

Limitless Undying Love: The Beatles and the Perennial Philosophy

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Introduction

This book is a critical study of the Beatles' lyrics, from the perspective of their spiritual content and message, but before you are put off by such terms as 'critical' and 'study', let me assure you, dear reader, that there's nothing in this book that you don't already know. If you've picked this book up, you *know*, on a gut level, that the band whose main message was encapsulated by the John Lennon song 'All You Need Is Love' weren't just spouting some passing sixties fad. They were ahead of their time, and, indeed, when they were writing from a truly inspired place, writing in line with the time-less wisdom of what has come to be called the 'Perennial Philosophy' on their side. As Lennon put it in an interview:

*On any trips—whether they're chemical or anything—things that you discover are self-awareness, all the things that you've already known. Nobody's telling you anything new. A scientist doesn't discover anything new, he just tells you what's already there. Nobody can tell you nothing. Even somebody like a Dylan or a Sartre or somebody like that. They tell you something that is like a revelation—but it always is something that you know inside that they've just affirmed for you.*¹

All that this little study is going to do for you is put flesh on the bones of the knowledge you already have.

So, before we begin, what are we talking about when we refer to 'the Perennial Philosophy'? The phrase comes from Aldous Huxley², and is the title of his book of the same name, published first in 1946—a superb treasury of spiritual wisdom, (and this is perhaps the crucial point) compiled from *all the major faiths in the world*. At the core level, as Lennon states in another interview:

*All the religions are the same, it's just a matter of people opening their minds up.*³

In the book *Natural Grace*,⁴ theologian Matthew Fox uses the analogy of the five major faiths in the world, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, being like five fingers on one hand: beneath all the apparent differences and geographically and culturally specific ideas and attitudes, astonishingly perhaps, the true mystical tradition of each religion is saying *exactly the same thing*.

And what, exactly, is it that the Perennial Philosophy is saying? Luckily, this can be summarised quite readily, and has been done so in

¹ Quoted in *The Beatles Anthology*, Cassel 2000.

² He took the phrase from the Latin *philosophia perennis* of the philosopher Leibnitz.

³ Op. cit.

⁴ Bloomsbury, 1997.

recent years by Ken Wilber, in his excellent and moving book *Grace And Grit*⁵, where he breaks it down into seven points:

One, Spirit exists, and Two, Spirit is found within. Three, most of us don't realise this Spirit within, however, because we are living in a world of sin, separation and duality...a fallen or illusory state. Four, there is a way out...there is a Path to our liberation. Five, if we follow this Path to its conclusion, the result is a rebirth or Enlightenment, a direct experience of Spirit within...which, Six—marks the end of sin and suffering, and which—Seven—issues in social action of mercy and compassion on the behalf of all sentient beings.

Here's John Lennon again:

*I think a lot of bad things have happened in the name of the church and in the name of Christ...I think people who need to go to church should go. And the others who know the church is in your own head should visit that temple because that's where the source is. We're all God. Christ said 'The Kingdom of Heaven is within you'. And the Indians say that and the Zen people say that. We're all God. I'm not a god or the God, but we're all God and we're all potentially divine—and potentially evil. We all have everything within us and the Kingdom of Heaven is nigh and within us, and if you look hard enough, you'll see it.*⁶

This aspect of liberation, God, the Divine, call it what you will, being *within* (cue George's 'Within You Without You') is a cornerstone of the Perennial Philosophy, and Christ's statement to this effect in the Gospels needs looking at therefore in detail. Here is the King James Bible, Luke, 17, verses 20-21:

And when he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the Kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, The Kingdom of God cometh not with observation:

Neither shall they say, Lo, here! Or, lo there!, for, behold, the Kingdom of God is within you.

Christ sounds positively sarcastic here about those looking for a 'Kingdom of God' in external terms. Nevertheless, ignoring this, most adherents of mainstream Christianity throughout the centuries have been looking for salvation in terms of a second coming, an external event in time. This can happen because, as Huxley points out in another excellent book, *The Human Situation*⁷:

⁵ Shambala, 1991.

⁶ From the *Anthology* again.

⁷ Chatto & Windus 1978.

There are two main kinds of religion. There is the religion of immediate experience...the religion of direct acquaintance with the divine in the world. And then there is the religion of symbols...the religion of knowledge about the divine, rather than direct acquaintance with it.

This parallels Wilber's formulation, again from his *Grace And Grit*, where he defines the two types of religion as 'exoteric' and 'esoteric':

Exoteric or 'outer' religion is mythic religion, religion that is terribly concrete and literal...If you believe all the myths, you are saved;...[this] type of religion...has nothing to do with mystical religion or esoteric religion...esoteric or mystical religion...is a matter of direct experience or personal awareness. Esoteric religion asks you to believe nothing on faith or obediently swallow any dogma. Rather, esoteric religion is a set of personal experiments that you conduct scientifically in the laboratory of your own awareness...The experiment is meditation.

So, the Perennial Philosophy pertains to the inner, and to 'direct experience'. I personally wouldn't even use the word 'religion' when talking of the Perennial Philosophy, and prefer to use the term 'spirituality'.

All this is very important to our study, as both Lennon and Harrison are interested *only* in direct experience spirituality, as we shall see. Lennon is often very anti the established churches and creeds. He, after all, denounces religion as mere 'opium for the masses' in the song 'Working Class Hero':

Keep you doped with religion and sex and T.V.

'Imagine' continues the attack on exoteric religions and their dogmas:

*Imagine there's no heaven
It's easy if you try,
No Hell below us,
Above us only sky...
Imagine there's no countries
It isn't hard to do
Nothing to kill or die for
And no religion too.*

People often take it that with his attacks on established religion, Lennon was positing a purely humanist solution to all the world's problems. That this is not so should be evident from the earlier interview quotes, and from what we will be unearthing in the course of this study. It is, in fact, perfectly consistent with the Perennial Philosophy to be *against* the

exoteric churches and religions. Was it not Christ himself who railed against the Pharisees, ‘whited sepulchres’ of the empty religions of his time? Does not St. Paul warn against the letter that killeth?⁸

Another misconception is that only George was the ‘spiritual’ Beatle. He was certainly spiritual, but it was John who led the way—and Paul also has his moments, as we shall see. Inevitably we are dealing with the songwriters within the band in this study, so Ringo, who contributed hugely to all the recordings and live performances, of course, won’t be getting much of a look-in.

In the process of writing this book, the effect of ‘rubbing shoulders’, as it were, with promulgators of the Perennial Philosophy old and new, has broadened and deepened my own spiritual outlook, experience and knowledge. It is my sincerest wish that the process of reading this book may grant a similar level of illumination for all who read these words, and send you off to listen to the songs with a new perspective, and an inner ear opened.

All You Need Is Love
Give Peace A Chance
We All Shine On

Dean Carter 2003

⁸ 2 Corinthians, 3:6.

Early Pointers

There's A Place.

Most people wouldn't be too surprised by an assertion that the Beatles were writing spiritually influenced songs by, say, 1967, but my contention is that John Lennon at least was writing from a spiritual standpoint much earlier.

Nestled unobtrusively in the running order of *Please Please Me*, the very first Beatles LP, just before 'Twist And Shout', there's an easy to overlook little gem of a song called 'There's A Place'. The opening lines are

*There's a place where I can go
When I feel low, when I feel blue...*

Now, let's stop there for a moment, and ask ourselves the question, 'What *should* come next? What kind of 'place' *should* we be dealing with here?' Remember, we're looking at the Beatles' first album, recorded in a legendary mere twelve hours in February 1963, to cash in on their first two hit singles, 'Love Me Do', a very modest hit, just reaching the U.K. top 20, and 'Please Please Me', their first British No. 1.⁹ The Beatles' influences up until this time were the great rockers of the fifties, Elvis, Bill Haley, Chuck Berry, et. al.

Now, a song written for teenagers in early 1963 *ought* to have been pretty much in that tradition—as are most of the songs, many of them covers, on the album. One would expect the place the protagonist is talking about to be an actual physical location where he can 'rock around the clock' and blow the blues he mentions away. It ought to be about a place like the 'social hall' in which everyone is having a ball in Bill Haley's 'Rip It Up'. Or maybe some place 'across the tracks' where a band with a 'wailing sax' is playing, as in Chuck Berry's 'Rock And Roll Music'. Maybe this song is going to be a tribute to the Cavern Club, or the Star Club Hamburg. What we get though, what this 'place' turns out to be, is rather a shock. I'll quote the whole verse now, without which the impact is lessened:

*There's a place where I can go
When I feel low, when I feel blue,
And it's my mind, and there's no time when I'm alone.* [my emphases]

Huh???

Did they just sing 'it's my *mind*' ? *Mind* as *place*, posited in a early early sixties pop song? Remembering that this is before Dylan and the later Lennon had beefed up the subject material of pop, before acid,

⁹ Why, one wonders, was this excellent and very sexual early Lennon song left off the recent 'No. 1' compilation? Is it just that Lennon isn't around to fight his own corner any more?

before ‘pop’ had become ‘rock’, when all that songs, we assume, were ever about were holding hands and kissing in the back row of the movies? Yep, ‘fraid so. Even in this little, not very celebrated song, (fabulously short, not even two minutes long), Lennon can’t help but be Mr. Deep—without even consciously trying. The outside world, life, can make one ‘down’ and ‘blue’, and he encapsulates a means of escape from the world and its problems not by having a milkshake and dancing the night away, but by embracing *inner* space as an antidote to *outer* difficulties. We notice also the fact that he says

...there’s no time when I’m alone.

Not only is Lennon telling us about Mind-as-place as recompense for outer problems, the sorrows of the world, he is also claiming that in embracing ‘mind’, *time can be transcended*.

Too much! Whatever happened to boy meets girl, the supposed subject material of all pop song writing from this early ‘innocent’ era? With verse two, we seem to be back in Neil Sadaka, happy-ever-after land, almost before we’ve properly got away from it:

*I think of you, and things you do
Go ‘round my head; the things you’ve said--
Like ‘I love only you’.*

This, at first, seems rather a disappointing come down, a somewhat phoney switch of focus, considering all that’s gone before. However, we’re not actually engaged in a present moment of me/you dynamic, but a memory—we are, interestingly, still in the protagonist’s ‘head’. We hear the woman speak only through Lennon’s mind. It feels as if the pressures, pleasures, even, of relationship are being digested at one remove now, are going ‘round [his] head’. Perhaps this is why he is feeling ‘low’ and ‘blue’ in the first place. However, no conclusions are made. There isn’t even a positive or negative statement about the, presumably, somewhat important fact that the girl says she loves him and him alone. Not ‘baby done left me’, but ‘baby says she loves me and me alone’! And yet this isn’t the be-all and end-all of the song, like, again, it *should* be. This little declaration of love is being treated *very* coolly, is simply being stored as information. No ‘she loves *me*, yeah yeah yeah’ here.

Volumes are being spoken, silently, in these few lines of ‘There’s A Place’. There is none of the ‘going to the chapel and we’re gonna get married’ saccharinity of mass-produced pop of this era. In this, apparently simple little song, such a line is simply being stored in the singer’s head, and examined—‘OK, I’ll think about it’, he’s saying. Perhaps she’s having an affair with someone else—methinks the lady doth protest too much? Perhaps there’s more to all this soppy boy/girl malarkey that pop

music, among other cultural norms of the time, promulgated? And, after all, how can it compete with the inner serenity hinted at as achievable *by oneself* in the opening verse, where ‘there’s no *time* when I’m alone’?

As if to reassert this superiority of mind-as-place over the demands of love relationships, now comes the middle eight, with its fairly bald assertion

*In my mind, there’s no sorrow, don’t you know that it’s so?
There’ll be no sad tomorrow, don’t you know that it’s so?*

In mind-as-place, we are told fairly straightforwardly, sorrow can be overcome, as well as time transcended. Or perhaps *because* time is transcended. There’s also a feeling that as ‘sorrow’, the usual stuff of love songs, the stuff that is making the narrator feel ‘blue’, is inevitable, perhaps the whole idea of boy/girl love is being rejected. Johnny wants more, and can get it without you, thank you, girl. We are also reminded of the ‘sorrows of the world’ as outlined by the Buddha, and as overcome by him, through *inner* illumination.

The dynamic of the song’s concerns seem to go like this:

- a) Verse 1, statement of mind-as-place, where unwelcome emotions (feeling ‘low’ and ‘blue’), can be overcome, and Time itself transcended.
- b) Verse 2, attempt to re-orient song towards boy/girl subject material, undercut by writer/narrator’s own ambiguity about love and by the fact that he is still very much ‘in [his] head’.
- c) Middle eight, once again extolling virtues of mind-as-place. In context, this can be seen as a rejection of normal notions of love [purely secular/sexual/romantic], and, indeed, the forms of love-song-writing that keep such illusions in place.
- d) Verse 3=Verse 1. Repeat of initial statement.

One might even suggest that this repeat could be seen as a triumphant re-assertion of the author’s concerns, after the 2nd verse’s moment of self-doubt, where he felt he ought to return to the ‘proper’ banalities of pop lyrics.

‘There’s A Place’ is a revolutionary song. It puts meditation squarely on the map as a matter for pop-lyric scrutiny as early as 1963, and, both by simply doing so, and due to its own inner dynamics (via Lennon’s own vacillations of purpose and conviction), engages in a debate over the superiority of the cultivation of inner awareness versus the distraction of the normal staple of pop music, boy/girl love. These sorts of vacillations, as we shall see, become almost commonplace in Lennon’s writing: ‘There’s A Place’ is essentially a miniaturised blueprint, in some ways, of all Lennon’s later and greater songs. The Inner, mind-as-place, wins the battle in this song, although the song’s assertion that mind-as-place is superior is qualified by the fact that the

things the girl has said are going ‘round [his] head’ in the second verse. This is the sort of ‘mind-chatter’ that meditators are encouraged by their teachers to eliminate. So perhaps this is an unconscious acknowledgement on Lennon’s part that, despite the fact that he can achieve transcendence over ‘time’ and ‘sorrow’ through inhabitation of mind-as-place, it’s a hit and miss affair, and that guidance will still be necessary—which will lead us to an important, and more well known, later song, ‘Nowhere Man’.

Essentially what Lennon has hit upon in this song is the *twofold nature of mind* that becomes familiar to those engaged in meditation, but which is unknown, in the West, to people in general. The everyday mind of thoughts, judgements and conceptualisations, all bound up with the ego, the mind of this ‘mind-chatter’, is encapsulated in the second verse. Even while going into his mind for solace, it is this aspect of mind that is in the way, and still runs on with thoughts about the external world and its problems. The things people have said go ‘round [one’s] head’ in an uncontrolled and un-looked for way. To most people, this is all that mind is—thought activity, and it is mostly uncontrolled, compulsive, habitual. But, to a student of meditation, the teacher introduces the idea that there is another aspect of mind, the silence *behind* all this mental noise, the *source* of thoughts, rather than the thoughts themselves. In meditation, one is attempting to get to this source, to which we may give the title of capital-‘M’ Mind. It is *this* aspect of mind, *Mind*, which does indeed provide refuge from ‘sorrow’, and transcend time. The Tibetans overcome the confusion of nomenclature by having a different word for these two aspects—the ego-mind of thought-activity they call *sem*, the basic nature of mind itself, the source, the capital-‘M’ Mind, they call *rigpa*. In the Zen tradition the two are known simply as ‘big mind’ and ‘little mind’.

The Dharmapada, compiled only a few months after the passing of the Buddha, opens with two contrasting statements which make evident this two-fold nature of mind, and without an understanding of which, the statements seem paradoxical:

Mind is the forerunner of all evil states. Mind is chief, mind-made are they. If one speaks or acts with a wicked mind, because of that suffering follows one, even as the wheel follows the hoof of the draught-ox.

