

The Cosmic, Biological and Cultural
Conditionings, and the Seeking for Freedom^{*†}

Daya Krishna

The fact of dependence and inter-dependence is so large that even the blindest eye cannot escape it, and yet man 'feels' free and believes that he can have more of it, if he so wills and endeavors and makes the effort.

A hurricane can blow off everything, an earthquake can occur, destroy or damage the earth itself. At the mercy of it all is the helpless creature called man who, like all 'living beings', is pre-programmed by his 'genetic' make-up to repeat the life of his species and follow the journey to old age and death, unless 'accident' intervenes and something happens to him.

Unlike other living beings, however, man has to be acculturated, educated in the mores of the society he is born in and learn the language, both verbal and non-

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† An attempt has been made to leave Daya Krishna's article as "unedited" as possible. Nevertheless, mistakes which occurred in its first printing owing to incomplete proofreading have been corrected.

verbal, through which he is made to learn, and even like, what to do and what not to do.

Conditioned like this, man grows up gradually and thinks he is a Christian, or a Jew, or a Muslim, or a Hindu, or Buddhist, or a Jain, or a Confucian, and believes that he is these first and a human being afterwards. He may have other identities such as being a tribal, or some that he has not been born into but has come to accept later. The 'identity' in all these cases, however, is not so much a 'self-identity' but, rather, something 'given' by others like the 'name' one was given when one was 'born' into this world. One may, of course, change one's name just as one may be converted to another religion or adopt another 'nationality', but one has to go through a pre-determined formal process in order to be accepted by others.

But, whatever the restrictions or compulsions, there is always the possibility of a change and this defines the difference between 'nature' and 'culture' both of which constitute the 'determining' and the 'conditioning' circumstances of man as a biological species, as also a socio-cultural being which he alone is, and which differentiates him from all the other species.

The fact that the human 'individual' is born as an individual in the biological sense, like all other living beings, but has still to be 'helped' to become an

'individual' in the strict human sense of the term by others who themselves were helped to become 'individuals', is what differentiates the process of individuation amongst human beings and also provides the foundation for the emergence of that sense of the I, or the 'selfhood', with which the sense of freedom is integrally related to the feeling of responsibility and accountability to others in self-consciousness. To be treated as an 'individual' is to be treated as one who is 'free' and hence, responsible for what one does and thus is subject to praise or blame, reward or censure for what one has done.

Individuation, freedom and accountability go together, for learning to become an 'individual' is, first and foremost, a 'learning process' in which imitation or mimesis plays the key role as it provides the basis for the possibility of 'change' in that which has been learnt, a 'change' that itself may become the centre of approbation or disapprobation, depending upon the judgment of those who had already made changes and innovations that were liked and approved by still others who had gone through the same process.

The 'mimesis', or the imitation, thus, is not an endless repetition by successive generations of what they learnt from their predecessors but, rather, of the

innovations and the changes that had been found interesting and worthwhile by them.

This is the building of 'traditions' where each generation passes on its innovations and changes to the succeeding one, and challenges them to at least try to approximate the 'masters' of the past, if not surpass them. T.S. Eliot tried to articulate these two different sides of individuation in his well-known essays "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919) and "What is a Classic?" (1944).

The 'freedom' of creative contribution, though conditioned and circumscribed, is nevertheless 'real' enough to itself and becomes 'conditioning' and 'circumscribing' factors through what it brings into being, and those who come after feel the same ambivalent and ambiguous relation towards it.

The facticity of 'conditioning', however, is denied in the 'self-consciousness' of freedom which - just because it is 'freedom' - feels itself to be unconditioned and 'demands' that it be so. The 'limitations' and 'constraints' are seen as something to be overcome, or rather as essentially contingent in character, superimposed on it by the circumstances of its being situated in an 'empiricality', which itself is contingent in character. The lack of 'intrinsic

necessity' is writ large on everything that is, as it could always have been otherwise since there is no self-contradiction involved in thinking it to be so. Counterfactual conditionals are the heart of knowledge and the possibility of changing at the heart of action.

The indubitable self-certainty of the 'I consciousness', whether in the 'cogito' of Descartes or of the '*aham pratyaya*' of Śaṅkara, follows from this. Freed from the contingent bondage of all 'objectivity', the 'I-consciousness' feels itself to be the centre of certitude and freedom, and thus also of the suffering caused by that which is 'other' than itself and thus need not necessarily be.

There could not be an emptier freedom than this, as there is nothing to be changed or affected, and hence the very exercise of freedom is made impossible in principle. The dream of a 'freedom' unconditional by anything else has turned into the actualization of an absurdity as there is nothing left to be conditioned by it.

To be able to determine or influence, conditioning thus presupposes that that which has the ability to condition must itself be capable of being influenced, conditioned, determined at least by that which it wants to influence, condition or determine.

The idea that the 'ideal' of 'omnipotence' is involved in the very notion of 'freedom' is as much mistaken as the complementary idea that 'freedom' involves the possibility and the necessity of being 'free' of everything else, including one's own desires, seekings, aspirations, in short all the *vṛttis* as Patañjali's *Yogasūtra* puts it, and, of course, all the *saṃskāras* which the whole past history of the universe, at all its levels, has left in one, as it has had to, because one is its child, its creation, just as everything else is.

The idea that 'freedom' involves within it the ideal of *kaivalya* is as mistake as the idea of *siddhis* also adumbrated in the *Yogasūtra*. The *Sāṃkhya* has a notion of plurality to *puruṣas*, or a plurality of the *kevalin*, without asking the question: 'What is the relation between them?' Nor does Pātañjala-yoga seem to be aware of the problem created by the postulation of the *siddhis*, promised by it to all on the road to *samādhi*, through the practice prescribed in its third chapter, known to all who have even a nodding acquaintance with this fundamental text on Yoga in the tradition of spiritual seeking, that is not confined now to India alone but has spread all over the world and become global in character.

Freedom, then, has to be conceived in a different way if it has to become the possession, not just of one, solitary, isolated individual but of others as well. A plurality of 'centers of freedom' in inter-communication, in interactive relationship, has to be conceived if one is to resist the temptation of a 'false' monistic singularity of the idea of a 'God' who cannot bear to have any others besides Himself and, thus has to be both omniscient and omnipotent without ever being 'known' or influenced by anyone else.

