

99% vs. 1%

An unusual title, to be sure, which requires explanation but first a few words are in order about where this essay is going. Basically it's an attempt to take a snapshot of an insight touched upon in several more recent articles which warrants further development. The fundamental issue around which these articles center is how to conceive of our spiritual life (even this very phrase is brought into question) in the modern world while still being rooted firmly in the Judeo-Christian tradition. To be sure, an all encompassing task with the possibility that a number of loose ends may be left hanging and require some tiding up at a later date. At the same time the treatment given in these earlier articles have a somewhat amateur-ish air about them by reason of not having been thought through well enough nor having bounced them off other folks to get their feedback. Still, getting the material out there is both enjoyable and demanding, an exercise that makes you think things through. While these deficiencies are out there for all to see, it's good not to get too hung up because they can freeze you up and prevent further exploration in the form of writing. In other words, too much caution can preclude the communication of any insights derived from simple observations about living, plain and simple.

At this stage in the ongoing process of writing articles the title *99% vs. 1%* is intended as a photo shot, if you will, of what earlier ones posted thus far on the Lectio site and with a view of further developments. It may be helpful to know that when writing these articles almost always another larger or more complex project is in the fire. For example, the current one is *Expansions on the Book of Isaiah* and *Notations on Plato's Phaedrus*. While material from both do not consciously impinge on the present essay,¹ for example, both texts somehow offer continuous input. Besides, alternating between all three keeps you from getting bored or sterile. And so, these articles may be considered as chapters of a larger whole...a book...though clearly that isn't the intent. It seems too much planning in that direction can get in the way and would detract from the task at hand.

With this brief introduction out of the way, let's examine the choice of the article's title. 99% represents how much and how often we rely upon (or think we rely upon) our mental faculties to get around in the world. Clearly this is an exaggeration to show the imbalance we often bring to any given situation, so we'll keep the title as is. 99% highlights the fact that our rational minds are the best means (if not the only way) by which to comport ourselves in the world. Yes, we have instinctive drives and follow their impulses, but more often than not we look down upon them, even as threatening. Some might call them "primitive." Even though for the most part they're kept in the background, we know they are there waiting for an opportunity to lunge at us. Should we give into these drives, we feel ashamed and seek as quickly as possible to restore our emotions or the like under control of the intellect. In the meanwhile, we move along with memories of past encounters either haunting us or accompanying us like shadows. Actually we stumble through most of life under these circumstances while retaining some doubts and regrets at not having resolved our vague, persistent unease.

¹The word "essay" is helpful to keep in mind. It's derived from the French very *essayer* meaning to attempt. With this in mind, the current document is an essay...an attempt...at clarifying something near and dear. It may not achieve that goal, but that is less important than the enjoyment of moving in the right direction, of trying (*essayer!*) to express something that is important though not explored very much.

Should we be adventurous and examine this shadow world (also it has a certain subterranean quality) we find that it governs us far more than we realize. So when we turn our attention here, quickly we discover that our intellect is pretty much at the tip, barely staying above the water. We place a high value on our intellect...perhaps too high...and consider everything else as lower. To that so-called lower side of ourselves is attributed the low value of 1%, again, another exaggeration but to make a point. As it turns out with life, the situation can get reversed. In that scenario we function at 1% with regard to our minds and 99% with regard to our emotions and the like. According to Margaret MacMillan, author of **The War that Ended Peace**, new discoveries in psychology and science prior to World War I contributed to priming society for going to war, albeit indirectly, as they fed into how people perceived themselves, their respective nations and their relationship with others. Chapter Nine (*What Were They Thinking?*) is a fine summary not so much of historical factors as to the cause of World War I but deeper trends such as discovery (and fear of) the subconscious by Freud and social Darwinism. In other words, a whole host of new discoveries lay bear strong, dark hitherto unknown currents of human life. They have been operative, of course, all along but in the decades prior to World War I, they were on the verge of coming into consciousness with ultimately murderous results. Once these irrational forces came to light, it was impossible to stop them. Their resolution lay in war and destruction...the unfolding of these forces, of course, were to erupt even more violently in a few decades, World War II.