Mind is the forerunner of all good states. Mind is chief, mind-made are they. If one speaks or acts with impure mind, because of that, happiness follows one, even as one’s shadow that never leaves. [BMS Publication]

So Lennon has hit upon the two aspects of mind, but not yet been given the guidance to properly sort them out, despite the fact that if the song is to be believed, he has been able since an early age to reach a

transcendent state where ‘there’s no time’ by his own instinctive, unaided efforts—no guru, no method, no creed. His upbringing in our unenlightened culture doesn’t help—we have only one word for something that would be more easily understood if there were two separate words. We will have to make do with the device of capitalisation to make the distinction clear as we go along. It won’t be the only instance of capitalisation we’ll be using, as we shall see, or of our culture having a limited vocabulary in these important matters.

‘There’s A Place’ was released as the B-side of ‘Twist And Shout’ in the U.S. in 1964, the only non-Beatle penned Beatle single. ‘Twist And Shout’ being pure sexually driven rock and roll, it’s interesting to note that even at this earlier stage, with the inclusion of ‘There’s A Place’, the Beatles were also putting out deeper messages, pointing to the fact that there’s more to life than is ever postulated in the normally limited materialistic vocabulary and consciousness of popular music.

In My Life

Here is the opening verse of John's 'In My Life':

*There are places I'll remember
All my life, though some have changed;
Some forever, not for better,
Some have gone, and some remain.
All these places had their moments
With lovers and friends I still can recall,
Some are dead and some are living—
In my life, I've loved them all.*

Deep stuff for a 'pop' song. In the 1980 Playboy interview, Lennon states

'In My Life' was, I think, my first real, major piece of work...It was the first song I wrote that was really, consciously, about my life.¹⁰

We note here the link with 'There's A Place', i.e. the continuation of the idea of 'place' and 'places'. In 'There's A Place', as we have seen, the 'place' Lennon is referring to is not in the objective external world, but is, instead, his 'mind', a 'place' where there is neither 'sorrow' nor 'time'. 'In My Life' a classic song on the 1965 *Rubber Soul* album, never released as a single¹¹, deals instead with places in the usual sense of the word, physical locations in the objective world, and hence they are subject to time, to death, change, and decay. Such places are, of course, significant because they are the backdrop for one's own existence, and that inevitably, (unless one is a complete hermit), involves other people. Lovers and friends, as well as the places they live in, work in, etc., are also subject to time, death, change and decay. Unlike the 'place' of the mind in 'There's A Place' where 'there's no time', the external objective reality we all inhabit, as we all know, *is* very much prey to time.

In both 'There's A Place' and 'In My Life' Lennon is obviously writing from a level of depth that makes a lot of the early Lennon-McCartney output pale by comparison lyrically (to say nothing of the general standard of pop song-writing, then and now). What can have made Lennon, who *could* have continued to write in simple boy/girl terms as the stock in trade of his chosen profession as a songwriter until kingdom come, write with such depth while still such a young man?

The answer is—*suffering*. Pain, 'sorrow', the very stuff that he takes refuge from in his mind in 'There's A Place'. In spiritual terms, pain is good for you—you know that, don't you, dear reader? The

¹⁰ Quoted in *The Beatles Anthology*.

¹¹ The idea of 'the best song being released as a single' had already become ludicrous with the Beatles, as so many of their songs were classics, even from early on.

Perennial Philosophy confirms this fact time and time again. It was his first encounters with the sorrows of the world that led the young Gautama Siddharta out of his hitherto protected existence and set him on the road to becoming the Buddha, 'the awakened one'.

Stanislav Grof, in his *The Adventure Of Self Discovery*¹², defines those who are brought up safely in the arms of a (exoteric) mainstream religion as

..having a false sense of having arrived [which] then prevents them from starting on a journey of spiritual discovery.

Thus to be comfortable is detrimental to spiritual growth. C.G. Jung goes even further:

*...the unconscious always tries to produce an impossible situation in order to force the individual to bring out his very best...What is needed is an impossible situation where one has to renounce one's own will and one's own wit and do nothing but wait and trust to the impersonal power of growth and development.*¹³

Blessed are the comfortable (not). We remember the anonymous adage

God comforts the disturbed and disturbs the comfortable.

and Boethius' declaration in *The Consolation Of Philosophy* that

Good fortune deceives, but bad fortune enlightens.

If this isn't enough evidence that, to the world's wisdom traditions, what seems good for you is actually bad for you, there's the advice of the Tibetan *Rosary Of Gems*:

Know that sorrow, being the means of convincing man of the need of inner life, is a spiritual teacher.

I think it is fairly clear that John Lennon, an almost text-book study in teenage rebellion, was never among the comfortable, was always dissatisfied, and thus was always, by nature, destined to be a seeker. He was abandoned by both parents, brought up by his Aunt and Uncle, and then lost his Uncle in his teens. Also in his teens, he became reconciled with his mother (she taught him his first guitar chords), then lost her in a tragic road accident. Even his best friend, Stuart Sutcliffe, at one point a member of the band, had died of a brain haemorrhage in 1961.

¹² State University of New York, 1988.

¹³ Source unknown.

So although these words are those of a young man, Lennon had seen enough change, death and decay for them to ring true rather than ring hollow. He had already experienced at first hand the truth encapsulated in Shakespeare's famous lines from *As You Like It*:

*...All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players:
They have their exits and their entrances;*

The scenery itself shifts, the 'places' that we knew and loved change, 'Some forever, not for better'. And as for the 'actors' in the 'drama' of our lives, they too 'have their exits and their entrances'—'some are dead and some are living'.

The 'poetry', if you like, of this first verse of the song lies in its directness and simplicity. There are no clever metaphors, not even the metaphor Shakespeare uses of life being a play, no difficult imagery. Lennon states with characteristic first person simplicity what it is that has happened to him, so far, in life's journey, and our appreciation of these lines comes from simple resonance: he's right, that's how it is, he's got it 'in a nutshell', as the phrase has it. It is the equivalent of the Buddha's defining of the basic human problem, if you like, in the famous First Sermon on the Four Noble truths, where he says

*I show you sorrow.*¹⁴

There is also an equivalent of the second part of the Buddha's statement,

I show you the end of sorrow.

There is a cure, a remedy, a course of action to defeat time, change, death, decay, posited in the second verse:

*But of all these friends and lovers
There is no-one compares with you,
And these mem'ries lose their meaning
When I think of love as something new.
Though I know I'll never lose affection
For people and things that went before,
I know I'll often stop and think about them,*

¹⁴ I use the usual translation of the Pali term *dukkha* as 'sorrow' or 'suffering' here for its resonance with the use of the word 'sorrow' in 'There's A Place'. I am aware that 'sorrow' as such doesn't quite do justice to the term. *Dukkha* includes the idea that even that which, for now, makes you happy will one day make you sad, because it is subject to time, change, death and decay. In *The Power Of Now*, Eckhart Tolle puts it like this: '...your happiness and unhappiness are in fact one. Only the illusion of time separates them.'

In my life, I love you more.

A new lover, bringing an absolute redemption and a moving on from all the past, is posited here. This part of the song is offered like a positive affirmation, and one notes, it is phrased *in the present tense*. Lennon doesn't say 'someday my dream woman will come', he, as it were, conceptualises her as already existent, and declares of her 'I love you more'. This being in the present, in the 'here and now', is a cornerstone of the Perennial Philosophy.

That Lennon had more than his fair share of suffering early on in his life, and is therefore attracted to the 'down' mode of boy/girl songwriting, is evident both from the majority of songs he wrote himself in the early days, and in the songs he chose to cover. He *could* write sunny and optimistic songs—'I Feel Fine', 'I Should Have Known Better', 'A Hard Day's Night', but, for example, we have the contrasting opening cuts on the *Please Please Me*¹⁵ album. McCartney's breezy opener is 'I Saw Her Standing There', all up-tempo fun, boy meets girl, they fall in love—the sort of stuff early Beatle songs, and pop songwriting of its era should, as it were, be about. The following track, and Lennon's debut as writer on the LP is called, significantly, 'Misery':

*The world is treating me bad—
Misery.*

Even in a minor song like this, given these lines, we get a sense Lennon's awareness of the pain that the external 'world' out there can bring (and thus the need to run for refuge to *inner* realities).

The 'baby done left me' roll call of songs written by Lennon piles up, and then, by the time of the *Beatles For Sale* album, Kenneth Allsop's criticisms of the Beatles' songs, mark a turning point in Lennon's writing—he basically suggested to Lennon that he start writing autobiographically. Thus, despite the fact that he's the most famous man on the planet, and despite the fact that the Beatles had conquered America and done the seemingly impossible, become bigger than Elvis, Lennon writes a song like 'I'm A Loser'!

*Although I laugh and I act like a clown,
Beneath this mask I am wearing a frown.*

It seems appropriate to quote a modern exponent of the Perennial Philosophy here, Eckhart Tolle:

¹⁵ I shall always be referring to the chronologically more accurate British album releases in this study.

*You must have failed deeply on some level or experienced some deep loss or pain to be drawn to the spiritual dimension. Or perhaps your very success became empty and meaningless and so turned out to be failure.*¹⁶

With his traumatic past, plus what he perceived as the inauthenticity of his success, Lennon qualified on both counts. That he felt he'd 'sold out' in order to achieve success is obvious from this quote from *Lennon Remembers*:

One has to completely humiliate oneself to be what the Beatles were, and that's what I resent...I didn't foresee; it just happened...until this complete craziness is surrounding you and you're doing exactly what you don't want to do with people you can't stand, the people you hated when you were ten.

This image of a clown mask, although a kind of cliché, is appropriate. Lennon hits out very vociferously in the *Lennon Remembers*¹⁷ interviews at the role of entertainer that had, as it were, been thrust upon him. Lennon, in my view, partly due to what had happened to him in early life, was a born *artist* who strayed into the 'entertainer' camp by being involved in the prevalent form of entertainment of his day, rock music. McCartney was the exact opposite, a born entertainer who, due to association with Lennon, at times rose to the level of an artist. Certainly in my view, since that association has been absent, i.e. since the split up of the Beatles, his music has lacked any depth or credence. (Depth and credence are often lacking in his work with the Beatles, sadly.)

The 'clown mask' image resurfaces on another deep-level song from the *Help!* era, 'You've Got To Hide Your Love Away'. In that song a whole, rather sinister, chorus of clowns, i.e. those with their masks firmly in place, gang up on Lennon and exhort him *not* to show his feelings:

*Gather 'round all you clowns
Let me hear you say
Hey! You've got to hide your love away.*

'You've Got To Hide...' is one of a number of songs in which an elusive dream girl gets away, including 'Ticket To Ride', 'No Reply' and 'Norwegian Wood' where, in the song's subtitle we are told 'This Bird Has Flown'. But 'You've Got To Hide...' has an added level of depth in that, really, it's a song about society enforcing an inauthentic mask-self

¹⁶ *The Power Of Now*, Hodder & Stroughton, 2001.

¹⁷ The Jann Wnner *Rolling Stone* interviews from 1970. First UK publication, Talmy, Franklin Ltd, 1972.

upon the individual. It is a song about hiding, about keeping the mask intact, about not letting emotions show. That, for me, makes it a song really about male roles in society, where one has to be tough and never admit to any pain. Lennon touches on this in the 1980 *Playboy* interview:

My defences were so great. The cocky rock and roll hero who knows all the answers was actually a terrified guy who didn't know how to cry.

The pressure to repress such natural instincts as showing grief is something that most men could vouch for. This quote, from the *Anthology*, about how he reacted to his Aunt Mimi's husband dying, a surrogate father for him, makes the point:

[When] he died, I didn't know how to be sad publicly—what you did or said—so I went upstairs...Then my cousin arrived and we both had hysterics.

Repressed emotion leading to inappropriate responses—'having hysterics'—when a loved one has died. This was part of the mindset that Lennon had inherited and which, eventually, through his art, he came to discard and replace with new more positive attitudes. Or rather, not new, but timeless: the attitudes of the Perennial Philosophy.

'Girl', another excellent Lennon song on the *Rubber Soul* album, is a (flawed) attempt to flesh out a portrait of the dream-girl (flawed because how can you portray an *ideal*?). Here's John on the song, from *Lennon Remembers*:

It wasn't just a song, and it was about that girl—it turned out to be Yoko in the end—the one that a lot of us were looking for.

And here are a few other revealing remarks about this ideal woman by John:

I always had this dream of this particular woman coming into my life. I knew it wouldn't be someone buying Beatle records.¹⁸

...who could give me what I get from a man intellectually...someone I could be myself with.¹⁹

So, obviously Lennon himself thought little of the role of entertainer of the masses he had unwittingly adopted. This is why he can (unfairly I think) dismiss everything he wrote before 'In My Life'. Lennon seems to have adopted wholesale, in his later years, this view of art *only* being art

¹⁸ Quoted in *A Hard Day's Write*, by Steve Turner, Carlton Books 1995..

¹⁹ Quoted in the *Anthology*.

if it is obviously self-referential, a standpoint originating with Allsop's remarks and then reinforced by Yoko's ideas.

This is perhaps the only problem with 'In My Life'. Human love is flawed and problematic, a distorted mirror of, as Wilber puts it, our 'fallen and illusory state', of the Divine Love which, as we'll soon see, Lennon came to see as the prime reality. Thinking he'd found his ideal woman, Lennon came to idealise her, as we shall see in later chapters, and think of *her* as his guru. He always remained convinced that she was the most important influence in his life, and his comments from 1980 interviews sound entirely self-negating:

*Yoko really woke me up to myself. She didn't fall in love with the Beatle, she didn't fall in love with my fame. She fell in love with me for myself, and through that brought out the best in me. She was the ultimate trip...She's the teacher and I'm the pupil...She said to me 'You've got no clothes on.'*²⁰

This is verging on the idolatrous, and to have so exaggerated view of another fallible human being is in itself an ego-error.

So 'In My Life' offers a partial solution to the sorrows of the world. It bravely, correctly, resolutely assigns the past to its proper sphere, of 'affection' and memory—and then one moves on. But as a positive affirmation of the new love that will transform all this, that he will love 'more' than all his accumulated past, he is hanging an awful lot on another mere fallible human being like himself. In effect, he is forgetting, for a moment, that 'the Kingdom of God is within', and looking too much 'without' to another person. Huxley quotes Shankara thus on the subject:

The nature of the one reality must be known by one's own clear spiritual perception; it cannot be known through a pandit [learned man].

The whole troubled issue of gurus and teachers will crop up repeatedly in this study. What I'm saying here is that even if a guru *can* show you the truth, Lennon was prone to forgetting the truth he embodied in the very first quote from him we used in the introduction:

*things that you discover are self-awareness, all the things that you've already known. Nobody's telling you anything new.... Nobody can tell you nothing. Even somebody like a Dylan or a Sartre or somebody like that. They tell you something that is like a revelation—but it always is something that you know inside that they've just affirmed for you.*²¹

²⁰ Quoted in the *Anthology*.

²¹ Quoted in *The Beatles Anthology*, Cassel 2000.

Forgetting, perhaps, that he is his own inner teacher, Lennon eventually comes to confuse his lover with his guru. We remember that in ‘There’s A Place’ Lennon had already hit upon the answer in inner terms—‘In my *mind* there’s no sorrow.’

