

COMMITTEE VI

Eastern Approaches to the
Unity of Spirit and Matter:
Qi and Science

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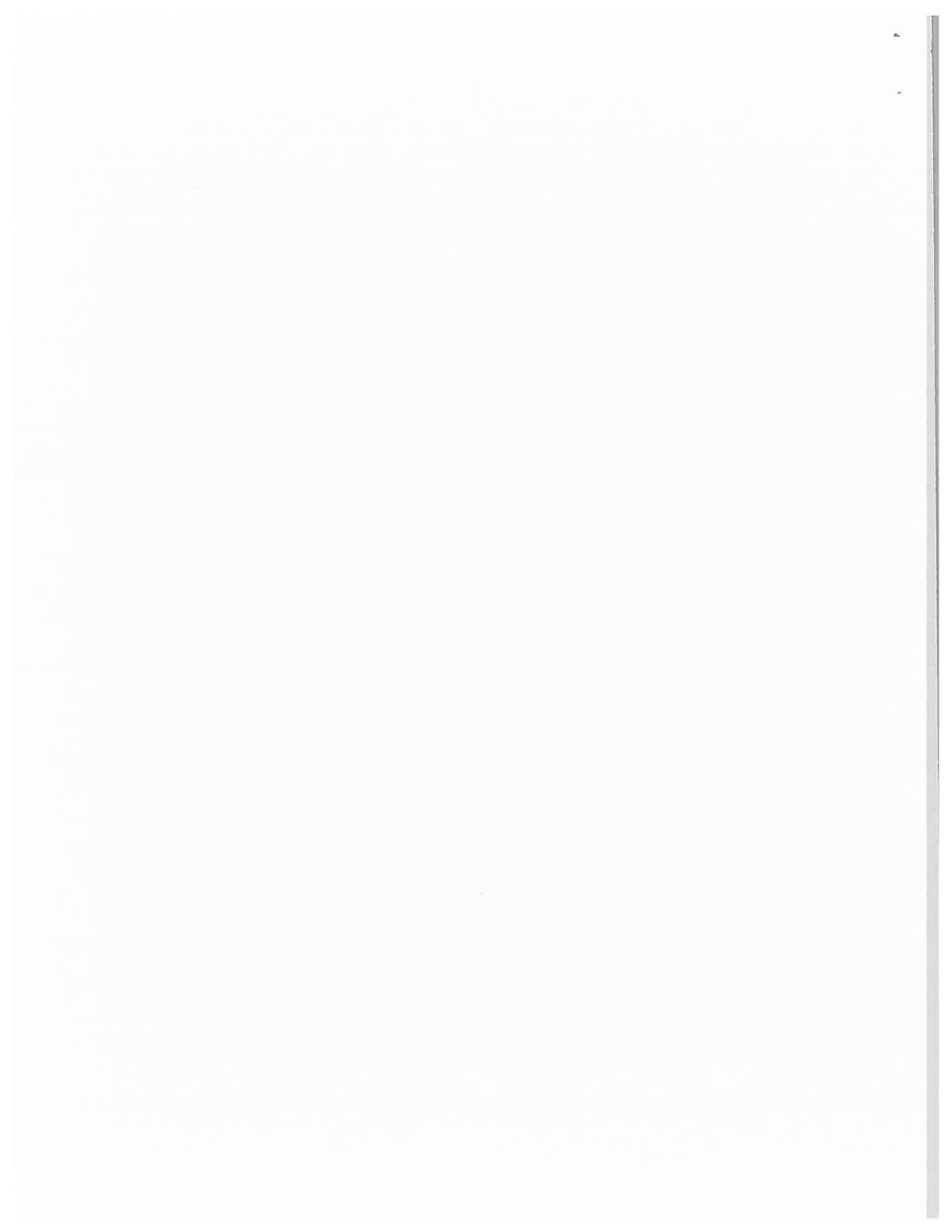
THE INDIAN VIEW OF NATURE

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In the vast corpus of the thought of India there are many views about *Nature*, and not a single consistent and invariable one which could be regarded as *the Indian view*. Nevertheless, there are some features common to most of the views about Nature which have been influential in India. Furthermore, some of these features are not shared by the mainstreams of one or the other of the two major non-Indian world-views and zones of thought, namely, the Western (European and American) and the Sineatic (Chinese, Korean and Japanese). It can hardly be over-emphasized that there is a great deal of variety in the views about Nature within each one of the major cultures; and almost all views can be found in each. Still, there are distinctive features of the views about Nature which are noteworthy; they contribute one of the major ingredients in what makes any culture distinct from the others.

