only' of the Theravāda and the 'bhakti-only' of certain forms of Protestantism. Yet there may be philosophical arguments for thinking that dhyāna is reliable as a mode of knowledge and liberation, and that bhakti is not. These would alter our dialectic. But first we must tread the initial path of the dialectic, for it seems unavoidable for those who are in dialogue between Christianity and the Indian tradition.

2.56. It was argued before (2.27) that the Transcendent is

conceived as manifesting itself through experience, and that the type of doctrinal system we find is correlated to the kind or kinds of religious experience regarded as central to the religious life. Four possibilities were distinguished: one where the only serious form of life and experience is that found in dhyāna; that where the only serious form is that found in bhakti; that where both forms are present but where bhakti is subordinated to dhyāna; and that where both are present but dhyāna is subordinated to bhakti. Let us consider the first two, as represented by the Theravāda and modern evangelical Protestantism respectively. The latter, of course, pays great attention to the historical basis of the Christian faith, and so can make only a partial appeal to experience. But I think it just to pick out two typical features of evangelical Protestantism which make it contrast with the Theravāda: first, undoubtedly it lays great emphasis on the saving experience of God's loving acceptance, despite the majesty of God and the gap that subsists between the sinner and his Maker; second, it has no significant place for the contemplative life. These features justify us in speaking of it as 'bhakti-only'. Conversely, the Theravāda is, to all intents and purposes, 'dhyāna-only'.

2.57. What can the two parties say to one another? In so far as the Theravādin claims his faith to be experimental, a 'come-and-see' (*ehipassiko*) doctrine, he is holding that the truth of the dhamma can be verified in the higher stages of dhyāna that supervene upon the treading of the Path. But if he appeals to the typical Buddhist experience, can the evangelical Christian not appeal to the experience of the Prophets and to his own awareness of the God whom he worships and lovingly adores? Can either side, however, remain purely 'experimental' in their arguments without conceding the possibility of the validity of the other form of experience? Can the Theravādin simply write off the Prophets and Paul? Can the Protestant simply write off the Buddha and the *arhats*? It would seem not, unless appeal is made to something other than the experimental principle. If appeal, say, is made to the authority of the Bible we move into a new ambience of argument. But the assumption of the present discussion is that we are concerned with religious experience for the moment and it is useful to try and isolate this aspect of the inter-religious dialectic, to see where it, considered in itself, must lead us. As we hinted, however, there may be further

arguments which outweigh any conclusions arrived at through the dialectic of religious experience.

2.58. Quite clearly, if we at all argue from a position of equality between faiths, and if we stick to the problem of religious experience, it would be unjust and unreasonable to write off the central experiences of another tradition. It would be wrong to despise dhyāna; it would be wrong to despise bhakti. If religious experience has any significance at all, then at least both these forms of it must be given respect. This being so, it seems inevitable that neither the dhyāna-only nor the bhakti-only interpretation of religion can have universal validity. Only if it could be shown that the two forms are genuinely *incompatible* could one be in a legitimate position to hold to this one to the exclusion of the other. The question of the possibility of incompatibility will be discussed below (but already – 2.40 – something has been said to suggest a chance of conflict between prophetic orthodoxy and the experience of dhyāna).

2.59. It seems, then, that the dialectic of religious experience points, in itself, to those doctrines which incorporate within their fabric a focus for bhakti and for dhyāna. Two systems of this sort have been identified: theism and Absolutism. Theism can, but does not necessarily, hold out a place for dhyāna. As we have seen, evangelical Protestantism can scarcely be thought to be a theism which provides a home for dhyāna. But the theism of Catholicism and the theism of Ramanuja and Madhva assuredly do (and this is not to exclude a number of other systems and movements which do the same). Thus by 'theism' in this context, we mean 'theism as hospitable to dhyāna'.

2.60. So far we have proceeded in this dialectic of religious experience upon the assumption of the equality of bhakti and dhyāna. This principle of equality must still be applied, and the substance of the following argument is that bhakti and dhyāna can live together in equal wedlock only if the dominant theological interpretation of religious experience is theistic. I shall argue that Advaitin doctrines ultimately make nonsense of bhakti. Bhakti is there overwhelmed by dhyāna and made meaningless. Thus within the embrace of Advaita, bhakti perishes. It can no longer live in equal wedlock with dhyāna.

2.61. We must revert, in order to establish this point, to a

description of certain phenomenological features of bhakti. Bhakti involves the loving adoration of a majestic, but loving God. Adoration or worship implies that there is a gulf fixed between the Object of worship and the worshipper. A holy Lord is not on a par with the souls he saves. They cannot aspire, from the very nature of the bhakti which they feel, to equality with the source of liberation and the source of their existence. Thus bhakti is predicated on the sense of a gap between God and man. This is brought out vividly in the Prophetic religion of the Old Testament: it is expressed powerfully in the religion of early Islam, flowing from the revelations in Muḥammad's experience; it is found in the thought and heart of Paul; it is the common theme of those who worship the Lord. It is not simply a doctrine belonging to a single tradition. It is not a brute dogma. It is the expression of a feeling which lies quite at the heart of bhakti and of Prophetic experience.

2.62. The sense of the gap is also the sense of the glory and the power of the Other. Hence it is not surprising that with bhakti there goes a doctrine of grace. Liberation is participation in the holiness that has its source in God. The Lord is uniquely holy. Thus it follows that if holiness is somehow given to the worshipper it must come from God. In brief, God alone can save. If, then, we gain any good, if we do any good, if we attain liberation, if we taste eternal life, all this must be through the operation of God's grace. Admittedly (and here we come to a tension between the ethical and the experiential dimensions) when we do good we do it ourselves; and surely doing good is not irrelevant to salvation and to our deserving God's favour. It thus seems that we can in some degree, through our own actions, work out our salvation. This conflicts with the sense of holiness and glory in the experience of bhakti, and explains the ding-dong of theological controversy between those who preach salvation by faith alone and those who allow works as an adjunct to faith in the qualification for salvation.

2.63. The aspects of the phenomenology of bhakti help to explain why there can be a conflict between it and dhyāna, a conflict that might add up to an incompatibility. For as we saw earlier, in dhyāna the normal subject-object relation is washed away, so that it is easy for the contemplative who already believes in God or the Absolute to see in his experience an identification with Ultimate Reality. The gap between God and

the soul becomes entirely closed. The sense of Otherness no longer subsists. And as Devendranath Tagore remarked: 'What we want is to worship. But if the worshipper and the Object of worship are one, how can there be any worship?' In brief, there seems to be an incompatibility between the respective phenomenologies of bhakti and of dhyāna.

2.64. Again, emphasis on dhyāna tends to mean a doctrine of salvation by works. Thus the Theravāda, as being dhyāna-only in style, teaches that one can gain Nirvana through one's own efforts, not through reliance upon another. This is in conflict with the idea of grace which typically flows from the bhakti experience.

2.65. The Absolutistic interpretation of religion thus seems to render bhakti ultimately meaningless. And this is brought out explicitly in Advaita, with its doctrine of levels of truth. Bhakti has a provisional importance only. In the experience of the 'That art thou' all rituals and praises die away. Given, then, the principle of equality (2.60) between bhakti and dhyāna, the dialectic of religious experience seems to militate against an Absolutistic interpretation. This may seem a surprising conclusion, in view of the fashionability of the view that Advaita holds out the strongest promise of uniting men of different traditions and faiths. How do we account for the grip which modern Vedanta retains on the thought of many of those exercised by the divisions between religions?

2.66. The causes appear to be these. First, in fact many people, especially in India, genuinely rate dhyāna above bhakti. They see, too, that there have been contemplatives in all the great traditions, and seek a unification of religions through a universal dhyānic element. Second, Advaita Vedanta has made a big impact in modern Hinduism and has provided the basis for an ideology which responds to the criticisms of Christian missionaries by pointing proudly to the synthetic character of the Hindu tradition – its capacity for absorbing many different strands of life and thought. Thus Advaita stands for the Thesis of Religious Unity (1.19), since the agreement is more likely to be attained by a synthesis and a symbiosis than by the conquest of the world by one faith. These causes of the fashionability of Advaita Vedanta will exercise us later, for clearly they both express important viewpoints.

2.67. Our conclusion, however, is that, given the principle of the equality of dhyāna and bhakti, Advaita does not represent an acceptable theology for it points to the ultimate dissolution of bhakti. What then of the other alternative? What of the type of theism which is hospitable to dhyāna? Could it not be objected that it must offend against the phenomenology of dhyāna, for it cannot accept the washing away of the subject-object distinction?

2.68. Now for the purposes of the present discussion, we are conceiving religious experience as being the manifestation of the Transcendent (2.27). The experience of the contemplative in the higher reaches of dhyāna is, then, a manifestation – of Nirvana, of the Brahman-ātman, of God – as yet we do not say which. But what is 'seen' in this inner cloud of unknowing lies outside as well as within the experience. That is to say, Nirvana is not just an experience or a set of experiences; nor is the Brahman just a collection of samadhis; nor is God just a bundle of perceptions of him. The concepts in question have wider ramifications. It is in no sense our aim here to be reductionists, and identify Ultimate Reality with the experiences of men. To say that there is a correlation between certain sorts of doctrine and certain forms of religious experience is not to say that the doctrines simply are descriptions of experiences. Likewise a table is something which is hard to the touch and so on. It would be useless to have a concept which did not manifest itself (so to say) to perceptual experience; but this does not at all mean that a table is simply a set of experiences. The table must always be conceived as 'transcending' what is immediately given in experiences. Thus it is absurd simply to look upon a dhyānic experience, within the context of religion, just as a dhyānic experience. It is also the manifestation of something. If it is conceived, as in theism, as the manifestation of God in the soul, a model must be used to explain on the one hand that there is difference (for the soul and God are intrinsically different, according to theism) and yet union. The most well-used analogy in this context is that of the Spiritual Marriage. The image of the soul and God as lovers (delightfully portrayed, incidentally, in the legends about Krishna and the cowgirls) makes sense, because in physical love there is a merging of two in one in a shared bliss. Two become 'one flesh': but this does not mean that the population of the world is reduced every

time there is a wedding. The twoness remains. There is a duality, and yet the most intimate possible union. This is why the analogy of love makes sense of God's manifestation in dhyāna. The contemplative trembles on the edge of the loss of his identity, but cannot feel himself to be absolutely identified with the God who is his Creator.

2.69. The image of love, of the Spiritual Marriage, is the key to the equal life of bhakti and dhyāna. Dhyāna in this image is suffused with bhakti. The two intertwine, but they do not strangle one another. Both remain meaningful moments of religious experience under the wing of the right kind of theism. It can therefore be concluded, in regard to this phase of the dialectic of religious experience, that the principle of equality points unmistakably in the direction of a theism which is hospitable to dhyāna. In a broad sense, this means the Catholic tradition, together with the Eastern Orthodox within Christendom (though some Protestant movements, notably the Society of Friends, are also deeply hospitable to dhyāna). It means, in the Indian tradition, the theism of Ramanuja and of Madhva, among others.

2.70. But all this argument is predicated upon the principle of the equality of bhakti and dhyāna. As we have seen, there are those who would not accept this. They see dhyāna as secretly superior. They have an aristocratic view of the yogin. They (often correctly) identify bhakti with popular religion. There are those too who would simply dismiss bhakti as invalid, as resting upon an illusion, but who would accept the validity of dhyānic experience. Conversely, there are those who would consider dhyāna invalid and bhakti as an important means to the knowledge of God.

2.71. We may divide these reactions against the principle of equality into two main positions: first, an *evaluation* of one or other of the two main forms of religious life and experience as inferior; second, a view depending upon psychological or philosophical arguments to the effect that one or other of the forms is illusory. Naturally, the second position will entail the first; but the converse does not hold. Since some approaches to religion may importantly spring from aesthetic or evaluative judgment rather than from empirical or metaphysical argument, it is reasonable to treat the aesthetic alternative independently of the other. But since there are two types of

religious life and of religious experience, bhakti and dhyāna, these two main positions divide into four. First, there are those who would value dhyāna higher than bhakti; second, there is the converse evaluation; third, there is the psychological or philosophical argument that dhyāna is illusory; fourth, there is the like argument that bhakti is illusory. Let us deal with these arguments and positions in turn.

2.72. The position that dhyāna has higher value than bhakti can be taken up in two ways. First, it can be a dogmatic assumption that dhyāna is superior to bhakti; second, it can depend upon particular grounds. Some of these are philosophical or psychological and will be considered separately, in line with the division of alternatives in the previous paragraph. Among theological and aesthetic grounds which might support the judgment are the following. First, it could be argued that the life of the world is impermanent and deficient and that the only true happiness comes through experience of the Permanent. Such a view is in a line with much of the spirit of contemplative writings, both Eastern and Western. Second, it might be urged that the product of dhyāna is typically a direct knowledge of the Transcendent, while bhakti feeds typically upon faith. Faith being of the nature of belief is inferior to knowledge. Hence dhyāna is superior to bhakti. Third, dhyāna can be achieved through one's own effort; but salvation according to the sentiments of bhakti (2.62) is due to an Other and hence is outside one's control. From this point of view also dhyāna is superior. Fourth, dhyāna involves effort and discipline: this is much less in evidence in regard to bhakti. Indeed the whole spirit of the latter is to say that salvation comes as a gift from God, and the adoration which we address to God has its roots in God's action: consequently bhakti essentially needs no effort on the part of the devotee. Either you have it or you do not. Fifth, some of the manifestations of bhakti are intolerant. The supposition that one has to have faith in a personal Lord suggests that those who are 'outside' this commitment are in an inferior and even damnable position. It is no coincidence (on this argument) that Madhva and his followers were the only group in the Indian tradition to speak of eternal damnation (1.47). Nor is evangelical Protestantism notable for its tolerant attitude towards non-Christian beliefs. These arguments are among those, then, which might

support the aesthetic judgment that dhyāna is superior to bhakti.

2.73. The devotee of bhakti might invoke counter-arguments. He might seek to establish the superiority of bhakti over dhyāna. He might, firstly, point out that bhakti overflows with the joy of God's goodness. Since God is Creator of the world, it follows that the world too is basically good. however much it may be vitiated by the incapacity to follow the beckonings of the divine vision. Thus bhakti consummates the satisfactions of the world. It does not flee from them, as does dhyāna so typically. Second, bhakti is the mother of commitment. Love God and do what you will – hence one does what is God's will. There is a beautiful and loving dynamism about bhakti. By contrast dhyāna, in seeking knowledge of the Transcendent, is too much centred in contemplation rather than loving action in the world. Third, dhyāna is admittedly an act of oneself, at least where it occurs outside the context of bhakti. But this makes it over-methodical, over-rigid. It is a technique. But bhakti has a warmth and spontaneity lacking in such a detached technique. The very glory of bhakti lies in the fact that it is not due to meditation and preparation. The spirit bloweth where it listeth. Fifth, bhakti offers a direction and purpose to living, and sees this against the control of the cosmos by a loving Lord. Too often, by contrast, dhyāna is pessimistic. It is mere good fortune that the cosmos offers the chance of liberation through the methods of yoga. The bhakti view is consistent and glorious.

2.74. A rehearsal of such points pro and contra is probably in itself sufficient to persuade us that no knockdown proof from one direction or the other is to be expected. This being so, it might well seem reasonable to say that the criteria are such that only a 'draw' is permissible: in short, that the principle of the equality of bhakti and dhyāna is in practice the only humane presupposition to adopt. But even though this solution is essentially correct, it is worth-while to examine the particular assumptions lying behind the arguments described in the foregoing two paragraphs.

2.75. The first argument for dhyāna is the contrary of its counterpart on behalf of bhakti. From the one side the satisfactions of the world are seen as illusory: from the other they are seen as capable of transformation. But what does such a contrast in value judgments about the world depend on? On

ordinary experience? It points both ways. On the joy of the Permanent and its contrast with the sorrows we so often encounter? Probably it does. But this is only to say that the joys of dhyāna immeasurably outweigh the troubles of the world. The adherent of bhakti can say that the joys of ultimate salvation do so likewise. Yet (by a reversal perhaps of Pascal) bhakti can claim to have heaven and all this too. The transformation of the finite stands for something, even in comparison with the infinite joys of the life of God. Moreoever, if the world is governed by a personal Lord it must surely have some significance in itself. These points amount to two methodological conclusions. First, the superiority of dhyāna might be defended by saying 'Well, if you had this supremely serene joy you would recognize its fantastic worth'. This is so much as to take up a dogmatic position (see 2.58). The contrary dogmatic position would be possible for the adherent of bhakti, except in so far as he relies on *hope* of a future bliss. But this is inconsistent with his basic position. For eternal life must begin within the world of the good creation of God. Second, the general theological position of the one side is contrasted with the general theological position of the other. The value judgments depend on apprehensions of the truth. The truth here becomes the dominant factor. It is not possible that a merely aesthetic judgment about the relative worths of dhyāna and bhakti can settle the issue, once we have entered this perspective. The moral to be drawn from the first methodological point is that there is no external criterion which would allow us to go beyond the principle of the equality of bhakti and dhyāna. If we are reduced to the dogmatism of uncontrolled appeal to experience we are forced to concede that no reason against the principle of equality can be given. The moral of the first point, then, is that the principle of equality still holds. The moral of the second methodological point is that a decision as between dhyāna and bhakti depends on theological assumptions. It was the whole point of the dialectic of religious experience to see whether religious experience afforded a basis for evaluating theologies. If theologies are brought in to tip the scales in favour of one form of religious experience rather than the other, in order that a theology congenial to that form may be defended against a rival theology congenial to the other form, the whole process must be seen to be circular. In short the introduction of the

theological argument cannot affect the basic principle of the equality of bhakti and dhyāna.

2.76. The second pair of contrary considerations, about knowledge, faith and commitment, invokes a value judgment about certainty and a judgment about dynamism in the world. The latter can be set on one side, since it has basically been dealt with in the previous paragraph. It depends on a theological presupposition issuing in a judgment about the value of dynamism in the good world of God's creation. As to the former, it has not as much substance as might be expected. For though it is undoubtedly impressive that there should be a direct existential confrontation with Ultimate Reality in the depths of the interior life, it by no means follows that this constitutes 'knowledge' in the ordinary sense. Knowledge in the ordinary sense trades on the idea of demonstrability in public. If I claim to know that there is a fox in the garden I must show that I have authority to say this. I must be able to cite clinching evidence. I do not, of course, absolutely need to go into the garden and produce the fox. One of the whole points of making knowledge claims is to save people the bother of checking up themselves. And if everyone were suspicious of knowledge claims and insisted, for example, on going into the garden to look at the fox, there would then be no rationale behind the ordinary institution of saying 'I know'. (There are exceptions, naturally, for I speak only of the main usage of 'know', such exceptions as this for example: when I am taking an examination it is important for others to check on my knowledge claims. But then examinations are only to certify reliability in a certain field. They certify that henceforth normally I can be trusted in my knowledge claims in that field. The examination is, happily, parasitical on the 'real' world). If knowledge in the ordinary sense trades upon the idea of demonstrability in public, the 'existential' knowledge of the Transcendent scarcely conforms to the ordinary model; this is not necessarily to say that such experience is somehow inferior. It could well be immeasurably superior. Niceness in a man may be much more important than the whiteness of his face, even though the latter is easily demonstrable and the former not. Further, the interior knowledge of the contemplative is knowledge by acquaintance: it is, so to say, encounter. But what is encountered reaches (as we have argued – 2.68) beyond the immediate apprehension. This being

so it is not simply possible to assert the existence or nature of that which is encountered on the basis of the encounter: the description of what it is that is encountered itself runs beyond what is yielded in immediate consciousness. This is not to deny what is obvious: that a new insight into the nature of that which is encountered may be yielded by the encounter. It is only to say that the claim to certainty about the description as a whole may not be warrantable by the experience. To put the matter very crudely: contemplation may bring encounter, and encounter may bring insight. But knowledge *about* what is encountered is not solely certified by the experience found in contemplation. In brief, the advantages of 'certainty' and 'knowledge' in this context are eroded by these considerations. The result remains a draw as between dhyāna and bhakti.

2.77. We now turn to the third pair of contrary considerations advanced respectively on behalf of dhyāna and bhakti. The discipline of dhyāna is contrasted with the spontaneity of bhakti. It may be that either side has exaggerated. It is not guaranteed that the person who performs the requirements of the Eightfold Path will gain Nirvana: for there is a 'coming' and 'supervenieance' about the final experience. This is brought out in the Mahāyāna in Zen Buddhism, which on the one hand is highly emphatic about the need of methodical self-training (and is even cruel in its operation of this training) and on the other hand is most powerfully committed to the sense of spontaneity in the gaining of satori. Conversely, bhakti religion easily becomes wooden and ritualistic. It is easy to smuggle in method and works into the supposed spontaneities of faith. Works become a symptom of salvation; and a smug assurance of divine favour can replace the fervid love of true adoration. Thus the contrast is not in practice easy to detect. But this is perhaps beside the point. Surely the point being made (or rather the contrary points being made) concerns (or concern) dhyāna and bhakti as properly undertaken. But then the hostility to the 'mechanical', technical, aspects of dhyāna stems from a presupposition about grace upon the part of the adherent of bhakti religion. And the praise of methodicalness by the adherent of dhyāna religion is to be tested against the respective fruits of the two types of faith. It is hard to decide this issue (save in terms of observations of how adherents actually act and think) on theological presuppositions.

