

The beginning of philosophy, according to both Plato and Aristotle, was that moment of wonder that stirs within us a primordial disquiet that at some point breaks through our everyday awareness, throwing us as it were into a realization that we are immersed in a mystery so profound and utterly beyond our conceptual grasp of the world, that we are invariably reduced to verbal incoherence in attempting to articulate it.

But wonder, in its self-conscious mode, had come to me as a postlapsarian awakening, accompanied by a profound disquiet that for many years I kept concealed, as though this condition was a private stigma, an illness I could not confess to, and therefore was unable to share fully with others. This was the condition of alienation, whose only work is to provoke an inner response that deepens into a commitment to a journey of growth, one that inevitably entails undergoing sorrow and grief. The journey is undertaken with a kind of intuitive faith in a process that will liberate one from the condition of despair by way of a painful retrieval, through an accumulation of insight, of some primordial condition that cannot be reduced to any form of substance. It is what Thomas Merton called our original unity, an ancient and shared awareness as gratitude and love, or Buddha nature. The journey is a process that is neither purely deterministic, nor subject only to chance: it entails deep listening to a kind of music the mind-body sings as it resonates to the world, whose notes occasionally strike a deep chord to which one responds by taking up these echoing strands of a very ancient tune, and weaving them into one's own unique song. This in turn acts as a mysterious guide that one comes to trust more and more, as one penetrates deeper through life's continuous unfolding, as though some pattern were implicit in the very intertwining of the coloured musical threads as they sing *with light's spectral wings the endless song in honour of the fullness of the world*. It is a task we can ultimately only undertake on our own, whose work would be to rejoin us to the body of the world in a transformed relationship. And it is firstly the *via negativa*, the way

of solitude and silence, that must prepare the ground for the affirmation of the *via positiva*. Inevitably the journey becomes one of articulation, a territory always but only partially mapped by those who inspired us to explore the terrain. Where such attempts seem to fray at the edges, perhaps only the poet, or the mystic, can breathe new life into language, transmuting it with a verbal alchemy that once more renders the ordinary unfamiliar. Their gift, perhaps, is to humbly acknowledge what language owes to silence, reminding us of what as children we knew without words: the luminous unaccountable givenness of the world in which we naturally trusted, until we were persuaded otherwise and forgot the obvious fact that we lacked nothing from the beginning...

The permission generously granted me by that letter I had carried from a temple in Colombo so many months ago had allowed me space to inquire into the source of my own anxieties, my own suffering. Unexpectedly, it has become a journey of writing that took me back to revisit the traumas and raptures of that post-war world, tracing the threshold moments of growing through a historical period characterized by a sense of epochal crisis. Perhaps none of us can really live optimally unless we endeavour to grasp the full range of our human capacity that is suspended between the aspiration towards a greater spectrum and depth of understanding and our embedded, organic, physical, sensate nature that we cannot escape, and whose painful woundings we endure, any more than we can escape the myriad complexities of planetary existence that gave birth to us. Nor should we wish to, for it is what we are as well as the very source of our enduring capacity for wonder.

I now realize there is an essential paradox at the heart of existence, and that all attempts to dispel it by reducing life to one of the two terms Either/Or is doomed to fail. The essential tension between the One and Many is far harder to grasp, and to live, than to settle for relativity, post-modern absence or belief in an overarching absolute. To take a stance on Both/And defies reason, and

yet reason is incapable of making sense of paradox. Here we reside momentarily within a realm beyond logical articulation. The illusory self, so central to the Buddhist understanding of mind, is only able to reach this ‘self-comprehension’ paradoxically in its own unique way. At a deeper level, being true to ‘who I am’ entails recognition that the common ground of my humanity is rooted in a complex web of interdependence, that what I call my ‘being’ is also the being of others.

It is in opening to our fundamental transiency, by seeing through the delusions of our cherished culturally reinforced dualisms, that we can live fully by an outpouring of creativity and generosity that emanates naturally by letting go of our fears, resentments, and cravings. By living in the light of the intelligence of the heart-mind, which is the meaning of *bodhi citta*, we uncover the naked core of our humanity, where sometimes we can feel overtaken by the fierce luminous blaze of non-differentiating love for all sentient beings and for the earth that gave birth to us and which sustains us.