Our main interest here is to point out some of the common features of the Indian views about Nature; only secondarily do we compare and contrast these features with the non-Indian views. However, one general remark may be made regarding the divergence of the major world-views about

Nature.

THREE VIEWS OF NATURE:

In the West, Nature as she is is almost always viewed as alien to human beings. This alien is hostile and needs to be conquered, subdued and reduced. In fact, for many a century the Westerners have not referred to Nature as *she*; she has been reduced to an *it*. There is a hostility, or at least a competition: it is Man versus Nature. Man is right and nature is wrong. This in its turn reflects another duality: that between God and Man. God is right and Man is wrong. In each of these dualities the lower aspect needs to be controlled and subdued. This needs action: technology (based on the scientific laws) to control external nature and religion (based on the Law of God, Torah) to control human will, the inner nature. Nature must be bent to the will, benefit and use of Man; and men to those of God. In either case, the unruly and wild nature needs to be tamed for some utilitarian purpose.¹ Post-Renaissance science and technology offer the paradigmatic case of the Western attitude to Nature. There is something very deeply anthropocentric in this attitude: Man separated from nature, hostile to it, and determined to conquer it. And nature exists for the use and benefit of Man --an attitude with a discernible continuity from the *Genesis* to the so-called *Anthropic Principle* in contemporary physical cosmology.

Control is the main feature of the Western Man's relationship with Nature; and it is almost always mental. Whenever this rational control is called into question, the relational pendulum swings to the sentimental. In general, the *developers* and the *conservationists* subscribe to the same level of spirituality, even though at that level their actions and the consequences of these actions are different and call for appropriate choices.

In the cultures influenced by the Chinese world-view, as one can see especially in Japan, Nature is not 'true' or 'natural' as she is. She must be moulded or assisted to become 'natural', which is an ideal form of her; then she is truly beautiful and perfect. This ideal form, which results from a transformation of Nature, is given material and visual expression, and does not exist only in the mind, as is the case with Plato's ideas. Nature must be transformed to be loved. It is perhaps not an exaggeration to suggest that the Japanese love not flowers but flower arrangements! Nature to be contemplated is not what she is, untransformed, but what she ought to be, ideally. If Nature is exploited in America, she is reformed and decorated in Japan! For example, the gardens in Japan are not *natural* in any ordinary sense of that word; something artificial and artifactual is drastically imposed on them, an unnatural order. Whenever this imposed order transcends the merely mental and emotional, as in some exquisite Zen gardens (as rarely happens in a Western garden, however pleasing to the mind and the senses it might be),

there is present an unearthly --might we say super-natural?-- beauty and quality.

Formalization of Nature is based on a rejection of Nature in the raw. If the West imposes a grid of mathematics on Nature, Japan imposes a formal aesthetic sensitivity, yielding not abstract mathematical laws but hidden deep formal structures and arrangements. If the Western natural philosopher calculates and measures, the Chinese one contemplates and draws. In the one case, there is a technological control and manipulation, in the other there is an aesthetic awe and adjustment. In both cases, the attempt is to find what is hidden in Nature, below the surface. And in both cases a Man-Nature duality remains, although the nature of the relationship between the two in the duality is different. Rather than being hostile, Man is a part of Nature in the Sineatic view; Man has his place in Nature, as he has in the social relations --albeit ritualized and formal. In no case is Man only for himself, atomistically separated from other beings --in society or in Nature on the large-- concerned only for his own advancement, comfort or convenience; a human being is always a part of a group or of a whole larger than himself. The new science of ecology is likely to find much more kinship with the philosophical traditions of China than with any other.