2.78. The fourth pair of contrary arguments concern intolerance and purpose. There is something in the charge that evangelical bhakti religion is intolerant; there is something in the charge that dhyāna can be expressed in a generally purposeless and depressing cosmology. The former charge has reason partly because of the dynamism of the religion of worship. It seeks to change the world and therefore to change the individual in conformity with the world. Sometimes the exponent of dhyāna seeks to eliminate the world by changing the individual's consciousness of it. But the charges have to be evaluated in terms of their presuppositions as well as in terms of history. The presupposition of the charge against dhyāna is that the world is purposeful. But this is a theological judgment tied up with belief in a personal God. To invoke such a consideration in favour of bhakti is, in the present context, to be involved, as before (2.75) in a circular argument. The charge of intolerance against bhakti applies, no doubt, more to the bhakti of the Christian tradition, and is a just one, in so far as the present discussion is concerned. For this discussion is predicated on the principle of the equality of religious experience, and often evangelical intolerance has made disgustingly light of the serene glories of the Indian traditions of dhyāna. But then the charge of intolerance itself depends on the principle of equality. In brief, the fourth pair of contrary arguments in no way leads us to infringe or abandon that principle.

2.79. The preceding paragraphs have been concerned with 'aesthetic' and theological arguments pro and contra. We have shortly to turn to psychological and philosophical considerations. But it should be noted that the discussion still proceeds in strict relation to what might be said from within the experiential dimension of religion. It could be claimed that the Bible has little if any place for dhyāna and therefore by consequence. . . . Or it could be argued that the Vedic scriptures, including and especially the Upanishads, place emphasis upon mysticism, and so. . . . These other, mythological and authoritarian, considerations are not in our present purview. It must anew be stressed that the present argument is in the area between doctrine and experience.

2.80. It could be argued either that dhyāna or that bhakti is invalid as a mode of knowledge of reality. We have excluded from the present discussion any consideration of a general

philosophical or psychological argument against the validity of religious experience as a whole. For if no apprehension of the Ultimate in personal experience is possible, then neither Hinduism nor Christianity will have much to say, either at large or to each other.

2.81. The theory that bhakti depends upon an illusion is fairly familiar to the West and is associated with Freudian psycho-analysis. Now the terms of the present argument are such that we have to consider whether a Freudian account of bhakti leaves dhyāna equally untouched. That is, we are here concerned with arguments to show that the one form of religion is invalid (from the point of view of its truth claims) while the other remains untouched. Consequently, the main question to consider is whether there are grounds for differentiating between the two forms of religious life and experience. To put the matter crudely: can dhyāna plus (say) Freud prevail over bhakti without itself dying in the battle? Can the converse occur?

2.82. The up-to-date Theravādin might indeed be attracted by Freudian theory, for it solves for him the problem created by the principle of the equality of religious forms of experience. The Prophets, Muḥammad, Ramanuja and many others have to be accounted for. It seems a stroke of good fortune that Freudian theory should specifically centre its description of the origins of religion upon the Father-figure, that is, upon the personal Lord. The focus of bhakti is in question if truly the Lord is a mere projection from the world of the nursery. Within limits the Advaitin or the Mahāyānist could take up the same standpoint. For the Advaitin popular religion can be seen as a projection, which is useful in the process of growth but which must be ultimately transcended in the non-dual experience of the Brahman-ātman.

2.83. Now certainly the notion of projection could hardly be plausibly applied to the Therāvādin. The Father-figure seems to be absent. Admittedly the life of the temple can focus on the great serene statues of the Buddha. But is this worship? Is the Buddha a focus of fear and love? Not in the manner in which the Lord so conspicuously is in Christianity. The Freudian analysis is written in terms of the Judaeo-Christian tradition (this is most perspicuous in the notoriously slip-shod, unhistorical and disgraceful account of the origins of theism in *Moses and Monotheism*). It is surely a very odd thing that

infantile sexuality should function as one of the mainsprings of the explanation of religion when the latter is described in relation to the religion of one culture alone. Is infantile sexuality not a feature too of the Indus Valley and of Banaras? As a general theory of religion, Freudianism is grossly defective. Still, it might work as a theory of bhakti, might it not? And this is the main point at issue.

2.84. But if bhakti can be analysed in terms of projection, the contemplative life can be analysed as a retreat into the womb. The undifferentiated bliss of being-and-yet-non-being attained in dhyāna can easily be compared to the putative state of the infant before he emerges through the traumatic shock of birth into the puzzling relationships to which he must perforce, at whatever cost, adapt himself. If a hostile naturalistic account of bhakti can be given, so likewise can a hostile naturalistic account of dhyāna. It is extremely unlikely that one could give a plausible account of the one without exposing the other to a deflationary vertigo.

2.85. The central fact is that religion already presupposes the concept of the Transcendent, of the 'invisible' world which is manifested through religious experience and in other ways. Since a psycho-analytical account of the origins of religion is typically naturalistic, that is, it dispenses with the concept of the Transcendent altogether, it is bound to produce typically a result which in general renders religion meaningless, even if *in particular* it may illuminate the religious situation. The psychological determinants of religious belief are important data for the evaluation of religious truth, but a general account of them which rules out *in advance* the possibility of any truth in religion is not going to help much in the dialogue between faiths.

2.86. It is therefore proper to conclude, within the limits of the present dialectic of religious experience, that dhyāna and bhakti remain equal aspirants for the imagination of religious mankind. They remain equally valid for the interchange between Christianity and Hinduism. It follows, then, if the previous argument (2.69) was correct – that only in the context of a theism which is hospitable to dhyāna can dhyāna and bhakti hope to live together in a state of equality and without the ultimate destruction of one party or the other – that the natural theology we are seeking must lie in a sort of theism.

2.87. This natural theology is no longer based upon merely intellectual arguments. It is based upon the deliverances of religious experience and upon the dialectic between bhakti and dhyāna – two forms of the religious life which have been crucial in the history of religions and in the history of Indian religions in particular. But what does such a conclusion say to us in regard to the other dimensions of religion?

2.88. Though we have concentrated essentially upon religious experience, it has also been argued that this has to be understood in the context of the ritual dimension. The practice of worship is the milieu of the higher experiences of bhakti. The illuminations of dhyāna occur in the general context of yoga. Thus the dialectic between experience is also the dialectic between forms of the religious life. Consequently, if the present account is at all correct, Ultimate Reality lies at the end of two corridors – the one being the corridor of grace and bhakti, the other corridor being that of inner contemplation. This is, if you like, the essence of 'That art thou': the two directions point to the same Being. That Reality, according to the present argument, is best described in theistic terms, for they can render meaningful the two corridors. Thus the new natural theology is theistic, and rooted in experience. It allows us to see in the luminous quest of the Buddhist saint an approach to Divinity; it allows us likewise to see in the fervour of the adherent of bhakti a drawing close to Divinity. The corridors, wherever they manifest themselves, are signs of religious light and a context of the higher endeavour. The differing rituals of worship and contemplation afford entrance into and participation in the divine life. This is the conclusion of this natural theology which speaks both to the Indian and the Western traditions.

2.89. At the doctrinal level, we cannot dispense with the concept of the Transcendent. This is one lesson of this natural theology. At the experiential level, we must look to bhakti and dhyāna to supply the encounters with the Transcendent in experience. At the ritual level, we must see worship and yoga as the framework of the religious apprehension of the Transcendent. And what of ethics?

2.90. So far we have said remarkably little on this score, though the value judgments of theism have been touched upon (2.75). This is because moral insight by itself (more than

intellectual argument) cannot supply the stuff of religion, the stuff of faith. Yet this points to something of importance for clarifying the sense in which our 'natural theology' is natural at all.

2.91. Both intellectual argument about a First Cause and ethical beliefs can exist independently of religion. Both logically and psychologically morality has no absolute necessity to draw its sustenance from a religious view of the world. By contrast, we can hardly speak of bhakti or yoga without placing ourselves explicitly in the religious context. Bhakti is intrinsically directed towards an Object of worship; the practice of yoga is directed towards liberation. Thus the ethical dimension of religion differs from the experiential and the ritual (and for that matter the mythological) in being both within and without religion. Ethics overlaps the frontier between the sacred and the profane: it bestrides the division between a religious attitude to the world and a non-religious one. This is not to say that there is a homogeneous morality which exists on both sides of the divide. Religion makes a difference to the moral values that the adherent holds.

2.92. Now this feature of ethics might make it a candidate for figuring centrally in a natural theology. It has not been uncommon for arguments to be advanced from moral values to God. For one ideal of a natural theology is that one should start at a common meeting-place between the believer and the non-believer. This is also the logic behind the attempt to produce metaphysical arguments for the existence of God. The premises represent, or are supposed to represent, propositions acceptable to any reasonable man, whether he be committed to the Christian faith or not. But it is far from the present purpose to resurrect such a traditional concept of natural theology. The burden of the whole argument of this chapter is that we must find contact between one faith and another in religious experience and ritual. It has been argued that we must start with some concept of the Transcendent. We begin, in a sense, from the religious position. But we try to show a way of generalizing the experience of mankind in differing traditions. In short, our natural theology is a new version of the crude idea of a 'general revelation'. It is not a means of starting from non-religious assumptions and working round to religious ones. It is not in that sense natural theology. On the

other hand it is not an exercise either in revealed theology as traditionally conceived. It is not an attempt to excogitate Christian revelation as such. It does not begin from a prepared position or a trench of dogma. It is rather an attempt to lay bare the shape of the dialectic between faiths and between the forms of religious experience most prominent in the history of mankind.

2.93. But if the proper evaluation of religious experience starts from the concept of the Transcendent, it could be that traditional natural theology has a role to play, not so much in demonstrating anything, proving God's existence, as in furnishing the concept of the Transcendent. The traditional demand for an explanation of the existence of the cosmos suggests the possibility of an eternal Being 'beyond' the cosmos. Nevertheless, we have already seen how the Theravāda rejects such a concept of an underlying Being. For it, the Transcendent is rather to be found in a permanent state, contrasted with the impermanent states of empirical existence. Thus it is illusory to suppose that a standard notion of a Transcendent Being is to be discovered in all faiths. On the contrary, there are alternative conceptions. But yet they have at least an indirect measure of unity. To see the impermanence of the world is to entertain at least the possibility of the Permanent; and to see the contingency of the world is to entertain at least the possibility of an underlying Transcendent Being. Thus traditional natural theology provides at least one of the concepts of the Transcendent; while another is furnished in a different way through the Buddhist analysis of existence. In both cases one starts from a conception of empirical existence. In both there is a sense of the inadequacy of a view of reality confined to the world. This sense of inadequacy cannot be held to *prove* anything; but it can provide the starting-point (if one be needed) for the framing of a contrasted concept of the Transcendent.

2.94. We have argued that religion is six-dimensional and that the dimensions are interrelated organically (2.8 et seq.). From this was argued that a proper natural theology must branch downwards beyond the doctrinal dimension towards the ritual and experience which represent a main form of the manifestation of the Transcendent. This led us to use the analysis of systems presented in the previous chapter, and

centring on the polarity between bhakti and dhyāna, for an investigation of the dialectic of religious experience. It was found that this dialectic finds it impossible to avoid the principle of the equality of the forms of religious life and hence a theology incorporating both forms in equal amity needed to be found. That form of theism which is hospitable to dhyāna was discovered to fill the requirement – a theism more in evidence on the Christian side in the Catholic and Orthodox traditions than in that of evangelical Protestantism.

2.95. But since traditionally natural theology has been contrasted with revealed theology, it still remains to see whether our proposed 'natural theology of religious experience' has to be contrasted with revelation. Now earlier it was argued that the divine self-manifestation can occur both through concrete historico-mythological events, etc., for instance, through the mythological dimension, and through religious experience. If one defines revelation in such a way that immediate experience of God counts as revelation, then the natural theology of religious experience incorporates part of the substance of revealed theology, though in an open and undogmatic manner. But yet what of the remaining revelation (in the Christian case) through historical events?

2.96. Here it is necessary to see in what way religious experience has a 'universal' character, and we may then ask whether mythology also shares this. Religious experience is not universal in the sense that everyone (every culture) has it; nor is it universal because it is everywhere the same – for we have made use of the polarity of bhakti and dhyāna which such a theory of a universal core of religious experience would disprove. But it is universal in the sense that it is not, in either of its forms, culturally and historically restricted. We can, that is, detect the same general form of religious experience in independent religious cultures. We can thus say about a particular interior or prophetic vision: this is a member of the class of experiences of this or that sort. We can treat each experience as an *instance* of its class. Now in so far as mythological elements are employed to express the impact of religious experience, we can point to universal themes in mythology (again in the same restricted sense of 'universal'). For example the wrath of God in the Old Testament and the terrifying aspects of the theophany in the *Gītā* both serve to express the

tremendum of the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*. Rudolf Otto's *The Idea of the Holy* is replete with examples of this kind. And yet on the other hand, the historical character of the Biblical revelation gives it an incurable particularity. Hence will be generated two rather different attitudes to mythology.

2.97. On the one hand, a religion which emphasizes the experiential dimension as manifesting the Transcendent will tend to take a tolerant view of mythological divisions. If men clothe their bhakti in various ways, this is no matter, for the essence of their religion is contained in the inner possibilities of bhakti itself. If some worship the Lord in the figure of Vishnu, others as Shiva, others as Christ, it is no matter. There are so many mythological garbs of piety. It is the inner man, not his clothes, that one should value. By contrast, those whose religion leads them to identify God's self-manifestation in mythological particularities can scarcely take such a tolerant view. If God reveals himself in Christ, and strongly and uniquely, then how can one with equanimity worship him in the form of Vishnu? It therefore seems that Christianity, with its insistence on the revelatory importance and uniqueness of the salvation-history portrayed in the Biblical narratives, must retain the notion of revealed theology as something excogitated out of what is simply *given*. There remains a revealed theology contrastable even with the wider 'natural theology of religious experience' which has been delineated in this chapter.

2.98. But does this mean that it is possible for the Christian to withdraw from the dialectic of religious experience – to withdraw from the search for a meeting-point between religions – and stake his claims boldly and exclusively upon historical revelation? Does the necessary concession that there is a particularity about God's self-manifestation justify an evangelical theology which has no truck with religions? It is surely one of the causes of the suspicion which a sensitive Hindu can justifiably feel about Christian theism that those who are generously and intelligently capable of entering into dialogue with Hinduism are also, as Christians, in alliance with those who are narrow and intolerant in their attitudes. The stronger Christian ecumenism becomes, it could be argued, the less likely is it that a real mutual understanding between Hinduism and Christianity will take place. For as denominations

interpenetrate, so the force of evangelicalism will grow – an evangelicalism which has no relationship to the traditional religious life of India. This would be pessimistic: influences can work in different directions. Nevertheless, there is some sign, in the English-speaking world at least, that Roman Catholicism is increasingly influenced by avant-garde Protestantism, and the latter can take up postures which make nonsense of the whole argument of this chapter.

2.99. But since this theme happens, as we shall see, to be closely connected with the problem of Transcendence as well as with the problem of the dialectic of religious experience; and since both these problems can gain illumination from traditional Hindu theology; and since it is in the next chapter primarily that I wish to explore the possibility of a Sanskrit theology for Christianity, i.e. to see the way in which Hindu theism can serve as a better basis than the philosophical theology of Aquinas; the discussion of modern secular and evangelical Protestantism can suitably belong to this coming chapter.

CHAPTER III

TRANSCENDENCE AND INDIAN THEISM

3.1. It might seem strange to couple secularism and evangelical Protestantism. It might seem strange to link Paul van Buren with conservatism in Biblical interpretation. But there is, especially from the perspective of New Delhi or Banaras, a powerful connection between the two. Let us see why.

3.2. Protestantism characteristically, though not universally, has been unenthusiastic about natural theology, for the latter stands, in the Protestant mind, for a version of salvation by works, and so is linked up to the complex of abuses which the Reformation was all about. This concentration upon a Biblical position, to the general exclusion of metaphysics and other expressions of human thought and feeling, has certainly given Protestantism a powerful dynamic, but it has also presented it with a double problem. On the one hand, the Biblical revelation seems to be somewhat eroded by the historical scholarship which has, for over a hundred years, attempted to use the methods of modern scientific history to penetrate to the facts lying behind the Biblical narrative. This crisis in the authority of scriptures has, as we shall see, led to the adoption of three main positions. The second problem presented to Protestantism by the rejection of natural theology and its concomitants in the shape of the concept of natural law, etc., has been that of how to adapt the Christian faith to human culture. For if one thinks that men already possess some light within them, the faith comes as a completion or perfection of the best in human culture. Consequently, Christianity can graft itself on to existing institutions. But if one believes that men have no light, are totally depraved, the faith comes as a replacement of existing cultural values. But this has an ironic side to it. For Protestantism, because of its very history, incorporated a great deal of European values, and these became inextricably bound up with the faith. It could appear to the non-European that much

missionary effort was directed, not to replacing paganism with the Christian faith, but to replacing non-European cultural values with European ones. In brief, Protestantism not merely had the problem of how to adapt the faith to human culture: it had the problem of distinguishing within itself between the divine and the merely human. The two problems of Protestantism can respectively be dubbed the 'Problem of Revelation' and the 'Problem of Culture'.

3.3. The three main reactions to the Problem of Revelation have been as follows. First, there are those who have clung the more rigidly to a pretty literalistic interpretation of the Bible. Second, there are those who have bolstered a (to them) crumbling Bible by an appeal to the values and ideas of contemporary thought (held to be pointing somehow in a Christward direction). Third, there is Barth and that which stems from Barth. But now revelation is seen in Christ not in the words of the Bible. The Bible is itself only a means towards the apprehension of that which it describes. But Barth, like the Conservative Evangelicals, equally sets his face against natural theology. But though the present-day descendant of the second (or 'liberal') position is secular Christianity, it also, strangely, has an inheritance from Barthianism. It is this that accounts for the similarity between modern secular Christianity and evangelical Protestantism in their relations to religions.

3.4. This connection can be seen in terms of the following argument. If we are to exclude natural theology, as Barth wishes to do, we must draw a distinction between God's revelation and human ideas. This distinction is necessary precisely because we wish to guard against an infection of the Gospel by human creations. This is not just a matter of getting theology right: it is equally a matter of purifying Christian action and Christian attitudes. It is both an intellectual and a moral task. Now if we distinguish between the Gospel and human ideas, we must do so in such a way that the latter are seen in their full embodiment. It is not as if ideas subsist by themselves. They are an expression of cultural and social patterns. In brief, the Gospel is contrasted not only with human ideas but with all the products of human culture. But religion itself is an expression of human feelings and social relations, etc. It is itself part of human culture. Consequently, the Gospel is contrasted with religion, even including empirical Christianity.

The Gospel in essence is God's self-revelation in Christ. This whole argument flows from Barth's initial position, and has as a consequence the concept (given a special meaning and relevance by Bonhoeffer) of religionless Christianity. Contemporary Christian secularism makes use of the contrast between Christ and religion to get rid of all or most of the apparatus of theology. For are not ideas like 'transcendence', 'God' and so forth simply religious, and so capable without loss of being rejected? And does this not make Christianity thoroughly acceptable and intelligible to modern secular man, who makes no use of these ideas? We see then a close link between Barthian evangelicalism and secular Christianity.

3.5. It can be noted, too, that Barthianism as outlined above is relevant both to the Problem of Revelation and to the Problem of Culture. It seems to solve the former by placing revelation beyond the fallible propositions of the Bible. It seems to solve the latter by making explicit the distinction between human values and the Gospel, thus opening the way to a critical appraisal of Protestantism from within, to separate the wheat of the Gospel from the chaff of mere Europeanism. No wonder Barth's theology, as mediated and expressed by Kraemer's famous *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World* should have made such a big impact on missionary thinking. It gave further impetus to the process of indigenizing Christianity, without compromising the evangelical position.

3.6. And yet both Barthianism and secularism are incapable of saying anything to the Indian tradition, and this is a measure of their bankruptcy for the interplay between religions. Both depend upon an unconscious fraud, which it is now our task to expose. The fraud lies in the alleged contrast between the Gospel and religion, coupled with the undoubted fact that Christianity continues as a religion. The exposure can be argued as follows.

3.7. Though empirical Christianity is treated as a cultural phenomenon, it must in some way reflect the Gospel. For suppose that it no way did so there would be no sense in connecting the Gospel more with Christianity than with say Buddhism (and this would make nonsense of the idea of a 'Christian' message). We may assume therefore that there is some reflection of the Gospel in the Church – in the preaching of the Word, in the sacraments, in Barth's *Church Dogmatics*.

It is unbelievable that the missionary who sings hymns and sacrifices himself in labours for others does not conceive himself, however inadequately, to be following Jesus. It is part of the very logic of paying attention to Barth and Kraemer that they express something relevant to the Christian's witness – to the reflection of the Gospel in the Church. We may conclude, then, that the Gospel is empirically reflected. But further, there are ways in which Christianity, as reflecting the Gospel, can be compared to aspects of non-Christian religion. For example, the doctrine of grace found in the qualified non-dualism of Ramanuja and his followers (2.35) is highly reminiscent of the very way in which the great Reformers formulted their own piety – their own return to the Gospel. The word 'Abba' ('Daddy') used by Jesus of his heavenly Father and incorporated into the liturgy of the early Church is strongly reminiscent also of the tender love of the Lord found in bhakti devotionalism. These comparisons are only two among many that might be made between the Christian reflection of the Gospel and the religious life of the non-Christian world. Hence we arrive at two propositions: first that the Gospel is reflected in the Church; second, that some of these reflections in the Church are themselves reflected in other faiths. The conclusion to be drawn from these two propositions is clear enough: that there is some reflection at least of the Gospel in non-Christian religion. Kraemerism is therefore faced with a dilemma: either the Gospel is so different from empirical Christianity that the Church means nothing; or the Gospel is not totally other than the (alleged) creations of human culture. The attempt to make the Gospel transcend all religions breaks down, and with it this twentieth-century version of Protestant evangelicalism.