Freedom, thus, is limited by the freedom of others, many others, just as it limits their freedom in return. The relation between 'freedoms', however, need not be of just 'limitation' in the negative sense; it can also be positive in the sense that each person's freedom may enhance the 'freedom' of others and, in many cases, it actually does so. Children will not grow and become adults, nor will society function and men survive if it were not so. Without society and culture, man cannot even 'become' human or achieve 'humanity' as we know it, and without economy and polity there will be no such thing as 'civilization' in the sense in which we know it. Tribal societies with their cultures at all levels, from the most primitive to the most sophisticated, have always been there since 'man' is said to have emerged on this

planet, but civilizations have not been many and have been 'rare' achievements of 'humankind'.

Societies cannot be thought of without mutuality, cooperation and helpfulness, but the building of civilization needs all these of a qualitatively different kind, as it does not depend on direct, fact-to-face, personal relations of the 'I-thou' kind talked of by Buber and many others, but of considerations of an impersonal, theoretical nature based on rules and norms and values which have a space-and-time horizon of a different kind.

personal relations are great, but a civilization cannot be built on just that alone and - what is even stranger - the realms of 'unfreedom' created by it in range and depth can hardly have a parallel in the one created by one human being for another in the face-to-face, personal relationships, where the 'felt bondages' may be even much more subtle than those due to the functioning of impersonal institutions that lie at the foundation of civilizations.

The emergence of the realm of 'freedom' through the building of institutions governed by self-consciously formulated impersonal rules and norms created both a problem and an opportunity for individual, personality centered relationships to discover and face new hidden

possibilities lying within those, which could not have been realized, or even seen, as possibilities earlier by the individuals, submerged as they were in the socio-cultural norms within which they lived. The freedom from the state of nature that had already been achieved through living as socio-cultural beings achieved new dimensions added to it through the new 'seekings' in the field of knowledge and action that these inevitably brought with them. The rise of religions and empires at whose foundation lay knowledge and aspirations of all kinds, made the man 'feel' larger than himself, a part of a wider humanity than the one self-enclosed within an extended family or a tribal as earlier he had been. Language gave wings to imagination as the earliest recorded oral and written traditions attest, and man began to see himself and others not as what they were, but what they could be. The 'givenness' of nature had already been transformed into the 'givenness' of socio-cultural reality to which was now added the 'givenness' brought into being by political and economic reality which now began to influence and shape both natural and socio-cultural reality in a way that has resulted in contemporary times in a radical reversal of roles where 'planning' emanating from the 'political centre' is supposed to take initiative and responsibility for

changing 'reality' at all levels, be they natural or socio-cultural or anything else.

The 'mutational' change in the way the political institutions are expected to function has not been noticed because of the inherent inertia in all thinking which functions on the assumption that the concepts it uses to capture reality remain the same in form and content, giving 'reality' the shape it always had. That 'reality' is essentially unchanging is the unconscious assumption of all knowledge as 'space-time invariance' is supposed to be inscribed in it by definition. The illusion is sustained by ignoring the history of these conceptual formulations and the way in which they were formulated and the cognitive and non-cognitive contexts in which they occurred. The story of the emergence and obsolescence of concepts, and their diversity and development over time in different civilizations is yet to be written.

The illusion of adequacy and completeness of our conceptual structures to grasp the 'reality' they are concerned with would be revealed more easily if one looks at the debris and the graveyard, or rather the 'museums' of knowledge, that were once considered 'knowledge' and now are known as superstition. One reason for the refusal to see the obvious lies in the very process, through

which 'knowledge' is learnt and transmitted from generation to generation. The second lies in the 'time relationships' of the generations within which knowledge is transmitted and preserved, and that of which it is supposed to be 'knowledge'. The cosmos or the world within which life arises seems to have regularities which appear almost not to change at all and, thus, provide that permanent backdrop to all knowledge, giving it the appearance of that constancy, that its truth will outlast not only all humanity but life itself. The 'living world' with its immense variety of flora and fauna also provides that backdrop, as it was all there when human beings appeared on the scene, and though it is true that man has domesticated and bred both plants and animals, their number is far, far less than those which exist independently of him.

The socio-cultural reality, on the other hand, man has to maintain himself by a continuous effort as it is not independent of him. The danger of 'losing' is always there, inbuilt in the process, as 'learning' and transmitting is not an easy job, and the possibility of forgetfulness is also a possibility. The trouble and the effort is just too much for those who are perforce made to 'learn' and those who have to 'teach', as every generation learns anew at great cost to itself. There is,

of course, modification and change in-built in the process of transmission itself, but the illusion of unchanging continuity is preserved not only by marginalizing or ignoring the changes, but by the fact that language takes the centre-stage particularly when 'writing' appears and gives a fixity to that which was evanescent when 'spoken' and preserved only by an unbelievable self-conscious effort as is found in the oral traditions of India whose foremost example, of course, are the texts known as the *Vedas*, and which are not just four as is ordinarily believed for some mistaken reasons, lying perhaps in the desire to see something as unchanging when it could not be such by the very nature of the case.

The beginnings of economic relations symbolized as trade bring in its wake forces of change which are different from those that are a necessary accompaniment of the process through which socio-cultural reality is maintained through transmission from generation to generation. It is not that the processes involved in the latter are absent from the former. In fact they cannot be, as the processes designated by what is known as 'economics' are embedded in the socio-cultural reality itself and cannot be conceived to exist apart from it. But these are overlaid by new 'forms' which gradually

begin to change the socio-cultural reality itself, introducing as it does a new dimension of dependence on something that is 'external' to a particular social system, which generally is not seen as such because of the talk of 'inter-dependence', forgetting that the relation may be asymmetrical in character.

The problems created by economic transactions needed a 'regulatory authority' of a different kind than the one that was required for the maintenance of then socio-cultural system itself. It also created the need for a new kind of 'knowledge' that was required to make the functioning of this whole new emerging sector possible. It was not just 'cheating' in respect of the weights and measures, or the ensuring of the quality of goods sold in the market, but also such things as the facilities of transportation and storage that required an 'authority' outside the economic system and superior to it, so that standards were maintained and the violators punished. This is well known to the earliest texts dealing with the problems of a polity, no matter whether they were written in India or elsewhere. Kauṭilya's *Arthaśāstra* refers to it, as much as the *Athenian Constitution*, and in both it is the task of a separate department to deal with the problem. But the positive aspect of the relation between polity and economy is by and large ignored, except in

general sense that it should function for the welfare and prosperity of the people.

The emergence of the polity was required not only to ensure all this, but also to safeguard the trade-routes, both at land and sea, which brought the other essential function of polity into the open, as it was concerned with protecting and defending something that was not only 'outside' its domains, but also vague and nebulous in character. That 'Flag follows the trade' is a well-known saying, but the need and the necessity for it have seldom been understood.