Moving to India, one moves away from the gardens altogether --whether they be French, English or Zen. The great Mughal gardens of India are not indigenous to the

Indian sensibility, which is at home not as much in the garden as in the forest. No man-made order, mathematical or aesthetic, can be imposed on the forest, without reducing it in some way. The whole of Nature is like a giant forest: wild, mysterious, awesome. She is what she is: she cannot be tamed or controlled. She must be accepted as she is. There is a deep-seated acceptance in the Indian attitude towards Nature, and towards everything else. Nothing needs to be controlled or altered or transformed --except oneself. What needs to be changed is the level of one's vision. If one sees from the perspective of the Vastness (which is what *Brahman*, the highest Reality in Indian thought, means literally), one sees rightly and knows the true order in which everything has its right place. Nature does not need to be improved or corrected; it is one's vision which needs to be cleansed. The true order is not something to be imposed on Nature by Man, mathematically or aesthetically, by eliminating the surface. Nature does not need to be controlled or transformed or decorated; she needs to be accepted in her entirety as a whole --in depth as well as surface; and the depths cannot exist without the surface. She can be loved and celebrated as she is; or if one finds her too much of an enchantress she can be rejected as a whole. But she is alive and must not be diminished or reduced.

The most fundamental principle of a true philosopher in India is non-violation (*ahimsā*). Nature is right as she is, as is Man --deep down, essentially. There cannot be a

conflict between what is and what ought to be. If one would see deeply, in reality, and not be stopped by the surface appearances, one would see the basic rightness of all there is. 'All this is Brahman,' says one of the *Upaniṣads*. There is no duality between Man and Nature, any more than there is between God and Man. No one needs to be subdued or controlled. Strictly speaking, viewed from the highest level of insight, which is by definition the most comprehensive and the clearest vision, *there are no others*; there is an essential underlying unity of all that exists. To be sure, if one's attention is co-opted by the surface of things then Nature, rather than being a revelation of the essence, becomes a veil. Nature is *māyā*, which means both the creative power of *Brahman* as well as the magical illusion hiding *Brahman*. There is this persistent tension in Indian thought: between Nature as revelation of Divinity and Nature as illusion.

At root, the Indian attitude to Nature is metanatural: Nature does not exist by herself or for herself; she is dependent on the Divine Energy and exists for Its sake. In this it parallels India's metasocial attitude to society: society does not exist for its own sake, no more than a human being does for his own. All small and large arrangements, organisms and constellations exist as varied manifestations of the Divine, and for the sake of Divinity. Ultimately, all forms derive their existence from and have their meaning in what is eternally beyond form. Truth, with a capital T, is

not in forms; they are true to the extent they participate in the Truth. Truth, Freedom and Brahman for the Indian are radically beyond the pale --the pale of society, language, thought and time. At his best, the Indian is a complete supra-formal maverick, bound by no form or convention or law, responding only to the whispers from the Other Shore. Only the Buddha could have said, "I wander alone in the world like a wild rhinoceros." Perhaps not he alone: Yajñavalkya could have said that, as could have Mahavira, Patanjali, Shankara, Ramana or Krishnamurti. But not Confucius, nor Aristotle.

That which is 'outside the square (*fang-wai*)' would be outside his concern, once declared Confucius, the master of li. Li, the unnatural order of social norms and ceremonial rites created by man to govern his behaviour and emotions, is operational only when it has the four walls as its reference of relevancy.² The only worthy concern of a serious person in India is that which is 'outside the square,' any square: only with respect to That can what is inside the square have any significance. At any level of perception, there is the pull of the visible and there is the ability to see beyond. Indians sages seem to have consistently sacrificed the visible for the power to see clearly. In that clarity, as the *Yoga Sutrās* (1:48) of Patanjali says, 'the insight is truth-bearing.'

However, all great insights are bound to be understood at a lower and degenerate level when the requisite tension of the clear vision of the moment is dispersed in concepts and

sentiments. It cannot be said that India (or for that matter China) has had a particularly praiseworthy record of care for the environment or natural resources, either in the modern times or the ancient. It may be that the strong pull of the transcendent concerns in India has almost always led to a lack of concern for the visible world, and the consequent devaluation of Nature --space, time, materiality and causality. This is especially striking in the Vedanta and Madhyamika schools of thought which display nothing of the exuberant love and celebration of Nature and earthly life so characteristic of the Vedas.