3.8. This last remark is not in any way intended to belittle the achievements of evangelicalism. They can doubtless speak for themselves. But it is intended to bring out the unconscious fraud of this latter-day attempt to bypass the challenge and the joy to be found in the existence of the great non-Christian religions. (Though to speak thus is already to lose something of the flavour of that challenge: we could as well speak of the non-Hindu religions). Secularism likewise undergoes the same indictment for its woolly-headed evasion of the religious issue in the world. Its burden is the same: that somehow Christian witness supersedes 'religion'; so one does not need to bother

about the religious alternatives to Christianity. But in some ways the charges against secularism are more severe than those which can be levelled at the unconscious fraud of Kraemerism. They are as follows.

3.9. Secularism pretends to be a presentation of the essential message of Christ. That message has to do with the possibility of an authentic freedom for man caught through the contagion of the man Jesus. The message also concerns the bankruptcy of religion: the liberation involved in the authentic freedom open to man is a liberation, among other things, from religion. Did not Jesus come to destroy religion? If he did come with this intention, where was it from? From the womb of his mother, the seed of his father? Then he was not sent: it was his own appraisal of his destiny that gave him the status of prophet. But what sort of prophet? Surely not, on this account, the kind that figures so largely in the pages of the Old Testament, for they were given to saying: 'Thus spake the Lord'. And that Lord was a God of worship, a God who was the recipient of religious offerings. On this account, provided by secularism, Jesus cannot have been quite a prophet of *this* sort. Well, there is some substance to this view. Jesus was a revolutionary, and fitted into none of the preceding categories. Yet he spoke in synagogues, and he used the crucial term 'Abba'. What more personal expression for the divine Being could be used? The hero of secularism did not speak in secularist terms. And if the idea is that we should be rid of religion, why should we single out for our hero of authentic freedom a person who turned out to be the founder of one of the great religions of the world? The secularist position is incoherent as an exposition of the Gospel. But still it might hit back, and as follows.

3.10. It might be argued on behalf of secularism that Christianity has always had the potentiality of being the deepest form of humanism, for it combines the symbolism of the Cross with the idea of the worth of the human personality. It combines the call to suffering necessary for the betterment of mankind with the love which attends to the wants and needs of man. It is more than a superficial utilitarianism, for it meets man in the depths of his concerns for freedom and his apprehension of the death which hedges him about. Thus by an historical evolution Christianity must today express itself secularly. In doing so it realizes its destiny. This is one line of

secularist reply. But such a reply does not do much more than combine John Stuart Mill and Heidegger. This is not necessarily an absurdity (though Mill is more my own hero among the humanists); but it does not seem to have much connection with the Christian tradition. The very people that the humanists and some of the Existentialists wish to fight against are the proponents of the Gospel. Are the humanists not better at presenting humanism than the Christians? Can they not be relied upon to see more clearly the need of a deeper humanism than that which the Christian secularists criticize? But in any event there is an underlying assumption behind this reply of Christian secularism: it is that somehow man has come of age, so that religious belief as such is doomed. The future of mankind lies with humanism.

3.11. This assumption is typically Western European and therefore pervaded by the typical cultural tribalism of the West. It extrapolates from the intellectual empiricism of the West to the condition of mankind as a whole. There is little substance, however, in such an extrapolation, as we have already argued (1.4). There is little substance, because the great majority of men hold quite a different kind of view of the world from that of the contemporary empiricist. There is little substance, because the presupposition is that there is somehow a necessary conflict between science and technology on the one hand and religion on the other. There is little substance in the assumption, because it is not sensitive to the connection between the intellectual side of faith and the other dimensions of religion. The tribalistic extrapolation towards an hygienic and secularist future may be one of the great contemporary illusions.

3.12. But it is open to the Christian secularist to change his tack and offer a rather different reply (one which is in line with some of the thinking of Bonhoeffer). The new reply is this: it is not so much that the Christian Gospel is against God and prayer; what it is genuinely against is the inherent superstition of human religion. This superstition can occur at the intellectual level by erecting God into a hypothesis to explain the world or to explain particular features of the world (but the advance of science has shown the superfluousness of the God-hypothesis). The superstition can occur at the moral level by postulating God as a guarantor of ethical values to which

we should already be committed, irrespectively of the guarantee of God (anyone who does good because of fear of God is not pleasing the very God he superstitiously worships). The superstition can occur at the level of religious experience and prayer in the desire to evade our difficulties, problems, poverties and perplexities by praying that God should remove them (but the rain falls, after all, as the Gospel indicates, upon both the just and the unjust). The superstition can manifest itself in the screening of the world by a whole apparatus of hymns, incense, candles, rites, irrelevancies. Thus man's coming of age consists in the final abandonment of the superstitious elements that are so frequently interwoven with human religion. But secretly there is a God. Secretly we sacrifice ourselves on his behalf. Secretly we worship him with true praise and true loyalty.

3.13. This alternative reply of the secularist is a more reasonable one, at least in the sense that it is consistent with the Christian tradition which he claims to be expounding. But it remains highly dogmatic, for it simply assumes the God of faith, to whom one can speak in the secret recesses of one's life. Now it may be that faith implies a kind of dogmatism. It needs to start from a given point. What is objectionable about the dogmatism of this secretly theistic secularism is that it makes use of the heart of religion while professing to be against religion. It uses 'religion' in a loaded sense, to refer to superstition, and to refer to the wrong kind of dependence upon God. But it is well known that religion contains superstitious elements (though we should sometimes be rather clearer about what the criteria of superstition are: there is a parable about a mote and a beam). It is no new thing to attack the wrong sort of religion. But in so far as this alternative reply of the secularist relies on the hiddenness of God's presence and the possibility of the inner life of prayer, it is making use of the very element of bhakti which we have seen to be central to one form of the religious life. Though superficially opposed to religion, this secularism is deeply religious. But, it might be objected, what kind of criticism is this? Is this not a sort of praise? From the religious point of view doubtless it is. But the criticism lies in the apparently fraudulent character of this secularist alternative – while cleaving to religion it claims to be secular. While making use of bhakti it yet claims to transcend religion and

therefore religions. While bathing in the light of the experiential dimension of religion, it pretends to evade the real challenge presented by the universality (in that special sense delineated earlier – 2.96) of religious experience. It addresses itself to the condition of some Western men, at the expense of neglecting the condition of other great traditions. Thus this secularist alternative does not help in the dialectical interplay between faiths.

3.14. But, it may be answered, this secularist alternative is only a way of pleading for the purification of faith, for the transcending of the outer forms that so often turn religious practice into superstition. If this is what the alternative amounts to, that is good. Other religions than Christianity have striven thus to transcend and purify their heritage. One could, in this connection, add that it is not difficult to construct a 'secularist' version of Hinduism or of Buddhism. Indeed, one can find something of this in the writings of Swami Vivekananda. Such a 'secularist' Hinduism would set its face against the superstitious elements in the multitudinous cults which empirical Hinduism embraces. It would appeal to Shankara in defence of the proposition that true realization takes one beyond all externals, beyond the cults, beyond the theories. It would draw a distinction between the eternal Truth and the manifestations of empirical religion. It would claim to finish with religiosity by transcending it. It would adequately parallel the Christian version of secularism. The same operation is equally easy to conduct in relation to Barthianism. True Buddhism lies beyond the constructions placed upon it so often in the tradition: one must distinguish between the dhamma and the theories and cultural prejudices of men. Did not the Buddha himself warn us against theories (1.60)? Empirical Buddhism must stand under the judgment of the experiential Truth, which is not enshrined in propositions, but is what the fallible propositions try to point to.

3.15. To say all this is not to take the Barthian position lightly. It is rather to show that the Barthian type of critique of Christianity from within could in principle be mirrored in other faiths. By saying 'The Truth transcends empirical religion' one is not exempting oneself from the challenge of other empirical religions, precisely because within those religions there is the possibility of that self-same transcendence, that self-same critique of faith from the standpoint of Truth.

3.16. It may therefore be concluded that a secret fraudulence runs through the whole contemporary attempt to distinguish between the Gospel and religion, and thus to produce a new evangelicalism or a new secularism which evades the essential challenge of a religiously and ideologically plural world. Indeed, the above arguments could, with some adaptations, be employed to show that Christian secularism can have little to say to non-religious ideologies, such as Marxism. Nevertheless, it may be thought that the strictures on secularism are unduly harsh, since at least this movement represents an attempt to come to terms with what it conceives to be the contemporary world. At least it has roots in liberalism, which is perhaps but a modern version of the quest for a natural theology. And, after all, my prognostications about the future shape of men's thinking may just be false: it could be that a secular empiricism is the way in which the spread of science and technology will force educated men to think. There may be justice in the secularist diagnosis.

3.17. But if there were justice in the diagnosis it would be because there was an incompatibility between the religious view of the world and that of science and technology. It would be because scientific speculation rendered religious doctrines obsolete, and because the fruits of technology rendered religious experience and ritual empty and meaningless. There is no special call to think this: for a proper notion of divine transcendence shows that there is no incompatibility between science and doctrine, and a proper evaluation of ritual, etc., shows that the latter cannot constitute (save superstitiously) a rival to technology. The fabric of faith is not geared to magic. It is true that religion has often been tied in with conservatism and ignorance, for it has been deeply entrenched in society, and society has often been conservative and ignorant. This explains why a revolt against traditionalism can also take the form of a revolt against religion (frequently a healthy expression). But all this does not add up to an inevitable revolution in which the religious aspect of human existence will disappear. On the contrary, the poetry and grace of faith have a much more meaningful place amid the glitter of machines.

3.18. The position fairly recently adopted by the Bishop of Woolwich, in his widely printed *Honest to God* and in *The New*

Reformation? has powerful elements of secularism, though he cannot be classed with the rather clear atheism of Paul van Buren. Though Robinson makes use of the secularist protest, he also makes use of the theology of Tillich, with its concept of the Ground of being. This concept corresponds roughly to that of a Transcendent Being, though Tillich is ever on his guard against treating God as an entity, hence his dislike of such phraseology as I have just now used. (Though in the last of his works published before his death, he made it clear that his real objection to treating God as an entity was that this implied existence in space and time: he should therefore have no worry about the concept of a Transcendent Being, because the notion of transcendence implies – 3.46 – non-spatiality, etc). One of the most prominent features of Woolwich's work is his attack upon the anthropomorphism which he considers to be so widespread among the Christian faithful – an anthropomorphism which conceives God as 'up there' and as 'descending to earth' (as if by spaceship?) and so forth. He is also concerned to attack that sophisticated offshoot of anthropomorphism, the 'God of the gaps', invoked to explain what is scientifically up till now inexplicable.

3.19. If there is a lot of anthropomorphism among theists, both Christian and non-Christian, this may be because of the lack of proper religious education. But appearances can be deceptive, for the mythological dimension of religion lends itself to ambiguous interpretation. The story of Adam and Eve, for example, has traditionally been a way of expressing something about the human condition in general; but equally it has been taken in a sort of a way as an historical incident. It has universal application, but has a particular reference. This is symptomatic of the *undifferentiated* character of typical myths. He who thinks mythologically does not make the same differentiations between history and symbolism, between chronicle and psychology, between experience and doctrine, as occur in sophisticated modern thought. Thus Adam and Eve existed in the undifferentiated imagery of the Garden of Eden (perhaps towards the Persian Gulf, perhaps not properly on earth as we know it at all: hovering between geography and the world where the invisible interpenetrates with the visible). Thus the 'anthropomorphism' of much of the language of worship does not strictly correspond, even and perhaps

especially among the unsophisticated users of that language, to a literal anthropomorphism.

3.20. There is a scandalous and amusing story which comes out of Poland and which illustrates this point. The story is as two-edged as is the position of Poland herself. It recounts how Gagarin, after his famous exploit in space, was given a parade in the Red Square and thereafter a reception at the Kremlin. During the latter Khrushchev drew him on one side and said: 'Comrade Gagarin, when you were up there was it just empty space or was He there?' Gagarin replied: 'I am sorry to have to tell you this, Comrade Krushchev, but He was'. 'I thought He might be', answered Krushchev, 'but this must remain an inner party secret, you understand'. Later Gagarin went on his world tour, and while in Rome was given a reception in the Vatican. During this, the Pope drew him on one side and said: 'Signor Gagarin, when you were up there, was it just empty space or was He there?' Gagarin was about to reply 'He was', when he remembered that it was an inner party secret. 'I am sorry to have to tell you this,' he answered, 'But He wasn't'. 'Ah,' said the Pope. 'I thought He might not be; but shall we keep it to ourselves?'

3.21. Are religious people upset by such a story? Not in my experience, for they do not *really* believe that God is up there in the literal sense, though they make use of the mythology of heaven. The mythology presents a picture, but the effect of the picture is not destroyed by literal disproof of its face-value veracity. If the mythological symbolism were taken literally the above story would simply be blasphemous to the pious. (Humour of this sort, incidentally, can often make some shrewd points in bringing out the false nature of literalism, as in those innumerable tales about St Peter at the heavenly gates). In brief, the appearance of anthropomorphism in religion may belie the real sentiments which it expresses. It may therefore be that the Bishop of Woolwich was underrating the faithful. Nevertheless, anthropomorphism is liable to increase at a time when the myths are fading, for then they come to be taken literally by some and totally ignored by others. It is notable that modern Christianity has, in reaction to the Problem of Revelation (3.2), thrown up a Biblicism which is highly anthropomorphic, most of all in its attitude to morals, where God's concerns about proprieties of human behaviour are cited with

great and detailed confidence. (Such Biblical literalism can sometimes be used with confidence to justify racialism, and more nobly and significantly it can be used to attack it.)

3.22. The Bishop of Woolwich's concern to provide a corrective both for literalism and for the deistic view of a 'God of the gaps' can be fulfilled by an analysis of the concept of transcendence and by a doctrine which brings out the continuous creativity of God. The latter doctrine helps to overcome the feeling that sometimes afflicts us that God's activity is fitful and irregular. The reason behind this feeling is partly that God manifests himself revelatorily here and there perspicuously to the faithful and to the recipients of revelation; but does not manifest himself thus everywhere. Religious experience and historical events revealing the divine are relatively sparse in the multitude of perceptions and events making up the fabric of our world. Another reason is that God tends to become private intellectual property: so that it seems shameful that my startling catalogue of the things which I understand by appeal to the idea of God's intervention in the world should be reduced by the progress of science. I ferret out more gaps for my private God to fill. But in any event a properly articulated theism helps to overcome the deistic illusion, and to restore to our consciousness the continuous sense of the creative presence of God in the world. It will be argued that the theism of Ramanuja not only fulfils the requirement of the 'natural theology of religious experience' outlined in the last chapter but also provides a corrective to the deism and anthropomorphism that constitute a major part of the Bishop of Woolwich's concern.

3.23. At first sight, it might seem that the theism of Madhva provided a better background to the elaboration of the Gospel in Indian terms than that of Ramanuja. If theism implies a dualism between worshipper and Object of worship, then the rigorously dualistic metaphysics of Madhva might seem more theistic than the qualified non-dualism of Ramanuja. This initial impression turns out to be mistaken, as we shall see. To see this, though, it is necessary to explore in a little more detail Madhva's system.

3.24. Madhva's metaphysics have both a negative and a positive side. Negatively, his system represented, as did Ramanuja's, a reaction against the non-dualism of Shankara.

His concern to express the distinction between the individual and God, implicit in the experience and logic of bhakti (2.61), led him to reject non-dualism. It also led him to reject the idea of two levels of truth in religion and elsewhere – this rejection being buttressed by commonsensical philosophical arguments about the concept of truth. Admittedly Madhva was in a certain embarrassment about the 'That art thou', though he could solve this problem by a clever, perhaps too clever, piece of exegesis.

3.25. More positively, Madhva held a general theory reminiscent in some respects of Leibniz's. According to this, each individual entity, and in particular souls, possessed certain intrinsic and idiosyncratic characteristics. Thus no one soul is fully like any other. Given that Madhva operated with the traditional Indian concept of karma, it was an easy inference that the destiny of each soul is intrinsic to itself. Moreover, this destiny was worked out as a consequence of the basic characteristics of the individual. Thus although the world is dependent upon God, and therefore karma is dependent upon God, God's action in apportioning the destiny of individuals flows from an appraisal of the inner nature of those individuals. There is no injustice in such a world, since everything that happens to me is a consequence of my nature, even though the events which occur are dependent upon God.

3.26. The variety of destinies implicit in this scheme led Madhva to a hierarchical view of both liberation and damnation. There are various grades of release; likewise there are grades of punishment – some individuals being destined to eternal damnation, a doctrine unique in the Indian tradition and, as we saw (1.47), one of the reasons why some have seen a Christian influence on Madhva's thought. But Madhva does not succeed completely in reconciling his idiosyncratic monadism with the doctrines of reward and punishment in the hereafter. There are innumerable souls, but numerable ends to their careers. Madhva's hierarchical thinking, incidentally, was not confined to the destinies of human souls: he had a whole hierarchical arrangement of gods (below the Lord, of course). This may reflect a Jain influence upon him, since this is characteristic too of the (non-theistic) Jaina cosmology.

3.27. Madhva's monadism represents not merely a dualism or distinction between the soul and God but between every soul and every other. His is a pluralistic conception of the spiritual world:

it is also a pluralistic conception of the material world, for every substance is different from every other, and every material substance is distinct from every soul. There is thus a fivefold distinction between entities: between God and soul; between God and thing; between thing and thing; between soul and soul; between soul and thing. Since every entity seems to be autonomous, according to this doctrine, something is needed to weld the whole into a viable unity (too radical and independent an autonomy would surely lead to chaos). This something is provided by God's power. It is God that coordinates the activities of souls, etc. This aspect of Madhva's doctrine involves, in theory, a modification of the 'internality' of destinies; but is in line with the common theistic argument in the Indian tradition that that which consists of multiple parts presupposes an Arranger. Thus, for Madhva, the things and souls constituting the world are dependent (*paratantra*) upon the Lord, but the Lord is independent of them (*aparatantra*).

3.28. It should of course be remembered in all this that the Indian doctrine of creation differs from that of the Bible. For the Bible (at least as it has been interpreted in Christian doctrine) the world is created *ex nihilo*. There is no pre-existent substance with which God has to work: he is not limited by the intractability of his material. Everything is in accord with his fiat and his will. It has been common too to assume that this doctrine of creation implies that the world came into existence a finite time ago, some having estimated with peculiar implausibility (an implausibility, however, which says something about the spirit of ancient Jewish cosmology) that it came into existence in 4004 BC. Nothing like this is to be detected in the Indian tradition. Traditional Indian cosmology has typically assumed a pulsating cosmos – that is, a cosmos which periodically collapses into chaos and emerges therefrom at the beginning of the next cycle. Admittedly the Mimamsa did not accept this typical view: but for a special reason. Since the Mimamsa is essentially atheistic (oddly so, since it is the school of the exegesis of the Veda *par excellence*: but one must remember that it concerned itself with sacrificial ritual, which could be treated autonomously as efficacious without reference to God or gods or even to Brahman conceived as Ultimate Reality), but since also the Mimamsa relies utterly upon the Veda for its authentication, it became necessary to

hold that the Veda is eternal. If the Veda were not eternal, then it would be caused. If it were caused it would be (in view of its rational character) the product of a person. If it were the product of a person it would owe its authority to that person. If it owed authority to a person it would not have intrinsic authority. Therefore it cannot be other than eternal. But if it is eternal one cannot believe in the periods of chaos in the history of the cosmos, for in such a period of chaos the Veda would disappear and lose its identity. Since, therefore the Veda is eternal, the cosmology of the pulsating universe must be rejected. But this Mimamsa view was exceptional, and explicable as above. For other systems the universe pulsates.

3.29. A pulsating universe is open to two interpretations. It can be regarded as containing within itself an inner dialectic, explaining its periodic collapses and restorations. Such is the view of the non-theistic systems. As we saw, Samkhya has delineated a dynamism within the cosmos to explain its evolution out of chaos, etc. (1.31). Alternatively, the re-emergence has to be explained in terms of a divine Being, either by supposing the atoms (or whatever else may be the stuff of the cosmos) require co-ordination and arrangement by the Supreme Being, or by supposing that the cosmos is emanated out of the fabric of Brahman and periodically reabsorbed therein.

3.30. For Madhva, then, the universe is everlasting. It makes nonsense of his monadism to think of Brahman's being given a *carte blanche* in the periodic act of creation. The Supreme Being refashions the world in accordance with its multiple destiny. In this respect the doctrine of the dependence of the world (and the independence of the Lord) represents a less radical Creationism than is found in, say, Christian theism. The world, to put the matter crudely, has a *qualified* dependence upon God.