And so we end up with the sharpest of all possible dualisms, the intellect and emotions, using the latter term a bit loosely and in an all-inclusive manner to include that which does not belong to the intellect. Little by little new discoveries about irrational forces governing our behavior which came into being in the late nineteenth century backed the intellect into a corner from which it couldn't escape. Now having been taken down unceremoniously from its pedestal, it was forced to operate in a confined space. The choices made under these conditions are quite bleak, and like anyone backed up into a corner, the forces built up there lash out with a force having little concern for the consequences. When we consider our own lives and observe those instances when we've been governed by this process, we become more sympathetic with how other people are similarly affected not just now but throughout the course of history. All our work, study, recreation and entertainment are colored by this, pretty much living on the edge waiting for everything to explode. In fact, it's a tribute to human nature that it hasn't done so big time, but the possibility remains.

These forces seem to have played a role in devaluing spiritual practices which had nourished earlier generations. Suddenly that world disappeared which makes you wonder how firmly it had been established in the first place. In fact, we're still in the process of ascertaining the effects of that seismic shift. One explanation is that the older forms, despite their pervasiveness, never took hold but were more a cultural phenomenon. Now that we're not as bound by customs and the culture in which they had flourished, we're experiencing a kind of disconnect with the past. This doesn't mean the desire for spirituality has dried up; quite the contrary. More than ever people are seeking practices they deem compatible in their struggle with the now familiar dichotomy between religion and spirituality, the latter usually considered more genuine and not part of an establishment on its last legs or having passed off the scene altogether. Not long ago such a distinction was unconscionable. Now people are talking about it openly, a topic hitherto relegated between God, the individual and his or her clergyman. In the meanwhile, the complexities of the modern world which means you can access what's going on everywhere and at once, make you

wonder how you're supposed to tie it all in with your life. It's quite a daunting task to make sense of all this and your place in it, if any. The sheer size of this can drive some people toward a spirituality that emphasizes doing small things with a pure intention. St. Teresa or the Little Flower comes to mind, albeit in an updated form.² This emphasis upon littleness can be a healthy sign, that we prefer rootedness in our corporeality instead of engaging in flights of the intellect and even the spirit. At the same time we need to be on guard as using it as a way of taking refuge in the face of insurmountable odds.

So if we turn attention to littleness, albeit in an updated form for the twenty-first century, perhaps...just perhaps...we may find a way out of the various binds which ensnare us on every side as far as it goes with spiritual growth. This means first we recognize what the intellect lays out for us and then gently lay aside many of its leads. If we follow this course with care, the deeper forces mentioned above are less likely to take us by surprise. These forces pack an especially hard punch at night, the time when they manifest themselves in the form of dreams over which we have no conscious control. Then we awake and wonder how and why we've had such violent thoughts and images, thankful that at least we hadn't acted them out. The element of surprise is always present, however, and never, it seems, are we prepared sufficiently for their violent interruption. Having recourse to the intellect may help us understand the dynamics. Yet this faculty doesn't seem capable of coming to grips with them, of making us peaceful and fulfilled. For that we have to look elsewhere, and that elsewhere is closer than we think.

Continuing along with this theme of littleness which offsets a large, complex world (forget about the universe, let alone multiple universes), we discover it's a good lead for developing spirituality today. It even has a modern twist, eco-sensitivity, of minding the planet which starts on a local level and offers a genuine sense of satisfaction by our personal contributions. This littleness rests on a paradox of sorts. While we may focus in on a particular action, quickly we discover it's one among a countless gazillions of them, all going on at once and everywhere. The best part is our intuitive feel that all are connected. More generally, they all come to birth, hang around for a greater or longer period of time, and then dissolve...over and over, just like Ecclesiastes has said. However, he adopted a rather negative stance, of seeing this transitory-ness as "vanity"...perfectly true...but that's not the case here.