In summary, remembering that a great deal needs to be elaborated and qualified in such large-scale generalizations: the Western attitude to Nature is predominantly scientific and technological, centred on Man; the Sineatic attitude is aesthetic and poetic, patterned on the relationships in the Society; whereas the Indian attitude is mystical and metaphysical, focussed on Brahman. Clearly, these attitudes overlap each other and are only rarely met in extreme purity. None of these cultures has a monopoly either of wisdom or of stupidity; their perspectives can be understood at a high level of clarity and sensitivity or at a low one. Within each major culture, for it to have survived long, all variety of human responses are met. However, each culture has its own peculiar genius and unique emphasis; each one presents a distinct cluster of attitudes towards Nature.³ Also, it is worth noticing that when one speaks of the Western attitude,

one is speaking of something which has developed largely in the modern times, although with a discernible continuity with its own past; but in speaking of China or India attention is focussed on the classical periods, perhaps with some continuity into the present. This is understandable historically: the impulse for major intellectual, economic or military initiatives in the last few centuries has started in the West, and the modern epoch has been dominated by the West. The only insights and practices in the non-Western world which have not been swamped by the Western influence are pre-modern ones; they alone present possibilities of distinct contributions to the emerging global culture.

MAIN FEATURES OF THE INDIAN VIEW OF NATURE:

The following attitudes and assumptions, some of which are implicit in what has been already said above, are more or less shared by practically all schools which have originated from India, including the Hindu, Buddhist and Jain, although some of the terms used are different in different systems. Of course, there are many fine distinctions, or varied emphases and nuances, among different schools; but these details cannot be discussed here.

Unity of All There Is: There is One Energy which permeates the entire cosmos, visible and invisible, gross and subtle, but It manifests Itself at different levels of being

and of consciousness. At the highest level is pure awareness without materiality, and at the lowest level is total materiality without awareness. These limits are like the theoretical limits in mathematics, and are not to be met with in the realm of *manifestation* which is the realm of Nature. This One Energy has been variously called *Brahman*, *Prāna*, *Om*, *Śūnyatā*, and the like. It is worth remarking that there are schools, for example the Advaita Vedanta, which can be and have been interpreted as saying that the highest level is the only one which is real and is *Brahman*, with a radical discontinuity from all manifestation. However, it is also possible to understand this as an assertion that all levels are real because all of them are different manifestations of the same One Energy.

This perspective of *One Energy* needs to be distinguished from an apparently similar idea in modern science. It is an assumption in science that various forms of energy are interconvertible. The law of conservation of energy-momentum in a closed system presupposes this interconvertibility. Therefore, we could quite rightly speak, from the scientific point of view, of one energy pervading the entire cosmos. However, in science, although there are many *forms* of energy, we cannot legitimately speak of many *levels* of energy. The notion of *levels*, although extremely difficult to pin down rigorously, is crucially important in understanding any of the traditional systems of thought. Imagine making any sense of Dante without some

notion of differences in levels! Confining our attention to the Indian thought at present, the Energy is One but is manifested at different levels, which have different degrees of consciousness, not only quantitatively but also qualitatively. The idea of *consciousness* is inherent in the notion of *levels*, and *vice versa*. *Energies --or beings*, when we speak theologically or personistically (God, angels, humans) rather than cosmologically, each mode having its special advantage and flavour-- at a higher level have higher consciousness than those at a lower level. There is a *verticality* in all traditional spiritual thought which is absent in modern science.

It may be remarked here somewhat parenthetically that this absence of levels of being in science is intimately connected with one of the fundamental assumptions of scientific inquiry that the level of being of a scientist --in terms of his quality of goodness, compassion, freedom from selfishness, largeness of vision; in short, the kind of person he is-- has nothing to do with the kind of science he produces. He may be the humblest of human beings or the most insecure and arrogant, his science is independent of the level of his being. Conversely, therefore, whatever scientific knowledge one may possess, it cannot affect one's level of being. On the other hand, this vertical change in the level of being of a person is the only *raison d'etre* of any spiritual tradition and discipline, making them in principle orthogonal to the scientific enterprise.⁴

Reverting to the unity of Nature, the notion of the unity of Spirit and matter is included in it, for *Spirit* is at the totally conscious end of the spectrum of One Energy whereas matter constitutes some of the other levels depending on whether we are speaking about only the physical matter or biologically alive organic matter or psychically capable mental stuff (or grey matter). It seems to us obvious that spiritual, psychic and material (biological and physical) phenomena exist, even though sometimes prior philosophical commitments make it difficult for people to acknowledge one or the other. Also, a relationship between Spirit and matter is hardly in question: no spiritual or mental --which is different from spiritual-- phenomenon can be studied without some mind and body experiencing it and interacting with it; otherwise we cannot know that such a phenomenon exists. The important question is: are mind and spirit results of more and more complex organization of matter --as is the general view of science, inherent in its notion of *evolution*² -- or do different levels of matter result from differentiation or crystallization (or grossification) of the spiritual energy? The latter is more or less the universal view of spiritual-religious traditions. Does spirit produce matter or does matter give rise to spirit? The classical Indian tradition unequivocally affirms the former.