3.31. The matter could be put in another way in terms of the general metaphysics proposed by Madhva. The extent to which each individual is governed by an internal, intrinsic destiny is the extent to which he remains independent of God. The very dualism of Madhva expresses, in its ontology, a detachment between the world and God. On the other hand, it is intended to express the sense of Otherness. But this sense of Otherness is bought at the expense of a relatively great autonomy of the world of souls and things. The dualism moves towards theism;

the monadism towards deism. There is, then, reason to suppose that Madhva in the Indian tradition does not provide the most radical and conclusive form of theism. This by itself would not be a criticism were it not for the fact that we have argued for theism (or at least a theism hospitable to dhyāna) as being the reasonable and sensitive outcome of the natural theology of religious experience. Given this conclusion of the dialectic between bhakti and dhyāna, we must continue our search in the Indian tradition for an expression of the theology in question.

3.32. The fact, too, that Madhva feels called upon to do a certain violence to the 'That art thou' and therefore by implication to a crucial aspect of the Upanishadic tradition, so venerated in the Vedantic traditions, means that his theology can hardly claim a universal respect within Hinduism. It is perhaps unwise to insist on this overmuch, for the Hindu tradition is plural. But one of the main reasons for a natural theology in the Indian key is that this connects up with the mainstream of Indian tradition. It can scarcely be said that Madhva's exegesis commands too much confidence in this respect. On the other hand, the qualified non-dualism of Ramanuja is at least close to the spirit of the *Brahmasūtras*: and it could turn out to be quite as just an interpretation of them – to put the point mildly – as that of Shankara. It is true that Ramanuja emphasizes a type of bhakti hardly to be found in the Upanishads themselves; but it is equally true (as Ramanuja himself pointed out) that Shankara relegates the requirements of Vedic religion (in fact, relegates Hindu orthodoxy) to the 'lower level' which is transcended in the non-dual experience of Brahman.

3.33. At first sight, Ramanuja's qualified non-dualism, despite its basis in the religion of bhakti (as well as that of dhyāna) seems to underplay the differences between God and the world and God and the soul which, as we have seen, is characteristic of the phenomenology of the religion of worship. The two main ways in which Ramanuja explains the relation between Brahman and the world are these. First, the relation can be conceived as like that of the soul to the body. Second, it can be conceived as that between substance and attribute. These ways of presenting the dependence of the world upon God have attracted to Ramanuja the charge of pantheism. It is easy for the Western Christian, who is conditioned to think

of pantheism as dreadful heresy, to detect its signs even where it does not exist. And as we shall argue, Ramanuja's qualified non-dualism is not only not objectionable from the standpoint of theism (Christian or otherwise) but is an extraordinarily good expression of the central insights of theism.

3.34. The more significant of the two ways of presenting the relation between the world and God is the first. It is also the more misleading, from the standpoint of those who adopt a common view of the mind-body (or soul-body) relationship – namely that mind and body are (so to say) just two ways of looking at the same thing. Such an 'identity' theory of mind and body would, if transferred to the analysis offered by Ramanuja, imply a Spinozistic account of reality. But Ramanuja used the two concepts in a special way. In particular, he used 'body' to mean an organic body (such as the human body). He did not use it in that neutral sense which is liable to assimilate the human body to material objects, and thus pave the way for a dualism between the physical (i.e. what can be investigated by classical physics) and the spiritual or mental – a form of dualism obvious in the Western tradition. But he also defined 'body' in a somewhat eccentric way (perhaps) – to mean that which is instrumental to the soul. A servant may be instrumental to his master, but he is, so to speak, a transferrable instrument; while there is a unique one-one relationship between the body as instrument and the soul, at any given time (Ramanuja was not wishing to deny the doctrine of reincarnation). Still, there are many respects in which the organic body is not in fact instrumental to its soul. My welfare demands that I should not get indigestion; but I get it, even despite my intentions. I may be able to control my arm, to a high degree, but I cannot manipulate my liver. And so on. The difference between the ordinary soul-body relationship and the God-world relationship is that the world, unlike the body, is totally instrumental to its soul, namely God. It is in the total control of God. Thus Ramanuja's analogy brings out the purposiveness and instrumentality of the created world. At the same time, since Ramanuja held that soul and body are inseparable (i.e. that a soul requires embodiment, even if the embodiment may change, and conversely that an organic body requires a soul), there is an internal relationship between God and the world.

3.35. This latter doctrine might seem to undermine the real dependence of the world upon God which is characteristic, one would think, of theism. But this appearance is illusory. Ramanuja presupposed the everlastingness of the world in its successive periods of formation and decay. He was not therefore disposed to think of the possibility of one sort of 'disembodied God', namely a God who precedes the existence of the world. Given the everlastingness of the world, he expressed very strongly the dependence of that everlasting world upon the divine Being, because he conceived the world as totally instrumental to the purposes of God. In brief, any feature of the world that you might care to mention corresponded completely to the intentions of God. This is so much as to say that God is Creator of every bit of the world.

3.36. It could be objected to this last conclusion that the world might totally correspond to the purposes of God without actually having been created by him. Might it not be by a kind of happy coincidence that God found his will reflected everywhere with absolute fidelity? But Ramanuja's conception of the body-soul relationship is not one of a happily pre-established harmony. If the body is instrumental to the soul, it is because of the soul's influence upon the body. Thus the total instrumentality of the world to God's purposes amounts to a total causal dependence. And what more can the doctrine of creation offer?

3.37. We are sometimes misled in this matter because it is so common in the West to think of creation as having occurred in time. It is common to think of its having occurred a finite time ago (3.28). The reasons for thinking in this way are largely scriptural: this cosmology derives from a literal reading of Genesis. Thus Aquinas was able to say that though the arguments of natural theology to establish the existence of a First Cause and so on were compatible with the everlastingness of the world, the finitude of the world can be derived from revelation. (Here we see in practice the contrast between natural and revealed theology). But there are very few who would base a cosmology upon Genesis. Genesis scarcely pretends to be an astronomical work. How could it so pretend, in the absence of scientific astronomy? It is a work belonging to the undifferentiated (3.19) mythological thinking of mankind. As such, it is not a good source book for calculations of the backward dura-

tion of the cosmos. It is, however, unfortunately typical of that sophisticated unsophistication which is so often apparent in theologians that Genesis has been taken as a text for the doctrine of the temporal finitude of the cosmos. Once we abandon this prejudice, we may with equanimity think of the real possibility of the everlastingness of the cosmos. The matter remains unresolved in modern astronomical speculations. But what difference does it make to think of the cosmos as infinite in time? It makes no difference as far as theism is concerned. The world could be as totally dependent on God under the one circumstance as under the other. Let us illustrate this with an example: suppose there were an everlasting juggler, everlastingly keeping three or four balls in the air. The airborne balls would have been thus from eternity; but they would still remain dependent on the action of the juggler. Still (it might be replied) the juggler does not make the balls — they are somehow 'given' to him. But the doctrine of theism is that of toal dependence, not partial. This is where the divine juggler is a super-juggler. Instead of just some characteristics and relations (e.g. the height of the balls from the ground) being dependent on the juggler, all are. The 'total dependence' theory is no more difficult than that of creation *ex nihilo* and boils down to the same idea. Thus the notion that the world is totally created by God is equivalent to the notion that it is totally instrumental to his purposes. Ramanuja's theism, therefore, well expresses the doctrine of creation and is, moreover, explicitly compatible with the everlastingness of the cosmos.

3.38. So far the system of Ramanuja expresses a stronger dependence-relation than that of Madhva, and in so far as the latter is a necessary element in theism, we may regard qualified non-dualism as (paradoxically) a stronger form of theism. But there is a further aspect of Ramanuja's analogy of the world-God relationship which is relevant to the problem posed by deistic anthropomorphism. It is easy, as we have noted, to slip into the way of thinking that God is normally absent from the world, but occasionally intervenes. This anthropomorphic deism can be encouraged by the very distinction between the world and God so vital to the structure of theism: for then the world can be conceived as an independent, autonomous entity which goes on according to its own laws, except at such times as God comes in to adjust the mechanism.

3.39. Now it is undeniable that natural events do, in general, conform to laws. The regularities of the cosmos are not merely obvious, but a condition of its being recognizable at all by rational beings – for rationality would become impossible in a completely chaotic environment (indeed would a 'completely chaotic environment' really constitute an environment at all?). The regularity of the world is not at issue: what *is* at issue is its autonomy from God. From the theistic point of view, the regular world is a continuous expression of God's creative activity. If the world is at any time dependent on God it is at all times so dependent: and if anywhere, then everywhere. Now Ramanuja's system gives a good expression of this aspect of the matter, and thus serves as a cure for the anthropomorphic deism against which the Bishop of Woolwich, among others, has been campaigning.

3.40. One can see this by presenting Ramanuja's theism in a rather different light from that in which so far in this book it has been described. The accent so far has been upon the distinction between God and the world as elaborated through the soul-body analogy. This is the 'qualifiedness' of Ramanuja's non-dualism. But we can, too, look at his theism under its non-dualistic aspect. Here we see the world and God as a single system. The world stands to God as attributes to substance.

3.41. Now it may be that the language of substance (dravya), etc., is rather questionable. I do not wish here to get entangled in philosophical disputes on this issue. Let me rather attempt to present a version of Ramanuja's theism which admittedly bowdlerises it a bit, but does, I hope, bring out an important way of looking at the God-world relationship. One can regard reality as composed of two entities, God and the cosmos, operating as a single system. The cosmos, according to the doctrine of total instrumentality, is simply an expression of God's will. Looked at from this point of view it is misleading to think of the world and then of God as something added extraneously to the world. Though this is a natural perspective for those born in finitude, it is a more proper theistic attitude to see reality as initially a dynamic unity, with the world as the material expression of the divine Being underlying it. There is then an organic relationship between God and the world. This notion is a cure for anthropomorphic deism.

3.42. It also enables us to see the so-called 'interventions' of

God in a way different from the suggestion implicit in the very term 'interventions'. It is not as though particular divine self-manifestations are irruptions into a previously fixed order. Even if we allow that miracles occur, i.e. that there are miraculous exceptions to laws of nature, this in no way indicates that there has been a breach in the fabric of the world. For the fabric of the world is just the continuing expression of God's dynamic activity. If God chooses to act in a 'disorderly' way, this merely signifies that the fabric has a different pattern from what we might have expected. Let us use an analogy. Supposing I am practising tennis shots against a wall, I may go on for a long time repeating the self-same pattern: the ball hits the wall, it bounces back, it is hit back to the same spot on the wall, it bounces back . . . and so on. But if I suddenly hit the ball upwards, allow it to come down and bounce and then resume the former pattern, this is no more than unexpected. It is not a breach in the fabric of my practice: it just is a feature of that fabric. Thus so-called divine interventions are divine variegations of the typical pattern. It is by trying to treat the world as self-contained and then adding a God on that one gets the feeling of anthropomorphic deism: but if one begins from the assumption of a single dynamic system, then such a deistic attitude is banished. This is another reason why Ramanuja's system is a stronger expression of theism than Madhva's.

3.43. The dynamic unity implicit in this theism helps to assimilate Ramanuja's thought to that of the Upanishads, though his description of God is more personalistic than many Upanishadic passages. This is partly because of the context of the concept 'Brahman' in sacrificial ritualism, as contrasted with the fervent bhakti of Ramanuja's own faith. But the apparent pantheism or monism of the Upanishads is really but an expression of the dynamic unity between Brahman as spirit and the material world as called forth creatively by the spirit. We can begin to see this by an analysis of the concept of transcendence: it will be argued that the difference between transcendence and immanence is essentially a merely pictorial one – the difference of feel induced by the respective ideas of 'beyondness' and 'withinness' (*trans-* and *im-*).

3.44. An analysis of transcendence also will have the merit of exposing the fallacy of supposing that religious doctrines are

intrinsically in conflict with science. For a proper notion of transcendence is fatal to anthropomorphism: and it is only anthropomorphism (the idea of a localizable God, etc.) that is ruled out by a scientific attitude. Thus do modern knowledge and true religion conspire.

3.45. Let us begin with the image of 'beyondness' contained in the idea of transcendence. What beyondness is this? Much will depend on the object that we conceive the verb 'to transcend' to be taking. But since we are here principally concerned with the God-cosmos relationship, it is natural to discuss that notion of 'beyond' where we say that God is beyond the world or the cosmos. But there is a powerful air of paradox about this way of speaking. To say that God is 'beyond' is to suggest that he is a spatial being. And yet on the other hand the realm of space is precisely the cosmos 'beyond' which God is said to be. Naturally, however, we are not using 'beyond' in a literal sense. What the language of beyondness here seems to mean is that God is other than the spatio-temporal cosmos, and that by consequence he is non-spatial.

3.46. To say that God is non-spatial is so much as to say that the subject 'God' does not take spatial predicates. It is an absurdity to think of God as a thousand feet long or as more or less than a thousand feet long. Likewise it is absurd to think of him as a million miles, or one mile, from here. Thus one element in the idea of transcendence is God's non-spatiality. But this by itself is clearly not an adequate description of what beyondness means. For there are other subjects, like 'the number two', which do not take spatial predicates; and we do not say about them (unless we are in a rigorously platonizing mood) that they are beyond the world or beyond the cosmos. Though non-spatiality may be one element in the idea of transcendence it is not the only one.

3.47. We have indeed already mentioned another element (3.45): that God and the cosmos are 'other' from one another, i.e. they are distinguishable entities. Thus God and the cosmos are not identical (which would simply amount to a form of materialism). But in addition to this element of distinctness, we must recognize the ambience of the concept of beyondness. God's being 'beyond' is typically associated with the whole theistic picture, which includes the idea of creativity. God's being 'beyond' or 'behind' the world is suggestive of the

dependence, the continuous and ubiquitous dependence, of the cosmos upon his creative activity. Thus associated with the elements of non-spatiality and distinctness is that of continuous creativity. This implies, incidentally, a sense which can be given to the omnipresence of God. Though superficially the latter idea seems to conflict with the element of non-spatiality, it can be taken rather to signify the causal or creative presence of God in everything. If things are everywhere dependent on God, then his hand, so to say, is hidden behind them.

3.48. This brings us to another aspect of the picture presented by 'beyondness' and 'behindness' – the concealment of God by his handiwork. This connects up with the ritual and experiential dimensions of theism: the holy God is a *mysterium*. He is 'hidden' from profane gaze. No man shall see God and live. This holy concealment is part of the whole picture of the sacred, invisible reality which permeates the visible. But total concealment can never be part of the attitude of actual religion, for as was argued earlier (2.27 et seq.), God is always conceived as revealing himself, either in experience or in historico-mythological acts. The picture behind 'revelation' is of course the image of the removal of the veil which normally conceals the Holy Being. Thus the concealment aspect of 'beyondness' has to be complemented by the revelatory aspect. It would be wrong to treat transcendence in independence from the way in which the concept is embedded in religious faith. Thus so far we may delineate the feel of transcendence by pointing to the elements of non-spatiality, distinctness, continuous creativity, concealment and (complementing it) self-manifestation. It remains to see whether these elements are self-consistent. For it could easily be thought that the elements of creativity and non-spatiality are contradictory (how can what is not in space cause events in space?); and there is ground for thinking that creativity and self-manifestation are in conflict (for if the former implies omnipresence and self-manifestation implies special presence, there is the problem of how the divine can be everywhere equally and yet in some places more than others).

3.49. The problem of non-spatial causation can be illuminated by reference to the analogy of the person employed in Ramanuja's system. The comparison of the God-world relationship to the soul-body relationship is suggestive. For we are all aware, in our own immediate experience, of spatial events

which have as part of their explanation references to non-spatial states or occurrences. For example, my thought that it would be nice to watch the cricket tomorrow can easily, once tomorrow comes, enter into a biographical account of why I came to watch the cricket. But it is absurd to predicate spatial expressions of my present cogitations upon the attractions of tomorrow's cricket. My cogitations are not an inch long, or three centimetres from my right ear. It may be noted that I have here been careful to use the terms 'account' and 'explanation'. There are notorious difficulties in treating mental occurrences as causes of physical ones (there are also notorious difficulties in understanding precisely the contrast between mental and physical). But the example is sufficient to show that reference to what is non-spatial can enter into an explanation of the way spatially-describable things are. My cogitations are referred to; and they help to explain the spatial fact that my legs are slowly propelling me round the boundary. Thus in principle there need be no contradiction between the elements of non-spatiality and creativity.

3.50. We now turn to the problem of omnipresence and special self-manifestation. How can it be that God is more manifest in one place than in others, when he is secretly present everywhere? It could be that we are normally incapable of perceiving God, but on certain occasions break through the veil of our insensitivity. But this cannot be the whole account, given the spirit of theism. For the latter implies that the gracious knowledge of God is given by grace. It is not that we through our own efforts cut through the veil of our insensitivity, but that God cuts through it, on occasion at least. Moreover, our insensitivity can hardly explain or be very relevant to the fact that (from the Christian point of view) God is specially present in certain concrete historical events. For his special presence there is not a matter of epistemology (of his being there more luminously to human gaze than elsewhere), but of ontology. He is specially active there: he is identified with the man Jesus in a special way. Thus the insensitivity explanation will not cover everything. How then is it that God though active everywhere is more active in some places than others? Various solutions of the problem, no doubt, are possible, but the concept of *engagement* is at least one which offers the promise of fruitful application. It can be illustrated by an analogy.

3.51. Suppose I am busy in my garden and my boy wants me to play cricket with him. I leave off digging and turn to bowling. Bowling, apart actually from being less effort engages me more: I express my real interests and character more in the bowling than in the digging. Thus of two activities, one can express more engagement than the other. It therefore does not seem inconsistent to hold that God is more engaged in some of his activities than others. They have, so to say, a different quality about them. There thus seems no incompatibility between omnipresence and particular revelation. In general, we may hazard the thesis that the above account of the nature and context of the concept of transcendence is free from contradiction.

3.52. We may now ask: And how does this 'beyondness' differ from 'withinness'? Is there a real difference between transcendence and immanence? The Upanishads, for instance, often make use of the idea of Brahman as within things – subtly, like the razor in the razor case. But this withinness is not literal. One does not suppose that by drilling a hole in the table one will find Brahman, any more than one supposes that by taking a spaceship one will reach heaven. If, then, withinness represents an analogy, and is not literal, one of its elements is literal non-spatiality. But more, the image brings out the sense of the concealment of the Holy Power, though that Holy Power can manifest itself in experience (for example, in the depths of the self) and in the operations of sacrifice. Again, the Upanishadic 'withinness' occurs in the context of the whole doctrine of the dependence of the visible on the Holy Power, Brahman. This Power is creative, omnipresently. Moreover, it is distinguishable from the manifest world, for it was out of its own substance that it brought the world into being, and we can therefore conceive the independent existence of Brahman, before the evolution of the visible cosmos. Thus all the elements which we detected in and around the concept of transcendence can be mirrored in the notion of withinness. Transcendence and immanence boil down to the same idea.

3.53. This point is sometimes concealed from us because of two facts. The first is that in speaking of God or Brahman as within all things we are implicitly presupposing the existence of the cosmos. In thinking of God as transcending the cosmos we are psychologically readier to conceive God's existence independently of that of the cosmos. There is therefore a

stronger sense of the contingency of the world conveyed by the picture of 'beyondness'. But on the other hand, the picture of 'withinness' can suggest the core beneath the shifting and impermanent exterior. Secondly, the notion of immanence is sometimes used in a highly restricted sense, to refer to the divine activity within historical events and in religious experience. In this restricted sense 'immanence' stands for one of the elements which we detected in the context of the concept of transcendence, viz. that of self-manifestation or revelatory activity. If then transcendence and immanence are contrasted, what is being contrasted is the rest of the elements on the one hand and the element of self-manifestation on the other. This is a reasonable distinction, but in view of the ambiguity of the term 'immanence' it would be better to abandon its use in this highly restricted sense. We can then operate with the idea of special activity which manifests God. As for the alleged transcendence-immanence polarity where the latter concept is not being used in the highly restricted sense, this, as we have argued, rests upon an illusion. The two ideas are just two pictures delineating the same thing.

3.54. The preceding discussion suggests that it is not at all a simple matter to contrast theism and pantheism. What is sometimes dubbed pantheism turns out just to be a doctrine of the world which uses the image of withinness rather than that of withoutness or beyondness. Thus Ramanuja's theism does not constitute a departure from the 'pantheism' of the Upanishads. His closeness to Christian theism does not of itself mean a break with the Upanishadic doctrine of the Holy Power, Brahman. Admittedly Ramanuja stresses bhakti in a way which moves beyond the comparatively formal nature of Vedic sacrificialism. Thus there is undoubtedly a stronger emphasis on the personhood of the divine Being, and on his love for his creatures. But there is no essential break in doctrine, except in so far as the 'That art thou' points to a non-dualism between the soul and the Holy Power in the moment of contemplative union. This leads us to the question of the soul in Ramanuja. For hitherto we have been speaking of the God-world relationship, rather than the God-soul relationship.

3.55. Essentially Ramanuja's theism adopts the same analysis here as in the other case. The God-soul relation is another version of the soul-body relation. That is, the soul itself is treated

as intrinsically instrumental to the purposes of the Lord. This means that the operation of karma, which controls the destiny of the soul, is itself seen as an expression of the will of God. By consequence, salvation is dependent wholly upon God's activity. This is the basis for the cat-principle doctrine of grace found in some of Ramanuja's followers (2.35). But also, the soul is not simply controlled by the Lord: it is an expression of himself, just as the whole created world, in being instrumental to his purpose, is expressive of him. Thus the soul can be treated as a kind of offshoot of the divine substance, a spark emanated from his inner being, and bearing the marks of divinity. The nature of the soul corresponds to that of the Lord, but does not share in his omnipotence, etc.