Putting this insight of littleness into action keeps things manageable so we don't get caught up in a form of dualism, that which is outside as against us, from which it's hard to extricate ourselves. It sets the stage for comporting ourselves in real places with real people in real time and transcends both our likes and dislikes. Furthermore, it's a wonderful complement for our lack of knowledge or better, our inherent ignorance. When this has taken root within us by simple awareness of what's involved, we better appreciate the unbelievable vastness of what we don't know as well as what we happen to know, and that's frightfully little. At the same time there's no reason for despair for the following reason. You make a subtle but definite shift from the littleness we're discussing here to an awareness that everything has come into being, is sustained for a limited period of time and then passes off the scene. This means you've hit upon something quite big. Yet it is so evident that rarely do we capitalize on it and make it part of our lives. Nothing...absolutely

²Another example along this line, albeit lesser known, is Br. Lawrence of the Resurrection, a 17th century lay brother of the Carmelite Order. His **Practice of the Presence of God** has a wide appeal among Christians of all stripes because of his lack of Catholic devotional-speak.

nothing...is excluded from being begotten, let alone ourselves and the world of human creation.

So if everything is begotten on the micro and macro levels, no distinction whatsoever, automatically we wonder if there's anything outside it which could be designated as un-begotten. A caveat of sorts...such talk has nothing to do with Christian theology about the nature of the Father in the Trinity. The approach at hand has an apophatic air about it, not theologically but as it pertains to the natural realm. You have to run with it a while, paying close attention to the rise and fall of stuff which might trigger a new insight you haven't had before. This insight wells up from within without any concrete proof in the way we're accustomed to think of a proof. It arises indirectly, more from a sense of incompleteness we've always felt but never were able to put our finger on. And so this incompleteness is the essential for pushing us onward.

The obscure yet real drive begins with observation of the rise and fall of physical things, pure and simple, with no strings attached. That means we seek nothing further than this. Mental stuff is included, but that's not as easy to latch on to. The reason is simple. The world is full of physical stuff easy to perceive which enables us to begin experimenting wherever and whenever. It's a question of just doing it (as the expression goes) but not in an aimless fashion. Knowing how to take the plunge gets round to the idea of a technique to push us along. Here the idea of *sophia*, the Greek term for wisdom, may help out. While most people associate *sophia* with some kind of wise insights into life (certainly true), more basically it refers to what we'd call today technical know-how. *Sophia* applies to the ability of a person to perform a craft and do it well.³ This, in turn, leads to the fundamental notion of *arete*, another Greek term commonly tied in with virtue. However, *arete* suggests the best of anything as well as the best of any human performance and, of course, virtue. So in the context at hand, to have *sophia* with regard to how physical stuff rises, is sustained and falls leads to *arete*. That is to say, *sophia*-as-technique enables one to see the best or noblest of something.

Applying this twofold insight into the real (physical) world is where we make the actual transition from seeing stuff as regular old stuff to seeing stuff as begotten, that it has an origin, existence and fades away. Such an insight removes the stuff a bit further from the normal way it impinges upon our lives; in other words, it helps us become detached. Like Ecclesiastes, we run with this insight for a while, get used to the basic pattern (it holds in every situation, no matter what) and again like Ecclesiastes, get bored with the whole enterprise regardless of the splendor or horror that bumps up against us. One of the best features about this enterprise is that we become less conscious of how we stack up against other people. It yields a disinterestedness which precludes the temptation to see some people as above us and others as below us. They all boil down to the same thing (stuff!) as far as begetting goes. It's an insight that cuts into the heart of the matter but is a lonely one, if you will. There aren't many people who subscribe to it for the simple reason they haven't been trained even though the practice is right before everyone's eyes. However, that's the price to

³Consider a verse from the Wisdom of Sirach: "All these (craftsmen) rely upon their hands, and each is *skillful* in his own work. Without them a city cannot be established" [38.31-2]. A bit later in contrast to these artisans is someone who could fit the bill as a priest or scholar: "On the other hand, he who devotes himself to the study of the law of the Most High will seek out the *wisdom* of all the ancients and will be concerned with prophecies" [31.1]. In other words, two groups of people forming the basis of society. The former has the verb "skillful" or *sophizo* (connotes giving instruction) and the latter, the noun *sophia* as an object of search.

pay and ultimately turns out not to be as steep as previously thought. Apart from all these considerations is the incomparable reward that come our way.