Higher and Lower Nature: It is a consequence of the unity of Nature that the entire human being is a part and parcel of

Nature. To be sure, he has not only biological and physical aspects, he also has psychic and spiritual aspects. But there is a continuity among these various aspects and levels of being (or materiality), and not an opposition or a duality. There is not a mind-body dualism as there often is in Western philosophy, nor the soul-body dichotomy of Christian theology. There are subtle bodies (for example, *linga sharira* of the Samkhya school or *sambhoga kāyā* or *dharma kāyā* of Tibetan Buddhism) which can be formed and nourished by spiritual efforts in this very body and which can survive physical death. The spiritual aspects are also a part of Nature; they may be distinguished from other levels by being labelled *higher* or *inner*, as contrasted with *lower* or *outer*; but they are not supernatural. Krishna, the God incarnate, says in the *Bhagavad Gītā* (7:4-10,12):

My nature has eight aspects:

earth, water, fire, wind, space,
mind, understanding
and individuality.

This is my lower nature;

know my higher nature too,
the life-force
that sustains this universe.

Learn that this is the womb

of all creatures;

I am the source of all the universe

just as I am its dissolution

Nothing is higher than I am;

Arjuna, all that exists

is strung on me,

like many pearls on a thread.

I am the taste in water, Arjuna,

the light in the moon and sun,

the sacred syllable in all the Vedas,

the sound in space, valour in men.

Know me, Arjuna,

as every being's eternal seed,

I am intelligence of the intelligent,

Majesty of the majestic am I.

Know that nature's qualities

come from me-- lucidity,

passion, and dark inertia;

I am not in them, they are in me.

Subtle and Gross Nature: Clearly, we do not know all there is to know about Nature. Given the incredible amount of knowledge gathered about Nature in the last four centuries, we can easily imagine that the next four centuries or forty would reveal a great deal more about Nature.⁴ What we know about Nature is not all there is. There are hidden aspects of Nature, hidden from us so far. With appropriate procedures and instruments, more will be revealed. There is a general

principle in Indian thought according to which knowledge is state-specific, that is to say, what one knows and can know depend on the state and level of consciousness of the knower. A person at a higher level of consciousness can know subtler aspects of Nature which may be hidden from those at the ordinary level. An important question is: do the successive discoveries of science based on an extension of our sense organs [including the rational mind (*manas* in Sanskrit) which is included among the senses in much of Indian thought] remain at the same level of consciousness? Does a telescope change *what* one sees or does it change the eyes with which one sees, and therefore changes *how* one sees anything? It is the latter which is the concern of the spiritual paths. The quantitative extension of observations in science reveals new sights for us to see, but it does not change our eyes.⁷ On the other hand, a major new theory in science, for example the theory of quantum mechanics, does alter the way we look at Nature and what sorts of questions we ask of her. However, these new questions are also posed, and the answers are acceptable, within the mental-sensual sphere as before. This does not yet constitute a new level of consciousness as spiritual masters speak of it; so that new questions arise from a transformed questioner and the answers are sought in a different domain.

There are phenomena, a whole class of them constituting a separate level, which are *personistic* in the sense that they always involve a *person* in the interaction, either person-to-person or person-to-object. Such phenomena

--including all the extra-sensory and psychic phenomena which may well be simply an extension of the more usual psychological phenomena-- cannot be measured and studied without a person being one of the necessary components of the experimental arrangement. It is worth noting that this *personist* interaction is not necessary in the quantum mechanical phenomena in spite of the fact that a great deal has been written about the necessity of including the subject or the knower in what is sometimes described as the *interactive universe* of quantum mechanics. In all experiments dealing with the quantum phenomena, the scientist and every other person can go home to lunch while the data are gathered by a computer. This *personist* level of Nature, if it is hidden from us, is hidden in a different way than the many unknown things, for example the mechanism of super conductivity at high temperatures. The *personist* level is designated as *subtle Nature*, and the (occult) knowledge of it is in general said to require a cultivation of some capacity or faculty of the person in question. These capacities include attention, will, creative imagination and openness (or receptivity) --all the interior qualities which define the very essence of a person and determine his level of consciousness. It should also be said that there are many examples of people who have had special occult knowledge, and the corresponding powers, without any particular training. It is possible that these powers are quite natural, as seeing and hearing, and that most of us lose them in the process of wrong education, or that different people are born with

different degrees of these occult abilities, just as is the case with other abilities.