However, if we capitalise the ‘you’ of the last line of the song, and make it ‘You’, ‘In My Life’ becomes an acceptable spiritual message song. If the song is addressed to God, remembering that God is not some external force, but the Divine that lives within all of us, we have a very different slant on the song. The love of God *is* the redemptive and transformative love that we all hope for, while the repeated experience of earthly loves show us that human love is, as we have already made plain, part of our fallen and imperfect state, even if they contain elements of that pure, Higher form of Love.

A lot hangs upon the use of this unfortunate portmanteau word ‘love’ we bandy about so readily, which has become so devalued. When it comes to words of value and depth, English appears to have a very limited vocabulary compared with other cultures. The Greeks, for example, defined various types of ‘love’, with *eros* meaning physical, sexual, earthly love, and *agape* denoting spiritual love. Lennon and McCartney started off writing about boy/girl small ‘i’ ‘love’, about *eros*, but by the time of the great ‘sermon’ songs by Lennon such as ‘The Word’, ‘Tomorrow Never Knows’ and ‘All You Need Is Love’, we are obviously no longer dealing with kissing in the back row of the movies, but with capital ‘L’ Love, spiritual Love, *agape*. As Lennon puts it rather charmingly in the ostensibly all boy/girl song ‘If I Fell’:

I found that love was more than just holding hands.

As one listens to the Beatles’ output with a new ear in the light of this study, one might do well to ask which ‘love’, *eros* or *agape*, it that each song deals with. For example, when in ‘Within You Without You’ George sings

With our love, we can save the world

it isn’t too difficult to understand which it is he’s talking about, is it? Human sexual love, as we can plainly see, isn’t the love that is going to save the world.

Harrison interestingly understood the spiritual inner meaning of ‘In My Life’, as, by all accounts, he used the song on his ill-fated 1974 tour and made it very plain that the song’s addressee was God. Or was it just by then everybody ‘knew’ that George was ‘the spiritual one’, and made the assumption that he was addressing God rather than the departing

Pattie (who had famously fallen for best friend Eric Clapton)²²? Another aspect of this study will be the uselessness and inauthenticity of labels: label a person, 'Beatle', 'spiritual one', or anything else, and you have a new inauthentic mask self to deal with! Lennon was so un-enamoured of this processing that he and Yoko appeared nude on the cover of *Two Virgins*.

²² George's, 'Something' and 'It's All Too Much', Clapton's 'Layla', and 'Wonderful Tonight' were all inspired by Pattie Clapton nee Harrison nee Boyd.

Help!

Just before we look at ‘Nowhere Man’ we need to take a brief look at two important songs, ‘Help!’ (Lennon) and ‘Yesterday’ (McCartney).²³

It doesn’t take a genius to work out that we’re far from boy/girl land with John’s ‘Help!’ In *Lennon Remembers*, Lennon admits that there is no pretence at a narrator in this song:

It was just me singing ‘Help’ and I meant it.

He also goes on to say in the same interview that

I always wrote about me when I could...I like first person music...It’s about me and I don’t know about anything else really.

We’ve already touched upon many reasons why Lennon would need ‘help’ in the first place, the difficult circumstances of his early life, and he was to confront many of those feelings of isolation, abandonment, pain and rejection on his iconoclastic and resolutely ‘first person’ first solo album, *Plastic Ono Band*.

But there was yet another reason to be singing ‘Help!’ John and George had been famously ‘spiked’ by the ‘naughty dentist’ of Beatles legend by this time. Timothy Leary, the so-called acid guru, was always very insistent on the fact that the drug should be taken in an appropriate ‘set and setting’, in the right spirit of self-exploration, in a safe environment. In the 1966 *Playboy* interview, for example, he maintains that

*It’s dangerous to take a trip if you have no internal trust and no external place to turn to afterwards.*²⁴

Here’s Leary again from that same interview:

Everyone, normal or neurotic, experiences some fear and confusion during the high dose LSD session...That’s why it’s tremendously important that the LSD session be conducted in a protected place, that the person be prepared and that he have an experienced and understanding guide to support and shield him...When unprepared people take LSD in bad surroundings, when there’s no-one present who has the

²³ I’m assuming here that most people now understand that most Lennon-McCartney songs were, in fact, Lennon or McCartney songs. They wrote separately to begin with, put their heads together for the early breakthrough Beatlemania-producing singles (‘From Me To You’, ‘She Loves You’, ‘I Want To Hold Your Hand’), then reverted to writing separately, with some occasional collaborations, especially, and most artistically successfully, around the time of *Sgt. Pepper*.

²⁴ Quoted in *The Psychedelic Experience*.

*skill and courage to guide them through it, then paranoid episodes are possible.*²⁵

So much for the supposedly fiendishly irresponsible Mr. Leary as portrayed by the media.

To have an LSD experience without having any idea what is going on due to having been ‘spiked’, (and what’s more to be ‘spiked’ in early 1965 before knowledge of the drug had travelled beyond a few enclaves), must have been the equivalent of having the cosmic rug pulled out from under one’s feet, only to find that, not only is there no rug beneath you, but there’s no *floor*. John later referred to this first trip thus:

*It was terrifying, but it was fantastic.*²⁶

So when John sings

I’ve opened up the doors

in ‘Help!’, we know that it’s ‘the doors of perception’ to which he refers, and not only have these doors been opened up, but that they’ve been blasted off their hinges by an unsought visionary experience.²⁷ This was later followed up by deliberately sought ones!

‘Help!’ opens with a really heavy, doomy sound, with its descending bass progression taking us down, down, down with each repeated plea:

Help! I need somebody.

Help! Not just anybody.

Help! You know I need someone—

Help!

It’s not until the verse comes in that the song starts to even remotely resemble a rollalong Beatles number. We note also that ‘not just anybody’ will do—what is needed is this intellectual equal, which, given that he later admits (in ‘Strawberry Fields Forever’) that

No-one, I think, is in my tree

might be rather a tall order.

²⁵ *Playboy* interview, op. cit.

4. *Lennon Remembers*.

²⁷ Another assumption I’m making is that most people reading this book will know of Huxley’s book *The Doors Of Perception*, which chronicled his very spiritually orientated experiments with mescaline in the 1950s, and also of the source of the book’s title, Blake’s declaration in *The Marriage Of Heaven And Hell*, ‘If the doors of perception were cleansed, everything would appear to man as it is: infinite.’ H’m. The Doors...would a good name for a rock band.

Another descending figure on guitar then takes us into the verse, but even this, which Lennon later moaned was musically ‘too fast’ and ‘commercial’, actually has a driving urgency behind it, rather than an amiable uptempo feel. Appropriate for lyrics such as

*When I was younger, so much younger than today
I never needed anybody's help in any way.
But now these days are gone, I'm not so self-assured,
Now I find I've changed my mind, I've opened up the doors.*

And there's that word ‘mind’ again. The chorus contains more pleas, as well as the actual word ‘please’, including, we note, this line

Help me get my feet back on the ground,

that ground which had been whipped away from under him once the had been torn. One is reminded of the Buddhist concept of ‘Ground Luminosity’—The Void, the underlying Nothingness containing All, which, in subsequent journeys, both chemically catalysed and otherwise, will be confronted and explored in greater detail.

The pleading tone of the song never lets up, and by the time the first verse is repeated, a definite feel of melancholy and exhaustion is evoked in the backing when the beat is discarded. The coda is a plea too, with its rising vocal ending on

Help me—ooh.

It's hard to ascribe significance to the inarticulate sounds that feature so prominently in pop and rock songs, but after the insistence on ‘me’ here, the ‘ooh’ really does sound like a cry of pain. This prefigures the cathartic work-outs of such later Lennon solo songs as ‘Cold Turkey’ and ‘Well Well Well’. The song really is fixedly first person, about that person's pain. A second person is, however, being addressed at various points—

...I do appreciate you being ‘round,

but we are left wondering if this person will fit the bill of the ‘not just anybody’. After all, despite her/him ‘being round’, the pleas for help and cries of pain are undiminished. The ‘you’ needed is plainly the dream-intellectual-and-artistic-equal girl, or some person of a higher order not yet encountered...perhaps some *being* of a higher order. If we do our little trick of capitalisation again, the line

Won't You please, please help me?

could be seen as a plea to God.

‘Help!’ is a straightforward, unambiguous plea for just that, for help. To ask for help is seen as the first step towards cure in the treatment of any addiction, and that it is also the first step that puts us *consciously* on a spiritual path. It is effectively (to return to Wilber’s seven point summary of the Perennial Philosophy), a matter of *realising* that we are in a world of ‘sin’ and ‘separation’, ‘a fallen or illusory state’, and acknowledging that, paradoxically, while spirit is definitely within, the ego-self that is all we have hitherto known of ourselves now has to be side-stepped, and spiritual teachers, guidance, ‘help’, is necessary. To ask for help is not an easy thing to do, to acknowledge that there is a problem, rather than limping along pretending there isn’t one, seduced by the endless distraction that our present culture doles out to us to keep us from the truth, is difficult. Lennon was later to say in ‘Strawberry Fields Forever’ that

*Living is easy with eyes closed,
Misunderstanding all you see.*

But Lennon was too much of a genius, too truly intelligent, to carry on living with his eyes closed, despite living in what he described as ‘the super life’ of immense fame and wealth. In Buddhism, one of the six realms in which beings are trapped in the endless round of *samsara* is the indolent realm of the Gods, perhaps comparable to the pampered life of a super-star, or of the young prince Gautama Buddha. If his own misgivings about the inauthenticity of this life (‘I’m A Loser’) hadn’t been enough, it was somehow Lennon’s karma that the doors of perception had now been rent violently asunder, and his ‘impossible situation’, as defined by Jung, had become even more ‘impossible’.

A few words also about the film of the same name. The seam of ‘Beatles being chased by adoring fans’ having been thoroughly played out in *A Hard Day’s Night*, the writer of the *Help!* movie, Marc Behm had to come up with some other excuse for lots of ‘zany’ chases and so on. What he hit upon was the idea of a mad religious cult after a ring on Ringo’s finger. This fictional cult worships ‘Kaili’, obviously a modification of the Hindu goddess Kali²⁸, some of whose more literally minded (i.e. dim) devotees in the past did indeed commit acts of so-called ‘holy’ murder. Lennon had already seen enough of the dark side of the Goddess in his life, as we have already emphasised. The movie, of course, keeps up the myth of perpetual youth and beauty that Western

²⁸ All things having in Tantric philosophy a two-fold aspect, Kali is the dark side of Shakti, the divine feminine principle. Where Shakti is the creative, Kali is the destroyer, usually depicted as wearing a necklace made of human skulls or heads, drinking a skull-cup filled with blood. The Tantrika or devotee is expected to adore both aspects of the goddess, Life-giver and Life-taker, thus accepting the indisputable fact of death as an aspect of life, a more balanced view than in Western philosophies, in my opinion. We will be investigating opposites more as we go along.

culture, in its spiritually vacuous state, has come to idolise, and the Beatles escape her clutches...but in real life this was not to be the case. It's not the case in real life for any of us, and a major aspect of what spirituality and the Perennial Philosophy is about is, of course, how we deal with life's one irrefutable fact: death.

It was also during the filming of *Help!* that the Beatles met a real swami, the Swami Vishnu Devananda, who presented them with a copy of his book on Yoga²⁹. It wasn't until a few years later that Harrison's interest in such matters had developed to the extent that he actually turned to the book. But how extraordinary, that while filming in the Bahamas a bit of nonsense about a fake Indian cult, a real swami should turn up to set the record a little more straight. What a white cockney character *pretending* to be Indian in the film calls humourously 'the mystic East' seemed to be fighting back. There are no coincidences. Lightweight stuff as it was, (ironically so, given the depth of its title song), the *Help!* movie sparked off the whole interest in Indian mysticism on the part of, first and foremost George, then the other Beatles, then Western popular culture in general.

²⁹ Yoga doesn't just mean a series of postures to improve health: it is the full system of thought and action moving towards spiritual enlightenment, not just a keep-fit exercise.

Yesterday.

The fact that this song, perhaps the most successful song of modern times in terms of airplay and the number of cover versions, came to its composer in his sleep has become the stuff of urban legend. Here McCartney was able to do what any artist aspires to do: get to the *source* of inspiration. This source is itself the capital ‘M’ Mind behind or below our noisy everyday mind. Creativity then becomes a matter of simply, as we would say today, channelling. And this is the first song in the Beatles’ cannon where we know the origin of the creative process behind it, and that that creative process was simply a matter of taking dictation from a Higher Power, the same Higher Power which sometimes gives us important or numinous dream-messages and hints. With his obvious interest in borderline states of consciousness as exemplified in, for example, ‘I’m Only Sleeping’, ‘I’m So Tired’ and the sound-collage ‘Revolution Number 9’, to say nothing of his professed interest in taking ‘trips, chemical or otherwise’, we know Lennon was very interested in this process, as all true artists should be.

We know now that Lennon and McCartney’s working methods as songwriters were at odds with each other—which is why I’d class Lennon as an artist by nature, McCartney as an entertainer by nature. Lennon would start with the words: when he wasn’t just working under pressure to produce Beatles product, he’d have something to say, then add the music, the means of saying it, later. McCartney does the reverse. It was the melancholy *melody* of ‘Yesterday’ that came to him in his sleep. Which is why the song had the working title of ‘Scrambled Eggs’, until McCartney worked up the lyric to match the melody. I’m reminded of philosopher Emmanuel Kant’s dictum on creativity:

*Form without content is meaningless: content without form is blind.*³⁰

McCartney often starts with *form* rather than *content*. This is why, once led down blind ego-alleys about the value of his work, partly, probably, due to his ability on occasions to channel, to access inspired material without really trying, McCartney’s songs are often devoid of value. Good music, but almost any old thing will do when it comes to the words. This was due to an inability to grasp the nature of achievements such as ‘Strawberry Fields Forever’, a trawling of Lennon’s unconscious depths, offered up for inspection intact, with little or no unpacking or explanation on the part of its author, as we shall see.

In the case of ‘Yesterday’, however, Paul could see that ‘Scrambled Eggs’ would not do! The lyric is one of loss and of pain, of a lost lover. Paul shows that he too can be affected by ‘sorrow’, and can see the effects of time, change, death and decay:

³⁰ Source uncollected.

*Suddenly I'm not half the man I used to be,
There's a shadow hanging over me.*

'Suddenly' things change, as Lennon puts it in 'In My Life' 'forever, not for better'. Things are good, then the axe falls, then they're not. However, in 'Yesterday' there is no objective standing back from all this as exhibited by Lennon in 'In My Life'. The narrator/Paul longs for things to go back as they were, to be able to put back the clock, to return to 'Yesterday' when

...all my troubles seemed so far away.

This is not a song of moving on, while still giving the past its due of 'affection' ('In My Life'): it's simply a song of mourning, an emotion everyone can empathise with, but less of a spiritually mature statement, therefore, than 'In My Life'.

The song is couched in terms of a boy/girl scenario. It's a lover who has departed, merely because the protagonist made a mistake in some way, and now it's all over:

*I said something wrong
Now I long for yesterday.*

This all seems fairly plausible, but the sheer emotional *weight* of the melody, and of George Martin's superb, tragic-without-going-over-the-top scoring, I think, hints at a deeper level of meaning. I think, underneath it all, 'Yesterday' is Paul's lament for his dead mother—he too, like John, lost a mother in his teens. The very fact that the song came directly from the unconscious would point to this. That Paul rarely wears his heart on his sleeve, or perhaps less visibly so, is merely a reflection of the fact that people are different in outlook, they react differently to the events of their lives. One might even agree with Huxley's assertion in *Texts And Pretexts*³¹ that

Experience is not what happens to a man; it is what a man does with what happens to him.