This loneliness is an important ingredient, for it primes us to step away from the ordinary way people go about their business that we may assume something new. Here's where you determine whether or not you have the courage to follow through, a risky venture, but that's the nature of the enterprise at hand. If you're seeking comfort, ultimately it lays in the fact that everyone will pass off the scene once and for all. No coming back whatsoever. Should you abide with the loneliness for a while...staying put, as it were, and not running away (our first impulse)...things smooth out more quickly than anticipated. Even better, a new insight dawns, albeit vague. So if this insight is worth forsaking everything and you get a vague glimpse into what's going on, where do you go from there? Do you change your lifestyle? Some may go that route, but it's rare. In most cases a withdrawal from normal human intercourse is involved. However, whether you go off into the woods or remain at home end, you up in the same place.⁴ Then there's that inescapable "meanwhile" which applies to us all. Quite a lot of spirituality speaks of our divine origins, how to comport ourselves morally and to prepare for death. Running through all these is the common thread that life is transitory. Genuine spirituality revolves around this notion which is common to philosophy as well. Everyone knows instinctively what's being talked about, but little seems discussed about that "meanwhile" in which we spend the bulk of our days. And those days are filled with so much activity it's hard to break away, fearful of living and the plain fact that we're doing that here and now.

There's nothing ethereal about this focus upon the "meanwhile" part of life, all very concrete and this-worldly. In other words, we're stuck with physicality whether it belongs to our own bodies or involves the stuff all around us. So if we can't escape from it, why not capitalize on it? Avoid getting spiritual, if you will, and follow through with the begetting aspect of reality as already outlined. That consists of coming into existence, hanging around in existence and then passing from existence. There's plenty of it which means you can start at anytime. For the most part we blow by opportunities to make the most of situations which comprise that 99% of physical reality. And the 1% represents the actual amount of time we devote to the perception of begetting. To put it in another way, the task at hand is to reverse the following equation by which most of us live: mental first and physical later. Instead it should be: physical first and mental later. Everyone will say and say rightly that first we "are" physically because we're made of the same stuff as everyone else. Nothing could be more obvious. Yet that isn't the realm in which we live as experience teaches us painfully. The results are so obvious and have been described so often there's no need to elaborate upon them.

A host of objections are bound to arise just by speaking like this despite agreement with regard to priority of the physical. Historically speaking, it seems that any spirituality based upon it was fine until the advent of the industrial age or even as late as World War II. After that life became increasingly complex as we all know through technological developments. Complex jobs always had existed, however, such as being a doctor. Only now we depend upon far more people doing

⁴Perhaps Henry David Thoreau had an insight not unlike this. Although he spoke eloquently about nature and the solitary life, rarely did he stray far from home. In fact, his cabin on Walden Pond was about a mile from Concord, close enough to run for business and some social life.

complex tasks, so accepted that we barely give this a thought. Above all else being a parent is one of the most consuming jobs out there, for it involves considerable mental energy not just for oneself but for one's family. Because this is so incredibly self-evident you wonder if posing the suggestion of focusing upon physicality is worthwhile, even justified. It is worthwhile because although we exist (physically), we don't utilize this physicality in a proper way. The complexity of modern life has intervened and now stands firmly in the way, showing no signs of backing off. Besides, the alternatives of functioning mentally and spiritually are more exciting than ever despite the pitfalls of modern life. How can paying attention to physical acts and functions common to everyone on the planet (not excluding a good number of animals) compare to the loftiness of the technological world? How banal can you get? Is this what life is all about?