The emergence of the political function and its relative segregation required from the fact that it was the locus of the 'right' to punish the defaulters within and take all measures, including war, against those that threatened its interests that were primarily economic, resulted in a new division between the 'ruler' and the 'ruled', besides other divisions such as between the 'literate' and the 'illiterate, and between the 'rich' and the 'poor'.

These three divisions, though inter-related, are independent and have formed the basis of all civilizations. They have been seen as forming distinct classes, or *varṇas*, each with a vested interest of its own, though centered around a central value, respectively

known as power, knowledge and wealth. The relations between them have always been ambivalent as each needs the other and also wants to be - if not completely independent - at least superior in status to the other two. The creators of wealth and the value it embodies, known as development in economic terms, or rate of growth of Gross National Product of a country, earlier known as *prabhava* or *abhuyudaya* in the Indian tradition, have generally not tried to emphasize this too much, but have always known that the other two 'depend' upon it even if they do not like it. The tensions between the three continue even now, as no one knows whether knowledge is central to the way things are taking shape, or the 'realities' and 'compulsions' of economic and political life, and the relations between these two.

The centrality of the 'political', however, has always been there as it is not only the seat of legitimate centralized power, but provides the conditions for the effective pursuit of these other two values pursued by those who are engaged in them. The relative independence from the socio-cultural realm, which these institutionally segregated formations had achieved, results gradually in a subtle transformation of the relations that while preserving the illusion of the relative autonomy of the field, slowly undermined it in

such a way that the autonomy of both the 'knowledge' and the 'wealth' sector got eroded, so much so that their direction and growth began to be determined not by facts and forces inherent to them but by others which are 'external' and determine those in terms of its own perspective of what is needed and required.

The story of this transformation has not exactly been told in this way, but the changing relations between 'knowledge revolution', 'industrial revolution' and the formation of new kind of polities through the series of 'political revolutions' in England, America, France, Russia and Germany, have not been analyzed or seen except in the monolithic perspectives provided by Marx and others who followed his way of understanding these phenomena.

The 'revolutions', however, in all these realms have not ceased and it will be difficult to say which has taken precedence now, and what is emerging on the horizon. The term 'globalization' tries to capture this, but in a misleading form as what is really 'global' is generally absent from it. Also, the extent to which 'globalization' is occurring is different in different fields, and the tendency and the trend in them is not uniform either. Disparities and conflict between them are evident in the developments in the field of economy on

the one hand and polity and 'knowledge' on the other. The reach of economic institutions is increasingly transnational, while ethnic claims to political identity have become increasingly disruptive of political identities built through a long period of struggle against the 'rule' of Western powers in Asia and Africa. As for 'knowledge', it has become increasingly esoteric, capital intensive and pursued like industrial production in hierarchical institutions, employing hundreds of specialists in different fields, needed for the production of that which is needed by the state or the industries for purposes of power and profit. Moreover, it is treated as a 'secret' possession by nations, which are increasingly taking measures, legal and otherwise, to deny access to it by others. The amalgamation of economic corporations at the transnational level, political fragmentation, and monopoly in knowledge, have all become the order of the day, each pulling the so-called globalization in different directions. Economic compulsions are at odds with political necessities, and the interest of those who thrive on the monopoly of knowledge for their pursuit of power and wealth stands in the way of that 'universality' of knowledge, which was always claimed for it as it was the pursuit of Truth.

The changing relations between these, and the tensions generated between them define the situation of man and the problem of freedom in the contemporary context in a way that has never happened before in history. At the centre of it lie the radical change in the conception of knowledge, which now is seen not only in purely instrumental terms, but also as something that can be self-consciously 'created' by the collective effort of man, through planning and management and investment of huge resources, mobilized for the purpose by the state or the political centre, that sees itself now in terms of the 'future' and not as the 'preserver' of all that was achieved in the past. It is not the *dharma*, or the *status quo*, or the socio-cultural realities that give meaning and identity to a people. It is rather 'development' in all fields and all directions that is seen as its 'defining' function, leading to perpetual instability whose quality and intensity is increasing at such a rate, that not only all social relations, including the one between the generations, are being disrupted, but also the conceptual structures that man had evolved to 'understand' human reality and the values it was supposed to enshrine and pursue to make it 'human' and give it meaningfulness. The obsolescence of all 'past' knowledge and its final irrelevance to the present and the future of mankind is the order of the

day, proclaimed aloud by the consignment, segregation and banishment of all the cultural creations of the past into the 'museums', and 'rejected' by the practicing artists of the day.

The eternal verities symbolized by the ideas of Truth, Beauty and Goodness appear not only to have lost the aura around them, but also the 'givenness' or 'independence' of all human activity and consciousness which alone gave them that 'reality', which made them the 'ideal' for being pursued by man and realized in his life. Not only this, the rejection of all past achievements of man entails the rejection of the idea of civilization as built by the collective efforts of mankind over millennia, and replaces it by the creation of a 'new' reality by the effort of a new race of individuals, each working separately, but also in harmony with others, a harmony that has to be 'pre-established', like the one in Leibnitz's system, if it is not to be imposed by the will of someone who arrogates to himself, or is given by others the power to do so. The former is only another name for that which already exists in the world of 'living beings' and is generally designated by the term 'nature'; the latter is the secular version of the theological notion of an omnipotent being who is also supposed to be omniscient. The latter, of course, is not

ascribed to man either as an individual, or even when he is given or takes the power in his hands to coordinate and integrate the diverse activities of individual men.

The illusion of 'omnipotence' has gripped mankind, which seems to have learnt nothing from the disaster created by this mentality in the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany in the previous century. The reason for its persistence is perhaps related to the advances in knowledge and the resulting technologies that had been cumulatively accumulating since the time of Galileo and Newton, and whose pace has increased dramatically since the middle of the twentieth century, when man achieved the first nuclear chain reaction in Chicago under Enrico Fermi and later, when the voyage to the moon was successfully planned and executed under the orders of the late President John Kennedy in the USA.

Gripped mankind is the result of that slow accumulation of knowledge that has now accelerated at such an astonishing speed, resulting in the inversion of the relations between knowledge and technology, whose far-reaching implications have yet to be realized. Technology has ceased to be dependent on the prior existence of knowledge, which in any case is contingent. Instead, it determines the 'creation' of knowledge required for it as it itself is required for the

achievement of pre-given ends required and desired by man. The building of the atom bomb and the journey to the moon, as we have pointed out earlier, were dramatic examples of this. But since then, the trend has become irreversible, as what has become prior is the 'ends' we want to achieve, and hence we seek that knowledge and technology which is required for its achievement. The revolutions in information technology, genetic manipulation, and building of machines with artificial intelligence have only carried this trend further.