It is clear that the phenomena pertaining to *Qi* belong to the personist class, and require a cultivation of special faculties by those who would experience them. No doubt, some people are born with especially sensitive psyches and are able to relate with and manifest *Qi* more easily than others. However, what needs to be emphasized is that these subtle phenomena are not super-natural; they are very much a part of Nature --subtle Nature perhaps, requiring procedures and methods other than those available in present science. There may be a fundamental difficulty here: as long as science proceeds basically from matter without any consciousness, however rudimentary, it is extremely difficult if not impossible to understand the personist phenomena which necessarily involve consciousness.

Perhaps we may be allowed to make a prediction of a mega trend in science: In the last four centuries science has been engaged with the fundamental project (Western project?) of understanding the whole of the cosmos, including life, mind, spirit and consciousness ultimately in terms of dead matter in motion. And there has been an amazing amount of success in this project, and an astounding degree of control over nature. But inherent in this project has been a desacralisation of Nature as well as of Man. Over the next few centuries --or decades, since everything is rather accelerated now-- there will likely develop a science with a

basic project (Eastern? Likely, global) in which the cosmos, including matter, will be understood in terms of movement of consciousness.

The attempts in this committee to understand and explore the material effects of *Qi* are a part of this project. It is important, however, not to lose the significance of the whole enterprise: it is not only *Qi*, or *Prāna*, which is in question in the judgment hall of science, but also science is in question as an exclusive approach to the truth about Nature. It may be tragic if *Qi* is subjected to the same sort of impoverishment by science as *soul* was in the 19th century West, in attempting to prove its existence by measurements of its physical weight. It is partly a consequence of these misconceived attempts, which do not allow a difference in levels and the obvious necessity of bringing criteria from appropriate levels --St. Paul said in vain that the things of the spirit can be understood only by the spirit-- that scientists, and Westerners generally, now either blindly *believe* in the spirit or the soul, or just dismiss them equally blindly. What gets lost is the idea that a different kind of mind --St. Paul called it the 'right mind'-- can be and needs to be cultivated in order to understand spiritual phenomena. If scientists themselves do not feel the need for something higher, well and good; after all, most people don't feel any need for poetry or philosophy or subtle feeling. Why give into the imperialism of an impoverished science in which Dante's 'the love that moves

the sun and the other stars' (*Divine Comedy, Canto 33:145*) becomes merely the 'physical attraction between particles of matter,' labeled *gravitation* in *The Principia* by Newton --himself quite a fragmented and insecure human being? The scientific reductionism has been the chief force of desacralisation of the West; that is why so many Westerners are looking to the East for something they do not find in their own culture. If *Qi* is completely scientized, without challenging the assumptions and procedures of science, there will be no *East* left to contribute anything distinctive

Be that as it may, the point to be made here is that according to the Indian views of Nature, the extra-sensory phenomena may be extra-science, but they are not super-natural.

Fundamental Lawfulness of Nature: All levels of Nature, subtle or hidden or visible, are subject to laws. Even the *devas* or gods of Indian mythology are not above the laws; they may, however, know subtler aspects of Nature which are hidden to the ordinary human level of consciousness and may thus possess powers which strike us as miraculous. But the cosmos is orderly and based on laws. This fundamental lawfulness of the cosmos at all levels is one of the most significant features of traditional Indian thought from the point of view of a *rapprochement* with modern science, and which sets it apart from the mainstream of the Judaeo-Christian tradition and the concomitant conflict

between science and religion which has been practically axiomatic in the Western world. (It is incredible how many scholars of otherwise fairly sound judgment --such as A. N. Whitehead, Albert Schweitzer, Paul Tillich, Teilhard de Chardin, to name only a few well-known representatives of different brands of Christian thinking-- have misunderstood, not always innocently, this basic feature of Eastern thought!) Natural laws cannot be set aside, however fervent the prayers asking for this; but they can be overcome by the application of higher laws. One does not take off for the stars by repealing the law of gravity!