3.56. Now admittedly one who stood in the Judaeo-Christian tradition might criticize the very concept of the soul: is not this a Greek and essentially unbiblical importation into Christianity? Does not the Old Testament look upon a person as an organic unity, rather than as split up into two components? Indeed, is not the Biblical conception close to that of contemporary philosophy and science? Such objections do not have as much substance as one might think. First, the concept of the soul has a long history both in Catholic and Eastern Orthodox thought. Second, it does not necessarily involve a splitting of the human being into two separate parts: for Christianity has made use of the Aristotelian concept of the soul, which certainly does not do this. Third, even if the Biblical conception was such-and-such it does not follow that it should be accepted uncritically. (There was a Biblical concept of witchcraft). Fourth, the mutual organic interplay and interdependence between soul and body is a central feature of Ramanuja's thinking. Still, despite all this we might find it preferable to use the concept of the person (as expounded by P. F. Strawson) than the old-fashioned terminology of body and soul. But even here, from the Christian point of view, we need to make sense of the kinship between God and man expressed in the idea that the latter is made in the divine image. If this is part of the heritage which we retain, it compels us to seek for some analogy between the person and God (even in the fallen state of humanity). This analogy is essentially making use of the principle used by Ramanuja, whose whole theology is the application of the analogy of the person to the God-world relationship.

3.57. The preceding analysis of transcendence in relation to the theology of Ramanuja indicates that the latter has a reasonable claim to be interpreting one central motif of Upanishadic thinking. If Ramanuja rejects the non-dualism between self and Brahman propounded by Shankara, this may perhaps be taken as an infidelity to the Upanishadic doctrine of 'That art thou'. But on the other hand, the stress which Shankara laid upon illusion, *māyā*, is far in excess of anything to be found in the Upanishads. Leading as it did to a double-decker theory of religious truth, it enabled him to reconcile Upanishadic passages of a more theistic nature with those expressing a radical non-dualism. In this way, he made sense of the Upanishads from an exegetical point of view. But it was not open to him in the thought-forms of his age to take a sceptical view of the monolithic nature of the scriptures. It was hardly open to him to look upon them as the work of possibly conflicting hands. He had to think of them (as indeed did Ramanuja) as exhibiting a consistent doctrine. The double-decker theory was admirable in allowing him freedom to stress one aspect of Upanishadic teaching rather than another, and to transcend the sacrificial religion of early Brahmanism. But if now we take a 'modern' view of the scriptures (corresponding to the critical evaluation of the Bible which has been one of the great glories of modern Christianity), then we can begin to recognize that the Upanishads are not quite a self-consistent whole.

3.58. What has happened is that Ramanuja has stressed one side of the Upanishadic teaching and Shankara another. It would perhaps be best to see both philosophers as engaged in a dialectic with the Vedic revelation. They both develop something, both out of their own experience and out of the scriptural materials to which they owed loyalty. They moved beyond the Upanishads, yet they both had some roots in the Upanishads. Their systems were a growth from a certain soil: they absorbed some of the substance of that soil but they are not to be identified with it. If it has been common in modern India to think of Shankara as the exponent *par excellence* of the Upanishadic tradition, it is equally correct to recognize the continuity of Ramanuja not only with the immanentism of the Upanishads but also with the theism of the Gītā. For these reasons it is just to count the two exegetes as equally valid

interpreters of the tradition. Given, in addition to this, the argument of the natural theology of religious experience which we explored in the last chapter, there is good ground for thinking of Ramanuja as one who well expresses the synthesizing spirit of the Indian tradition.

3.59. Yet time does not stand still. If the natural theology of religious experience is to be adapted to the need to express a truly Indian Christianity, there is no ultimate necessity to stay in the past. It is perhaps too easy to turn backwards to the great figures of the Indian tradition in order to seek for a framework: just as Aquinas turned back to Aristotle and just as many nowadays in the West turn back to Aquinas. The figures of the past are a starting point. Beyond the theism of Ramanuja there may be evolved something entirely new. The substance of the present argument is only this: that the natural theology of religious experience finds a congenial Indian expression in the doctrines of Ramanuja.

3.60. The problem of our tendency to look back to the past is relevant to the secularism discussed earlier in this chapter (3.9). It might be thought that Ramanuja, for instance, is an essentially medieval figure: while we have emerged out of the world of medieval thought forms. The new world of science and technology seems very remote from the theologizing of the past. This is where the present analysis of transcendence can help us to see the compatibility of science and religion. And beyond that it can let us see a certain solidarity, so long as we are in search of an integrated outlook upon the world.

3.61. As to compatibility: it will be clearly seen that the analysis of transcendence in terms of non-spatiality, etc., clearly rules out the sort of anthropomorphism which science would be bound to destroy. God is not to be found in another galaxy, nor is he some kind of electromagnetic force. The doctrine of transcendence is a prophylactic against such superstition. The organic unity between God and the world provides the setting for the repudiation of a capricious interventionism. Even so, it may be complained that the doctrine of transcendence still locks away an area of reality from the probing of scientific experimentation. Is this not a way of setting limits on science? And is this not to invite conflict: for science is ever avid for *lebensraum*?

3.62. But the doctrine that the whole of reality is accessible

to scientific investigation (itself bound up with concepts of space and time) is not a scientific doctrine. It is a philosophical or metaphysical one. How could it be shown on the basis of experimentation and observation that there is nothing which is not capable of experimental or observational investigation? A theory about the limits or lack of limits of science is a theory which necessarily transcends the limits of science. Hence the doctrine of transcendence can be seen as non-scientific; but it can hardly be seen as unscientific.

3.63. And what, after all, is the cash-value of the idea of transcendence? It is not presented as a constituent in a scientific hypothesis. Its cash-value has a more intimate connection with the non-doctrinal dimensions of religion. It has a connection, for instance, with the ritual dimension, for the omnipresence of God means in practice that one can pray to God intimately everywhere, and it means that everything can be seen *sub specie aeternitatis*. Heaven is all around us, and we can see ourselves as swimming in the divine waters. Does such an attitude conflict with experimentation? Does it conflict with curiosity about causes? Does it obstruct our investigation of accidents and disasters? Does it inhibit bridge-building? Does it make nonsense of mathematical physics? Is it in conflict with psychological experimentation? None of these things follows at all.

3.64. But it is one thing to show that there is no incompatibility between theism and scientific attitudes: quite another to show their solidarity. This solidarity cannot of course come from a confirmation of theism by science. If theism could be confirmed in this way, its reference would lie within the spatio-temporal cosmos. It is rather in the plane of values that the solidarity can be discovered.

3.65. For let us consider the double aspect of the whole scientific endeavour. On the one hand, it is geared to ever more expensive and subtle attempts to understand the structure of the world. On the other hand it is geared to the production of things useful to mankind. On the one side, it is an intellectual enterprise; on the other it promises bounty. The technological side of course has its own theoretical problems; and the pure sciences have practical problems. But the contrast can in principle be drawn. Now the technological aspect of scientific endeavour necessarily of its nature subserves the wants (good,

bad or indifferent) of men. It gains its rationale ultimately from these wants – from the subservience to actual human values. In so far as religion represents an expansion and co-ordination of human wants, it offers one type of possibility for the increase of values. One type of possibility lies in the more efficient satisfaction of wants: another in the stretching and shaping of wants. Thus religion, which can do the latter, is engaged in the same sphere as is technology. Moreover, since the values which we actually have are constantly in need of criticism, the doctrine of creation provides a constant principle of criticism, for it constantly suggests the question of how we put to use the natural goods which flow ultimately from the Supreme Being. And it keeps in front of us the ever-open possibility of more abundant life. Thus although religion is not itself a sort of technology, save where it gets mixed up with magic, it complements the aims of technology.

3.66. As to the intellectual side of science: this delving into the structures of the world involves a wonderful process of ridding men of an anthropomorphic view of their environment. The discoveries of science are both a transcendence of and a shock to the common sense and 'human' picture of the world. From this point of view, the psychological effect of scientific enquiry might seem in conflict with the religious outlook, which can be suspected of restoring an anthropomorphic view to the universe as a whole, through the doctrines of theism. (Hence, perhaps, the attraction of non-theistic religion, in particular Theravāda Buddhism, in the modern world). Nevertheless, theism, as we have seen, is the enemy of ordinary anthropomorphism, and consistently stresses the mysteriousness and Otherness of the divine Being, as well as his analogy to personhood. The intellectual effort to unravel the structures of the world has, moreover, an aesthetic basis: the world, or aspects of it, become the focus of a certain sort of contemplation. This is certainly not the contemplation of the mystics: it is an intellectual and manipulative contemplation. But it cannot, as contemplation, be jealous of that further kind of contemplation which is expressed in worship and yoga. This is one root of the persistent attraction, despite its obvious defects, of the Teleological Argument.

3.67. Enough, no doubt, has been said to dispel the ghost of that supposed conflict between religion and science which is

part of the mythology of our times. The dynamic qualified non-dualism of Ramanuja is itself a fine structure of doctrine for expressing the continuous creativity of God, which, though a clear doctrine of transcendence (or immanence) can see beyond the surface of the world without becoming victim to the illusions of a superstitious anthropomorphism. Ramanuja's system thereby is not merely a way of appropriating Christianity to the Indian tradition (essentially a task for Indian Christians), but also a theology relevant to the present religious concerns of the West. If, then, one wishes for a theology of religious experience capable of picturing the world in an unsuperstitious manner, qualified non-dualism presents itself as a powerful possibility.

3.68. But this system clearly belongs to the doctrinal dimension of religion, though its merit in part lies in the way in which it can make sense of the combined claims of both dhyāna and bhakti. It would be unrealistic, though, not to recognize the mythological setting of Ramanuja's theology – his Vaishnavism. Could this mythology also be appropriated by Indian Christianity? Yet we have already seen that the remaining element of revealed theology which is a necessary feature of Christian theism depends upon a different mythology – the salvation-history of Israel and the life, death and resurrection of Christ. These surely must stay as the true Christian mythology. To remove this aspect of exclusiveness in the Christian message is to betray the nature of the Gospel. And this cannot be the way to a reconciliation of religions, since suicide is no way of cementing a friendship. Yet once we have recognized the non-sacred character of the words of the Bible (3.2) and rejected an authoritative literalism, there can hardly be an absolute ban on the Christian usage of alternative mythological imagery to portray the character of God. If the divine Being is said to be a Rock or a Lamb, then also he can brandish the ornaments of Vishnu. As we shall see (5.17), there are aspects of the spirit of Indian mythology which can illuminate the Christian world-view; and this being so, it would seem appropriate to incorporate the relevant features of the symbolism into the life of Christian worship. Perhaps this may not be a matter for Indian Christianity alone; for with the decay of religious images in the psychology of the West it might be that a fresh life of symbolism could be opened up by the introduc-

tion of other icons than those familiar to the European tradition.

3.69. The argument of the present chapter has been that the interchange between religions remains a challenge, and one not answered by evangelical Protestant theology nor by secularism. A natural theology of religious experience seems a necessary aim of Christianity, and in the Indian context finds one supplied in Ramanuja's interpretation of Vedanta. This not merely may serve as a means of appropriating Christianity to the Indian tradition, but also helps to illuminate some of the problems about anthropomorphism vexing some contemporary Western theologians. But the whole argument should not be treated dogmatically: indeed the point of an argument is to escape dogmatism. What has here been offered is only one line of approach. But it may be a fruitful one, even if it is wrong, provided it stimulates others to work towards the same kind of objective.

3.70. If there be any dogmatism about it, it is the suggestion that Christianity must retain one piece of intractable particularity: the salvation-history described in the Biblical writings. This makes it necessary to examine in rather more detail than hitherto the Thesis of Religious Unity (1.19). Its central place in so much modern Hindu exposition and its apparent relevance to a religiously plural world must render this thesis important without reference to the claims of Christianity. But seeing that Christianity also retains this ineradicable historico-mythological particularity to which reference has just been made, the Thesis of Religious Unity must be viewed from this perspective also.

CHAPTER IV

THE THESIS OF RELIGIOUS UNITY

4.1. President Radakrishnan has written in one of his books as follows:

'To say that God exists means that spiritual experience is attainable; the possibility of the experience constitutes the most conclusive proof of the reality of God: God is given, and is the factual content of the spiritual experience. All other proofs and descriptions of God are matters of definition and language. The fact of God does not depend upon mere human authority, or evidence from alleged miraculous events. The authority of Scripture, the traditions of the Church, or the casuistries of schoolmen who proclaim but do not prove, may not carry conviction to many of us who are the children of science and reason, but we must submit to the fact of spiritual experience, which is primary and positive. We may dispute theologies, but we cannot deny facts. The fire of life, in its visible burning, compels assent, though not the speculations of smokers sitting around the fire.'

The centre of religion is, for Radhakrishnan, experience; and this enables him to see that inner unity in all religion which is obscured by theologies, priests, divergent traditions. Spiritual experience occurs in all the major faiths. And since it constitutes (on this view) the core of these faiths, there is a common core to religion the world over. It should be noted that there is a single type of experience here in mind. The assumption is that this is the mystical or contemplative experience which has played so strong a part, as we have seen, in the history of Indian religion.

4.2. It is not altogether difficult to see why mystical experience should be favoured as the supreme point of religious life. For one thing, the conflict detectable between contem-

platives and orthodoxy from time to time both in Christianity and Islam (typified in the cases of Eckhart and al-Hallaj), and intelligible because of the nature of mystical experience, as we have seen (2.63), lends a certain attraction to the contemplative. For Christian and Muslim orthodoxy have been often dogmatic and notoriously have set their face against idolatry. Commonly the multifarious cults of Hinduism have been interpreted as idolatrous – hence the destruction of images during the Muslim invasions and the rigorism of many Christian missionaries. Since modern Hinduism in part represents a response to the missionaries, usually regarded not only as bearers of an alien culture but also as contemptuous of the Indian heritage, the unorthodoxies of some mystics have redounded in their favour. Again, the mystic has that 'experimental' approach to religion characteristic of much Indian religion (2.1). Lastly, prophetism and bhakti have frequently been tied up with symbolism and particular cults, whereas the 'emptiness' of the contemplative state tends to make mysticism preach a transcending of imagery and cultus – as for instance with Shankara.

4.3. These motives were reinforced for Swami Vivekananda, that most eloquent of modern advocates of the Thesis of Religious Unity, by the example of his master Ramakrishna, who claimed to have trodden, in his interior life, the paths of different faiths, including Christianity and Islam. Here was a living, saintly proof of the thesis. It was Swami Vivekananda's achievement to have organized Ramakrishna's following into a web of dedicated service: but in addition he gave his master's parables the doctrinal backing of a modernized version of the teachings of Advaita Vedanta. Because of the notable efforts of many swamis of the movement who have come to the West, the name of Ramakrishna is indissolubly linked in many minds with that of Vedanta.

4.4. The Thesis of Religious Unity undoubtedly has a great measure of attraction. It seems plausible to a number of people in the West, for instance, as a kind of extension of Protestantism. Protestantism had as one of its motives the feeling that the Church and the priesthood, as organized in pre-Reformation times, constituted a kind of screen between a man and his God. Religion had become over-institutionalized, weighed down by too many theological distinctions, too transactional. It is but a short step from this attitude to the further thought that maybe

the divisions between sects and faiths is artificial, a product of priests and organizations. Thus it is an attractive idea that religions are separated from one another by mere externals: throw off these and one may gain to an inner core of truth. Yet in a way the Thesis of Religious Unity as interpreted by modern Hindus goes one better. For though it adheres to the principle of the underlying core of truth it also saves the externals. It does not seek to wrest men forcibly from their ritual observances and so on. Rather it treats these externals as alternative disciplines, ultimately, one must admit, to be transcended, for attaining to the underlying and indivisible truth. It thus seeks to give us unity in diversity, and proudly claims that this is the great message of the Hindu past, which has so successfully allowed different cults and doctrines to live together in a single main tradition.

4.5. There is a splendid parable which illustrates the Thesis of Religious Unity, and yet which leads to a logical point of the greatest importance in evaluating the thesis, though not entirely favourable to it. The story is of a number of blind men who got hold of different parts of an elephant. One describes the tail, another a foot, another the trunk and so on. Each thinks he has got hold of a different entity from the others. But of course it is the same elephant. Likewise with religion: the Christian has got hold of this part of the truth, the Muslim another part, the Buddhist another part and so on. If they but knew it they have all got hold of parts of the same truth.

4.6. The story is suggestive. For we all know from common experience that we are liable to give partial assessments of what we encounter. It is easy to inflate such partial assessments into exclusive views. How much more is this likely, then, in religion, where we only see in a glass darkly! But still the logical point must be made, and it is as follows. *We* can describe the blind men hanging on to different parts of the same elephant as doing so because we see the elephant. The parable depends on the notion that we have eyes whereas the hangers-on are blind. In short, if one is in an advantageous position regarding the truth one can say with confidence that others only have a partial view of it. Hence the trouble with the belief that different religions point to the same truth is summed up in the pithy question: What truth?

4.7. Who is blind? Whose eyes work? The Christian could

well say, and many a liberal Christian does in fact say, that other religions have a partial apprehension of the one truth constituted by the revelation of God in Christ. But it could equally well be objected by a Sikh or a Muslim or a Hindu or a Buddhist that the matter is the other way round. The Christian is only speaking from his point of view, and his point of view is partial. My point, then, is that in order to say that a view is fragmentary or just one facet of the truth, you have to know the truth. The implications of this conclusion will be explored shortly, but meanwhile another conceivable moral of the story of the blind men might be drawn.

4.8. It might be argued that since men differ in their religious doctrines, practices, experiences, mythologies, ethics, there is no way of arriving at a definitive truth. The best we can do is to be sceptical. We are all blind men in the country of the blind. But then the story suggests that we can at least use our hands to feel. There is some measure of truth in our reports. We can then restate our scepticism not as total scepticism, but as a kind of agnostic relativism, as follows. The variety of teachings and practices is a sign of the incompleteness of the apprehension of the truth in the various faiths. And there is no way of settling who is nearer and who is further away from the truth. Thus we must treat all faiths as equally true and as equally incomplete. But what they fall short of cannot be stated.

4.9. The trouble with this agnostic relativism is that it seems to admit that contradictory claims can be equally correct. The Jain may say: 'There is no God'. The Muslim may say: 'There is a God'. Are these statements to be treated as equally correct? One could perhaps do so by thinking of them as getting at different things. It might be that the denial of God was a correct protest against a crude anthropomorphism, and this would make what it said compatible with the Muslim's affirmation. But as we have seen, the context of the Jain statement is not at all this. The Jain is not concerned to refine the Muslim's faith. The Jain is stating part of a radically different *Weltanschauung*. The contradiction seems to remain.

4.10. But what is wrong with contradictions? Here it may be useful to explore a little more closely the need for the rejection of contradictions than we have hitherto done. For it is not uncommon for people to think of religious claims as essentially

involving contradictions, precisely because the forms of language are strained to breaking point in the attempt to speak of the Transcendent and of the ineffable. It is not uncommon to treat the paradoxes of religious language as attempts to express something of the mystery of faith, and so on.

4.11. It is useful here to take two rather different examples of paradoxicality in the use of religious language. The first is the Trinity doctrine, incorporating that apparent contradiction that God is three Persons in one Substance. The second is the Zen *koan* or riddle, which seems to present the intellect with something radically unintelligible, such as having to conceive the sound of one hand clapping. In addition to these examples, it is also useful to consider the role of the idea of ineffability in the context of religion, together with analogous ideas like undefinability, incomprehensibility, etc.

4.12. The Trinity doctrine may be said to stand for a mystery, but it is necessary to understand in what way it so stands. As the doctrine was hammered out in the history of the Church, it had at least three motives. In the first place, it was a doctrinal and credal crystallization of what could be inferred from the Christian revelation. Though it is true that the New Testament itself does not contain the doctrine in the manner in which it came to be formulated, the divinity of Christ and the events of Pentecost were both suggestive of a trinitarian picture of God, while at the same time the dominant motif of monotheism in both Old and New Testaments had to be preserved alongside of this. Thus, firstly, the Trinity doctrine is a kind of inference from revelation. In the second place, the doctrine was a shield against movements such as Arianism which the Church held to imply the subversion of Christian faith. Thus Arianism, in treating Christ as subordinate to the Father and not with the Father from all eternity, essentially denied Christ's divinity. Yet Christians worshipped Christ. The whole liturgy of the Church would, if Arianism were true, be predicated upon idolatry – the worship of something or someone other than the One God. Thirdly, the Trinity doctrine used terminology to indicate that its message was no contradiction (three Persons in one Substance, not three Substances in one Substance, nor three Persons in one Person). Admittedly, it might be hard to comprehend how God could be Three in One. But the use of this language was a move towards comprehension.

4.13. These motives behind the classic formulation of the Trinity doctrine deomonstrate that the Trinity is not, so to say, a gratuitous contradiction put out to show the incomprehensibility of the Transcendent. The transcendence of God is equally evident in Islam and Judaeism, for example: but there is no felt need among Muslims or Jews to enunciate the Trinity doctrine. Quite the reverse. Thus the function of the Trinity paradox is not to bring out the incomprehensibility of the Divine. It has a particular shape, a particular set of circumstances: it is saying something about the nature of God. It is a *doctrine* in that it is trying to set forth something substantial about reality.