But all this requires planning, and high investment, and large institutions with division of specialized intellectual skills of hundreds, if not thousands, of people, which requires coordination, management and integration of the research work done by those people, so that the desired end may be achieved. The individual's 'freedom' to pursue knowledge and discover 'truth' is no longer a value, or even an 'affordable possibility', as what is wanted is 'intellectual factories' churning out 'knowledge' just as the industrial revolution is said to have done earlier. The 'knowledge revolution' has made knowledge an industry with all the consequences the Industrial Revolution had earlier brought in its wave. The individual entrepreneur or artisan in the field of knowledge is being slowly driven out, and if one has to

survive, one has to become part of some nationally or internationally funded project which subscribes to the purposes of someone else.

It cannot, of course, be denied that 'knowledge' is being created, at least knowledge of a certain sort, but whether this knowledge shall lead to the enhancement of freedom and liberation of man, individually and collectively, will be a matter of dispute and discussion. But, then, this prior question will have to be asked as to what is this 'freedom', or 'liberation', about which we are thinking in the human context, and whether it is so central as we tend to assume, or is just one value among others with which it has to be reconciled, as without that it itself may become meaningless, or stale and futile.

Perhaps the answer lies not in denying the practical or applied aspect of every ideal value that man pursues, but in 'seeing' that this aspect neither exhausts nor is essential to that which makes human life meaningful in itself in the context of temporality, which whatever one may say, is 'felt' by one as extending indefinitely into the future. Human life may only be given significance and meaning through the pursuit of something that is not only intrinsically unrealizable in time, but which is capable of being perceived as developing both quantitatively and

qualitatively when seen retrospectively from the constantly moving vantage point of the present. The moment of retrospection appears far off from the 'ideal' as it ever was, and is 'felt' to be so.

Freedom shares both these characteristics, as it seems to be an 'ideal' value to be realized through action both at the individual and the collective level. However, it is also presupposed by any and every pursuit that man engages in, challenging us to 'think' about something that, though already achieved, is yet still to be achieved, and in that sense is never achieved, or can even possibly be achieved.

The dilemma is perhaps shared by all other pursuits of man, as one cannot start with a clean slate, or just 'nothing', and has to presuppose at least 'capacities', 'potentialities', 'propensities' which themselves assume a past actuality which has left these 'traces' behind. The Indians called these *saṃskāra* and, at a deeper level, contended that 'intelligibility' demands 'beginninglessness', unless one wants to posit a beginning with God himself who created the world and everything with it and in it.

At a still deeper level, the paradox and the dilemma seems to point to the relation between temporality and atemporality, time and the timeless, or the empirical and

the metaphysical, or the phenomenal and the noumenal, both coexistent in consciousness and rooted in it. The awareness of time is a problem to which little attention has been paid except in the context of understanding change, or motion, or action, which all involve 'waiting' that always has an element of 'uncertainty' and the resultant anxiety involved in it. Time does not seem to be a form of 'inner sensibility', as Kant thought, since both consciousness and self-consciousness, experientially speaking, do not seem to 'feel' time as involved in them. Phenomenally speaking, one hardly 'lives' in 'time-consciousness', as is 'known' to everyone who internally 'feels' the same, even though 'others' see one getting old or changing in body and mind all the time. One, of course, has to accept these as facts, but only as a matter of inference, something to which one is compelled by evidence, but which one also forgets easily as it is not corroborated by the experiential evidence of the way one 'feels' and 'lives' all the time.

Yet, that which is felt to be 'unreal' can become 'real' in an instant, the moment one wants or desires something, and feels simultaneously its 'present absence' and future 'presence', if only one were to do something to bring it about through action based on some knowledge relevant to it, and also pertaining to the same. The

Indians call this *pravṛtti*, the generalized name for the 'out-going' movement of consciousness, determined by desire, and memory, and imagination, and resulting in that perpetual 'seeking', or 'thirst' for what-is-not, which the Buddha called *tṛṣṇā*, and which lies at the root of *saṃsāra*, or the human world as we know it.

But if there is *pravṛtti*, there is also *nivṛtti*, the counter-movement of consciousness, the 'withdrawal' from it all, and 'returning' to oneself to find once again what one had lost to the 'world of objectivity', the *saṃsāra* with its myriad charms and unending frustrations, ever-changing, never remaining the same or being 'still' even for a moment, as 'time' is the essence of it.

Freedom, thus, lies in this double capacity of consciousness at the human level to move outward or return inward as it pleases, bound neither by the one or the other, and hence at another level, feeling itself 'free' from both. Neither of these can define it exclusively, or exhaust its reality as it 'appears' to itself as transcending both, no matter if this is 'judged' to be illusory by the consciousness itself when it 'sees' the situation 'objectively' and tries to understand it. Both the 'outward' and the 'inward' movement seem to have in-built limitations not exactly known to man, and perhaps, 'unknowable' in principle, as

the former encounters the 'givenness' of the body and the physical world on the one hand and the socio-cultural and politico-economic 'worlds' on the other; while the latter seem to result from the very nature of consciousness and self-consciousness, and the interactive inter-relationship between them.

The illusions of the possibility of omniscience and omnipotence are in-built in the two movements themselves, though it is clearer in the case of the outer-movement of consciousness than in that which we have called 'inward'. The former has almost come to a clearer focus in contemporary times when man has visibly started 'playing God' with the new power that he has got to 'create' forms of life and matter, that have never existed before. The 'achievement', of course, is built on the millennia-long efforts of man, to which all civilizations have contributed, even if it remains largely unacknowledged and unappreciated. Not only this, this feeling of 'playing God', which is so widespread because of unbelievable successes in the creation of new technologies, has blinded man to the fact that God, for all his omnipotence, seems even more 'helpless' than man to be able to do much with the 'world' which he created, if he did create it. Power, any kind of power, creates more problems, which become increasingly intractable as

they are rooted in the illusion that the more power one has, the freer one is, when in fact, it is not so. Power, as everyone should know, does not give 'freedom', but something else, which whatever it may be, is not freedom, at least not for those who do not have this power. Power, as everyone knows, is essentially asymmetrical in nature, and if someone has more 'power', others are bound to have less than he has, and even be subservient to him.

The 'inward' turn does not seek power directly, or even 'freedom' indirectly through it, but instead seeks 'freedom' directly as it conceives of it in its capacity to 'withdraw' from everything else, and be centered in itself, without relation to anything other than itself. But as the feeling of 'unrelatedness' is founded on the illusion created by the fact of withdrawal, which if reflected upon sufficiently, would itself show its illusoriness. 'Withdrawal', obviously, is a withdrawal from 'something', and makes sense only in relation to it. *Pravṛtti* and *nivṛtti* are both related to one another at all levels in their myriad forms and are cannot be understood, at least conceptually, without the other, even though one may not consciously 'feel' or realize this when one is settled, if only relatively, in the one or the other. The problem of *jīvanmukti*, or 'being

completely liberated' while one is 'biologically alive', tries to come to terms with this in the Indian tradition.