God not apart from Nature: Even the highest level of the One Energy, notwithstanding the designation Brahman, Spirit or God, is not completely apart from the cosmos. (In the systems in which *Brahman* is totally apart from Nature, the latter is completely an illusion and does not truly exist. Another way of viewing this is that whatever exists is *Brahman*, and is therefore divine.) The cosmos is frequently called *brahmāṇḍa* which literally means the *egg of Brahman*. That is why, strictly speaking, there are no *creation* myths in India. There are, rather *emanation* myths. A typical metaphor is that the cosmos arose from Brahman as a web emanates from a spider. "As a spider sends forth and draws in its thread, as herbs grow on the earth, as the hair grows on the head and the body of a living person, so from the Imperishable arises here the universe" (*Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad I.i.7*). Or, as Krishna says, quoted above: "all that exists is strung on me, like

many pearls on a thread." Again, "I am the taste in water, Arjuna, the light in the moon and sun..." One of the contemporary sages of Bengal, Sri Anirvan, told me not long before he died: "You will know something true when you understand that *God is dog and dog is God.*"

Sacredness of All There Is: Since everything emanates from *Brahman*, is the very egg of *Brahman*, is *Brahman*, everything in the whole cosmos is sacred. Nothing is profane --except perhaps that which is out of its proper place in the cosmic order (*Ṛtā*). Lack of order is the mark of profanity. No particular activity is profane; all levels of manifestation, in their proper place, are needed for the maintenance of the cosmos. All these creatures, at all levels and manifestations, need not only to be tolerated or respected, but also to be celebrated. An Indian may confidently answer Blake's query in his little poem *Tiger, Tiger, Burning Bright*. Yes, it is the same hand that fashioned the Lamb which made the tiger of fearful symmetry; not only that, but the Lamb and the tiger are one.

Since all Being is one, which is to say that all levels of being are manifestations of the same One Energy, there is not a radical discontinuity between contiguous levels of being, from animals to humans, or from the humans to the *devas*. Furthermore, in accordance with the Law of Karma, one may move up or down the scale of being. The Law of Karma posits a strong relationship between doing (including thinking, feeling) and being: *one acts as one is, and one is as one acts*. It simultaneously sets a constraint on the

permissible human action --some constraint is inherent in the very notion of lawfulness-- and also allows a way for overcoming the limitations of a given level. Thus the Law of Karma is a law of responsibility, inviting each person to choose and strive for the level of being which he wishes to occupy. But, in order to be free, one must live according to the law.®

Compassion for all Beings: Not only other human beings, but all creatures participate in the same sacred One Energy and need to be accepted and respected. This feeling of compassion, along with joy and love, is a natural accompaniment of a life lived in accordance with the right cosmic order (*Ṛtā*). It is not like a separate virtue to be practised strenuously, it follows by itself from the clear vision in which one sees the interdependence, relatedness and oneness (also uniqueness, although there is no time to develop this point here) of all there is. Thus the first and the most important principle of ecology is the cultivation of oneself so that one sees clearly and comprehensively, and lives in accordance with *Ṛtā*. Otherwise, one is sure to impose on Nature some mental or emotional notion of what is good for her, later regretting some results of the law of the unintended consequences. There is a tension here: between a deep acceptance of Nature as she is and a sound management of her. Often, the Indian acceptance and non-violation of Nature have resulted in non-interference and neglect.

Unique Human Responsibility: Human beings are so structured that they can potentially perfect themselves or complete themselves, with the aid of the very faculties which make us essentially persons, namely, attention, effort, will, openness and creative imagination. A completed person (*sap̄skṛta*, cultivated, cultured, well-made), and not an ordinary human being (*prākṛta*, common, vulgar, uneducated), is like a microcosmos mirroring in all essentials the Vast Cosmos. For such a person the Nature inside him is the same as the Nature outside, and he contains within him all levels of the cosmos --in the sense that all levels of being have their counterpart in him, from the most spiritual to the most material. In such a person, *Prāna* resides in all its levels whereas in an ordinary person, *Prāna* is the animal life-force, manifesting as breath. According to these ideas, even when apparently the same air is breathed by people of different levels of consciousness, the subtle substances (or energies) which they take in are different, as are the substances which they breathe out.