With these real objections in mind you wonder if the proposal put forth in this essay should even be tossed out there. Like anything else, the validity for the worth of anything comes by doing it which means beginning at the beginning, and that means getting down to business as soon as you open your eyes. Before you do anything else, be aware of your surroundings, that you've been out of touch with them for some hours when you had been asleep. While still in this half-awake stage you roll out of bed and proceed to take care of bodily needs followed by breakfast. Of course, it's best to avoid turning on the radio or the like. That would activate the mind unnecessarily and discomfort you for the remainder of the day even though it seems an innocent thing to do. While you're doing these early morning chores, notice how the body responds naturally and without direction from the intellect, all quite seamless. This is reassuring, for the body takes care of itself minus mental intervention. Next comes the commute to work which for many people is a "quiet time" followed, of course, by the day's work when mental work begins in earnest and as you leave the physical behind. You may manage to re-gain some of the physical in the evening, but mostly you're worn out. Evening is a time when you have regrets for the day: not so much at having not functioned properly but having not paid as much attention to your native physicality as you wished. This doesn't resemble what used to be called a "particular examen" but a general feeling of how the day when vis-a-vis this attention. You can justify your failure (a bit unfairly) by saying that my job requires a lot of mental energy, and I can't be focused upon my physicality. If this really eats at you, it may be time for a different life style, one that is simpler. It just may be that you're destined to pursue this more fully.

So here's the real rub. You have insight into the invaluable worth of common physical functions and the like, but they don't jibe with the demands of work, especially the highly complicated ones typical nowadays. We even haven't brought up family life which involves just as much if not more attention to mental tasks. Both instances are opportunities for building up reservoirs of knowledge—the physical and the mental—both valid and necessary, for enjoying life. However, both are made of different material: the physical is direct or immediate with regard to the senses and the mental is less so even if thoughts are the closest thing to you. Throughout the course of life you build up a reservoir of experience from both realms. You start wondering what life is about and that you may have missed the boat somewhere along the line. Life goes on like this with nagging questions still unresolved...some peace here and a stalemate there. In other words, you find yourself with a number of loose ends hanging that the passage of time precludes from getting resolved. While we have gained knowledge on the physical level as well as on the mental one, we cling to the latter for the most part and for obvious reasons. We can test the validity of this observation simple as pie. Instead of focusing upon knowledge gained and insights achieved, are

we happier by following the mental route? People are generally dissatisfied if not miserable because the physical and mental rub against each other not unlike tectonic plates. And like these plates, the action occurs underground...out of sight...with traces (faults: geographical and human) on the surface. This rubbing and hence irresolution makes you wonder what life is about, for both sides, the physical and mental, clamor for allegiance.

The image of tectonic plates is a good one chiefly for its invisibility, for the irresolution between the physical and mental (and therefore the spiritual) festers a long time tucked away beneath our conscious attention. We're familiar with both planes of life but in many instances are afraid of both. We feel a need to chose one over the other but don't seem to have the courage for it. Actually, a long time ago we made the choice, and it was for the mental. Given the value society places upon intelligence, it's natural for everyone to take this route and judge everything by it. We grew up this way and are expected to act accordingly. Carrying this further, we expect that the after-life will follow pretty much the same pattern, a gloomy prospect. There's something to be said about Purgatory but not as presented traditionally. The rut into which we got ourselves in this life needs to be broken. We can die without even realizing this and so need some kind of pruning in the next. If ever there were an argument for the soul's immortality, one based on concrete reality, this is it.

We can get around this unpleasant fate by playing a game first in our minds which is a rehearsal prior to when we actually play it out. Both are effected as follows. Go through a given day with as much attention upon the physical dimensions of yourself and everything you encounter. We're made for action as a simple observation of our bodies tells us: arms and hands to do things and legs to get us there for it. See how all this colludes without conscious intervention from our minds, how it plays out automatically. We manage to get through the day just perfectly. We may then ask after following these physical actions, am I better off than when I began the day? Has the quality improved and if so, would I continue with this same insight? There's no need to practice the other end of the spectrum, living on the mental level, because that is how we've been raised. We function this way every day. However, at the end of an ordinary day we can assess what had transpired. While we may have accomplished something good and have avoided doing evil, it levels out to be quite bland and uninspiring. When we've had enough of this (which most people do but are afraid to admit it) we're at the source of Ecclesiastes' observations with the conclusion "vanity of vanities, all is vanity." Such is the core of it all even though our experimentation has been less than desirable. That means more practice with the two modes of comporting ourselves throughout a given day.