But though one does achieve, through 'withdrawal', or realize some sort of freedom - freedom from all objectivity - one does not get the power to effectuate or transform, as there is nothing left to be changed or transformed, and in any case, one no longer wants anything, since one is supposed to have given up 'wanting', having seen through the illusion of the bondage that it creates.

Freedom without power, however, seems such an empty thing, and one does not know what to do with it. The seeker of *kaivalya* begins to want *siddhis*, the power to effect just by sheer willing, or even just wishing that it might be so, without the trouble involved in all *pravṛtti*, where action is mediated through the body and the cooperation of the 'other', including even that which is offered by *prakṛti*, or nature itself.

Freedom, thus, has an 'in-built' illusion not only of omnipotence, but of the denial of even the possibility of there being any constraint or restriction on it, whether of reason, or morality, or law, or taste. In short, it wants to deny the very possibility of the 'other', any other, and yet it needs it all the time as without it, it finds no meaning either in the field of

action, or knowing, or feeling the 'worlds' it wants to create and 'live' in.

The 'illusion' and the 'reality' however, are both rooted in 'self-consciousness', which simultaneously 'feels' itself transcending all that is an 'object' to it, and yet feels restricted and constrained by it. Its 'relation' to any 'object', whatever be its ontological status or nature, is always ambivalent and ambiguous as it can neither accept it nor reject it completely.

This essentially problematic and insoluble situation is perhaps best exemplified in the history of civilizations by the paradoxical relationship between self-consciousness and itself in the Indian tradition, as also in its relation to the complete 'totality' of the 'other' named God or *Īśvara*, or *Prakṛti*, that is, nature.

The three relationships are not only radically different from one another, but have deep differences within themselves. The relation with nature, at all its levels, is mediated through consciousness, and as the relation between self-consciousness and consciousness is attempted to be changed or transformed, this too changes. The attempt to change the relationship results in a change in both consciousness and self-consciousness, and thus also subtly affects the relation to nature. This, however, does not usually affect the nature of 'nature'

as it is generally conceived as inanimate, that is, the absolute negation not only of all consciousness but also of life itself. But in case the latter is not denied, 'nature' is seen, as in the poetic or aesthetic consciousness as 'living' and not 'dead'. That is something with which a 'meaningful' relationship can be established, as with 'living beings' in general. The ultimate transformation of nature into something that is not only 'living' but also 'conscious' and 'self-conscious' on the analogy of oneself, though infinitely and radically different, opens the door to the emergence of the 'other' as *Īśvara*, or God, which perforce has to be conceived in human terms, or on the analogy of what we know as the 'highest' in the world of the 'other' that we know, but only in symbolic or metaphorical terms, as in the *Puruṣa-sūkta* of Nārāyaṇa in the 10th Maṇḍala of the extant text of the *Ṛgveda* in its *Sūkta* 10.90. The relation to this would of course vary, depending on whether it is conceived as both transcendent and immanent, or only transcendent in nature. But whatever the conception is, the relation is bound to be ambivalent as, on the one hand, it is the 'object' of one's consciousness and, on the other hand, infinitely superior to oneself in every conceivable way and hence, one's Lord and master. The attempt to 'humanize' this relation by the various *bhakti* cults of India, and the *ṣūfī* and

mystic traditions elsewhere, has given an unbelievably 'richer' dimension to the human world, centered in the life of feeling and imagination, just as romantic and even classical art has tried to do in its own way in respect of the 'world' of nature. But the creation of an idyllic world, whether in relation to the transcendent or the immanent, is 'shown' not to be the 'real reality' of things, as in the famous *Viśvarūpa*, or the cosmic vision of the *Gītā*, or the sublime in the thinking of Kant as presented in his *The Critique of Judgment*.

Grace and prayer, thus, seem ultimately as unavailing as the 'withdrawal' into the 'formless' *advaitic* consciousness through meditation, or even the attainment of *siddhis* as promised in the *Yogasūtra*, or in the *Āgamic Tantric* traditions of India. It is not that these do not give either 'freedom' or 'power', or both, in both the 'objective' and 'subjective' senses of the terms. But it is the illusion of absolute freedom on the one hand, and 'omnipotence' on the other, that they generate, that creates the problem in all these realms.

Science shares these illusions with the spiritual seeking of mankind, and leads to the same consequences as the former. The 'bondage' and 'conditionings' in which all 'beings' are involved have to be recognized and accepted as it is only within the 'limits' permitted by

them that 'freedom' and 'power' can be exercised. The more complex a 'being' happens to be, in the sense that it requires a whole series of hierarchical levels of differentiated kinds of 'being' for its very 'existence', the more it limits both 'freedom' and 'power' in a way that does not seem to have been generally understood by those who have 'thought' on the matter. The number of 'necessary' conditions for the achievement of 'freedom' and the effective exercise of 'power' go on increasing, and the 'sufficient' condition which one thinks lies in one's capacity of 'willing' or 'withdrawing', depending as it does on oneself, make one ignore or forget that there are a host of myriad conditions, perhaps the whole cosmos, or rather what may be regarded as that which is not dependent on me for its being-what-it-is, that has to permit if not cooperate, for one's being 'free'; 'free' in both senses of the word, that is, 'free from' and 'free to do', the latter perhaps having one constraint, that it should not, at least in its 'willed intention', be a 'denial' of the 'freedom' and 'power' of all those who at least 'appear' to be the same as oneself.

The constraint on the 'exercise of freedom' involved in the notion of 'power', however, has an 'inbuilt reciprocity' in it. This is the essential problem which all thinkers concerned with ethics, or morality, have

tended to ignore or evade. There may just be no 'Kingdom of Ends', and men may not treat others as 'ends-in-themselves', and if they do not do so, what is one morally expected to do? The recourse to the notion of 'right', which Kant attempted in his *Science of Right*, is unavailing as, first, it is not a moral notion; second, it also involves the idea of 'reciprocity', as without the recognition of each one's 'right' by all the others, the very concept will make no sense; and third, the idea involves a whole legal system, needed to adjudicate and enforce it.

The moral dilemma created by the fact of a 'plurality of Freedoms' has not been squarely faced, as it has been tacitly assumed that the exercise of freedom as power is always for the realization of a value which is always positive in character, and that there is, or has to be, a pre-established harmony not only between all such values, but also with regard to the empirical conditions of their realization.