However, it's my hunch that buried deep beneath the ever-optimistic McCartney persona, there lurk various pockets of repressed material, and I also believe that in his journey into the subconscious the night this song came to him, he hit the pocket of the hurt and pain that the death of his mother had caused him. Paul's mother, Mary, as we shall see near the end of this story, comes to him later on, a visitation which is chronicled in the song 'Let It Be':

³¹ Chatto & Windus, 1932.

*When I find myself in times of trouble,
Mother Mary comes to me.*

‘Yesterday’ is important to our study because of its inspired origins, and inspiration itself is an accompanying factor of the sort of ‘direct experience’ of the Divine which is what the Perennial Philosophy is all about. Due, however, to McCartney’s working methods, only the melody can be regarded as inspired. The lyrics, added later, while they do justice to the emotional state evoked by the music, do not have that self-reflective aspect of the Lennon of ‘There’s A Place’ and ‘In My Life’—also known as the Witness Self. The protagonist of ‘Yesterday’ is fully caught up in his emotions, humanly so, of course, forgivably so. But the fact that one can rise above ones emotions, however painful, and however dreadful or difficult the cause of our sorrows, has been pointed to already in the two Lennon songs. This Witness Self is, again, another key factor of the Perennial Philosophy, as we shall discover repeatedly on our journey through the songs. Paul does however come up trumps in terms of the Witness Self in one important later song, ‘Fool On The Hill’, which we will look at in due course.

Paul’s ‘tune first words after’ approach means he is also, frankly, quite sloppy about his lyric writing, even in a major song such as this. The word ‘yesterday’ is used in the song not only not only to denote the time *before* the change came and the girl left, the time for which the narrator nostalgically longs (‘Oh I believe in yesterday’), but also as the time when that unwanted change occurred—‘Yesterday came suddenly’. Am I asking too much for consistency in a popular song? I would be if it weren’t for the fact that Lennon’s major songs show that melody, arrangement, truly meaningful lyric and basic internal verbal consistency *are* achievable, with a little thought.

Nowhere Man.

Paul's 'Yesterday' is well known for having been transmitted to him in sleep, and John's 'Nowhere Man' seems to have been 'received' in a not dissimilar fashion:

I'd spent five hours that morning trying to write a song that was meaningful and good...I'd actually stopped trying to think of something... Having given up...the whole damn thing came to me...letting it go is the whole game.³²

'I just had to let it go', John was later to sing on 'Watching The Wheels' on *Double Fantasy*. Here Lennon is acknowledging the importance of getting one's ego out of the way in order for genuine inspiration to occur. On 'Mind Games' (1973) he is even more in alignment with the Perennial Philosophy, singing not only that 'Love is the answer', but also that 'Yes is the answer', and

*Yes is surrender,
You've gotta let it, gotta let it go.*

Meanwhile, to be inspired to say of oneself

*He's a real Nowhere Man,
Sitting in his Nowhere land,
Making all his nowhere plans
For nobody.*

is somewhat characteristic of the Lennon we've come to know in this study, the Lennon of 'I'm A Loser'. There's more than enormous self-doubt at work though, I think. It's more to do with this idea of authenticity, once again. To any outside observer, Lennon was a great achiever, but knowing in his heart of hearts that he had not yet even attempted to do anything of quality (even in 1980 he's still completely dismissive of anything before 'In My Life'), to himself he was a failure, or, in fact, a non-starter. All this, from someone who, even if he had stopped writing in 1965, would still be regarded as one of the most influential performers and songwriters of all time! So far, his chosen medium, rock and pop music, had been largely a matter of entertainment for the masses, rather than art. Art involves making statements of belief and/or value, entertainment doesn't attempt anything 'deep' or 'heavy' like that. So he can quite deliberately say of this 'Nowhere Man'

³² Conflated from two separate accounts by Lennon, one in the 1980 *Playboy* interview, one from the Hunter Davies authorised biography *The Beatles*, Heinemann 1968.

*Doesn't have a point of view,
Knows not where he's going to.*

True, this is a 'he' rather than an 'I' song, but such a long catalogue of imperfections prefaced with an 'I' would have undermined the song's effect and rendered it merely absurdly self-pitying. As it is, Lennon can assume a sort of complicity with the audience—

Isn't he a bit like you and me?

Harrison's characteristic mode is to accuse other people, as we shall see when we come on the 'Within You Without You', and 'While My Guitar Gently Weeps'. Some might, and often do, say this preference for the second person is a weakness of his songs, as it makes it sound too sermonistic, as if he, George Harrison, another mere mortal ego, is somehow free from all the spiritual blindness he points out in others. Certainly it wouldn't work here. Rather than use 'you', Lennon's characteristic mode is to use the first person, but he is canny enough to see when it would be inappropriate.

The chorus does come as an admonition:

*Nowhere Man, please listen, you don't know what you're missing,
Nowhere man, the world is at your command.*

I think we can take this at face value, rather than as sarcasm. Addressing this Everyman/Nowhere Man figure (largely himself, but symbolically, all of us) Lennon is basically telling him to get his act together and realise his potential, which is enormous, fantastic, unprecedented, because

*The kingdom of God is within you.*³³

We are all, potentially, God—we've already heard from John to this effect in the introduction. In *The Perennial Philosophy*, Huxley puts this idea in the context of the famous Sanskrit formulation

...tat svam asi, ('That Art Thou'): the Atman, or immanent eternal Self, is one with Brahman, the Absolute Principle of all existence, and the last end of every human being is to discover the fact for himself, to find out Who he really is.

Most of what most of us do, set against this ideal of what humanity should be seeking, looks pretty pathetic. We are nearly all Nowhere Men, (and Women), however much money there is in the bank, however many

³³ *Luke, 17:21*

gold discs we have on the wall. Again, we have already discussed why, despite so much apparent success, Lennon was unsatisfied.

The Perennial Philosophy agrees that mere sensual gratification, which is all that the materialist-mindset believes in, is of little value—indeed, it blinds us to our potential. Dr. Paul Brunton, an excellent exponent of the Perennial Philosophy, puts it bluntly like this in his book, *The Wisdom Of The Overself*³⁴:

Those who have never found anything higher to obey than the personal ego have failed in life, however much they may have succeeded in the surface society of their fellows.

Lennon, in ‘Nowhere Man’, is well on his way to realising this to be true.

Back to the song then, which continues in this vein.

*He’s as blind as he can be,
Just sees what he wants to see,
Nowhere Man, can you see me at all?*

Here we have the idea of spiritual blindness directly evoked, and, interestingly, we wonder if, as the admonisher, at this point, the narrator/Lennon is equating himself with his Higher Self, the Christ side of himself.

We’re all Christ and all Hitler. We want Christ to win,

Lennon said during the Amsterdam Bed-In. In ‘The Ballad Of John And Yoko’ he goes as far as to sing ‘they’re gonna crucify me’, as, in print at least, ‘they’ did. In other words, might the line be, in effect,

Nowhere Man, can you see Me at all?

The second refrain is problematic, as it seems to contradict the exhortations of the first one:

*Nowhere Man, don’t worry,
Take your time, don’t hurry,
Leave it all ‘til somebody else lends you a hand.*

Is this mere sarcasm at the Nowhere Man’s expense? I think there’s more to it than that.

The song as a whole seems to point out the potential dangers and pitfalls of introspection if it is unguided, whereas ‘There’s A Place’ celebrated introspection, being in the mind, as a ‘place’ where ‘sorrow’

³⁴ Rider & co, 1943.

and ‘time’ can be transcended. The Nowhere Man is in this ‘place’ outside of physical location, therefore is ‘nowhere’, but instead of ‘getting his act together’ is merely inert, and involved in fantasy,

*Sitting in his Nowhere Land,
Making all his Nowhere Plans...*

Time is *not* being transcended here. Anyone who has attempted to learn to meditate will be well aware of the fact that in meditation one tries to still the mind’s internal chatter, which is only concerned with reliving or examining past events, and/or making plans for the future, and with fantasies. Thus the ‘Nowhere Man’ at this point has fallen into the trap of merely spending time fruitlessly, retreating from the world and/or his responsibilities. In this context the lines of the second refrain are, in fact, meant as reassurance. ‘Somebody else’, presumably a teacher or guide, will, at some point, show him a way out of this trap. It will happen in its own time, and cannot be forced, as in the adage

When the student is ready, the teacher will appear.

Once one has been liberated from internal chatter, then the potentialities of mind-as-place will once more be realised, and, rather than ‘the world’ bringing ‘sorrow’, the meditator will have the upper hand:

The world is at your command.

Note the present tense here: not ‘the world will be at your command’ but ‘*is* at your command’, once one’s potentiality, the kingdom of God within, is revealed. This is in line with current ideas about affirmation as pointed out in, for example, the *Conversations With God* books by Neale Donald Walshe: rather than ask for something in the future, one states that this is already the case, ‘I *am* rich’ rather than ‘I will get rich’. And we have already noted the use of the present tense in ‘In My Life’.

In ‘There’s A Place’, the fact that Lennon can’t keep the world at bay in that song’s second verse points to a need for outside help, Higher Guidance. Here the point is made even more strongly. Without guidance, embracing introspection one may merely become addicted to living in a self-created ‘Nowhere Land’, and therefore turn into a ‘Nowhere Man’, rather than realising one’s potential to overcome ‘time’ and ‘sorrow’. Most manuals of meditation are clear on this point: meditation should not be a substitution of the world or consensus reality for a fantasy world made solely of one’s own thoughts. Sogyal Rinpoche, for example, in *The Tibetan Book Of Living And Dying* points out that experiences which occur only within the mind are still experiences, and

...if you get attached to them they become obstacles.

I would say, then, that ‘Nowhere Man’ is basically a song about the pitfalls of unguided meditation, how it can become fruitless self absorption, introversion, and a recognition of the need for spiritual guidance, for a teacher, that ‘somebody else’ who *can* give the sort of help that is being pleaded for in ‘Help!’.

Clarity on the issue of gurus is also provided by Sogyal Rinpoche. As the Perennial Philosophy is concerned with the direct experience of the Divine, or, as the Buddhists would phrase it, the ultimate nature of capital-‘M’ Mind, only someone else who has had the direct experience can tell you how to get there:

The President of the United States cannot introduce you to the nature of your mind, nor can your father or mother...It cannot only be introduced by someone who has fully realised it...

We all get fleeting glimpses of the true nature of mind, the ‘big mind’ beneath our scurrying, noisy, ego-bound ‘little mind’, and some of the songs Lennon wrote are written from those visionary heights, as we shall discover. But a master lives in that state, regards the world from those heights at all times. Lennon is primarily an artist, as is Harrison, and they humanly vacillate between their moments of vision, and far less visionary moments. After all, I’m not stating that *all* the Beatles songs have a spiritual message or content. It’s the age-old problem that anyone consciously on the spiritual path faces daily—turning knowledge that has been gained into action. As Wilber puts it

...although a person can have a peak experience of a higher dimension, the person’s self still has to grow and develop and evolve in order to permanently accommodate to those higher or deeper dimensions, in order to turn an ‘altered state’ into a ‘permanent trait’.

The irony is, if one *does* manage to still the mind and achieve the ideal of living totally in the here and now, in *now/here*, then to be ‘nowhere’ is exactly the state one would wish to achieve, a state where ‘there’s no time’. Paradoxically, the ‘Nowhere Man’, apparently as far from nirvana as is possible, merely languishing in quietism and fantasy, is but a hair’s breadth from achieving his goal. If a tiny shift in perspective were to be achieved, the title ‘Now/here Man’ would be something we would apply to a saint or a sage, rather than to a ‘loser’; to one who has escaped the embrace of *Maya*, transcended illusion, rather than one who has simply swapped external illusion for the ‘Nowhere Land’ of an internal illusion.

Psychedelic Sermons And Numinous Encounters

The Word.

‘The Word’, another song on the wonderful *Rubber Soul* album, is a very obvious spiritual song—so much so that it seems rather remarkable that this hasn’t been pointed out more often. But then, rock hacks aren’t usually interested in spiritual concerns. The only excuse for ‘criticism’, as far as I can see, is to point out to others what they might otherwise miss about a work. But for that, of course, one needs, to paraphrase the Gospels, ‘ears to hear and eyes to see’. Here’s John on the song:

*It sort of dawned on me that love was the answer, when I was younger, on the Rubber Soul album. My first expression of it was a song called ‘The Word’. The word is ‘love’. ‘In the good and the bad books I have read,’ whatever, wherever, the word is love. It seems like the underlying theme to the universe...I think that whatever else love is—and it’s many, many things—it is constant. It’s been the same forever. I don’t think it will ever change.*³⁵

Having written about ‘love’ in one form or another almost accidentally by virtue of deciding to be a pop songwriter, and therefore dealing with boy/girl love as a staple, in only a few years Lennon had already come to realise that there was more to this ‘love’ business, i.e. that not only *eros*, but also *agape* exists. Indeed, Lennon seems to use the word ‘Love’ where others might use ‘God’: that which contains the materially manifested universe, the *underlying* reality. ‘God’, as a word, has no appeal to him, linked as it usually is with exoteric religion. He goes as far as to say, in the song ‘God’ on *Plastic Ono Band*, that

God is a concept by which we measure our pain.

However, towards the end of his life—to make it clear that, vacillations and all, Lennon ultimately was not an anti-spiritual humanist—he wrote

*Christ, Buddha, Mohammed, Moses, Milarepa and other great ones spent their time in fasting, praying, meditation, and left ‘maps’ of the territory of ‘God’ for all to see and follow in our own way.*³⁶

Notice here the Perennial Philosophy at work, as it were. All the major religions are covered, and the emphasis is on the direct experience, or rather *techniques* to bring about the direct experience: ‘fasting, praying, meditation’. Notice also that even in 1978, the word ‘God’ is put in inverted commas.

³⁵ From *The Beatles Anthology*.

³⁶ From *The Ballad Of John And Yoko*, published in *Skywriting By Word Of Mouth*, Pan/Jonathan Cape, 1986.

The word ‘God’ is left out of ‘The Word’, presumably because of its negative connotations from the ‘bad’ books of the Bible, the vengeful, racist Old Testament God, the personal God as conceived by later commentators, which is a sort of blown-up-to-cosmic-size image of faulty and un-evolved humanity, which, in my view, has nothing to do with the omnipotent, creative, loving and divine intelligence behind the universe. Brunton has this to say about such a concept of God:

*The utter simplicity of this anthropomorphic concept of God renders it available to the most primitive members...the broad masses of a civilised society...if we take this elementary view we have to set up God complete with eyes and hands and so on. We have to endow it with personal likes and dislikes, temperamental caprice and arbitrary conduct...Such usage makes God a contradictory mixture of omnipotence benevolence and omniscience on the one hand, and of racial favouritism, arbitrary cruelty and petty praise seeking on the other.*³⁷

This is the God of exoteric religion—pretty absurd, and hardly surprising that the founders and present-day adherents of a purely materialist world-view find it risible, and thus dismiss all spirituality.

Yet despite Lennon’s distrust of formal religion and the word ‘God’, almost ironically, (and indicating that the dividing line between esoteric spirituality and exoteric religion is often actually blurred), at the back of his mind seem to be two key passages in the Bible, which even those unacquainted with it and uninterested in spirituality/religion, will also have in the back of their minds somewhere. One, appropriately enough, from *John*, 4: 8, is:

God is love.

The other is the famous opening of St. John’s Gospel:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

So, ‘love’, this word that has been bandied about in so many Lennon-McCartney songs, is not just a matter of getting physical ‘butterflies’ when you see a girl you like go by (‘It’s Only Love’), it is nothing less than *God*, that which has been since the beginning and ever will be. It is, as Lennon puts it in the interview, ‘the underlying theme of the universe’. It is the primal creative force. Dante, in his *Divine Comedy*, refers to:

³⁷ Brunton, op.cit.