After some experimentation and reflection a Eureka Moment dawns, one you have to capitalize upon to make it endure while avoiding the temptation to grasp at it. As experience shows, any grasping is a sure-fire way to lose it. Rarely do you get it right on the first try, but that's no problem. Although you know it right away, it takes time to realize that the breakthrough lays in favor of the physical, not the mental/spiritual as one might assume. Because we're close to the senses, they impact us first and never lie despite what we hear about from scientists and the like. What these professional points of view seem to miss is the power of insight we can bring to bear upon physical reality, of seeing it directly minus mediation which includes reflection upon our experience. Here it's easy to slip into common-places to describe our experience. For example, one could say "go with the flow," "live in the moment" and "one day at a time." While true, they

don't get us far by reason of being tossed about freely. And so we opt to abide with physical reality, close to the ground. Seeing it in and by itself is not so much the goal though this is essential. Rather, we are to see things as they are being begotten...come into existence and pass out of existence. Note that the middle term is missing, deliberately so, things when they are in existence. That's what we are to avoid or simply allow to pass by because we do favor to linger in a place that has no real substance despite all these mental distractions that assail us day and night.

Living naturally (this phrase taking on a wholly new meaning in light of the new insight we've gained) is easy as we're attempting to spell out here. Our mental/spiritual side complicates things, the 99% of ourselves or what we attribute as living. To relinquish this seems unimaginable since it contains all that is near and dear as well as all that we fear. Shedding it for the 1% which society doesn't consider bad but as incidental is one of the worst things a person could do. Surely we must be crazy in forsaking a higher level of existence. However, living in accord with this meager 1% of physicality has nothing to do with forsaking our intellects, just our attachment to them. More often than not they are hindrances to an abiding perception of that begotten-ness concerned with the rise and fall of every existing thing. Yes, begotten-ness is a fine word as pertaining to the two realms of physicality and intellect/spirit. Without designating it properly never we'll be at ease, always looking for some ersatz resolution. So when we have doubts we acknowledge them as coming into existence and passing from existence minus their being held in existence. Of course, they are held in existence but so quickly that no one really knows if this state is real. It seems to be more ghost-like. We get ready for the next assault (they will be plenty of them) and allow the process repeat itself without getting involved. If anything could come close to the threshold of eternal life, this seems to be it.

The reason for positing attention to physicality as a kind of introduction to "eternal life" is that first and foremost, it is life...physical, of course, in all its vegetable-ness. As for the adjective "eternal," we may have some hesitation because it connotes lasting forever and forever applies to after physical life which is death. Because there's nothing more reliable than being attentive to our physical interaction with the world, we can say with certainty that it's devoid of illusion. The intellect seems an observer off to the side which is just what we want. We don't wish to ostracize this faculty but put it in its place, less than the previously exalted position it had enjoyed. So this attentiveness is a genuine watching...beholding...with regard to the rise and fall of literally everything. Because it occupies us completely, there's no time to insert anything else. Previously we had entertained other things (i.e., thoughts) without giving attention to what we were doing which is fine. However, this new perception of beholding the rise and fall of everything out there takes us to a new level which runs parallel with the one familiar to us. Its difference can't be put into words since living on what amounts to the vegetative level is simply ineffable. It brings into harmony all our faculties without any meddling on our part. This sounds too good to be true but turns out to be such, just what we've always wanted.

It's quite marvelous how compatible this attention to our vegetative life is with an awareness of that which is begotten. However, it doesn't stop there. Rather, it continues (and 'continues' is a figure of speech because no time gap gets in the way) into a realm that has no description, really. This isn't an empty space where we roll around aimlessly but something more real than what we've been accustomed to. Instinctively we know it lasts a long time (i.e., eternal) because it existed before us and is bound to do so after we've passed off the scene. There's little to verify if we're on

the right track except by contact with another person whose story concurs with ours. And we don't go out searching for such people. Automatically and mysteriously they plop into our lives. This may not happen right away but surely holds true. To verify, go out and try it.

In a way what's being outlined here, albeit imperfectly, follows something akin to the scientific method. You perform an experiment (examine the processes of begetting), test the results (the fact that all things rise, exist for a while and then pass away) and verify (if this makes sense to someone else). You do this not just once but collaborate with a number of people who go out and perform the same experiment to see if they come up with the same results. It's quite simple and very effective. The rules are ironclad and always produce the same result. The only thing that can go wrong is meddling with the procedure, of bringing in the intellect to come up with such-and-such a theory.