All these conditions just do not adhere, and the philosopher's 'wishful thinking' cannot make Reason's 'lawfulness' the same in the practical field, as it is in the theoretical one. The idea of 'law' or 'lawfulness' which, for Kant, is involved in the very idea of Reason is not the same when applied to Nature, as it is when

applied to volitional action at the human level. The exercise of freedom cannot, in principle, be seen as pre-determined categorically or unconditionally, even if it is regarded as having an autonomy of its own, or being 'self-determined', as Kant puts it. The reason obviously is that the so-called 'self' has to have a determinate or 'fixed' nature of its own, something that even Kant appears to acknowledge when he thinks of 'self-love' as standing in the way of 'self-determination', in his discussion of morality. The 'universalizability criterion', which is offered as distinguishing between the two, does not actually do so as firstly, it confines itself only to beings who are 'rational' and, secondly, it assumes that 'rationality', whatever maybe meant by it, cannot in principle be differentiated either in terms of quantity or quality, or both. Reason is not all of one piece, as the distinction between deductive and inductive logic made clear long ago, and as has been shown in recent times, there are radical divisions and distinctions even within these two broad divisions which the Western tradition has always known. The two hardcore deductive disciplines known as logic and mathematics have enormous differences between them, and the attempt to 'reduce' the latter into the former has, as everybody knows, resulted in such an 'obvious' failure that the very attempt has been given up. As for induction, the

problem is even worse. Neither 'strong' nor 'weak' formulations of 'verification' or 'falsification' criteria have withstood criticism, and the problem of justification in diversely different fields of knowledge, with their different methodologies, have only led it to the idea of 'incommensurability', which is to give up the 'enterprise' altogether. The valiant attempt to unify all knowledge claiming to be 'science', either in terms of a common vocabulary, or in terms of common methodology, miserably failed, as those who have followed the work of Carnap and others in this field well know.

Kant's attempt to steer clear of these difficulties and build a Transcendental Logic as the foundation of Pure Philosophy, which had nothing to do with 'experience' in any of its forms foundered on the rocks of 'moral' and 'aesthetic' experience, which contaminate his attempts to find the pure *a-priori*, as becomes amply clear when he is forced to give concrete examples, as in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, or talking even of Perfect and Imperfect Duties to oneself and others. As for the *Critique of Judgment* - beauty, sensuous beauty, bewitches him, though he tries to 'distance' himself by bringing in the notion of judgment, with its claim to universality, even in respect of a sensuously grasped particular, that is 'here' and 'now'.

As Kant was more concerned with 'beauty' in 'nature,' he did not see the necessity of distinguishing between the 'particular' and the 'individual', or the 'singular', which is the heart of what is considered 'good' or 'great' work of 'art'. This judgment, he himself had named and distinguished from the 'particular' in the categories of quantity, and gave a category corresponding to it, called 'totality'.

The intractable problems encountered in the exercise of freedom as power has led many to withdraw from the field of 'external action', and concentrate either on 'pure willingness' for the achievement of what consciousness regards as 'positive values', or give up 'willing' altogether and confine it, if at all, to the cessation of the ordinary activity of consciousness, and seek to transform it through 'self-reflexive' activity of self-consciousness found in the mystic traditions all over the world, and known specifically as 'Yoga' in the Indian tradition. This allows, both theoretically and practically, the simultaneous existence of a plurality of centers of freedom, without 'limiting' the freedom of any one by the others.

This 'freedom', however, has been so negatively conceived, emphasizing only the aspect of its 'withdrawal' both from the 'external' and the 'internal'

worlds known to the usual human consciousness, that a generalized impression is created that it has no 'positive' aspects in it and that, in any case, it can do little for the realization of positive values in the ordinary sense of the word. The terms *mokṣa* and *nirvāṇa* exemplify this pre-eminently, and even the advaitin's description of it as *sat-cit-ānanda* confines it to the world of *ānanda* only. The whole question of 'relation' between the 'realized souls', or the so-called *jīvanmuktas*, remains unresolved, just as is the question of the relation between the 'realized' and the 'non-realized' souls, or those who have attained this type of freedom and those who have not.

At a still deeper level, it seems to have been assumed that there are no internal qualitative differences amongst these 'realized souls', and that they are all characterized by 'finality', 'fixity' and 'absoluteness', which can, in principle, not admit of any change and creativity in it. There has, of course, been some talk of *bhūmi* and *maqāma*, in the yogic and the *ṣūfī* traditions, but all these have generally been seen as 'fixed' stages on the path to the attainment of that 'final' goal for which the journey was undertaken.

What is surprising, however, is to find that the 'history' of this journey is completely forgotten, even

though, by the very nature of the case, Sufism could not have been there before Islam, or Christian mysticism before Christ, or the Jewish mysticism before Moses, or the Buddhist and the Jain preachers before Buddha or Mahāvīra, or the advaitin 'Brahman-Atman' realization before the *Upaniṣads*. What is still more unbelievable is to find a total forgetfulness of what happened after them. The seeking and the exploration have not stood still, and they have, as everybody knows, a history of themselves.

The illusion of 'atemporality' is, of course, inbuilt because of the 'withdrawal' from the world of action, and the cessation of the movement of consciousness, or the *nirodha* of the *vṛttis* of the *citta*, as the *Yogasūtra* calls it. But the illusion is an 'illusion', as the notions of time, space, causality, and even matter, are taken from ordinary day-to-day experiences and supposed to be exhaustively 'defined' in terms of them. The 'redefinition' is accepted practically in all other fields, including that of modern physics, but not in respect of 'this' realm, perhaps because it is not considered as 'real' even by those who talk about it incessantly and swear by it.

Everything remains, though in a radically transformed sense, leading to a feeling of 'total break',

'absolute incommensurability', a 'paradigm shift' without continuity, or even the possibility of a 'bridge', epitomized in the distinction between *vyavahāra-sat* and *parmārtha-sat* of the advaitin, or the *saṃvṛtti-satya* and *parmārtha-satya* of the Buddhist. But the 'bridge' is there in the consciousness which makes the distinction and 'knows', in the two different senses of the word 'knowledge', the 'worlds' they represent or designate, and the immense variety and differences within each of them. There is not just one *vyavahāra-sat* or one *parmārtha-sat*, even though the broad dichotomous division 'hides' this immanent and intrinsic multiplicity in them.