*Love that moves the sun and the other stars.*³⁸

Huxley puts it like this:

*Love [is] the primary and fundamental cosmic fact.*³⁹

Or, as the popular saying goes, (derived, apparently, from an old French song,) ‘love makes the world go round.’ The God/Love connection is also emphasised in this passage from Boethius’ *The Consolation Of Philosophy*:

*And all this chain of things
In earth and sea and sky
One ruler holds in hand:
If Love relaxed the reins
All things that now keep peace
Would wage continual war...*⁴⁰

There is nothing ‘heavy’ in the music, despite this being a revelation. We are not meant to tremble before the throne. All is as it should be, upbeat, positive, expansive, the musical form fitting the content perfectly. And the lyrics are delivered as a series of injunctions, from one who has already been liberated by the Word:

*Say the Word, and you’ll be free,
Say the Word and be like me.
Say the Word I’m thinking of,
Have you heard? The Word is ‘Love’.*

All this is, as they say, delivered with the zeal of the newly converted. (No wonder Paul commented⁴¹ ‘‘The Word’ could be a Salvation Army song’.) Lennon, so often self-doubtful, prone to losing himself in introspection to the degree of becoming a ‘Nowhere Man’, has his moments of pure, positive vision, and is communicating that feeling here. He exhorts us to join him in his realisation in a very direct way, ‘Do this, and you’ll be free’! This is an almost aggressive approach compared to the later ‘I *hope* someday you will join us’, as expressed on ‘Imagine’. That he is aware of his Biblical borrowings is revealed in the almost mischievous

In the beginning I misunderstood

³⁸³⁸ *Paradiso*, xxxiii, 145.

³⁹ In a letter to Humphry Osmond describing a peak mescaline experience, quoted in Laura Huxley’s memoir *This Timeless Moment*, Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1968.

⁴⁰ *The Consolation Of Philosophy*, Book 2,7. Penguin translation by V.E Watts.

⁴¹ Quoted in the *Anthology*.

of the first verse.

The song's structure is interesting. It opens with a chorus, so the message is stated simply and with immediacy, and then repeated and repeated. The verses, such as the one with 'In the beginning', are offered as short explanations or glosses on the important thing, which is the 'Word' itself, or rather as explanations on how Lennon has come to this realisation⁴². The song is a form of incantation of 'the Word' itself, with only minimal justification or intellectual development. It is not offered as something for debate, there is no, 'this might be the answer' about it, this *is* the answer:

Say the Word and you'll be free.

This is in line with the Perennial Philosophy, because the Perennial Philosophy is about direct *experience* of the divine, not mere useless intellectual debate and 'cleverness', and all exponents of the Perennial Philosophy are very clear on this point. As Huxley puts it in the book

Argument and controversy are almost useless; in many cases, indeed, they are positively harmful. But this, of course, is a thing that clever men with a gift for syllogisms and sarcasm find peculiarly hard to admit.

He then goes on to describe the spiritual aspirant's journey in a way which parallels Wilber's seven-point summary, ending with these lines:

...finally he must make use of his cleverness in order to pass beyond cleverness to...the vision of truth, the immediate unitive knowledge of the divine Ground.

To back this point up he quotes Rumi

Sell your cleverness and buy bewilderment;

And Hui-Neng:

Doctrines given up to argumentation and controversy lead of themselves to birth and death.

The point is that, with the song 'The Word' a *technique* is being offered. To those not in the know, like Lennon earlier when he 'misunderstood', to simply say a word doesn't seem very effective, however, we are told categorically that it is. What we're dealing with here is, of course, meditative technique, in the use of a *mantra*, the repetition

⁴² Actually the wording of each chorus is, in fact, slightly different—just another example of how the Beatles as songwriters broke every rule.

of a single sentence, or word, or even syllable, upon which the mind can fix, thereby calming down and stilling internal mind-chatter, and enabling the meditator to reach a higher state of awareness. Lennon was more formally introduced to the use of mantras much later via the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, but here, as usual, he seems to instinctively prefigure later developments. Either that, or he had come across this other passage in *The Perennial Philosophy*:

...the constant repetition of 'this word GOD or this word LOVE' may, in favourable circumstances, have a profound effect upon the subconscious mind, inducing that selfless one-pointedness of will and thought and feeling, without which the intuitive knowledge of God is impossible.

Perhaps Huxley's book is among the 'good and the bad books' Lennon mentions in the second verse. These 'good and the bad books' might also be an acknowledgement that the Bible itself is full of contradictions, embodying as it does both the absurd 'God' of the popular religions and the words of those who have had the direct experience, prime exponents of the Perennial Philosophy, and therefore a pointer to Lennon's disagreement with much of institutionalised Christianity, which comes under a good deal of satirical fire in his books *In His Own Write* and *A Spaniard In The Works*. We also have his famous remarks in the interview with Maureen Cleeve that sparked off such controversy in 1966, the 'bigger than Christ' furore. It shows that Lennon was aware that the established church had no appeal to the young. If the Beatles were 'more popular than Jesus', that would imply a certain sense of responsibility towards the audience for its spiritual welfare, a responsibility that a song like 'The Word' gladly assumes.

The 'bigger than Christ' interview encapsulates the problem with all religions, namely that the avatar or prophet who realises his/her divinity, having given his teaching and left the world, then has to hand over the reins, as it were, to disciples who perhaps are less spiritually evolved, or, as Lennon put it in the interview:

Jesus was all right but his disciples were thick and ordinary. It's them twisting it that ruins it for me.

While indelicately put, this does show awareness of a need to get to the spiritual core of things, rather than the 'twisted' residue that is an established orthodoxy or religion, a need to preach a Perennial Philosophy, which cuts across established religions⁴³. Christ, we must remember, was not a Christian, and the Buddha was not a Buddhist. St.

⁴³ Interestingly the only song in which Lennon lyrically pictures himself as delivering a 'sermon' is the threatening 'Run For Your Life', the text of the sermon being 'I'd rather see you dead little girl/Than to be with another man'! Lennon obviously once again linking exoteric religion with something deeply negative.

Paul warned against the ‘letter that killeth’ as opposed to the ‘spirit that giveth life’—and exoteric religion often ends up being a matter of the letter, not the spirit. ‘Isms’ were later to be snooped at in the verses of ‘Give Peace A Chance’. Repeatedly, Lennon is a fan of esoteric rather than exoteric religion, or as I would put it, ‘spirituality’ as opposed to formal religion.

Perhaps we might remind ourselves here of Wilber’s formulation, in *Grace And Grit*, of the two types of religion as ‘exoteric’ and ‘esoteric’:

Exoteric or ‘outer’ religion is mythic religion, religion that is terribly concrete and literal...If you believe all the myths, you are saved;...[this] type of religion...has nothing to do with mystical religion or esoteric religion...esoteric or mystical religion...is a matter of direct experience or personal awareness. Esoteric religion asks you to believe nothing on faith or obediently swallow any dogma. Rather, esoteric religion is a set of personal experiments that you conduct scientifically in the laboratory of your own awareness...The experiment is meditation.

Wilber goes on to say that the personal experiments one conducts lead, via ‘a consensually validated pool of experiential knowledge’, to certain truths, summed up in those seven points. W.Y. Evans-Wentz, in his 1959 preface to his celebrated English translation of *The Tibetan Book Of The Dead*⁴⁴, quotes the Buddhist saint Milarepa thus:

Combine in a single whole, the goal of aspiration, the meditation, and the practice, and so attain Understanding by Experiment.

Evans-Wentz also points out in his addenda that yoga is a ‘scientific method’ to pierce through the veil of illusion, or *maya*, whose methods are

..as definite and certain in psychical results as those employed in a European or American chemical laboratory are in physical results.

Sogyal Rinpoche’s work also confirms the Perennial Philosophy’s existence and the form it takes:

*...meditation...cuts through and soars above cultural and religious barriers, and enables those who pursue it to establish a direct contact with the truth of their being. It is a practice that at once transcends the dogma of religions and is the essence of religions.*⁴⁵

⁴⁴ First published in 1927.

⁴⁵ Sogyal Rinpoche, op. cit.

The two types of religion, exoteric and esoteric, are often in conflict and opposed to each other. Dr. Brunton goes as far as to say that there is

...a dividing line between pure religion and the man-made institutions which claim to represent it...

and that

...true religion is belief in the existence of [a] supreme power demonstrated by practice of a genuinely virtuous life and not necessarily belief in a religious institution demonstrated by practice of formal religious rites...the effort at private self-communion with this power in contemplation and not necessarily the public utterance of fixed prayers in buildings...⁴⁶

Lennon's roughly expressed distrust of what exoteric religion fossilises into after the departure of its originator out of the normal human sphere is more eloquently given voice in another passage by Dr. Brunton:

Now and then there arises a Man who has...discovered the Absolute Being...But he soon finds that only a few can absorb what he has to tell them....The consequence is that within a century or two, sometimes within a generation or two...The meaning of his message becomes narrowed, the emphasis is laid upon the letter rather than the spirit. The forms of doctrine, the organisation of men become more important than the living truths behind the doctrine...The means are revered but the end is completely forgotten. Finally the religion becomes a shell, half-empty inside but impressively ornate outside.⁴⁷

He then goes on to add:

The original object of creating orthodox religious institutions was to serve truth, whereas the object of some selfish prelates or ignorant clergymen has been to suppress it...From such superstition, bigotry is born, from bigotry come quarrels and sectarian strife, and these finally issue in persecution and bloodshed.

T.S. Eliot, in the seventh of his 'Choruses From The Rock', uses this powerful image of the 'empty shell' religions:

*...the Higher Religions...
...came to an end, a dead end stirred with a flicker of life,*

⁴⁶ Brunton, op. cit.

⁴⁷ From *The Wisdom Of The Overself*.

And they came to the withered ancient look of a child that has died of starvation.

In a great deal of the Gospels, Christ Himself rails against this same phenomenon, the hypocrites, and ‘whited sepulchres’ of the Pharisees. It appears to be a perennial problem, as much the case now as it was at the time of Brunton’s writing, in 1943, or at the time of Christ’s ministry. From the outside, many intelligent people see the bigotry and bloodshed and conclude that religion is, in fact, a *cause* of the world’s evil. And yet mere humanism and scientific rationalism offer no solution, are a blind alley, as they are only appropriate for their own domains, and therefore leave a great deal of human life, thought, experience and feeling out of the picture, arrogantly dismissing them—throwing the baby out with the bath-water, as the phrase, rather graphically, puts it.

Lennon obviously has a profound dislike of exoteric religion, and yet, here he is, as Paul puts it, writing and singing ‘a Salvation Army type song’. What he does is share with us the result not of swallowing any dogma, but of having made the sort of ‘personal experiments...in the laboratory of your own awareness’ that Wilber talks about. In fact, he is not only sharing with us the fruits of these experiments, but giving us the secret of the actual technique that has brought such positivism, namely, meditation.

In the last of the four choruses of ‘The Word’, the words alter to:

*Say the Word, a chance to say
That the Word is just The Way,
It’s the Word I’m thinking of,
And the only Word is love.*

We’ve already heard the injunction ‘*Spread* the Word’ in the second chorus (my italics), and now the last verse makes Lennon’s intentions with this song, had there been any doubt, even plainer:

*Now that I know what I feel must be right,
I mean to show everybody The Light.*

Not much more needs to be added to this, although it’s interesting that he has moved from merely feeling that ‘love’ is the answer, the ‘universal principle’, to *knowing* it—but, we notice, knowing it not because he’s merely read it (which one might expect from ‘the Word’), but from *feeling* it. Feelings can be very unreliable in spiritual work, that is our emotions. But spiritual literature often takes us to a level of ‘feeling’ which is beyond or above ‘emotions’. Thus Eckhart Tolle points out that ‘emotion’ is a word derived from the Latin *emovere*, ‘to disturb’ and are

surface level realities compared with feelings, which are deeper. He actually defines enlightenment as

*To regain awareness of being and to abide in this state of 'feeling-realisation'...*⁴⁸

So, Lennon has moved on from merely realising that we are in a fallen and dualistic state by writing songs like 'I'm A Loser', 'Help!' and 'You've Got To Hide Your Love Away', which had begun to ask meaningful questions about existence, to detailing his own struggles with 'going it alone' on 'the Path' and acknowledging that help is needed in the form of somebody else who will lend him a hand ('Nowhere Man'). He then also postulates, with partial success, a 'cure' for the 'sorrows of the world' ('love' we again note) in 'In My Life'. 'The Word', meanwhile, unambiguously proclaims an answer, delivered, as the interview quote tells us, from a spiritually aware view of the universe that there is an 'underlying' force, reality, call it what you will. Lennon calls it 'love'—and for such a concept we must surely use a capital 'L'. Love not merely as *agape*, a spiritual reality *in* the 'fallen or illusory' manifested world, but 'Love', or even 'LOVE': as Huxley puts it 'the primary and fundamental cosmic fact'.

The last chorus-as-coda leaves us simply with a series of repeated instructions, as if to hammer home the point:

*Say the Word 'love',
Say the Word 'love',
Say the Word 'love',
Say the Word 'love'.*

'The Word', then, is not a song which seriously tries to persuade anyone of the validity of its message, it simply states that message. Faith isn't something arrived at by logical argument, it comes from mystical insight, as Huxley puts it 'direct acquaintance', of the sort that, it would seem, Lennon had now definitely experienced ('It sort of dawned on me..'). This enthusiasm and joy are evident in the song's vibe, and Lennon knows it is fruitless to appeal to the intellect. All he can do is persuade us of his positive state by singing while in that state, and tell us how to achieve the same ourselves. When Dylan later found God he sounded so miserable about it, and spent so much time gloating over those who hadn't been 'saved', that he probably produced an entirely opposite effect to that which he intended. He might have done himself a favour by digging out this 1965 Beatles album track and giving it a listen.

With references to the opening of the Gospel of (who else but?) St. John, references to 'The Light', a mention of Tao, ('the Way'), implicit

⁴⁸ Op. cit.

statements of the validity of repeating The Word as a mantra, nobody even at the time could have mistaken 'The Word' for the normal sort of boy/girl love song. There is no girl in this song, and the addressee is obviously us, the audience. This is an entirely different sort of love song, a spiritual love song, a capital-'I' Love song, a LOVE song. It is chapter one of the Gospel according to John Lennon. It is the older brother of the far more celebrated 'All You Need Is Love'.

To me, 1965, rather than 1967, was the pivotal year of the 60s. Chronologically right in the middle of the decade, it was then that the seeds which were to bear fruit with the 'summer of love' were sown. From now on the overtly spiritual becomes the dominant subject matter of John and George's writing. George's message song 'Awaiting On You All' on *All Things Must Pass* (1970) states clearly that

*By chanting the names of the Lord
...you'll be free.*

Of course, by then George was labelled as 'the spiritual Beatle', and everyone 'got' the message (although precious few acted upon it). But how many spotted that his song was merely a restatement, five years later, of Lennon's earlier 'sermon'?

The Void (Tomorrow Never Knows)

In this chapter we will be looking at the revolutionary Lennon song ‘Tomorrow Never Knows’, on the *Revolver* album. Its original title was ‘The Void’. The opening lines are:

*Turn off your mind, relax and float downstream,
It is not dying, it is not dying.
Lay down all thought, surrender to The Void,
It is shining, it is shining,
That you may see the meaning of within,
It is Being, it is Being.*

Here is George Harrison on the song:

‘Tomorrow Never Knows’...is saying what meditation is all about. The goal of meditation is to go beyond, that is transcend, waking, sleeping and dreaming. So the song starts by saying ‘Turn off your mind, relax and float downstream, it is not dying.’