4.14. The case of the Zen riddle is very different. To see its setting we need to go back to the very early Buddhist insistence that language distorts reality. For instance, we use nouns to stand for things and persons, as though these are permanent, substantial entities. But according to the Buddhist analysis of the world, everything compounded is impermanent. This initial thesis of the distorting character of language was extended radically as we have seen (1.61) by Nagarjuna's assault upon all theories, even Buddhist ones, as self-contradictory. From this point of view the philosophical dialectic, which tears these theories to shreds, is a form of yoga: it is a preparation for the immediate experience of the Void. The Zen riddle is the application of a rather similar idea in the context of Zen's techniques of meditation and training. The riddle breaks down conceptual thought, so that it is possible to experience the flow of the world without the screen of preconceptions keeping us normally from it. The contradiction or paradox here could be regarded from two points of view: first, as being an instrument in the process of engineering an enlightenment-experience, and second, as itself expressing the fact that the 'truth' is not a matter of understanding (as we ordinarily understand understanding), but of direct experience.

4.15. The 'engineering' view of religious contradictions is quite a possible one. If generalized, it could be taken as saying that all doctrines are but instruments for engineering experiences. Then indeed it would not matter that there are contradictions as between one faith and another. However, this generalized engineering view effectively dispenses with the notion of statable truth. It is thus quite different from the

pre-supposition of the Trinity doctrine, which claims to characterize God's nature, as we saw (4.12).

4.16. The ultimate end of the engineering view is to treat religion somewhat as follows: there are valuable experiences accessible to men by their treading a certain path. This conclusion is not at all the same as that of the agnostic relativism considered earlier (4.8). For relativism of this sort is a way of saying that different descriptions of the higher truth, though ultimately and in an unknown way defective, are equally good. It is not the claim that they are equally so bad that they do not touch reality at all. The religion of engineering, if it anywhere genuinely exists (for Zen Buddhists remain Buddhists), is at bottom essentially different from the traditional world religions. And it is with them that we are concerned: for we are discussing the Thesis of Religious Unity, not the possibility of a new religion distinct from (and in fact in conflict with) the established faiths. This is not, however, to deny a function to the use of Zen riddles and other analogous techniques. It is still obviously legitimate to engineer experiences. But the legitimacy, as far as the world religions go, depends on a prior assumption – that these experiences are relevant both to finding the truth and to the achievement of liberation or salvation. Neither the Trinity doctrine nor the koan, then, afford much comfort to anyone happy with a general invasion of contradictions into the sphere of religion. The one is not intended as a contradiction: the other is a technique, not a way of stating anything. But religions still retain a residuum of statement.

4.17. Yet we still retain a feeling of the inadequacy of such statement. The ineffability and incomprehensibility of God, the indescribability of Nirvana, and so on – these must surely be present to the consciousness of anyone who has seriously inspected or engaged in the spirit of religion. Two important comments, though, must be made about these concepts. The first is that they must be seen in their actual setting, in the worlds of worship and contemplation, etc. To say, for instance, that the peace of God is unspeakable or inexpressible is not to say that it simply cannot in any way be described. The Christian has some idea of what counts as this peace: he can distinguish it from the deathly life of unregenerate existence. Rather the Christian is giving vent to its marvellousness. A secular parallel may bring this out. If I say that I cannot express my

gratitude to someone for some heroic and kindly deed on my behalf, I do not mean that I could equally as well have kept my mouth shut. In saying that I cannot express my gratitude I am already expressing my gratitude, albeit inadequately. In so far as worship involves expressing praise, rather than stating facts, the inexpressibility of God becomes (crudely) the insufficiently intense character of my praise in relation to the praiseworthiness of God. This does not imply that I can say nothing about God. Likewise in the contemplative 'cloud of unknowing', what the mystic encounters is not merely above ordinary joys (and thus inexpressibly marvellous) but also without ordinary perceptual content, and thus not describable in ordinary terms. But this again does not mean that nothing can be said to characterize the state, for mystics have shown themselves eager and adept at conveying something of its nature. Again, the incomprehensibility of God is partly to be understood in the context of his glory: and partly in the fact that knowledge of God in existential encounter is not the same as an intellectual comprehension of him (a point very similar to that made by the Zen paradox – 4.11). If we look, then, at these concepts of ineffability and so on in their living context, we begin to see that they are not to be taken in a simple descriptive way.

4.18. The second important comment about these concepts is a negative one. Suppose for the sake of argument we say that ultimate reality (God, the Absolute, or however it is characterized) is totally indescribable. Then nothing can be legitimately said. But then there is no call to use such a term as 'God', which is already saying something (quite a lot in fact). If so, the words of religion all evaporate before our eyes. All the religions, so far as they are saying anything sensible, are saying precisely nothing. This would leave us with two alternatives. One is to escape back into the engineering view of religion, which as we saw (4.16) is not of use in establishing the Thesis of Religious Unity. The other alternative is to admit that anti-religious humanism is as good at saying nothing about Ultimate Reality as any religion. In this case, religion as a way of life loses its point. The Thesis of Religious Unity cannot be supported in this way either. We may therefore conclude that too drastic consequences follow from the conception of the *total* ineffability of religious truth. This may help to confirm the more moderate view of ineffability outlined in the preceding paragraph.

4.19. From all of the foregoing discussion it becomes obvious that there is no warrant for the introduction of contradictions into religious statements (even though in some contexts they may serve an engineering function). Of course, we ought already to know that contradictions will not do. A contradiction does not say anything, for what it gives with its left hand it takes away with its right. But if this were all that was at stake, contradictions would be harmless enough. There is no law against saying nothing. But a contradiction has a more lethal aspect: allow it happily in, and you can say anything. We can see this through the application of a little logic. The proposition P implies P and/or Q, where Q is any proposition you care to enunciate. This is an apparently trivial implication. For example 'Today is Friday' implies 'At least one of the following propositions is true: today is Friday, and Johnson is President of the United States'. Now suppose we allow the contradictory of P also to be true. This we can symbolize as 'Not-P'. Then since P is, on the supposition, true, we can say that P and/or Q. But Not-P. It follows that Q. From the contradiction, then, we can infer any proposition we care to enunciate. In the religious context, this might work as follows. Christ is the one and only Son of God; and it is not the case that Christ is the one and only Son of God. Consequently Hitler is divine. In brief, the admission of contradictions is not just the harmless exercise of saying nothing: it is the licence to say anything, however unpleasant or false. Or we could put the whole matter in a more personal way – the man who is complaisant about contradictions is suffering from a softening of the intellect. It may be that the intellect has to be transcended in religion, but this is scarcely achieved by its inefficient exercise.

4.20. It would appear then that the agnostic relativism discussed earlier is scarcely a satisfactory account of the unity of religions, for it says enough to let the contradictions remain. On the other hand, taken in a very mild way it may be salutary, for it is a means of expressing dissatisfaction with the dogmatism that so often mars inter-religious dialogue. We are left then with the primary interpretation of the blind men and the elephant outlined earlier (4.6), which raises the problem, for anyone who argues the Thesis of Religious Unity, of what central truth it is that all religions point to.

4.21. As we saw, it is equally possible for the Christian to say that the Hindu view of ultimate reality is partial and fragmentary as it is for the Hindu to say the same about the Christian faith. Given the assumption of the truth of a particular faith, it is possible to give an account of the fragmentariness of other viewpoints. But in this case, the Thesis of Religious Unity scarcely brings unity. For each faith will interpret it in a different way. In brief, the question 'What truth is it that the religions point to?' is in essence only the question 'Which is the true (or truest) religion?'

4.22. And this of course lands us in the awkward problem of what the criteria of truth are in this field. This problem is indeed given a new impetus and importance by the interplay between world religions, a relatively recent phenomenon. Now to go into the whole question of criteria would be a very arduous business. But fortunately we can gain quite a lot from the more modest project of considering an influential modern Hindu account of the matter, implicit both in the quotation from Radhakrishnan at the beginning of this chapter and in the writings of Vivekananda. This account of the matter is to say: we know the truth through spiritual experience. Consequently, the essential superiority of Hinduism in making sense of religious diversity lies in its capacity for spiritual experience. Thus Ramakrishna's experimental treading of the Christian and Muslim paths counts as confirmation that the truth is discoverable there, and that these paths can be unified with that of modern Hinduism. Yet, as we have seen, there is also the implicit assumption that it is mystical or contemplative experience which is the apex of spiritual insight. Also, of course, it is questionable whether the testimony of interior experience is the only thing that really counts in this context: the Christian, for instance, might wish to cite historical evidences, and so on.

4.23. Since a claimant to be the true or most comprehensive religion has to make sense of world religions from its point of view, a dimension is added to the problem of the criteria of religious truth. Not only is there the question of the grounds for claiming A to be true; but there is also the question of whether A makes sense of the substance of the other faiths. Transposing this matter into the context of the appeal to religious experience, we can ask whether A's account caters plausibly for the central experiences of these other faiths.

4.24. But at this point we find ourselves plunged back into those very discussions of a natural theology of religious experience which have occupied us previously. In short, those very arguments which tend in the direction of theism as being a comprehensive doctrine which makes sense equally (and here we mean *equally*, not just both) of bhakti and dhyāna are also powerful in the context of the Thesis of Religious Unity. If it is not the case that there is a single core of experience running through the great moments of world religions, but rather a polarity between the prophetic and devotional on the one hand and the mystical or contemplative on the other, it is not possible to state the Thesis of Religious Unity in terms of a single main objective in the faiths. The Thesis collapses into the notion that there are recurrent patterns of experience which cut across formal and doctrinal boundaries. And this leaves us with the question of how best these patterns are co-ordinated. The answer to this has been given by our argument regarding the natural theology of religious experience. In short, it is more plausible to think of a hospitable theism as being the unifying force in a coming world religion than the Vedanta of contemporary Hinduism.

4.25. This sounds like a remark against Hinduism. But on the contrary, Hinduism need in no way be simply identified with the modern Vedantist ideology. This has been imposed on the modern scene by a variety of factors. Among these have been the rigidity and not infrequent spitefulness of Christian propaganda, which has emphasized the narrowness against which so many Hindus instinctively react. It was not unnatural for Hinduism to find its self-respect among the educated classes in an opposed broadness, an opposed synthesis in which Hinduism saw itself as the welder-together of different phases of religion. The exclusiveness of the one side stimulated the inclusiveness of the other. But, as we saw in the first chapter, the Indian tradition has been extraordinarily variegated. This indeed, as the exponents of the modern Hindu ideology claim, is its great glory: but this glory is not to be preserved by clamping the Hindu tradition into the straightjacket of a single view. This maybe is what is happening through the common acceptance of the reinterpretation of the Hindu heritage in terms of a non-dualistic Vedantin synthesis. Thus the scepticism which has been expressed here about the Thesis of Religious Unity as

interpreted by modern Vedantists such as Radhakrishnan and Vivekananda in no way invalidates the importance of Hinduism in providing a framework for the co-ordination of the great moments of religious experience. The theism of Ramanuja is as much part of the Hindu heritage as is the non-dualism of the Vedanta.

4.26. This is not all: for the synthetic genius of Hinduism is itself a powerful counterweight to the narrowness of some forms of theism. If there is a theism which is Hindu it is bound to be a hospitable theism. Thus the importance of, say, Ramanuja lies not merely in the fruitfulness of its doctrines in explaining the relation between the world and God, but also in the flavour of hospitability which accrues to it from its general milieu. The gentleness of Hinduism must remain one of the great contributions of the tradition to world religion. It is sad, by contrast, that Christianity, which preaches love and meakness and gentleness, has so often, in its doctrinal pronouncements and in its actions, betrayed its spirit. Admittedly the burning vision of the one God is liable to give people a dynamic in which gentleness can easily be submerged by zeal. But the problem for religion, it seems, must be to combine the zeal with love, to wed belief in the truth to a genuine tolerance of other points of view. For various reasons, Indian religions have succeeded in great measure in this latter task, though open to the converse danger of a kind of religious relativism and indifferentism.

4.27. Yet it will doubtless be replied to all this that the argument of the natural theology of religious experience is rather soft. It may perhaps have some suggestiveness and plausibility: but it is in no sense a knockdown argument. The same no doubt goes for the neo-Vedantin view, which is suggestive, but is not so transparently obvious as to win universal acceptance. And so on. This is one of the roots of relativism, the feeling that there are no clearcut and absolutely decisive arguments in religion. This breeds uncertainty, even if it be masked sometimes by an almost fanatical certitude. Surely the dispassionate observer of world religions cannot but feel somewhat relativistic in his attitudes in view of these softnesses, the haziness of criteria of truth, the lack of compulsion in the arguments.

4.28. But one must not draw too hasty a conclusion here. The reason for the lack of compulsion in these arguments is partly logical and partly social and psychological. On the

logical side, what do we expect religious truth to be like? It concerns the Transcendent, it moves in the sphere of intimate experience, it is bound up with awe and bliss, it is entangled powerfully and fruitfully in symbolism. It is scarcely plausible to expect the truths of religion to be demonstrable or for the evidences to be like those of the law court or the laboratory. It is true that we yearn for proof, especially where immortality (but what kind if so) is at stake. It seems sad that when our lives are to be shaped by belief there is no absolutely authoritative way of establishing that belief. But on the other hand, the poetry would flicker and disappear, the ambiguities and profundities of faith would perish, the glory and bliss might fade away, if the truth of religion could be handed to us on a plate. The search for a kind of empirical certainty is counterbalanced by the real needs of faith. Thus from a logical point of view religious truth is not the sort where the knockdown public argument can suffice or even apply.

4.29. From the social and psychological point of view, too, there are obvious limits upon persuasion. The man who is attracted to Christ in India may yet feel the pressures against his opting out of the family structure and the ancient rituals: the European who feels the call of the Buddha may yet be under the pressure of conformity. Nor is this all. The way we are brought up moulds our thinking and our feelings deeply: the old faith, the values of our family, the familiarities of the tradition, the symbolism of our background – all these add their siren voices. How can we break out from the soft shell in which we have been formed? How can we come to see the other point of view? How can we get beneath the skin of other loyalties and other images? All these social and psychological factors stand in the way of an easy transfer of affections. The business of conversion is hard, and our sentiments are against this desire to turn men from one society to another overnight. These things being so, it is scarcely likely that individual arguments will produce dramatic changes. It is not likely that the course of persuasion will issue in agreement. The words that we utter, the actions we perform, batter like waves against a very slowly shifting coast.

4.30. But what does all this amount to? Is the test of a good argument its capacity to change a man overnight? The arguments and considerations – the dialogue and the witnessings,

the insights and the growths of understanding – may yet have good value, even if they do not issue in such dramatic individual changes. The assent of one partner to a discussion is not by itself a criterion of the worthwhileness of that discussion. We might be cured of our despair about argument if we attended a little more to the history of ideas.

4.31. Consider the case of a scientific theory, that of evolution. When Darwin and Wallace propounded this theory a great many people failed to accept it. This reluctance was not confined to religiously minded conservatives like Bishop Wilberforce, who so crudely debated the problem with T. H. Huxley. Many of the sceptics were themselves scientists. (This, incidentally is why talk of a clash between religion and science is nonsense: one can speak of conflicts between certain scientists and certain religious people, but that is all – and typically the ground of dispute is wrongly posed). It took some time for the evolutionary theory to gain a general acceptance among educated people. Part of the reason lay in the logic of the matter: the evidence for it was highly suggestive, but open to alternative interpretations – and one cannot get evolutionary history into a laboratory to test out the hypothesis experimentally. Part of the reason for the relatively slow spread of acceptance was the psychological and cultural shock to Western outlooks presented by the new theory. There had been a long tradition in the West of the essential difference between men and animals, and it was something of a shock to think that men were closely related to monkeys. (This might be considered a compliment in India, which has other attitudes to the animal kingdom). Again, the evolutionary theory increased the time-scale of the cosmos beyond the narrow confines imposed by a literalistic interpretation of the Bible. In the Indian tradition, with its immense cosmologies, things were otherwise: but the narrowness of the traditional Western view of the cosmos was in bad need of readjustment in the face of new geological and biological theories. Later, in the present century, the scale of the universe was to be extended even more dramatically by the discoveries of modern astronomy. Thus Darwin gave a shock to a number of preconceptions. These stood in the way of an easy acceptance of the theory. If he had been giving out a theory of the structure of the rosebud, who would have said anything? But since he cut at human sources of pride and cosmic comfort,

he was a natural target for suspicion and reluctance. But despite all this, the theory slowly gained acceptance. Through a process of social and intellectual dialogue it spread among the educated and permeated largely into the *Weltanschauung* of the population at large. This is an illustration of the way in which an argument can gain a foothold through a social process. One must not judge it by its immediate persuasiveness, or lack thereof, to individuals. Similarly in aesthetics we notice that a person is not necessarily recognized as a great playwright or artist in his own time, but through a slow process of social dialogue and familiarization a judgment of greatness comes to be formed. Thus it is illusory to regard arguments as individual matters. They gain momentum in society.

4.32. Consequently the lack of knockdown proof in the interplay between religions is no good ground for a sceptical relativism. The truth in religion very often emerges in a slow and gradual way. Thus Christianity itself, partly as a result of Darwin and other researches, has undergone very great changes in the last hundred years. Its old cosmology has been largely abandoned. The cumulative weight of scientific history has led to an agonizing reappraisal of the nature of revelation. All this has not been an overnight seeing of the truth: it has been the consequence of a long exchange between tradition and new knowledge. The process indeed continues. So, then, the argument which I have advanced in relation to the natural theology of religious experience does not suffer from its lack of clarity and decisiveness. If it has merit it will make its impact felt in the process of interplay between the faiths. On the other hand, it may turn out that the neo-Vedantin alternative emerges as the great contender for man's theological soul. Or some other. (And we have to recall that religious experience only represents one dimension of the interplay). But as long as men are moved in the directions of bhakti and dhyāna, the argument will at least remain a relevant one.

4.33. The theory of the social spread of argument has some warrant too in the history of religions: and indeed the natural theology of religious experience can be illustrated and reinforced there too. For it was perhaps no coincidence that Buddhism should have brought forth from within itself the cult of bhakti to supplement the religion of dhyāna. Conversely the austerely prophetic faith of early Islam came to

nurture Sufi dhyāna. Likewise Christianity evolved its own yoga. We see a drift towards the double experience from different versions of the single.

4.34. The substance, then, of our argument about the Thesis of Religious Unity is that this thesis has to give some account of what truth it is that religions point to. But to give such an account one must look from a certain point of view. The Radhakrishnan and neo-Vedantin is one point of view, one which makes use of Hindu ideas. Alternatively there are Christian, Muslim, and other, ways of delineating the essential truth. But then the question of how to formulate the Thesis of Religious Unity boils down simply to the problem of how we establish that any one religion is truer than others. It is in any event inconsistent with the spirit of the Thesis of Religious Unity for one religion to claim a special privileged access to the truth, and thus we are back in a situation of interplay between differing but equal faiths. So long as we confine the argument to religious experience, the problem is no different from that which we faced earlier in this book: how to evolve a natural theology of religious experience, based upon the principle of the equality of different forms thereof. Reason was given for thinking that a hospitable theism co-ordinates better the twin insights of dhyāna and bhakti than the neo-Vedantin hierarchical treatment of these types of religious life and experience. Thus the Thesis of Religious Unity leads back to the natural theology of religious experience.

4.35. Before leaving the thesis, however, I wish to advert rather briefly to another form of synthesis in modern India. I refer to the integralism of Sri Aurobindo. This has a significance of its own, for it is an attempt to impart a new dynamic into the traditional Upanishadic theology, by incorporating modern evolutionary ideas. In this way it is a synthesis of a rather different character from that of, say, President Radhakrishnan. Though it still centres very much upon yoga (though a yoga in a new context), it weds to dhyāna the vision of a changing and upward-tending world. Now it is true that something like evolutionary dynamics is to be discovered in Samkhya. What makes Sri Aurobindo's view of the matter distinctive is his marked sense of the directionality of evolutionary history. Also, Sri Aurobindo considerably plays down the illusionism of traditional non-dualism. The material world

is vitally important in his system, and through the upward pull of the Spirit, matter will be transformed. This outlook provides the basis for the attempt in Sri Aurobindo's practical religion to co-ordinate traditional yoga to communal work in the world. The Ashram at Pondicherry exhibits clearly the striving for an all-round development of the religious individual, in which athletics, the arts, literature and so forth all play their part in the spiritual life.

4.36. There are remarkable resemblances between the general shape of Sri Aurobindo's system and that of Teilhard de Chardin, who wrote independently his major work at much the same time as Sri Aurobindo. Both have a vision of an evolutionary universe in which there is progressive spiritualization. Both reinterpret traditional theology against the background of new biological knowledge. But in one respect, Sri Aurobindo's working out of such a system is more surprising: for Teilhard de Chardin's Christian milieu already contained, so to say, historical directionality – the sense of a divine plan moving forward through history and beyond. But this has not been a marked characteristic of traditional Indian thinking. In short, the great novelty in Sri Aurobindo is that the frequent picture of the cyclical cosmos (periodically burgeoning and collapsing again into chaos) becomes of much less cosmological account than the picture of an upward march through history to higher forms of spirituality.