The Continuum of Spirit-Matter: There is no radical discontinuity between Spirit and matter, or psyche (soul) and body, or other levels of being. (As has already been remarked that in the systems in which there is a radical discontinuity, there is no real existence of matter or Nature; such systems are more thoroughly monistic.) They affect each other, and no spiritual discipline is without a

physical component. Yoga is a particularly good example of this. It is said in the *Haṭhayogapradipika* (2:76) that "One cannot attain perfection in Rāja-yoga [spiritual meditation, in this context] without Haṭha-yoga [physical postures and breath control], nor in Haṭha-yoga without Rāja-yoga. So both should be practised till perfection is attained." Higher consciousness, or insight, affects the body chemically --although it may be better to say that the effects are *alchemical*, owing both to their subtlety and their transformational character. Conversely, a new *body* is needed for a higher consciousness to be able to manifest itself. It may be worth remarking that in this essentially spiritual perspective the driving thrust of the process of evolution is from Above downwards, the Spirit demanding and forging more and more complex material organization in order to be able to manifest Itself in body. A more sensitive (human?) body will be required for a superior manifestation of the Spirit on the earth.

Knowledge of Nature: Nature cannot be known truly by studying her only as an *it* --without consciousness and purpose. Furthermore she cannot be understood comprehensively only by studying her externally without at the same time studying oneself --that is to say, internal Nature. Unfortunately, all too often *objective and subjective* are used synonymously with *external and internal*; whereas one can study external phenomena subjectively, just as one can study internal phenomena objectively. A comprehensive and objective

knowledge of Nature requires a study of both the external and the internal Nature so that the mind does not subjectively interfere with true knowledge of reality and lets the object reveal itself, both in its interiority and exteriority.7

Based on these general principles of Nature, a great deal of sound wisdom and right attitude to Nature, to ecology and conservation, can be gathered, resulting in respect for and celebration of all life. The key lies in the understanding that there is One Energy (*Prāna*, *Qi*) which underlies, manifests in and delights in all creation. However, India's own record in these matters is not enviable, and one may rightly wonder if great and wonderful ideas have any practical effect at all. The main energy and the major insights of India all seem to have been occupied for centuries with the transcendent Truth. The more mundane and here-and-now concerns somehow get neglected. And the few --there can only be a few-- who have won the kingdom of the Other Shore, like the great Buddha (and specially starting with him in the Indian tradition) do not seem to be interested in ruling the kingdom of this shore. It may be that the right attitude needs a proper mix of the transcendent insight of India, the relational this-worldly wisdom of China and the practical no-nonsense knowledge of the West. Our times may be uniquely situated in a historical moment where a new global culture is emerging and we might become as much the heirs of Plato and Aristotle, as of Lao Tze and Confucius, and of the Buddha and Krishna.

Endnotes

1. In this connection see R. Ravindra: "Physics and Religion," in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, edited by Mircea Eliade et al.; Macmillan Publishing Co., New York, 1987, vol. 11, p.319-323
2. See Nelson I. Wu, *Chinese and Indian Architecture*, George Braziller, New York, 1963, pp. 45-46.
3. For some of the differences between the spiritual and religious traditions of the East and the West, and some similarities, please see R. Ravindra, *Whispers from the Other Shore: Spiritual Search --East and West*, Quest Books, Wheaton, 1984, especially chapters 1, 5 and 6.
4. In this connection, see R. Ravindra: "Experience and Experiment: A Critique of Scientific Knowing," *Dalhousie Review*, vol. 55, 1975-76, pp. 675-674.
5. All that can legitimately be spoken about in science is *change*, without the emotional overlay of *progress* involved in the notion of *evolution*. In this connection, see R. Ravindra: "In the Beginning Is the Dance of Love," in *The Origin and Evolution of the Universe: Evidence for Design?*, proceedings of a symposium organized by the Royal Society of Canada at McGill University, Montreal, May-June, 1985. To be published by the University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1987.
6. Of course, one cannot be unmindful of the fact that to speak about any long-term future of knowledge in the midst of the infernal nuclear weapons in the hands of the frightened and chauvenistic people shows either a dangerous ignorance of

the facts or an innocent faith in the miraculous!

7. In this connection see R. Ravindra; "Perception in Physics and Yoga," *Re-Vision* vol. 3, 1980, pp. 36-42.

8. See R. Ravindra: "To the Dancer belongs the Universe: Bondage and Freedom of Natural Law," invited lecture delivered at the Isthmus Institute, Dallas, Texas, October, 1986. To be published in the *Perkins Journal*, 1988.

9. See R. Ravindra: "Yoga and Knowledge", paper presented at the Fifteenth International Conference on the Unity of the Sciences, Washington, D.C., November, 1986.

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