Then it says: ‘Lay down all thoughts, surrender to the void—it is shining. That you may see the meaning of within—it is being.’ From birth to death all we ever do is think: we have one thought, we have another thought, another thought, another thought. Even when you are asleep you are having dreams, so there is never a time from birth to death when the mind isn’t active with thoughts. But you can turn off your mind, and go to the part which the Maharishi described as: ‘Where was your last thought before you thought it?’

...So the song is really about transcending and about the quality of the transcendent.⁴⁹

As was the case in ‘The Word’, Lennon is delivering a song (in the present tense, we note) that is actually an injunction, a set of instructions, telling us what to do, offering us the heart of meditative technique. As we’ve already discussed, in meditation one takes a step back, as it were, from one’s own thought processes, thereby de-energising them, in order to get to that locality from which the ‘last thought before you thought it’ emanates. It is about dis-identifying from ‘little mind’, from *sem*, and identifying with ‘big mind’, or Rigpa, or capital-‘M’ Mind. It is about turning off one’s ‘little mind’.

This is where ‘The Void’ comes in. To a normal uninitiated or spiritually trained Westerner, the idea of a void is just a terrifying emptiness—which is probably why Lennon changed the title, using the nearest Ringo-ism to hand.⁵⁰ But to the spiritually trained, to a student of

⁴⁹ Quoted in the *Anthology*.

⁵⁰ The title ‘A Hard Day’s Night’ also came from Ringo.

the Perennial Philosophy, ‘The Void’ is an apparent ‘nothingness’ *only from the point of view of the ‘little mind’*. The Void is, in fact, that which underlies all manifestation, it is the ultimate ‘emptiness’ which permits the existence of and contains all ‘form’. It contains it, and also, paradoxically, *is it*. As *The Heart Sutra* famously puts it:

Form is emptiness, emptiness is form.

Lennon is now transmitting elements of the Perennial Philosophy almost verbatim. ‘Tomorrow Never Knows’ was based initially on *The Psychedelic Experience*, by Timothy Leary, Ralph Metzner and Richard Alpert⁵¹, itself a rewriting of a key ancient text of the Perennial Philosophy, *The Tibetan Book Of The Dead*, which had been available in the West since the 1920s in English thanks to the translation by W.Y. Evans-Wentz. The original title of *The Tibetan Book Of The Dead* is *Bardo Thodol*, and we will be referring to it as such henceforward. We are in an area of some controversy here, of course, because *The Psychedelic Experience*, was written as a manual for the positive and safe use of psychedelics as a tool for self exploration, using the set and setting methods only that Leary and his companions stipulated.

This opening line of the song is a direct quote from the introduction to Leary’s book. He seems to see the visions that may appear during an LSD experience as elements within one’s own mind that could turn the experience into a ‘bad trip’, following the original *Bardo Thodol*’s description of all the various forms that arise in the ‘Bardo’ (‘in-between’) states as distractions from recognising the Clear Light and thereby gaining liberation and enlightenment, and, while allowing them, he suggests that one does not over-identify with them:

*Trust your brain, trust your divinity, trust your companions.
Whenever in doubt, turn off your mind, relax, and float downstream.*

An anti-mystical back-lash set in after the sixties, fuelled by an establishment and a media which supports it that sees people turning towards spiritual values as a threat to its own, purely materialistic, concerns, so that the very idea of using psychedelics in a responsible way as a tool for consciousness expansion and self-knowledge would probably seem anathema to most people now. But, the use of psychedelics (the phrase, coined by Dr. Humphrey Osmond, actually means ‘*mind manifesting*’) was a fact of the sixties, and part of the awakening from the dominant rational-scientific-industrial mindset of the time—a mindset which still holds the planet mostly in its grip, and in doing so threatens the very survival of life itself. I call this mindset the Horatio mindset, from Hamlet’s famous admonition to Horatio

⁵¹ Lyle-Stewart, 1964.

*There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.*⁵²

This mindset has castigated Leary, for example, a man who was fully aware that mere ‘fooling around’ with the drug (which is what most takers ended up doing, ignoring his instructions and guidance) was dangerous, as we saw from his warning quoted earlier.

So is Lennon offering advice in this song on how to deal with the overwhelming experiences of a psychedelic session, or offering advice on how to meditate? The answer is, *both*. Leary’s advice on not grasping to the forms that may arise in an LSD session hold true for meditation also, where one learns to become aware of one’s thoughts as the first stage in not being entirely caught up in them and identified with them. If one’s chattering mind can be closed down, one can experience the shining Void, the essence of Mind, Ground Luminosity, the Clear Light, the emptiness that enfolds manifested reality, and one cannot *force* one’s mind to do this: one learns to merely *observe* one’s thought processes without becoming attached to them and (as is our usual state) being dragged along by them (this goes for emotions also). *The Psychedelic Experience* describes the Void thus:

*The Void is not nothingness.
The Void is beginning and end in itself.
Unobstructed; shining, thrilling, blissful.
Diamond consciousness.
The All-Good Buddha.*

The original, the *Bardo Thodol*, describes The Void as being

*...Thine own intellect, which is now voidness, yet not to be regarded as of the voidness of nothingness...is the very consciousness, the All-Good Buddha.*⁵³

The goal of all meditators is to have a glimpse, an experience, of this state: it is not a mere cold intellectual abstraction. What we are dealing with here is, of course, also referred to as *nirvana*, a phrase now well known in the West, but misunderstood. John Snelling in *The Buddhist Handbook* has this to say:

*One classic howler is to see Nirvana as some kind of nothingness.*⁵⁴

⁵² *Hamlet*, I, v.

⁵³ Evans-Wentz translation.

⁵⁴ Century Hutchinson, 1987.

However, when *nirvana* has been misleadingly translated by such terms as ‘extinction’, it is hardly surprising that people get the wrong idea. Snelling himself, for example, does not come up with any more useful a definition. We have noted before the inadequacy of our language in dealing with metaphysical concepts, and I would be willing to bet that those given the job of translating these terms have often not themselves had any *direct experience*. Here is someone who *has*, I believe, had the direct experience, Eckhart Tolle:

What is God? The eternal One Life underneath all the forms of life.

*Being is the eternal ever-present One Life beyond the myriad forms of life that are subject to birth and death...Being is not only beyond, but also deep within every form as its innermost invisible and indestructible essence.*⁵⁵

We might venture a definition ourselves: an experience of the Void/nirvana is a reconnection with the ultimate reality, that state of being which is beyond all form—and therefore certainly beyond the ego-mind’s conception and the Horatio-mindset’s ability to grasp it.

Some might attack Lennon for merely copying rather than creating—I would argue he’s actually *transmitting*. Besides, he is putting these concepts into his own words: neither the *Bardo Thodol* nor *The Psychedelic Experience* use the terms ‘being’. And the second verse departs from *The Psychedelic Experience* altogether.

*That love is all and love is everyone—
It is knowing, it is knowing.
That ignorance and hate may mourn the dead—
It is believing, it is believing.
But listen to the colour of your dreams—
It is not living, it is not living.
Or play the ‘game existence’ to the end
Of the beginning, of the beginning,
Of the beginning (repeated).*

Lennon is here coming to his own conclusions, conclusions he had already surmised in previous experiences and in a previous song. ‘Love’ as in ‘The Word’, is the ‘underlying theme to the universe’, is ‘all’. As we are all part of the universe, it then follows that we are ‘Love’ also. While the Leary book mentions ‘bliss’ a lot in connection with the Void, as does its original, it doesn’t use the word ‘love’, as such. We are love, God is love—we are God, therefore. This second chapter in the Gospel according to John Lennon seems to follow on logically from the first.

⁵⁵ Op. cit.

Although Lennon doesn't actually say specifically 'the Void is Love', he does seem to be inferring it very strongly. This is only problematic for those who are still thinking of Love as merely an aspect, an attribute, or a quality of the manifested world— an emotion, in other words. This would be the normal sort of 'love' of the pop-song, love with a small 'l'. But we know that Lennon thinks of Love as that which is 'underlying' to the universe, which puts it on a par with the Void, and with God. Anyone who thinks that the Void stands behind or before God and that God is itself a manifestation of the Void isn't really thinking of God as The Supreme, The Absolute, The Ultimate Reality. God is Love, we saw from the earlier quote, not God shows love or is loving. We are dealing here with a non-personalised concept (or rather, experience) of God. Here's Dr. Brunton again:

...whereas all other inanimate things and living existences can be thought in terms of some other things or existences on which they depend or out of which they arise or into which they merge, God alone requires no such relation because it is itself the pre-supposition of all possible relations, things and existences...God is neither a particular being nor a mentally produced idea...personality implies a particular being. Therefore God is not personal. It is divine Being but not a divine being; Love, but not a loving father...⁵⁶

'God', 'Love' (with a capital 'L') and 'The Void' are synonymous, therefore.

Before any wars break out over what is simply a matter of nomenclature (no wonder St. Paul said 'the letter killeth!'), here is Sogyal Rinpoche, giving us yet another useful summary of the Perennial Philosophy:

Saints and mystics throughout history have adorned their realisations with different names...but what they are all fundamentally experiencing is the essential nature of the mind. Christians and Jews call it 'God'; Hindus call it 'the Self'; Sufi mystics name it 'the Hidden Essence'; and Buddhists call it 'Buddha nature'. At the heart of all religions is the certainty that there is a fundamental truth, and that this life is a sacred opportunity to evolve and realise it.⁵⁷

In this song/state death is conquered also, and only those in a state of 'ignorance and hate' would mourn the 'dead', quite an extreme-seeming statement from the point of view of everyday waking reality, but to a mystic who has attained transcendence there simply is *no death*. This is the line in the song which, for me, shows that Lennon must have had at

⁵⁶ From *The Wisdom Of The Overself*.

⁵⁷ Op. cit.

least a glimpse of the ‘Clear Light’ at some point. However, such states do not abide, and once back in the ‘mundane shell’ it requires belief to maintain the idea—hence the repeated ‘it is believing’.

The *Bardo Thodol* has very explicit instructions for the deceased’s relatives not to ‘weep, or make mournful wailings near the dead body’, as this makes it all the more difficult for the dead man’s spirit-mind to fix on the goal of liberation through recognition of the Clear Light, or the other manifestations of compassionate beings. And perhaps also Lennon had read the Bhagavad-Gita, where, at one point, Arjuna is admonished by Krishna thus:

*While speaking learned words, you are mourning for what is not worthy of grief. Those who are wise lament neither for the living or the dead.*⁵⁸

Arjuna is grieving over those who are about to die on the battlefield, but, in the next verse, The Supreme Lord Krishna points out that as we are all eternal, and merely inhabit different bodies as we go from reincarnation to reincarnation, there is no reason to grieve:

*Never was there a time when I did not exist, or you, nor all these kings; nor in the future shall any of us cease to be.*⁵⁹

All these references to death in the song point to the overwhelming nature of the psychedelic experience, often referred to as an ‘ego-death’. Let us focus on this ‘ego-death’. Leary’s book was not just bastardising an ancient tradition about actual physical death and then twisting it to fit a recreational indulgence. The idea that the *Bardo Thodol* was actually about ego-death not *actual* death came from the horse’s mouth, so to speak, from Lama Angarika Govinda, with whom Leary studied for seven months:

*Although the Bardo Thodol is at present time widely used in Tibet as a breviary, and read or recited on the occasion of death...one should not forget that it was originally conceived to serve as a guide for not only the dying and the dead, but the living as well...it is one of the oldest and most universal practices for the initiate to go through the experience of ‘death’ before he can be spiritually reborn. Symbolically he must die to his past, and to his old ego, before he can take his place into the new spiritual life into which he has been initiated.*⁶⁰

⁵⁸ *Bhagavad-Gita*, 2:11

⁵⁹ These lines from the Bhagavad Gita are quoted in the liner notes of George’s last album, *Brainwashed*.

⁶⁰ Quoted from Lama Govinda’s introduction to an edition of the *Bardo Thodol*, cited in *The Psychedelic Experience*.

In the full version of his introduction, added to the 1955 edition of the Evans-Wentz *Tibetan Book Of The Dead*, he also has this to say about the book's esoteric meaning:

It is recognised by all who are acquainted with Buddhist philosophy that birth and death are not phenomena which happen only once in any given human life; they occur uninterruptedly⁶¹. At every moment something within us dies and something is reborn. The different bardos, therefore, represent different states of consciousness of our life...The Bardo Thodol is addressed not only to those who see the end of their life approaching...but to those who still have years of incarnate life before them, and who, for the first time, realise the full meaning of their existence as human beings.

This seems to make it very clear that the Bardo Thodol is intended for those who go through some sort of initiation in a consciously taken and serious attempt to bring about a spiritual rebirth. Leary's idea that LSD should be used with reverence as a sacrament, perhaps somewhat in the way envisaged in the moksha-medicine taking ceremony in Huxley's utopian novel *Island*, with a correct and supportive 'set and setting', is light years away from the typically arrogant way in which the drug has been abused in the West— taken for a laugh at parties, dropped on unsuspecting subjects by the CIA, etc. As the Lama also states

If...the gates of an individual's subconsciousness were thrown open, the unprepared mind would be overwhelmed and crushed.

No wonder, then, Lennon wrote a song called 'Help!' just after his first throwing open of the 'gates of the subconscious' or 'the doors of perception', for which, as we know, he was completely unprepared.

Death: not the usual subject material of a pop song. Death, in fact, is something our Horatio-mindset dominated culture instinctively shies away from. The song 'She Said She Said' (also on *Revolver*) fictionalises an encounter between Lennon and Peter Fonda, in which Fonda, was attempting to act as a guide to Harrison, who was being 'overwhelmed and crushed' on his (and Lennon's) first deliberate acid trip. Fonda, trying to be reassuring, told Harrison 'I know what it's like to be dead', to which Lennon's reply was 'Who put all that shit in your head? You're making me feel like I've never been born.' The Horatio mindset still dominant in Lennon at the time, he can't accept what Fonda is saying, that there is something beyond death. 'Real' death, ego-death—what's the difference? According to the Perennial Philosophy, as all is Mind, very little. 'She Said She Said' is a fascinating song showing Lennon, or the Horatio-mindset part of Lennon, all at sea with these new experiences and ideas,

arguing against them. (Almost inevitably for a Lennon song, it fictionalises the encounter with Fonda by having the person with the Higher Knowledge be female.)

Musically 'Tomorrow Never Knows' is an extraordinary piece of work. Unlike 'The Word's cheerful jauntiness, this message song is delivered as a thundering sermon, as if from the lips of some great god-like oracle. The attempt is obviously being made to recreate in sound the 'throwing open of the gates of the subconscious', the kicking open of the doors of perception, that is a powerful LSD experience, or indeed any other powerful experience of the transpersonal realm.⁶² The *Bardo-Thodol* itself at one point refers to the sort of sounds that may be heard in the bardo-state as 'sounds so mighty as to daze one's brain'—and the sound picture achieved by George Martin and the Beatles in this song certainly seems to be in keeping with this statement.

Rather than unfold in conventional linear Western musical-structural terms, the song is all on one chord: it is a simple two-phrase melody over a drone—with no other melodic material, no chorus, no middle eight. Although the words alter, it is sung like the musical setting of a mantra.