4.37. This new form of Vedanta is relevant indirectly to the interplay between religions. For the latter cannot itself be isolated from the interplay between religions and modern knowledge. It has been argued earlier (3.11) that a facile secularism is not likely to be the future of human ideology, and that religion will remain a living force. But it is also clear, as we saw in relation to the changes which have come over the thought-forms of modern Christianity (4.32), that 'secular' ideas themselves can strongly influence the shape of religion. This interplay between modern knowledge and the Christian tradition has some counterpart in the evolutionary Vedantism of Sri Aurobindo. This in itself adds a new possibility to the conversation between modern Hinduism and Christianity, the more so because it chimes in with the Christian evaluation of history as a theatre of divine activity. But to go on to this aspect of the problem would be to move beyond the experiential

dimension in terms of which the present discussion of the Thesis of Religious Unity has been conducted.

4.38. In the next, and final, chapter, I wish to move beyond the search for a system which best expresses the natural theology of religious experience and which can supply a framework for the restatement of Christianity in Indian terms. That system, I have argued, can be found in Ramanuja, though who knows in what way qualified non-dualism might undergo transformation when it comes to be developed in this new context? It is, in any event, but one suggestion for an Indian natural theology. Our aim is to stimulate thinking, not to anticipate the way Indian Christianity might evolve. Beyond the system, there is also the great treasury of Indian philosophical and religious ideas. I want to pick out some of these as sources of insight for the Christian, for often they emphasize things which have been too much neglected in European Christendom.

CHAPTER V

REDRESSING THE BALANCE

5.1. The central formula for summing up the nature of Brahman in the Hindu tradition has been *saccidānanda*: the Holy Power is characterized as *sat*, (Being); *cit*, (Consciousness) and *ānanda*, (Bliss). It would be forcing matters to see this threefold formula as corresponding to the Trinity doctrine (though the attempt has been made). Such a correspondence would be an artificial way of making the Indian tradition conform to the Christian. For this very reason, perhaps, the Christian can learn something from this formula. It is with this, then, that we can start this discussion of the illuminations which shed light on Christianity from an Easterly direction.

5.2. The term 'sat' is reminiscent of the frequency with which, also in the Western tradition, bare ontological terms have been used for the divine Being. By 'bare' ontological terms, I mean expressions like 'Being', *Ens*, etc. Such terms also tend to creep into metaphysics. And it is quite common now to use the phrase 'Ultimate Reality' to stand for God, the Absolute, etc. (I have to some extent followed this usage in the present book). But as has also often enough been pointed out, especially by contemporary philosophers, there is something extremely odd about these expressions. They appear to involve the tacit assumption that existence is a sort of property. It is not necessary for us here to go in to the fallacies of this supposition. But in the context of religion such 'bare' ontological terms do have a proper use. This arises out of the following three considerations.

5.3. First, though the term 'Being' seems to be barely ontological, it has evaluative overtones. Thus the word 'satī' (the feminine of sat) means 'good woman', and was used for those pious widows who followed their husbands on the funeral pyre. To say that God is sat is to imply his supreme value. This is brought out in the Western tradition in the use of the term *ens realissimum*. How can one being be literally more

real than another? If a fly exists, as Kierkegaard pointed out, it has as much existence as God. If existence is not a property then you cannot have more or less of it, you cannot have it more or less intensely, and so on. The use of the superlative in *realissimum* only becomes at all natural when we couple existence to value: and as to value, it is a matter of degrees. One can be better, supreme, less good, and so on. Thus one function of the bare ontological terms is to signify the supreme value of the divine Being.

5.4. But this first function still does not explain the bareness. The bareness is significant precisely in that it says nothing about Brahman or God, while yet somehow saying something. We have argued earlier (4.18) that it would make nonsense of religion to regard God as totally ineffable: but this does not mean that what we say says everything about God. The concept of God may still be that of a Being about whom not everything can be said. That is, it includes within it the notion that God's nature transcends the descriptions which we can give. In this case, the very emptiness of the term 'sat' is a way of pointing to this transcendence of descriptions, though if we only had 'sat' in our formula, nothing would have been said about God's nature. Thus the second function of the bare ontological term is to signify the inaccessible upper reaches of the divine nature, lying beyond those aspects which we can truly speak of.

5.5. It may be noted that this point has an important critical value. It represents a kind of 'agnosticism' that can be a cure for anthropomorphism. Placing the sat first in the triple formula immediately brings out the ineffability of the upper reaches of Brahman, and is a marked contrast to the 'Thus spake the Lord' of the Old Testament. In this way the Hindu formula is already a corrective to the characteristic vice of Christian theism, anthropomorphism.

5.6. In this connection, it is worth-while for the Christian to do a little self-examination about characteristic attitudes towards idolatry. It has been a commonplace among missionaries in India that the rich and manifold cults of the gods are idolatrous. But if we really seek pure religion, we must seek to purify our own idolatry. It is highly doubtful whether a confident identification of the words of the Bible, taken literally and uncritically, with the pronouncements of God is less

idolatrous than the use of cults taken symbolically. For example, a letter to one of the British national newspapers recently sought to justify the death penalty by quoting the text 'Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed'; the correspondent affirmed, further, that the trouble is that man so often thinks he knows more than God. Monotheistic idolatry can indeed be more lethal than its polytheistic rivals, for polytheism can the more easily escape fanaticism. In brief, then, the sat in its second function is a sign against idolatrous anthropomorphism.

5.7. A third feature of the bare ontological expressions is that they by their very emptiness can help to express the voidness of the contemplative state. Thus the sat does much here what 'Suchness' and 'Void' do in the context of the Greater Vehicle. We may call this the 'mystical' aspect of sat. We have, of course, argued earlier that dhyāna and bhakti must live in harmony and equality, and to the extent that here the formula for Brahman might be thought to overemphasize the contemplative side it could be misleading. But again, it is a counterweight to the prophetism and devotionalism so strongly stressed in evangelical theism. One could put it this way: If we can see evangelical theism from the standpoint of the formula saccidānanda, we will have achieved a true meeting of bhakti and dhyāna and of the Christian and Indian traditions.

5.8. The element cit or 'Consciousness' is in one way puzzling. For it will be recalled that though Shankara makes use of the formula he also, at the higher level of truth, dispenses with the concept of the ishvara, the personal Lord. Yet from the Western point of view, consciousness and personhood are much bound up together. How can Shankara retain the notion of divine consciousness without at the same time admitting the personal nature of the Lord? However, it is typical of the Indian philosophical and religious tradition to draw a distinction between the soul and the psychophysical organism. Thus for Samkhya and Yoga, it is the underlying soul which can achieve liberation, leaving behind it the mental and physical processes and elements which go to make up the empirical individual. Again, the Buddhists succeeded in dispensing with the idea of an eternal soul while retaining that of the reborn individual. In the Western philosophical and religious tradition, on the other hand, it is usual either to dispense with dualism altogether

or, if it be admitted, to draw the line between mind and body. But what the Western tradition includes under mind is mostly subsumed under matter (taken in rather a broad sense) in the Indian tradition. The lines are drawn in different places. The mind is, for most of the Indian tradition, composed of subtle, refined matter, which is then 'illuminated' by the underlying consciousness. A consequence of all this is that individual personhood disappears in the state of liberation. By analogy in Shankara's system the Lord as a person disappears at the higher level of truth.

5.9. However, as theistic Vedanta emphasized, it is hard to sever entirely the connection between consciousness and individuality. For Ramanuja a soul is essentially embodied; for Madhva, souls are essentially different from one another. And if one abandons the double-decker view of Brahman, then the Lordship which is the object of bhakti needs to be co-ordinated to the Consciousness which is the object of dhyāna. Thus it is reasonable to treat the cit in the formula as signifying the personhood of the divine Being. The sat will already have warned us against treating this personhood in a literalistic and anthropomorphic way.

5.10. The ānanda or 'Bliss' stresses something which perhaps is underplayed in the Western tradition. It is singularly appropriate that joy should be one of the three great elements in the formula giving God's nature. Now I am not denying the joyousness of much Christian worship, nor the sense of blissful fulfilment in the next life which is the hope of many a Christian. There is much to laugh and sing about in the faith. Nevertheless, it is also common to think of Creation in a way which at best gives only one half of the picture. It is frequently felt that the world is essentially a vale of soul-making – that God put us into the world in order to give us a prolonged examination in morality. It was possible for F. R. Tennant, a writer whom I much admire, to construct a theodicy on this principle – that the great thing about the created world is that it provides the possibility of morality. This moralistic view of the world has a number of defects, and can be counterbalanced by the more exuberant picture often found in the Hindu tradition and partly symbolized by the concept of Bliss.

5.11. One defect of the moralistic view is that it does not really account for the cosmos as we know it. It was perhaps

just plausible when the cosmos was conceived as a pretty small affair, with men snugly at the centre. But the cosmos is too vast and proliferated for it to make sense much longer. If man is the centre of creation, and his moral welfare the chief end of divine creativity, why did the Lord string out all those vast and fabulous galaxies? Why the sheer profusion of stars and worlds? Why the immensity of the reaches of the universe? The moralistic view is good for men's egos, but it scarcely accounts for the prodigalness of the creation.

5.12. Another defect of the moralistic view is that it puts the cart before the horse. The parable of the good Samaritan shows that the loving man was the one who bound up the victim's wounds. He was not concerned with getting good moral marks: he was concerned with the interests of the victim, with his sufferings, with his restoration to health. The Sabbeth is made for man and not conversely. This view of the true meaning of morality puts welfare at the centre: the rules are important in so far as they preserve and promote that welfare. Consequently, it is topsy-turvy to think that the world was created for the realization of virtue. Virtue gains its importance from the world of men, not conversely.

5.13. Of course it is important in one way that the world provides the possibility of morality, not merely because morality is a necessary condition of human welfare at large, but because moral heroism is one aspect of human creativity – one aspect of the glories of which men are capable. But for that very reason it is more illuminating to see the world as providing the possibility of human qualities in the round, than to treat men in abstraction as moral agents: they are much more than moral agents.

5.14. The picture, on the other hand, of God as constituted by joy, as one of the three great elements in the formula, points to a wider view of creation. The creative activity of God is the overflow of joy. It may be that often we fail to see the goodness of the world, for it is replete with its miseries, sufferings, tribulations, deprivations, disasters, deaths, madnesses. The evil that we see surely militates against faith in a good God. But this problem of evil (as it is politely called) is equally potent against a moralistic view of the creation as it is against the view which sees the creation as an act of joy. If we are persuaded by the evil we see we will abandon belief in the

Creator, and the illusionism of Shankara will seem equally pointless. It is not our present purpose to consider this tragic aspect of faith: our assumption is that the Christian and the Hindu see beyond the evils and defects of the world to its inner glories. This being so, we can appreciate the nobler vision of the creation as an overflow of joy. For although there are evils to be seen around and within us, there are marvels to be seen there too.

5.15. The picture of the joy of creation is well brought out in those innumerable statues of the dance of Shiva, with his many arms gracefully, yet mysteriously and exuberantly, weaving out of his body and his legs angularly spread out jumpingly in a solitary ballet. The dance of Shiva is the formidable and delightful expression of the creative act of God. This creative act is not something performed for an ulterior motive. Shiva is not a hack dancer. He dances because he feels like it. The effect and expression of his dancing is the cosmos. This is his way of expanding himself in glory. This is something which he does for its own sake.

5.16. This picture of creation is an important counterbalance to the teleology contained in the moralistic picture. It may be that there is a purpose in the cosmos: but the cosmos equally is a self-expression of the Deity. It is something which is good for its own sake – a theme which is also to be discovered in Genesis, for did not God see that what he had made was good (not morally good, but good in the way that a good piece of handiwork is good)? One might draw a parallel with a game. The lover of cricket does not play cricket because it brings him money or good health (in any event the exercise involved is not all that extraordinary). He plays it because it is an activity which he regards as worth-while in itself. Indeed one may say, from this point of view, that the best things in life are useless. For of the things we do, some we do as conducing to some further end, others we do for their own sake, while some things we do both for their own sake and for some further end. But if we do something for some further purpose, we call it useful. Yet if we could attain the end without using those means we would do so. In brief the end is more valuable than the means. But a thing which we do for its own sake we do not do because it is useful. It is useless in itself, but satisfying to us. Thus since what we do for a further end (the useful) is inferior to

what we aim at (the useless), the best things in life are useless. If an exception were to be made, it would be in favour of those mixed things we do – satisfying in themselves but also conducive to some further end (like playing tennis to keep our weight down or like eating delicious food). But then the logic of their superiority would simply rest in their providing two useless things for the price of one useful thing. We may, then, conclude that the best things are useless. This has a religious moral, as we shall see: for those who try to use God to help them out of disasters fail to see the true meaning of worship and contemplation. Granted, then, that the best things are useless, we can understand the glory of the Creation. Perhaps the world is a mixed thing, both useless and useful. But it is at least a self-expression of the Deity. If it were merely an instrument of God's desire to provide a theatre of moral endeavour it would scarcely betray the wonders and glories and joys which we see in it.

5.17. The element of Bliss in the formula for Brahman, the Holy Power, points us, then, to an exuberant picture of the divine creativity. Since, it is true, God has chosen to create within that self-expression a reflection of his own nature in the shape of men (and no doubt of other rational beings), the cosmos expresses more than joy, but also necessarily concern for these other centres of feeling and potential love. But it is an important counterbalance to the moralistic view to meditate upon the joyousness of creation. Further, how can one take the world seriously if it is just a means to an end? How can the Christian or Hindu avoid that ever-present temptation to withdraw into the silence of the soul or the Godhead, if the world is not worth-while in its own right? If we are co-creators with God in the ongoing enterprise of the dance of Shiva, then we must see the world as an expression of divine joy as well as an instrument of ulterior purposes. In short, the dance of Shiva complements the trend towards a moralistic view so evident in the Judaeo-Christian tradition (a part consequence of the rightful stress on the ethical in prophetic religion).

5.18. One could crudely bring out the two points of view by thinking of the creation alternatively from the imperative or the expressive angle. As an imperative act, God orders the world into being: as an expressive act, his creative word gives vent to his joy. On the one side there is 'Let there be light!'

And on the other there is the 'Halleluiah!' of creativity. The first expresses the dependence of the world on God, for it comes forth by pure fiat. The second expresses its naturalness as an expression of his joy and love. Both sides are needed. For religion itself (as we have seen – 2.4) contains more than one dimension. If the first picture makes one connect creation to commandments, the second makes one connect it to worship and contemplation. The heavens declare the glory of the Lord.

5.19. But there is another aspect of the Bliss of Brahman. This does not just point to the joy of the Lord in the act of creation, for after all God exists whether or not he creates, and the formula is meant to be expressive of God's own inner nature. It points also to the joy of God himself. This joy is found, for men, both in worship and contemplation. The fruit of God-directedness is the perception of the bliss of the Transcendent. God, in brief, is a joy in himself: the supreme joy, indeed. This entails that it is wrong to treat God as an instrument of our own satisfactions. This is what very often happens, both in our attitudes to this life and the next. God becomes a means of granting us favours, increasing our prosperity, improving our mental health, making us into good citizens or what have you. Now it is true that God can be our friend. And it is true that to friends one can easily call for aid. A friend in need, as the proverb says, is a friend indeed. But friendship's aids flow from friendship's loves. I do not make friends (or I ought not to make friends) because I want to use them (and in any case are they then really friends?). Friendship is a kind of act of grace: it grows naturally. But from the love that is formed in friendship helping works can flow, and if I have a friend I can call upon him in my distress. The friend becomes a means only because he was first an end. Likewise God may become a means only on condition that he was first an end. The element of Bliss in the constitution of Brahman points to this supreme value in himself which God possesses and which the pious man discovers in him.

5.20. The triple formula, then, is a marvellous expression of the nature of the Holy Power that the Upanishads call Brahman and that the Bible calls the Lord. The upper reaches of his nature are unknown; but his character is personal and his creative power is good. He is the object of the contemplative life and the supreme joy of the life of bhakti. He is one who

dances out this fabulous world. This shining conception of the divine Being complements the Biblical picture. If it has the potential defect of being too abstract, it counterbalances the potential Biblical defect of anthropomorphism. If it seems indifferent to the ethical, it is a counterweight to the moralism of some of the Christian tradition. If it slants our thinking towards dhyāna, this is only to complement the evangelical stress on bhakti. If it hints that consciousness is something beyond personhood, this perhaps is only a means of indicating that God's personhood is not quite as ours is. The triple formula is, then, an illuminating account of the nature of the Holy Power. Its inner dynamic, however, spreads beyond itself, and moves over into another aspect of the Indian tradition which is illuminating for the Christian West.

5.21. The moralistic account of creation to which we referred earlier has a counterpart in the doctrine of man. The mythology of the Fall has played a big part in the formulation of Christian doctrine. According to a prevalent account, man was originally in a state of harmony with God, but owing to a wrong act by Adam, this harmony was broken. The consequent alienation of man from God was bridged by Christ's saving work in his life, death and resurrection. This interpretation of the Adam myth ascribes men's troubles to a defect of will. Adam made the wrong choice. The doctrine of original or inherited sin suggests also that our troubles basically are due to wickedness, to moral defect. Thus the picture of the creation as a theatre of moral endeavour is complemented by a picture of man's troubles as due to moral failure.

5.22. This contrasts quite markedly with the main emphasis in Indian religions. Thus Shankara ascribed the troubles of living beings not so much to sin as to a primeval ignorance. Likewise the Buddhist analysis, though it refers importantly to the craving and grasping which bind us to the world, traces these back in turn to ignorance. Now this ignorance is not of course simple ignorance. It is not failure to know the dates of important battles, or lack of grasps of relativity. It is not the mundane ignorance of the schoolboy or the peasant. It is essentially a spiritual ignorance, a failure to see the truth existentially in spiritual experience. Consequently liberation takes the form of a kind of insight or knowledge. Again this is not mundane knowledge. It is not a matter of learning up the

doctrines. It is not being good at mathematics (though there is no need to despise such a skill). It is spiritual knowledge. By contrast the Adam diagnosis of man's troubles hints at a different form of salvation. It is not here that spiritual knowledge supremely counts: rather it is harmony with the will of the Creator. It may be that this harmony is not to be achieved by good works on the part of man but rather by the gracious activity of the Lord working through man. Nevertheless, this is the flavour of eternal life for the Christian, in so far as he reflects on the Adam myth's account of his predicament. We therefore have two pictures of the Fall or defect of man: one stresses ignorance and salvation through a kind of knowledge; the other stresses a wrong act of will and salvation as arising through harmony with God's will.

5.23. There is something rather strange about both accounts. They make use of the analogies of knowledge and wrong choice, but they do not mean these quite literally. The notion of inherited sin has caused difficulty in the Christian tradition for this very reason. How can I be said to be accountable for the act of a distant ancestor, Adam (even supposing that he existed)? Questions too arise in the other tradition. How can my ignorance flow from something which exists from all eternity? And how does it fit in with my mundane ignorance? But the analogies are nevertheless taken rather seriously. The Christian, for instance, expresses contrition for his wrong acts, even if they cannot be directly ascribed to some primeval Fall, but are only the expression of that general condition which the myth of Adam signifies. From the analogies two pictures of the life of man emerge.

5.24. According to the one, our troubles are due chiefly to wrong choices. According to this diagnosis, one can reform society by reforming the choices of individuals. Give people greater strength of will, and all will be well. How often do we hear that men's technological prowess has outstripped their willpower! How often do we hear that the human race must pull itself together! If only people would cleave to the good and despise evil, we would achieve the Kingdom of God. This is one picture (though admittedly rather crudely presented). It is a picture which has its counterpart in some sophisticated philosophical theories: thus, for instance, Kant's worry was how to reconcile moral freedom with the determinism he

thought to be implicit in the scientific view of the world. Save freedom and thus morality – this was a main concern for him. He saw the distinctiveness of the human being as lying in his capacity to make moral choices. Underlying this attitude was the deeper Christian tradition of moral defect as lying between man and God and hence of moral goodness as the divine quality in man. In this picture, then we see man's troubles as troubles of the will. In the main Indian picture, on the other hand, it is rather that living beings are in the grip of ignorance. Salvation can come through following the prescriptions of the Teacher who knows the way. Naturally, we simplify here.

5.25. Both analogies may be needed. Certainly the Indian emphasis on an original ignorance is a good corrective to the unrealistic moralism of the all-too-prevalent interpretation of the Adam myth in the Christian tradition. For if we look at the life of man we see that the wrong choices made are as much due to ignorance and lack of imagination as to defects of the will. This is what lies behind the saying that the way to Hell is paved with good intentions. No doubt eating people is wrong, but the cannibal does not do it out of weakness of will or because he has made the wrong choice of life. He is born into a society in which the activity is natural. If we regret this we regret not the moral fibre of the cannibal, but the shape of his milieu. Many of those who followed Hitler did so because they failed to foresee the consequences of their support. A romantic myth here, a sense of injustice there, a financial collapse, respect for Hindenburg – all these things add up to a choice. But it is absurd to see that choice as a straight choice between the obviously good and the obviously evil, with the outcome depending on the person's probity and strength of will. Our model of moral defect is far too simple. Again, the attitude to animals has changed greatly in the last century or so (I speak here of Western attitudes). The proliferation of concern for the prevention of suffering to animals is not so much the result of a new stiffening of resolve as of a new insight into the way animals feel – a new orientation towards animal life. It is a change in the moral imagination. Consequently, the evil that men do is in part, no doubt, a product of defect of will; it is partly a product of ill intent; but it is also partly a product of imaginative obtuseness and partly a product of plain ignorance.