In other articles some space was given over to a discussion about this in terms of the suspension of our mental faculties concerning prayer. It sounds like a tricky subject and may be to anyone accustomed to place high value on the intellect. Yet experience with attention focused upon our physicality or vegetable-ness leads to this suspension without reducing us to a vegetable, that is, becoming senseless. Instead, we're freed up from the intellect which might seem odd to anyone who hasn't done the just mentioned "scientific experiment." One way to test this insight further is how we handle suffering. There's the physical kind and the mental kind, the former being more localized and the latter more dispersed which is of greater concern (we can't do much if we break a leg or lose an arm).

Though we may not think of it right away, concomitant with suffering is awareness of the passage of time. How can you focus on physicality for such an extended period of time without going nuts? Such is the case when we have a toothache or even worse. Thinking about the pain is the issue, for the thoughts are what make us suffer compared to the physical pain. Minus the thoughts, there is just the pain but no suffering. Does this make us throw into doubt those mental achievements which certainly are significant? No, they are marvelous, but the issue at hand is more important, not unlike the Gospel's pearl of great price you purchase in exchange for everything else. So when you do make the purchase, quickly you run into an obstacle that makes you wonder if it was worth the effort, always that lingering doubt. The obstacle consists of the rubbing of this attention to physicality up against our intellect. The former says one thing and the latter another, apparently irreconcilable. And so you get suffering along with pain. If you're talking about the spiritual realm or spiritual life, here is where thoughts...distractions...live, the topic of endless conversation. In the end, any reconciliation between the two planes is out of the question. That means you're left pretty much with nothing and wonder whether what you've achieved so far is worth it, even illusory. Awareness of this rub, often in the form of mental clashes or a general unease, makes you keenly aware of the passage of time.

While we're in this sometimes painful awareness of time's passage we need to persevere in our preference for the physicality of things by repeated gestures of remembrance, if you will, of past benefits gained from our practice. Here the Greek word *anamnesis* helps out, but it differs considerably from our conventional use of memory, the bringing to mind past events and facts. That pure vegetable joy we've hit upon made us realize that something quite amazing is transpiring on a level we could never have imagined before. We seek to live by it...memories of

past experiences of it...but bump up against our familiar reliance upon the intellect and follow its lead. But running with it leaves us uneasy. We know our previous insight somehow was superior. Words to describe it are way insufficient, and we lament the conflict in which we find ourselves. Granted, it's a low-grade struggle but what bothers us is that it's unremitting. Never, it seems, are we able to break the existing log jam.

When we examine further into why this is so, soon we discover that it's a question of *anamnesis* or better, our habitual lack of it. We haven't been trained to realize its potential, remembering past events being more or less a minor appendage to its real fulness. Originally *anamnesis* referred to our previous existence and is the ability to recall that existence within the present one. Then it matured, got Christianized, and developed further into a way we comport ourselves as made in the divine image and likeness. And so *anamnesis* can mean how we, being made in God's image or *eikon*, keep alive that reality by our likeness of the same divine reality. No problem with *eikon* since we're made that way and can't change it. The real issue is the likeness part of ourselves which needs as much contact or referral to the *eikon*. All this sounds like we're doing double-duty of sorts in life, that we're complicating it beyond measure.

Nevertheless, we're fashioned accordingly which means we're fashioned naturally, the vegetative level first which has been sorely neglected in favor of our "higher" faculties. It turns out this "inferior" faculty, the most basic one of them all, is the instrument by which we short-circuit the intellect (inaccurate to some degree, for it gives the impression of denigrating this faculty) in order to recover awareness of being made in the divine *eikon*. The intellect may shepherd us in that direction but comes up short since always it gets in the way. This indeed sounds attractive by reason of its unconventional approach, but it can be tried out readily. All that's required is functioning naturally and being aware of that fact. It will lead to something quite fantastic provided we take the first step and run with it a while. What takes us away from it is posing a question such as "Is that all there is to life, doing natural functions and the rest?" Such questions reveal our lack of faith in the value placed of this physicality. Instead of the dream-like quality typical of much of our lives we experience later when we reflect upon them, no matter how wonderful our accomplishments, they all fade compared with our physicality that never had left us, for it is us.⁵