The drone, comprising a chord of C, with an undeviating bass line and an amazingly powerfully played and recorded drum pattern, represents The Void itself, the unity which underlies all manifested complexities of form. (Unable quite to resist Western influence, however, a B-flat chord is superimposed over the drone on the 'it is not dying' etc. sections. A more fully monochordal take of the song was released on *Anthology II*). In stereo spacing terms, John's vocal delivering the sermon is deliberately placed in the middle of the listener's field of perception, i.e. in the central, third-eye position, from which, in my experience of meditation, waves of positive, relaxing energy emanate, and from which the internal flowing, unfolding images emerge.

Over this an astonishing sound collage of tape effects and backward guitars come and go, representing the visions in an altered-state experience as they also randomly follow one another. With the pre-sampling technology of tape-recorders only, one might think the Beatles were working at a disadvantage, but the fact that any given mix of the track could not, literally, be repeated, helped turn the recording into an actual event, a happening. This time-and-place specific mode of working, (more 'here and now' in action), has been superseded by sampling technology, but at the loss of any amount the numinous, of magic, of 'it can only turn out this way once'. This is one of the many reasons for the boorish flatness of modern popular music.

⁶² It is possible, in fact, for these gates to be thrown open spontaneously, in what the Grofs refer to as a case of 'spiritual emergency'. It's an 'emergency' in the usual sense of the word, a crisis, but it can be guided to a positive therapeutic result, one in which the inner, 'spiritual' dimensions of being are recognised, and a more authentic self 'emerges'. See *The Stormy Search For The Self*, by Stanislav and Christina Grof, J.P.Tarcher, 1990.

That Lennon was aware of his new role as a messenger, and aware of the cultural context of *The Psychedelic Experience*, is apparent in his request to George Martin to have his voice treated so that he sounded like ‘the Dalai Lama chanting from a hilltop’. Instead it was put through a Leslie speaker in a Hammond organ, which certainly gave it a super-human quality. What a long way the boys had come from ‘Love Me Do’!

So, whereas ‘There’s A Place’ almost sneaked in its concerns with inner transcendence past the teenybop-censor, Lennon’s growing maturity as a man and a songwriter meant that he could write songs fully and unapologetically about these concerns. Not only is this a song that talks about the possibility of finding a ‘place’ where ‘time’ (and its Siamese-twin, death) are transcended, it describes what being there is like, and gives explicit instructions as to how the listener can get there.

‘The Void’ was a truly revolutionary song in intention, concept, and execution. It was the first song on *Revolver* to be recorded, as far back as April 1966, and this shows the Beatles to be way ahead of their contemporaries. If it had been released as a single, the ‘summer of love’ would have happened a year earlier—on the other hand, perhaps it was simply too far ahead of its time, and would have been the Beatles’ first flop. The drone effect is broken at the end of the song also, as if to state that the musical ‘trip’ is over, and there is comedy-style pub-piano to fade out with, a sort of deliberate come down ‘back to everyday reality’ feel. It’s a bathetic ending, dispelling the intensity and ‘heaviness’, a device that was later employed on ‘Within You Without You’. The track was finally scheduled as the last in the album’s running order, so as not to scare off the teenyboppers⁶³.

It is interesting to note that while Leary continued to (over)use the drug and probably destroyed himself in the process, a process exacerbated by battles with the law and gaol terms, his partner Richard Alpert became the highly respected and influential spiritual figure Baba Ram Dass, who wrote the modern classic statement of the Perennial Philosophy *Be Here Now*. My own feeling is that use of drugs did open a door of perception—the trick was to actually go through the door, rather than get stuck in the doorway. *Something* had to blast open the doors of perception, to weaken the hold the Horatio-mindset had on all areas of culture. If LSD hadn’t done at least a partially successful job of doing so, I wouldn’t be writing this book, and you, dear reader, wouldn’t be reading it! Both Lennon and Harrison discontinued use of LSD after a certain amount of time, as we will see.

For the Horatios, I would like to insert this quotation from Huxley (although that’s probably a wasted gesture, as they won’t be reading a book like this!) In the ‘Man and Religion’ lecture in *The Human*

⁶³ Or the Horatio-critics. This is Jeremy Pascal’s reaction to the track, recollected in the 1970s in his *Illustrated History Of Rock Music* (Hamlyn, 1978): ‘Nothing had prepared your ear for it...there was this harsh, strident, ugly sound...an aural picture of utmost bleakness.’

Situation, after a definition of mystical experience, he asks the very Horatio-esque question ‘Why should this sort of consciousness be regarded as valuable?’, and answers thus:

I think for two reasons. First...it is intrinsically valuable, just as the experience of beauty is intrinsically valuable, but much more so. Second, it is valuable because as a matter of empirical experience it does bring about changes in thought and character and feeling which the experiencer and those about him regard as manifestly desirable.

Basically, it brings about change, change for the good, as Wilber also points out. This is what George has to say about it in the *Anthology*:

..although it has a down side, I see my acid experience as a blessing because it saved me many years of indifference. It was the awakening and the realisation that the important thing in life is to ask ‘Who am I? Where am I going? And where have I come from? All the rest is, as John said, ‘just a little rock and roll band.’

As Huxley points out in his influential *The Doors Of Perception*:

The urge to transcend self-conscious selfhood is...a principle appetite of the soul. When, for whatever reason, men and women fail to transcend themselves by means of worship, good works and spiritual exercises, they are apt to resort to religion’s chemical surrogates.

In a culture which had (since rise of industrialism, coupled with the ironically entitled ‘Enlightenment’) disregarded as unimportant all things subjective or spiritual (you can’t plot compassion on a graph—therefore, say the Horatios, it can’t exist), ‘worship, good works and spiritual exercises’ had become, by and large, unheard of. Ralph Metzner, along with Leary and Alpert the third writer of *The Psychedelic Experience*, considered the discovery of LSD to be nothing less than a turning point in human evolution, coming at a time that was synchronous with the Manhattan Project’s unleashing of the power of the atomic bomb, and therefore acting as some sort of an antidote to our destructive instincts. However, unlike Leary, Huxley was more cautious, and counselled ‘turning on’ only the intellectual elite. He realised there might be problems in using a sacralising agent in a non-sacred society, as did Dr. Stanley Krippner:

Psychedelic substances have been used very wisely in primitive cultures for spiritual and healing purposes. Our culture does not have this

*framework. We don't have the closeness to God, the closeness to nature, the shamanistic outlook. We've lost all that.*⁶⁴

Or, as Jack Kerouac famously put it:

Walking on water wasn't built in a day.

Essentially, give humanity a form of knowledge, and it can do either good or bad with it: it can smelt iron into weapons, for example, or ploughshares. It is hardly surprising that many members of a Horatio-mindset dominated culture went about using a 'chemical surrogate' for 'worship, good works and spiritual exercises', in the wrong way. I would not in any way encourage the use of LSD now: those who went before have already done the work for us, and, as Ken Wilber puts it,

...this 'one-step' transformation model now seems to be quite naive.

A lot of the songs I go into detail about in this study seem to me to be the artistic expression of so-called 'peak experiences'—but experiences of this sort do not by themselves lead to Enlightenment or right action. What is then needed is for the subject to transform his/her self in a way that is in alignment with the new-found perspective afforded by such experiences. George later puts it like this in 'Within You Without You':

*We were talking about the Love we all could share,
When we find it, to try our best to hold it there.*

This, as I'm sure we all know, is the tricky part. As Wilber puts it

...to turn an 'altered state' into a 'permanent trait'.

⁶⁴ Quoted in *Acid Dreams*.

Rain/I'm Only Sleeping

Before we look at 'Rain', the main subject of this chapter, we need to look briefly at another important song from *Revolver*, 'I'm Only Sleeping'. Again, both songs are by John Lennon.

'I'm Only Sleeping' is a celebration of sleep, or rather of drifting, dozing, reverie. The narrator/Lennon pleads not to be roused from this state:

*Please don't wake me, no don't shake me,
Leave me where I am,
I'm only sleeping.*

The benefits of sleeping? Well,

*Everybody seems to think I'm lazy,
I don't mind, I think they're crazy,
Running everywhere at such a speed,
'Til they find that there's no need.*

So a form of spiritual superiority is being touted here. It's true that any intelligent person can see that what most of us do, most of the time, is far from attaining our final goal of oneness with the Absolute, as outlined in *The Perennial Philosophy* earlier. But has Lennon fallen into his 'Nowhere Man/Sitting in his Nowhere Land' trap again? He says he is

Keeping an eye on the world going by my window,

but does that mean that Enlightenment is being achieved, or just a distancing from life, refuge without transcendence? Is he merely, as he admits, 'Wasting [his] time'?

Actually, it has to be conceded that in 'I'm Only Sleeping' Lennon seems to have at least partially adopted the viewpoint of the Witness Self, that deeper, nay deepest part of the self that simply *observes*: the true Self. Capital 'M' Mind, 'big mind', *Rigpa*. For Lennon to be speaking *fully* from this Witness Self, he would also have to be able to witness his own internal thoughts and processes, not merely that which goes on beyond the 'window'. Here is Wilber's description of the Witness Self from *A Brief History Of Everything*:

This deeply inward Self is witnessing the world out there, and it is witnessing all your interior thoughts as well. This Seer sees the ego, and sees the body, and sees the natural world. All of these parade by 'in front' of this Seer.

This seems to parallel exactly Lennon's stance of 'keeping an eye on the world going by my window'. He is able to step back and observe, rather than being totally caught up, as most of us are, most of the time, in engaging with life. No wonder then that Lennon pleads 'please don't wake me'. This aspect of sleeping is, admittedly imperfectly, incompletely, giving him an inkling of Enlightenment, of being Pure Awareness. While in this song he is only partly successfully speaking from his Witness Self, we also know that he *is* able to witness his own interior thoughts and spaces as well from 'There's A Place', and the apparently external events of life in 'In My Life'. Later songs such as 'Strawberry Fields Forever' and 'Lucy In The Sky With Diamonds' are also observations of inner states. A meditation master might disapprove of a mere drowsiness, and to an outsider, even to the Horatio-mindset part of himself, he's merely 'wasting [his] time', but despite acting without proper maps or guides within these interior realms, Lennon, relying on his instincts alone, knows he has at least partially hit upon something, some level of spiritual awareness.

It can't be sleep itself as such that he's really referring to which enables him to keep 'an eye on the world going by my window', but it is while he 'stay[s] in bed' that he finds that he can 'float upstream'. Dr. Brunton confirms the reason for Lennon's attraction for borderline states in this passage from *The Wisdom Of The Overself*:

The condition which lies between sleeping and waking is not only extremely interesting, for it does not belong to either category and is indeed a border-land with characteristics which partake of both, but also extremely important, for it is very receptive to suggestion.

Why is this receptiveness to suggestion important? Because

...intuitions.....occur...during the borderland region which lies between and vaguely overlaps both sleep and waking....

Lennon's unaided and unguided investigations into altered and borderline states, and into the whole realm of mind-as-place, has shown him the value of something that to an outsider, (which in our culture would inevitably mean a Horatio-mindset dominated outsider), would appear to be anathema, the very reverse of the Protestant Work Ethic⁶⁵. No wonder

⁶⁵ The last verse of Lennon's 'Girl' offers an attack on the Protestant Work Ethic: 'Was she told when she was young that fame would lead to pleasure?/Did she understand it when they said/That a man must break his back to earn his day of leisure?/Will she understand it when he's dead?' The attempt at writing a portrait of Lennon's dream-girl founders in this song. Instead she's gullible enough to believe in an ethic which, as presented here, is obviously untenable. The system merely kills those who believe in its tenets. Also note that Lennon thinks that anyone who thinks that fame is easy and leads to pleasure is stupid! The later collaboration with David Bowie, 'Fame', also points out that fame isn't all that great. In the prose piece 'The Ballad Of John And Yoko', Lennon states that to want to be famous is quite simply a form of stupidity.

‘Ev’rybody seems to think [he’s] lazy’! Westerners often dismiss meditation as mere quietist ‘navel-gazing’, showing our ignorance of the process, our distrust of it, and how thorough our grounding in the Horatio-mindset is. Sogyal Rinpoche turns the whole concept of ‘laziness’ on its head, pointing out it is the frenetic and pointless activity of the Horatio-mindset that is actually lazy—lazy about confronting the real issues in life, and filling in time with compulsive ‘busyness’ in order to keep reality at bay:

*Western laziness...consists of cramming our lives with compulsive activity, so that there is no time at all to confront the real issues.*⁶⁶

When we look at ‘A Day In The Life’ we will find that Paul, appropriately enough, provides that song with a portrait of this ‘compulsive activity’ in its middle section.

This ability to

Stay in bed, float upstream. [My emphasis]

is in direct contrast, of course, to the injunction in ‘The Void’ to

Turn off your mind relax and float downstream. [My emphasis]

To go ‘upstream’ implies effort, is an image of going against the grain, fighting against the current. Perhaps it points to expressing individuality, going against the crowd (which is what he’s doing simply by subverting the Horatio-mindset/Protestant Work Ethic by being, apparently, lazy). Interesting also is that the idea of effort is also negated by use of the word ‘float’—we are being offered an image of something that is physically an impossibility, is self-contradicting. Only a being of a Higher Order, a being existing outside the physical universe, can reconcile the concept of floating with that of moving against the current, which might indicate again that Lennon is by no means ‘wasting his time’, but reaching a state of non-duality in which what we normally perceive as opposites can co-exist. Interestingly in the *Dharmapada*, the Buddha states that

*...he whose mind is not bound by material pleasures, such a person is called an ‘Upstream-bound One’.*⁶⁷

Here’s Lennon, probably unconsciously, hitting the nail on the head once again when it comes to the transcendent, despite being little versed in the minutiae of the Perennial Philosophy.

⁶⁶Sogyal Rinpoche, op. cit..

⁶⁷ *The Dharmapada*, 16:10.

How can Lennon, in fact how can any artist, *not* be interested in borderline states, and in dreams? These deeper levels of the mind are the very springs of inspiration, at least in the Romantic tradition. Huxley defines inspiration thus:

*What may be called genius is the uprush of helpful material from the deep levels of the unconscious, which is then worked up by the conscious self into an appropriate form.*⁶⁸

We have already seen how Paul derived ‘Yesterday’ and John ‘Nowhere Man’ from deeper levels. Now with frequent forays into the depths being undertaken, a whole host of deeper-level songs start to emerge for both writers⁶⁹. Once LSD was eschewed by the Beatles, meditation then became the key to unlocking deeply buried creative material. Dr. Brunton though warns that artistic creations are *not* to be thought of as the ultimate in spirituality, there being one level higher yet than the realms of artistic reverie:

*Sages speak from the highest level; mystics contemplate and geniuses speak, write, paint and compose from the secondary levels.*⁷⁰

I have to say I think ‘I’m Only Sleeping’ is one of the Beatles best songs, an often overlooked gem, with its assured air of musical competence, lovely harmonies—there’s even a nice yawn thrown in!

Onto ‘Rain’ itself then. It’s an important message song, Lennon’s next ‘sermon’. In my opinion consigning ‘Rain’ to the B-side of Paul’s inferior ‘Paperback Writer’ is the beginning of a downsizing of Lennon’s talent and of the mystical bent of his writing which comes to a head, as we shall see, with the writing of ‘Across The Universe’. Here’s the complete lyric:

*If the rain comes they run and hide their heads,
They might as well be dead,
When the rain comes, when the rain comes.
When the sun shines they slip into the shade
And sip their lemonade,
When the sun shines, when the sun shines.
Rain—I don’t mind,
Shine—the weather’s fine.*

⁶⁸ Quoted in the chapter ‘The Unconscious’ in *The Human Situation*.