The 'division' seems to be based on a 'fear' that the 'freedom' seemingly achieved by the 'withdrawal' would be compromised, contaminated and affected if a relation is accepted between them. The 'fear' is founded on the illusory belief that one is, by definition, the realm of bondage and the other, the realm of freedom. There are 'bondages' and 'freedoms' in both, but for some reason it is assumed that there are no constraints or conditionings limiting one's freedom in the state of withdrawal, or that these inevitably 'belong' to the realm revealed and constituted by the senses, the mind, the reason, and the sense of values called *prajñā*. That there is 'freedom' in the 'world' constituted by these is

not denied by anybody. What is denied is the 'unconditionality' of this freedom, which is supposed to be 'freed' of this 'limitation' when one 'withdraws' from it altogether, forgetting that 'constraint' and 'conditioning' are in-built in the very noting of 'freedom', as it cannot be conceived without them. To be a 'free being' is first to be a 'being', and the 'freedom' has to be constrained and constituted by the 'form' of one's being. The concept of *śūnya* developed in Buddhism testifies just to this, that if one does not literally become 'nothing', there can be no absolute, or unconstrained, or unconditional freedom, which men wish for and seek in diverse ways, in the hope that there will remain 'something' and they will have 'freedom' of the sort that a 'thing', or a 'being', which is a 'this' and not 'that', can never have.

But what is this 'nothing', or a denial of all 'being', or the absolute *asat*, about which even the *Ṛgveda* talked in its *Nāsadiya-sūkta* and ultimately gave up as neither the term *sat* nor *asat* can capture what is being talked about? The only way it can possibly be made sense of is in terms of 'consciousness', as where there is no consciousness, even the least flittering trace of it, one cannot talk of either 'being', or 'non-being', or of the two as relative to one another, each 'defined' and

'restricted', or 'conditioned', by the other. 'Being' denies 'non-being', just as the latter denies the former, but in a radically different sense. The denial of 'non-being' by 'being' is absolute and unconditional, whereas the denial of 'being' by anything 'other' than it, or that which it is not, is conditioned by it, as it already has been asserted 'to be'. The asymmetry of the 'denial' becomes clear with the assertion of 'I' in self-consciousness, with which most philosophy starts as it arises from the reflection on this reflexivity of consciousness in man. The 'cogito' of Descartes, or the 'I am' of Fichte, or the 'aham pratyaya' of Śāṅkara are only a few examples of this. The 'self-certitude' of the self is radically different from the 'certitude' of the 'not-self', which is also asserted in the same 'act'.

Shall the 'other', or the 'not-self', or the 'not-I' which is a correlate of the 'self', or the 'I', and arises with it, perhaps as its shadow, be also conceived as 'self-conscious', or as capable of self-consciousness, or just unconsciousness, or bereft of it, or even of the 'possibility' of having it ever? This is the question that arises and challenges the self-proclaiming certitude of self-consciousness, and suggests to it the 'possible actuality' of its 'being', being in the same predicament, the same contingency that 'infects' *all* that *appears* as

an 'object' to it, both in the epistemological and the metaphysical sense of the word.

The epistemological 'objectivity' of whatever is said to 'appear' in the metaphorical sense of the word, confers, at least *prima facie*, the ontological 'objecthood' on it also. That the seemingly epistemological necessity gives rise to 'ontological necessity' is questioned by the demand, arising from the epistemological self-consciousness itself, for universality, objectivity and necessity of what is claimed to be 'knowledge', at least for the 'inter-subjectivity' world constituted by 'subjectivities' called 'human beings'. The recourse to 'varieties of reference' is unhelpful as it leaves the question of the 'reality' between these 'varieties' unsolved. Nor does Quine's attempt to distinguish between what he calls 'values of bound variables', as he gives no criterion for the choice between 'bound variables'. Arindam Chakrabarti's attempt to solve the problem by invoking the notion of a 'master-game', or rather, a 'game which everyone has to play', takes the problem away from 'knowledge' and tries to 'place' it in the bio-social and psychological necessities, as found in the lived life of beings at the human level. For him, the assertion or denial of existence is a 'game', which one may 'play'

according to any set of arbitrary rules devised by oneself, forgetting that a game in order to be 'played' has to have not only both 'constitutive' and 'regulative' rules, as Kant pointed out long ago, but also to be 'accepted' by others, except in games such as 'solitaire' or 'patience' which one can play by oneself, though even there one is not supposed to 'cheat', for if one does, the game ceases to be a 'game' as one can always 'win', and never 'lose'.

The 'other', then, which appears as an 'object' to the consciousness has to be granted an 'ontological objectivity' at least in the context of 'knowledge', and its 'appearance' seems as necessary even if it be considered as 'illusory'. It is this context which makes all epistemological 'objects' *qua* objects 'equal', and thus conferring on them an 'ontological equality' also. It is not that the distinctions are abolished as many have contended, but rather preserved, for 'to know' is to know the identity, the similarity and the differences at the same time.

The epistemological and ontological 'equality' is, however, questioned and denied in the axiological perspective or the perspective of 'value', which self-consciousness brings into being in the triple contexts of knowledge, feeling and action, even though most thinkers

have tended to deny this in the context of 'knowledge', and generally ignore it in the context of 'feeling'. As for action, they have to admit it, though with great reluctance as it breaks the unity of a 'being' and its basic 'equality', which they had sought and thought they had found in 'knowledge'. Kant's three *Critiques* are a standing testimony of this. Practical reason disrupts and questions all that was achieved in the realm of theoretical employment of reason, and when Kant talks of the 'beautiful', he does not know what to do with the world of 'feeling', without which the idea of the 'beautiful' would make no sense, and concentrates only on the judgment, which paradoxically for him contains the particularity, or even the singularity of the 'individual', with 'universality', even though it is not, and can never be 'conceptual' in principle.

The assertion of 'axiological inequality', grounded in substantive and even radical differences, both across different 'classes' or 'kinds' of being, whether naturally 'given' or 'created' by man, along with their epistemological and ontological equality gives rise to the problem as to which is to be given priority over the other. Almost everyone will agree that 'non-living beings' cannot and should not be given priority over 'living beings', and that even within 'living beings',

one would have to make radical distinctions between plants, invertebrate and vertebrate animals, and between all these and human beings, and even within human beings between those who pursue any positive value, or values, or ideals assiduously with commitment, patience and perseverance, and those who do not. Even among those 'rare' ones, one will have to make distinctions, if one accepts a hierarchy or ranking among values, between those who pursue values that are considered as 'higher', with equal zeal and commitment, and those who pursue values that, for some reason, are considered 'lower' in relation to those that are considered 'higher'.

Yet, in the perspective of facilitating the 'existence' or the actuality of these 'beings' at different levels, inanimate matter and its 'conditioning' and 'determining' reigns supreme, as none of the other types of 'beings' can even be conceived without it. The same is true at all levels, and yet the self-consciousness of man refuses to acknowledge this, and 'thinks' of itself as completely independent of all these, as if it could exist without all these, or even realize any value, or pursue and *puruṣārtha* without them.