We get a better handle on all this through practice in the real world. Abiding on the physical level as best we can allows us to leave the other level (intellect) to do its thing. Then quickly we discover that something...someone...is in the background supporting us. It has been doing this all the while, but we had been unconscious of it. Another way of putting this is that we've lacked *anamnesis* of this invisible support. The blind manner by which physical processes go about their business strangely brings to mind...causes *anamnesis*...of this reality which also informs our intellects. However, it prefers to stay away from them, if you will, because quickly our minds devolve into worthless musings. Here is where genuine silence comes to the fore. It's a value sought after in a noisy, technological world but is understood poorly. The silence isn't absence of

⁵At this point a quote from F. Scott Fitzgerald (can't recall the source) is helpful. It runs close if not the same as this: "The test of a first rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposing insights and retain the ability to function." While "intelligence" may be questionable here in light of what we're saying about it, still this quote sums it up quite nicely.

speech or reflection but a type of consent or follow-up to our attention with regard to the physical. Silence turns out to be a teacher, informing us of reality in a way we hadn't had before. What sets it off from the other way we gain knowledge is that it sees into the heart of things and doesn't make us tired compared to relying on the intellect which induces weariness. Thus we could say that the function of *anamnesis* is to reduce us to silence which, in turn, disposes us to use our physicality over our intellects.

Going through life offers opportunity after opportunity where we can try this out. What's needed is an opportunity to make an incision, if you will, into an apparently seamless fabric of begetting as discussed earlier that we may lay hold of the vegetative level. Like the famous fish in the ocean, we're always in it but need a conscious effort to realize the existence of the ocean. Here we come to the conclusion that there are two types of knowledge: one gained from physicality and the other through the usual means (intellect). Both are unacquainted, if you will, with each other even though they take up the same space in reality. The former is more concerned with the nature of begetting while the latter with the how, when and why of all begetting...in other words, the mechanism of begetting. So when these two types of knowledge rub up against each other as invariably they will, suffering comes into being. Before that, suffering didn't exist which doesn't mean the absence of pain. We can see this quite easily. Which is worse, thoughts about an impending operation or the operation itself? Everyone is familiar with this scenario and find it next to impossible to shake off.

Thus far this essay has delineated two worlds and their apparently irreconcilable differences: a world view founded upon the physicality of life with begetting as the rise and fall of everything imaginable versus one based upon the intellect. By far, the latter is universally preferable and the former might even be relegated to those who suffer some kind of mental retardation, an adult with the mind of a child. With such a wide gap between the two, one wonders if it can be narrowed. Actually this isn't the issue. Physical existence is crucial to get about in the real world in conjunction with the mental one though always it precedes it. This always remains true whereas the latter is subject to errors of mis-judgement or mis-perceptions. When you're taken up as much as possible with attention to the physical, you find it fascinating, not unlike some kind of game. Things flow naturally and so do you. After some time you acquire a new type of knowledge you hadn't had in your life, an intuitive kind which seems into the heart of things. It isn't a super-knowledge in the sense of being superior but a natural outflow of following the pattern of begetting.

Here we get to the crux of the matter, of reconciling the two types of knowledge. This may be seen in a concrete example...concrete because all this is very much on that level despite some convoluted language and ideas being used here. The whole enterprise is very simple yet doesn't seem talked about much. Besides, we're dealing with a borderline realm...that which is between manifestation and non-manifestation. Because the physical comes first and the mental (spiritual) second, the second is...well...secondary and needs to be based on what is primary, as it were. So the birth is a reverse one from the normal course of events. The mental doesn't so much forsake its content but primacy. This is quite difficult to describe because words are at the point of failing, being used as they are in between two very different realms. One way of looking at it is as follows. Previously (this means before our intellects were awakened to awareness of begetting, physicality) emotions would cause both problems and joys, and we'd follow them attentively. Now no longer

my emotions are of interest but their coming to birth, their being begotten. It is no longer their movement that's of interest, but this other informal movement which is the birth of their formal movement.

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