5.26. The traditional Indian concept of ignorance had much

to do with its contrast, contemplative insight. The present argument is not precisely saying that contemplative insight is the cure for moral defects, although it is clear that the serenity accompanying it is an important spring and token of the gentleness and non-violence which we ought to practise towards our fellow-beings. But the idea of contemplative insight is an analogy for two things which we have discriminated as factors in the troubles of mankind. Imaginativeness and knowledge are powerful keys to moral progress (though strength of character remains important too). Imaginativeness involves a participation in the world of others: it is in that degree 'existential'. Both the existential and the intellectual side are present in the concept of knowledge in the Indian tradition. We have seen, for example (1.63), the way the two are blended in Nagarjuna's use of philosophical dialectic as a form of yoga. Thus the Indian religious ideal of contemplative knowledge as the cure of (spiritual) ignorance represents an important analogy for our understanding the condition of man, just as the myth of the Fall throws light on another aspect thereof.

5.27. Both analogies point to the deeper reaches of our troubles. The myth of Adam, though it presents a moralistic picture on the surface, goes down beyond that, precisely because it cannot be taken literally. Likewise the Buddhist picture of ignorance as the cause of craving points to the need for reorientation if we are genuinely to pursue the good. This latter analogy is important, not merely because it is a balance against the possible moralism of the Western picture, but also because the technological achievements of modern civilization themselves need refreshment from it. Let me explain.

5.28. The spread of technology has caused many minor social revolutions. The dissipation of mundane ignorance, the need for trained personnel, the social mobility, the new techniques of agriculture, the new influx of cash – these phenomena have caused men and women in many societies to look anew upon their older customs and their inherited values. Very often it seems that the new knowledge renders obsolete older ideas. Morality is changed under the impact of newly discovered truths. This here, of course, is 'secular' knowledge. But imaginativeness remains as a necessary condition of true progress. It often may happen that the new knowledge brings

changes in imaginative insight. But we still need protection against the growing myth that good intentions combined with knowledge of the facts will be sufficient to eradicate misery. For misery is also a matter of personal contacts, of social dispositions, of alienation from the environment. And here the sympathetic imagination is needed, to preserve personal depth against a new shallowness. This is where the analogy of a deeper ignorance than mundane ignorance is needed, just as we need too the myth of a deeper Fall than a moral Fall.

5.29. This complementarity between the analogy of ignorance and analogy of primeval sin only reflects the necessity of the harmony between dhyāna and bhakti for which we have earlier argued. For the characteristic defect of the contemplative is lack of the existential knowledge of God, while that of the devotee is lack of the practical love of God. Thus the hospitable theism which is the outcome of the natural theology of religious experience branches down into a two-sided anthropology.

5.30. In this connection, it is worth mentioning that the gentleness and non-violence so characteristic of the early yogic tradition in India, and given new social and political meaning in the life and teachings of Mahatma Gandhi, blends with the emphasis on compassion and love found in the religions of bhakti. The ideal of the Bodhisattva on the one hand, and the agapeism of Christianity on the other, represent the outward-looking dynamic of personal concern. If the Greater Vehicle criticizes the Theravāda, and if Christianity sometimes criticizes the 'world-negating' aspects of yoga, this is a sign that the temptation of non-violence is sheer inaction on behalf of others. If the Hindu criticizes the Christian for his righteous aggressiveness, this shows no doubt that the temptation of love is interferingness. But properly practised, gentleness and love are indissolubly united. Here is a further respect in which the spirit of dhyāna and the spirit of bhakti are intermingled.

5.31. The history of modern India and the effect of Gandhi on civil rights movements in a number of countries indicates the force of the ideal of non-violence. Its appeal in the West is partly due to a recognition of the dogmatism and aggressiveness of much of the European tradition. Thus non-violence, tied as it is to the early practice of yoga, is a counterpoise to the over-enthusiastic conformism which is liable to afflict monotheism.

5.32. The ideal of spiritual knowledge connects up with the triple formula of saccidānanda in as much as the latter has overtones of the life of yoga through which one realizes union with Brahman. The Bliss and the emptiness of Being, together with purity of the divine Consciousness, all are objects, as it were, of the contemplative life as interpreted in Advaita Vedanta. It is true that we have here given a rather different emphasis to the formula, in setting beside its contemplative flavour that of the personhood of the object of worship and bhakti. But it has been our whole argument in this book that the two sides of religion must complement one another, and it may be that the two sides of the interpretation of the triple formula likewise harmonize and add to one another.

5.33. The Bliss and Being of the divine Power both express the supreme value to be found in the life of religion, through communion with God. This bears too on our conceptions of salvation and immortality. It is important in the Christian tradition that individuals have a possible destiny beyond death. But this individualism in eternal life or in the resurrection of the body has its psychological dangers. For it is notoriously easy for people to substitute concern for their own survival for concern for God. What indeed is survival supposed to consist in? Some parables and doctrines are here illuminating.

5.34. The Tibetan Book of the Dead describes the period between an individual's death and his rebirth in this world. During this intervening period he is able to see the divine secrets: and if he is a pure soul he will cling to them. But if he is impure, he will be so terrified by them that he will long for rebirth, and in fact this will be his fate. Those, then, who long for survival should ask themselves whether this survival is connected with the object of their religion. If it is then for the Christian survival will be survival with God. This will be an uncomfortable fate if one does not really like God. Heaven thus would become a kind of hell. Of course, there are other people who simply want survival, unconnected with God. Do they want it for ever? Or is it just an extension of the present life?

5.35. The doctrine of rebirth gives us an ironic perspective upon everlasting survival. The contemplation of an endless succession of lives, each lived approximately in the conditions to which we are already used, is a formidable prospect. The contemplation of rebirth functions in the Indian tradition very

much in one respect in the way in which the contemplation of death functions in the European. In one case, everlasting repetition makes the values of our present existence dwindle; in the other case, the cutting off of the individual likewise renders them puny. The contemplations breed a humility and ironic detachment which are good for the production of love and gentleness. They show us that we need to ask the important question: And what is it that we want survival *for*? The Buddha here can teach us something: that the true saint is the one who neither desires life nor the cutting off of life, neither survival nor failure to survive. If we take the Bliss seriously in our formula, then the divine glory should be enough for us, provided we truly love it.

5.36. The triple formula of Being, Consciousness and Bliss can, then, form the starting-point for a critiqué of, and reinterpretation of, the (largely European hitherto) Christian tradition. It is a very natural thing that a religion in its development should emphasize certain features drawn from within its own substance. The possibility of looking upon that religion from outside, or from half-outside, is an opportunity to bring to light other things which have been partly obscured by the tradition. It can be of immeasurable benefit to Christianity to have its ideas refashioned in the light of Indian experience. This is analogous to the manner in which the Church came to see its mission with a new clarity under the impact of Graeco-Roman culture.

5.37. The danger, it will no doubt be said, is that of syncretism, a frequent bugbear of the Christian. By what criterion can one distinguish between true and false importations into fabric of Christian belief? And is there not an ever-present peril that Christianity will be submerged in the synthesizing embrace of Hinduism? It is natural enough for Christians to worry about such matters, for they believe themselves to be in possession of a unique Gospel: and so they cannot contemplate with equanimity the obscuring of this Gospel. But it is quite obvious that forms of syncretism have been going on in the Christian tradition over a long period. It is clear that no single formula or theology will prevent such. Those who take a literalistic view of the Bible are as much liable to import their unconscious prejudices into the interpretation of the Gospel as are those committed to liberalism and natural theology.

The only answer to the problem will be the constant critical attitudes of those who belong to the Church. It is only in the community that the criterion will be found.

5.38. The present discussion of the Indian contributions to the critique of Christianity are relevant in that context, that they may stimulate thinking within the Church, both in the West and in India on the formulation of belief. For the Christian community cannot come to a mind about these things without having these things laid before it. But it is to be hoped that the discussion is relevant in a much wider context than that of the Christian community. It represents too some kind of contribution to the process of interplay between religions which is an increasing feature of the growing world culture.

5.39. The exposition of the saccidānanda which has been given is only one part of one line of approach to the insights which the Hindu, and more generally the Indian, tradition may bring to Christianity. Of course, it is no special duty of the Indian tradition to contribute to the understanding of the Christian faith. But we are here concerned with the relation between Christianity and Hinduism, and one arm of this relation is that contribution (it would be also possible to explore the Christian contribution to the understanding of Hinduism – a task for another time, perhaps).

5.40. Hitherto the main argument of this book has concerned the doctrinal and experiential dimensions (2.3) of religion. Occasionally we have touched on mythological ideas and on the ethical dimension of faith. It is appropriate to round off this rather cursory account of Indian contributions to Christianity by considering what they would mean in relation to revealed theology – i.e. what they would mean in relation to the salvation-history culminating in the life, death and resurrection of Christ. This opens the way to the possibility of a 'Christ Upanishad', in which Christ takes the place, as it were, of the imaginative deities of the Vedic *Śruti*.

5.41. In what way can Christ be seen as the revelation of the saccidānanda? As sat, 'Being', Christ is of supreme value: sharing in God's uniqueness. It is true that this 'exclusiveness' of the Christian revelation is strange and unacceptable from the Hindu point of view, where rather there is the concept of many incarnations and the notion that divinity resides in each

one of us. But we are engaged here in a kind of exposition of that revelation, not a defence of it. (As was pointed out earlier, the full attempt to explicate the criteria of religious truth and so to set out the lines of interplay between faiths, is a much larger task than can be performed here.) Secondly, Christ as Being has the 'upper reaches' of which we spoke earlier. It is not that there is nothing we can say about him: on the contrary the Christian tradition and the scriptural documents furnish us with the materials for a theology of the Incarnation. But as with the heavenly Lord, so with Christ: we recognize that Christ's nature transcends what truly we may say about it. Something of that mysteriousness which points to the ineffable 'upper reaches' is revealed in the resurrection. This rather bodily reappearance of Jesus cannot be fully understood, though we can understand something of the impact it had upon those who witnessed to it.

5.42. But did Christ have that inner Voidness, the contemplative unity with God, which is also signalled by the ontological bareness of the concept of Being? It has often been tempting for the proponents of the Thesis of Religious Unity to see in such sayings as 'I and the Father are one' an expression of that same unity with God or the Absolute which the mystics testify to. And it was not altogether unnatural for al-Hallaj, partly on the basis of his feeling of oneness with the Real, to model his life and, more importantly, his death upon the career of Jesus. But there is little evidence in the Gospels that Jesus was a yogin, though his periods in the wilderness may have involved the practice of some sort of dhyāna. Our attitude to the matter will be partly determined in advance by the weight which we may attach to the natural theology of religious experience: if the divine nature reflects and harmonizes both dhyāna and bhakti, then Christ somehow reflects them too.

5.43. The second part of the triple formula more explicitly draws attention to the personhood of the divine Power. It goes without saying that personhood is central to Christ's nature, from the simple fact that Jesus was a person in the quite ordinary sense in which we are.

5.44. The Bliss of Christ's nature could at first be obscured by the Crucifixion. Christ took upon himself formidable suffering and his earthly ministry, excluding the resurrection, ended

in degradation and seeming defeat. It is true that the man Jesus seems to have been a beguiling companion, and one who shared in the common joys of earthly men – so much so that he did not meet with the approval of the more upright and puritanical among his co-religionists. Oscar Wilde was not entirely without insight in his later unbalanced days in identifying himself with Christ, not of course because Wilde was in any sense a fit object of piety, but because he too had the power to beguile and ended in disaster. Sometimes the human side of Jesus is overlaid by too much adoration and solemnity, and it would be well for us to recall sometimes the joy which emanated from him. It may or may not be the case that he turned water into wine in Cana at the wedding feast: but the very fact that the story stuck is indication of the manner of man he was.

5.45. Yet somehow, from causes which remain opaque to us, the glory of Christ's creation is infected with ignorance and suffering. It is against this background that we tend to see Christ's work of salvation. But the traditional European emphasis upon the myth of Adam has spilled over into the doctrine of the Atonement. This has often been conceived as an act of restoring man to a previous relationship to God ruptured at the Fall. Or it has been seen as the triumph over that death which came into the world as the result of Adam's disobedience. As the hymn proclaims: '. . . a second Adam to the fight and to the rescue came'. What difference to our attitudes is made if we employ the analogy of primeval ignorance which we discussed earlier in this chapter (5.22)?

5.46. First, we might want to see Christ as the Teacher who releases us from that ignorance. This, as shall be argued, is by itself an inadequate characterization of the work of Christ, but it is part of the picture. If we think of teaching as a matter of enunciating propositions, then Christ was a singularly elusive Guru. He did not lay down a systematic theology. It can hardly be said that he gave out a formal system of moral teachings either. Christ differed from many of the more locquacious Gurus. His teachings were often parabolic, and, at least as they have been preserved, they are oddly fragmentary. About their revolutionary content, in relation to his Jewish background, we need have little doubt. But the content was not a reply on the same level as the teachings of the scribes and Pharisees. It rather consists in illuminations

designed to move people's thinking and feeling out of precast moulds.

5.47. This obliqueness in the teachings of the divine Guru should make us reflect on the true nature of the Guru. One does not seek a Guru because of the propositions one is going to hear: but rather from the sense that the Guru has a divine secret. He is able to convey that secret in living form. This idea lies behind the notion in Zen Buddhism that illumination is conveyed direct from the Master to the pupil. The Guru, then, is one who provides illumination through the power of his spiritual influence. This means that the teaching and the life of the Guru are of a piece, woven together in a unity. For this reason, Christ as the Guru is not just the Teacher but the one who died and rose again from the dead. It is through his acts that the influence spreads through the new society which he created upon earth.

5.48. The revolutionary nature of Christ's teaching is a sign that he did not just come to restore a breach between God and man, which was the result of the latter's moral defect. Instead we have to see Christ as the Guru who imparted a new dynamic to the life of men, by beginning a process of reorienting their imaginations, by opening their eyes to the possibility of being co-workers with God in his creation. One might say: he brought into human life a new Being, a new Consciousness, a new Bliss.

5.49. Now admittedly, when one contemplates the actual life of Christians one can easily be disillusioned about this revolution which Christ the Guru is supposed to have effected. It is not a simple matter to detect the reorientation of the imagination and the will which is supposed to follow from reliance upon the saving Guru. The Church seems to carry on in a wooden and blundering manner. But here perhaps the wider vision of the immensities of time opened up by modern science and evident in ancient Indian cosmology may make us think again. It is but a short time since the appearance of Christ on earth, and yet he has already left an indelible stamp upon human history. If we candidly listen to the Guru, we can be part of that process through which human life is progressively liberated from the evils which beset it. It is not necessary here to speculate, probably rashly, about evolution in the manner of Teilhard de Chardin or Sri Aurobindo. Since Christ is a revolutionary, the spirit bloweth where it listeth. We can be

taken in by brash predictions of how the world will go. But the Christian hope lies in the future, and there is no cause to despair at the disillusioning character of much of the new society which had its source in Christ.

5.50. If, then, one were to sketch the outline of a 'Christ Upanishad', it might go somewhat as follows. The Holy Power, Brahman, is that from which all this world proceeds. It is the overflowing of the Bliss of Brahman, and it conceals him. This Brahman is constituted by Being, Consciousness and Bliss. His Consciousness is that of Personhood: he is the personal Lord, whose body is this whole world, serving his purposes and desires, as he dances out his creation. This Brahman is the object of our bhakti. We rely upon him in love and gentleness. This Brahman is also the inner aim of the yogin, and union with Brahman is a marriage between the Lord and the individual soul.

5.51. Brahman expresses himself through the dance of the material world, but finds his joy too in the individual persons who are inhabitants of matter. But their consciousness can often be invaded by malice and suffering and ignorance, and these cut them off from the true Bliss that can be found in the bosom of the Lord. The Holy Power, having set in course the creation of the world, with its proliferation of living beings, also sets in course the dynamic which will bring them liberation. This liberation is not something which is achieved in isolation from creation. Nor is it something which the Lord achieves merely on behalf of the living beings within his creation. In it, he identifies himself with their tribulations and joys. For the Holy Power, Brahman, expresses itself in action in the figure of the Guru, Christ, whose life, sufferings and resurrection are of a piece with his teaching: a life and teaching which spread their influence through the new community constituted to carry on the work of co-creation. Thus the Holy Power, Brahman, is not one who lets forth the world of experience as though it is a lesser version of himself: it is the expression of his joy, his consciousness, his being. As such, it has its own perfection. But that perfection is not static: it is to be realized ultimately in the triumph of the glory of Brahman. And in the meantime it is seen to have its central point in the revolutionary Guru who lived out the divine life in the human condition.

5.52. The world, one might say, is the growing body of

Brahman. Within it, there are thrown up new forms of life. One new form was the life of man, who mirrors the being, consciousness and joy of the divine nature. A second form was found in the Guru Christ, who revolutionized the life of man, and set it on a new path towards divinity by breaking out from all the shells of orthodoxy and legalism which continually return to cramp the divine style of human living. Though the Guru promises eternal life, he does not promise that we can be led from the mortal to the immortal as a price of good behaviour. We are not led from death to life as a means of his using us or of our using him. If we are to follow the Guru it must be in such a way that we neither desire immortality nor death. Casting this sort of hope to the winds, we can be liberated in the service of the Holy Power.

5.53. Such might well be the outline of the 'Christ Upanishad'. But in fact that Upanishad remains to be written. For it can only come into existence genuinely from within the traditions of India, and all I have succeeded in doing is speaking a language half-permeated with those traditions. But it is worthwhile outlining such a possibility, in order to stimulate thinking and even, perhaps, writing, in this vein. It has been the argument of this chapter that the Christian experience as hitherto understood can be enriched by the insights of the multitudinous traditions of India.

5.54. Earlier it was suggested that the theology of Ramanuja was a starting point for the exposition of a theology which was not merely intrinsic to the Upanishadic tradition but also was a good expression of what we have called the natural theology of religious experience. The above attempt at an outline of a 'Christ Upanishad' follows the same general line. But the very fact that different cultures are in interplay today, as is witnessed by the interplay of religions in particular, means that the new theology for the Indian tradition cannot just be Indian, for the effects of other cultures, other ideas, will already be present in Indian thinking. We have seen (4.35) an instance of this in the theology of Sri Aurobindo. It is no exaggeration to say that the attitudes of President Radhakrishnan are determined in part by the impact of Western culture upon the Indian heritage. Swami Vivekananda was responding to a wider vision of religion than the Indian – hence the power of his message. It is therefore clear that even if the theology of

Ramanuja is illuminating both for the Upanishads and for the religious thinking of the West, it must remain but a starting point in the quest for a framework of religious ideology.

5.55. If this is so, then the theology of Ramanuja – or whatever form of hospitable theism is taken to express the harmony between dhyāna and bhakti – will be confronted with the philosophical and other criticisms of religious belief which have been prevalent in the Western world in the last few decades. Such criticisms in part depend upon an empiricist view of the world that is already fading in the West, and so in one respect they need not be taken all that seriously. But secretly they depend on a certain view of science and of the relation between science and religion. It was earlier argued (3.61 et seq.) that the two can go hand in hand. But this is not obvious to all: and an older evangelical suspicion of superstition has been transmogrified into a contemporary castigation of the more simple-minded interpretations of religious faith and practice. This challenge to orthodoxy, whether it be Eastern or Western, is important in its own right, but it also contains a significant moral for Indian philosophy and theology. I was at pains in the first chapter to point to some of the religious and experiential roots of the various systems within the Indian philosophical and theological heritage. (Similar remarks might be made about much in the European tradition). Since religious roots tend to be particular – particular in the sense that they belong to a particular cultural milieu, and so expressed in a mythological and ritual form peculiar to that milieu – it has been not unnatural to treat Indian philosophy essentially as *Indian* philosophy. But in so far as philosophy is a matter of argument and insight, and since argument and insight can be matched across cultures, philosophy must ultimately be an international activity, in which it becomes absurd to speak of English or American or Swedish or Indian or Chinese or Burmese philosophy. The best that one could do in the international milieu of philosophy is to refer to philosophers who happen to be Burmese or Swiss.

5.56. Thus the world interplay between religions will be complemented by an international forum of philosophical argument. In so far as religion is in dialogue with the 'secular' environment, it will be affected by this incipient philosophical internationalism. Thus the theology of Ramanuja, as a starting

point in the interpretation of the Christian faith for India, will also be exposed to the cross-currents of this wider debate. This is to its advantage. For then the Upanishads will become relevant to the West as well as to Indian Christianity. Not that relevance to the West is such a marvellous accolade. But service is not a matter of honours, and the dual mixture of philosophical internationalism and the interplay of religions will give the Upanishads this form of service to be rendered to those who are still beset by cultural tribalism.

5.57. Meanwhile there stands on the side, as far as modern India is concerned, the great and serene figure of the Buddha. It cannot be said that he expresses the same message as the Upanishads. He was probably far from theoretical sympathy with the natural theology of religious experience which has been propounded in this book. He is a contrast to Rāmanuja. He is a Teacher very different from Christ. If what I have said about philosophical internationalism and the interplay between religions is correct, the Lord Buddha will not be absent from the interchange of feelings and ideas. He is the third party in the Indian discussion. He should not be forgotten, either by the Christian or the Hindu. It is only to be hoped that the present discussion in this book has not unduly neglected him, and this was one of the reasons why the analysis of the Indian religious heritage was not simply conducted in terms of the *Hindu* heritage.

5.58. The worth of the ideas expressed here is, as was argued, to be seen ultimately in the living social dialogue between men of good faith. This is why we say: *satyam eva jayate*. Or, in occidental terms, the truth will out.

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