But the incredible story of this delusion of man's self-consciousness does not stop just here. He refuses to accept even the necessity of there being other 'self-

conscious beings' like him, if he is to 'exist' as a human being and pursue all that he wants to pursue, to make his life meaningful and significant in a way that, at least *prima facie*, does not seem to be possible at the human level.

The delusion, in a sense, seems structurally inbuilt in the nature of 'self-consciousness' itself, as it cannot but see itself as the centre of the world. But there seems to be a deeper reason than this, and it is that the acknowledgement and admission of other beings, like oneself, would limit its 'freedom' in a more fundamental and radical sense than the acceptance of all the other 'types' of being put together. The neglect and the denial of the importance of society, economy and polity in the thinking of most philosophers who have thought about these problems is an evidence of this, just as the 'mystical', the 'spiritual' and the 'aesthetic' consciousness has almost inevitably tended to do all the time.

Freedom, then, is there, not in 'aloneness' alone, or 'aloneness' all the time, but also intrinsically and inevitably 'with' the 'other', or rather 'others'. They can be the source of enhancement, enjoyment and deepening of one's freedom, or of its negation, constriction, lessening, and even turning into its opposite, or feeling

of bondage, of being imprisoned with nowhere to go, and being able to do nothing, just Nothing.

'Hell is other people', said Sartre, but so is 'heaven' also. The difference is between a negative and a positive relationship, or as Robert Browning said, 'A little more, and how much it is, a little less, and what worlds away'. But both the world of 'togetherness' and the 'world of aloneness' are embedded in the larger world constituted by 'living beings' in all their infinite variety. The still more incredible 'world' of inanimate Nature spreads across space and time, and is at least seemingly beginning-less and endless to human consciousness, perception, experience and imagination, when it is 'thought' about in self-consciousness.

'All this' conditions the 'freedom' not only of the individual, but of 'humanity' as a species, and of 'all' that is connoted by 'society', 'culture' and 'civilization'. Deeper than this, and even more fundamental, is the awareness of something that transcends space and time, an awareness that is a function of the reflexivity of 'self-consciousness' itself. The perpetual problems that the 'objective givenness' of space and time have raised for human 'thinking' are an evidence of the fact that at least man as a 'self-conscious being' has not found the world as

constituted by space and time, as it 'appears' to him, 'intelligible', because of the 'beginning-less-ness' and 'endlessness' immanent in it. Kant's well-known antinomies in this regard are more a reflection of the 'limits' of 'objectivating consciousness' when it becomes an 'object' to 'self-consciousness', than an indication of its inability to transcend or even 'negate' them, as in the 'withdrawal' of consciousness through a 'willful act' of self-consciousness itself.

But the 'freedom' to 'withdraw', at least in consciousness, from space and time, does not give one any 'freedom', or 'make' one free in any sense in respect of the 'world' constituted by the conditions involved intrinsically in space and time, including that 'part' of one which is in space and time. This is the 'world' in which, and in respect of which one acts and functions, with all the constraints that are involved in it. Kant's recourse to Pure Practical Reason in search of freedom is unavailing, as it has to be 'applied' if morality is to have any meaning, and hence suffer from all the limitations that the 'phenomenal' world constituted by the *a-priori* forms of sensibility and the categories of understanding suffered.

Surprisingly, the same problem confronts the 'pure consciousness' talked about in the spiritual and mystical

literature of the world, when it tries to act, or effectuate, or intervene in the world of space-time through what it considers as 'pure willing', as in the yogic search of '*siddhis*', or 'powers', which ultimately have to be applied to matters in the empirical world, or the 'world of *vyavahāra*' as the advaitin calls it.

The problem with 'willing', or even 'wishing', is that it has to accept the 'reality' of time, if not space, just as the whole world 'experienced' in introspection or inner sense, which is the central core of the phenomenological being of man, constituted primarily by self-consciousness and its relation to consciousness, is in time also. This is the intractable phenomenal part of one's being, which refuses to be transformed by the 'pure will', either of the Kantian or the spiritual kind. 'Transform Thyself' is as difficult, or even more difficult than 'transforming the world', and it is here that both the moral and the spiritual ineffectivity is revealed, and the illusoriness of the feeling of freedom exposed, even though, like the ontological-cum-existential argument, it pretends to certify its own absolute, unconditioned reality in face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary.

Freedom, of course, is there, but not the way it 'feels' itself to be, or even 'thinks' itself to be.

Freedom as 'felt' can always be felt as more or less, i.e. a matter of degree, like everything else that is real or exists. It also can have qualitative differences within it, and its differences along the value dimension are enormous. It can become evil or good, increase or decrease; it is a function of indeterminately numerous factors, including those that are in oneself or others. Above all, it is not there once and for all, something which one is born with, or that is intrinsic and innate to one, or something irretrievable that one can never lose.

Freedom can be cultivated and enhanced, just as it can be lessened, or destroyed by oneself, or others, or by events over which one has no control, as in paralysis, or coma, or Parkinson's disease, or other of such kind. Amnesia, or forgetfulness, or loss of memory, can make one practically helpless, as one may hardly recognize things, or even where one is, and where the pathways in different directions lead to.

This unbelievable fragility and dependence of 'freedom' is marked by the feeling that one can at least always do something if one wants to, or if one were to 'will' enough. But the illusoriness of the feeling is revealed by the fact that even if one were 'free' in the best possible sense of the word, neither the 'feeling of

freedom' nor the results achieved by its exercise are ever found as satisfactory as one had wanted them to be.

Thinking about 'freedom' has to be 'freed' from the illusion of its being there as something 'given', as something ontological, or transcendental, or non-natural, something God-given to man alone, 'given' as fixed and final, rooted as it is in the nature of human reality itself; forgetting that there is no pre-given, unchanging nature of man, or of anything else, and that the 'dream' of power associated with it, leading to the idea of even the possibility of omnipotence, will turn it into a nightmare for others, if not for oneself, and create a 'hell' instead of that which one has hoped for and dreamt. At a level still deeper, the illusion about freedom will lead to a greater unfreedom and bondage for oneself and others, a bondage from which one would find it increasingly difficult to extricate oneself.

Freedom, thus, is not the recognition of necessity, as Hegel said, or the Moral Will as Kant said, or something gained in *Samādhi* through *Sādhana*, as the Indians believed. Rather it is as empirical as anything could be, limited, constrained, conditioned and even, to some extent, 'determined', but not in the strong sense, by all that is, including oneself.