⁶⁹ Even the innocuous children’s song by the Beatles ‘Yellow Submarine’ is of interest here. What is a submarine? A vehicle. Where does it go? Under the surface, into the depths. This Paul song seems to have been triggered off by Lennon’s remark about that first unsought-for acid experience to the effect that Harrison’s house seemed to have turned into a giant submarine! It was also another song that came to McCartney from these borderlands of sleep.

⁷⁰ Brunton, op. cit.

*I can show you that when it starts to rain
It's really just the same,
I can show you, I can show you.
Can you hear me that when it rains and shines
It's just a state of mind?
Can you hear me? Can you hear me?*

Here Lennon is assuming a similar viewpoint to that of 'I'm Only Sleeping': he is in observation mode, 'keeping an eye on the world going by [his] window', and observing humanity going about its usual insane stuff, 'running everywhere at such a speed'. Out there, 'they' are reacting to the rain and the shine in predictable human ways, sheltering from the rain, and, indeed, sheltering from the sun, whereas he knows both rain and shine are 'just a state of mind', and therefore, whether it rains or shines, he can say 'the weather's fine'. This song surely is part of the long standing mystical/philosophical tradition of both East and West, in which the wise person accepts whatever happens to one 'from the outside', as it were, with equanimity. Our use of the word in such an everyday phrase as 'he took the bad news philosophically', points to this tradition. The *Bhagavad-Gita*, like the *Tao Teh Ching*, is littered with verses which describe the yogi as immune to external conditions which elate or upset the ordinary man, for example:

For one who has conquered the mind, the Supersoul is already reached, for he has attained tranquility. To such a man happiness and distress, heat and cold, honour and dishonour are all the same.⁷¹

Dr. Brunton meanwhile quotes a Mongolian text:

Whoso bears joy and sorrow with even mind has spirituality, although he may outwardly seem a worldling.⁷²

Let's look a little at this rain and shine. There seems to be an implicit criticism of both sheltering from good and bad weather here, as if 'they' are simply trying to avoid what life has to throw at them. Indeed 'they' have become so unwilling to face reality that, even when the sun shines and the weather is good, 'they' keep nature at one remove and cannot enjoy it, they 'slip into the shade/And sip their lemonade'. Now, of course, as we've cleverly destroyed the ozone-layer, they'd have good reason to, but this level of meaning was not Lennon's intention at the time of writing. One is reminded of Kahlil Gibran's words in *The Prophet*

⁷¹ *Bhagavad-Gita*, 6:7.

⁷² Brunton, op. cit.

Would that you would meet the sun and the wind with more of your skin and less of your raiment...

...forget not that the earth delights to feel your bare feet and the winds long to play with your hair.

The people, or types of people, that Lennon is criticising have shut themselves off against the forces of Nature, good and/or bad.

However, the ‘rain’ and ‘shine’ may also have an additional symbolic function, standing not for actual weather conditions, but good or bad fortune. We, generally, despair at what we perceive to be bad fortune, and rejoice at what we perceive to be good fortune—but our perceptions may be awry. Gibran, again, in *The Prophet*, sees joy and sorrow as ‘inseparable’:

Your joy is your sorrow unmasked.

And the selfsame well from which your laughter rises was oftentimes filled with your tears...

The deeper that sorrow carves into your being, the more joy you can contain.

We have already quoted Eckhart Tolle on the subject, but perhaps we should remind ourselves again at this point:

*...your happiness and unhappiness are in fact one. Only the illusion of time separates them.*⁷³

The new car eventually breaks down, the happy wedding turns into the painful divorce. All things in the material world are subject to time, change, death and decay. All that is manifest is *dukkha*. So for the mystic or the student of the Perennial Philosophy, the normal, simple, human division of ‘that which brings happiness equals ‘good’, that which brings sorrow equals ‘bad’’, is patently incorrect, as all things in life have a two-fold aspect. Here’s the *Tao Teh Ching*, verse 13:

Welcome disgrace as a pleasant surprise.

Prize calamities as your own body.

And here’s a frequently cited little parable illustrating the fact that we do not know what is ultimately for good or bad, as quoted, in this instance, in Dan Millman’s *Way Of The Peaceful Warrior*⁷⁴:

An old man worked on a small farm, with only one horse to pull the plough. One day, the horse ran away.

⁷³ Op. cit.

⁷⁴ H.J. Kramer, 1980.

'How terrible,' sympathised the neighbours. 'What bad luck.'

'Who knows whether it is bad luck or good luck,' the farmer replied.

A week later, the horse returned from the mountains, leading five wild mares into the barn.

'What wonderful luck!' said the neighbours.

'Good luck? Bad luck? Who knows?' answered the old man.

The next day the son, trying to tame one of the horses, fell and broke his leg.

'How terrible. What bad luck!'

'Bad luck? Good luck?'

The army came to all the farms to take the young men for war. The farmer's son was of no use to them, so he was spared.

'Bad luck? Good luck?'

We have all experienced times of apparent disaster in our own lives, and only we can know what was gained from such times. Carl Jung, apparently, would greet patients who came into his office spouting tales of woe with enthusiasm and delight, pointing out that this would produce the sort of 'impossible situation' that fosters the fastest personal and spiritual growth.

So, to the philosophical mind, 'rain' and 'shine', physical or symbolic, are not merely opposites, one to be celebrated, one to be feared and avoided. They are part of a larger design and pattern. And what is this larger design and pattern? That which *underlies* everything that is manifested. That which is beyond time, change, death and decay. The Void which is 'shining', the 'Love' that is 'all'. As Lennon puts it in the last verse of 'Rain', *everything* is 'just a state of mind'. The mind turns out not just to be *a* place, as in 'There's A Place' but *all* places, and *all* things. This Higher Mind, as opposed to the branch of it that is an individual's mind, is explained thus by Dr. Brunton:

...we learn that there is no reality independent of Mind and no ultimate being apart from our own inner most ego-less self...there exists no formed thing in our external experience which does not get its essential being from the same source whence we derive our own.⁷⁵

Earlier in the same paragraph we find him referring to 'the Void' as:

...this mysterious all-enclosing yet paradoxically all-excluding Void is the Real.

The word 'Mind' is, of course, favoured by Buddhism, over the word 'God', as the Ultimate Reality. Dr. Brunton gives the title 'mentalism' to

⁷⁵ From *Essays On The Quest*, Rider & co, 1984.

his doctrine of Mind being the ultimate reality, being God. Here's Sogyal Rinpoche, representing the Tibetan Buddhist tradition:

*The still revolutionary insight of Buddhism is that life and death are in the mind, and nowhere else. Mind is revealed as the universal basis of experience...*⁷⁶ [My emphases]

So, Spike Milligan's running comment in the *The Goon Show* that 'it's all in the mind, you know', was truer than the audience might have been expected to imagine!

Dr. Brunton is also careful to point out that the sage-like state of mind is not a mere matter of indifference or smugness:

*It would be easy to mistake such a serenity either for mere smugness or shallow optimism. It cannot be the first because it is too conscious of both the defects of its possessor and the miseries of mankind. It cannot be the second because it is born of truth, not emotional self-deception. It smiles only because it understands, not because it is emotionally basking in the rays of temporary good fortune.*⁷⁷

Lennon's exploration of his own deep emotional pain and his 'bearing all' in such extremely confessional works as 'Cold Turkey' and the *Plastic Ono Band* album I think shows that he is, or becomes, conscious of his own defects, while his promotion of peace showed later that he certainly hadn't forgotten the miseries of mankind—as does his 'political' phase, which resulted in the *Some Time In New York City* album, perhaps the nadir of his output. When McCartney attempted to write a similar song to 'Rain' in the shape of 'Fixing A Hole', unfortunately, mere smugness, rather than a sage-like attitude, was the result.

'Rain' is the third chapter of the John Lennon Gospel, the third message song. He promises that he can show us that 'rain' and 'shine' are the same, and the last verse is very insistently directed at the listener:

*Can you hear me [when I say] that when it rains and shines
It's just a state of mind?
Can you hear me? Can you hear me?*

'Can you hear me?' is left as the last line of the song, almost challenging the listener. The song is logically constructed, as Lennon's songs usually are when they are the vehicle for a specific message. The early part gives us the example of people reacting in their error ('They might as well be dead' is pretty harsh and condemnatory, almost like a 'hellfire and brimstone' sort of sermon), while the second part of the song, and the

⁷⁶ Rinpoche, op. cit.

⁷⁷ Brunton, op. cit.

refrain, offers us the key to right action and right realisation in the face of the joys and sorrows of the world. Both joy and sorrow, and external events like the weather, are merely ‘a state of mind’. Everything depends on one’s reaction to it, and the wise man, like the farmer in the parable, we might say (to borrow a line from Dylan’s ‘Love Minus Zero/No Limit’)

...knows too much to argue or to judge.

And beyond that there is the fact that all *is* Mind. As Rinpoche states:

*Do not make the mistake of imagining that the nature of mind is exclusive to our mind only. It is in fact the nature of everything. It can never be said too often that to realise the nature of mind is to realise the nature of all things.*⁷⁸

If ‘Love is all and Love is everyone’, as stated in ‘The Void’, then all is Love, and, as God is Love, all is God, and all is Mind. Therefore the terms God, Void, Love and also Mind are synonymous. It is to be stressed here once again that we are using the oft-devalued word ‘love’ not as an emotion, but, capitalised, as the fundamental cosmic fact, the emotion we associate with love being but one facet of the ultimate:

*It is no idle saying that love conquers all things for at the very base of the universe there is this wonderful unifying power.*⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Rinpoche, op. cit.

⁷⁹ Brunton, op. cit.

Strawberry Fields Forever.

After the enormous leaps forward the Beatles had been making artistically, musically, lyrically, and spiritually with *Revolver*, 1966 saw their last spate of touring. They had evolved musically in the studio beyond all recognition, and to knock out even the songs of 1965 before screaming fans must have seemed ridiculous to the band that had just pulled off the coup of such songs as ‘The Void’, ‘Eleanor Rigby’, and ‘Rain’. The tour was also marred by the huge ‘Bigger Than Christ’ furore in the States, and the incident of the Imelda Marcos snub. John and George especially rounded on Brian Epstein, and, after this, there was an end to the Beatles ‘freak show’, as Lennon put it.

So, one aspect of the inauthenticity of being a Beatle was now over. Rather than finding this liberating, as such, Lennon found himself rather at a loss. While Harrison enthusiastically took himself off to India, Lennon signed up for Dick Lester’s anti-war satire *How I Won The War*, mainly, it seems, because he could only see a future without touring as a ‘blank space’. This is understandable, after all, for someone who had been a gigging musician since his teens. The idea of continuing to play as the Beatles must have been by now completely absurd—but now there was something of a Westerner’s ‘void’ opening up, a nothingness, a ‘What now?’ Despite his distrust of the Protestant Work Ethic, he knew that without work to occupy himself, he would be confronted with himself.

*Work is life, you know, and without it there’s nothing but fear and insecurity.*⁸⁰

he was to say a few years later. This is exactly the sort of thing that the Horatio-mindset part of him had been avoiding through activity all those years.

The scene was thus set for ‘Strawberry Fields Forever’, a song which to me stands up as perhaps the most remarkable of all the Beatles recordings. From the point of view of this study it is one of Lennon’s most intensive pieces of soul searching, of going deep within, and dragging the listener with him—‘let me take you down’. What is confronted ‘down’ there in the deep and murky waters of Lennon’s soul gives occasional glimpses of the sort of answers that might have made ‘Strawberry Fields’ a ‘message’ song, but mostly this is a song chronicling doubt and hesitation. In many ways it’s similar to the vacillating ‘She Said She Said’.

⁸⁰ From a 1969 interview, quoted in *Imagine: John Lennon*, Bloomsbury, 1988

The song pivots around its very non-singalong chorus which, unusually for a chorus, (but not unusually for a Lennon song) is the first thing we hear after the (chromatically *descending*) introduction:

*Let me take you down, 'cause I'm going to
Strawberry Fields, nothing is real,
And nothing to get hung about—
Strawberry Fields Forever.*

What strikes one first of all is the ungrammatical nature of the writing, which, as we have seen in songs like 'Rain' and 'The Void', has become almost a Lennon trademark. For this sentence to make proper sense it should read:

*Let me take you down, 'cause I'm going to
Strawberry Fields, [where] nothing is real,
And [there's] nothing to get hung about...*

That the song was deliberately constructed in this way is evident from the consistent way in which the words are repeated in this form in each of the early takes released on *Anthology II*. Lennon is being unapologetically unclear, almost childishly so. The rest of the song takes up this tone of apparent non-sense. Why? The clue, to me seems to be Lennon's statement that

'Strawberry Fields' was just psychoanalysis set to music really.⁸¹

Like a difficult-to-interpret dream, 'Strawberry Fields' just stands there, as it were, making no concessions to sense or analysis. It just *is*, and its 'is-ness' has a distinctive and impenetrable quality. Lennon instinctively saw that to just allow something dredged up from the recesses of the psyche to stand for itself would give it its own reality, its own parameters, again, as in a dream. He must also have realised that such impenetrability would invite interpretation, but later moaned about having his songs scrutinised in such a way, especially when the interpretations started to become more and more unlikely. He had, however, effectively set himself up for this by producing such a wilfully, and powerfully, impenetrable song in 'Strawberry Fields Forever'.

So, this song is, once again, directed at the listener, and we are invited to go on a journey, a journey that will involve descending into the depths—this much, at least, is plain enough. Perhaps we're finally to be escorted around that 'place' alluded to back in 1963 in 'There's A Place', a refuge where Lennon can go when feeling 'low' or 'blue', where 'sorrow' is vanquished and time transcended. This place even has a name,

⁸¹ Quoted in *Lennon Remembers*.

‘Strawberry Fields’. Sounds quite pleasant, rural. Strawberries, of course, have certain pleasant associations. Only a few people on the song’s release knew about the real Strawberry Field in Liverpool, and few had the biographical background to the song that we have now.

Strawberry Field was a favourite childhood haunt of John’s, a home for orphans (with whom he must have empathised, being, effectively, one himself). Nothing else in the song’s lyric makes this plain, or points out that we’re dealing with a song about childhood, that we’ve gone down into a well of memory and are dealing with material from the past which is specifically about childhood. The song doesn’t describe Strawberry Field(s), or say what it meant to Lennon, nor does the song make any kind of a clear and logical statement about the past. Why should it? We are dealing with the subconscious, where clarity and logic, being the attributes of the conscious mind only, are absent. We, as listeners, are forced into the role of the analyst. Presumably Lennon knew that in the course of interviews etc. what, or where, Strawberry Field was in the ‘real’ world would undoubtedly come out, but what’s interesting to me is that nothing about the place is explained, or even really conjured up in the song. In the same interview in which Lennon points out that the song is ‘psychoanalysis set to music’, he also states that he doesn’t need analysis himself in the following way:

I don’t need to do that because I’ve done a lot of it with reporters.

A very interesting, and vulnerable, position to be in, to open up one’s deepest self not just to one other person in private, but to the whole world! If people had been paying real attention, the painful confessional nature of works such as ‘Cold Turkey’ and the *Plastic Ono Band* album should not have come as much of a surprise. Strange too that Lennon wasn’t more wary of reporters after the ‘Bigger than Jesus’ shenanigans, where he’d ‘opened up’ to a journalist he also considered a personal friend with such disastrous consequences.

So, it seems Lennon has two interlinked reasons for not ‘explaining’ or unpacking his symbol of childhood, ‘Strawberry Fields’. One—it’s from where he has taken us ‘down’, it’s material from the subconscious, it should stand for itself *as* itself, and explanation can take second place. Two—explanation will come, inevitably, once people start asking what it’s all about, once people in Liverpool point out that it’s a local landmark, and so on. Paired with ‘Penny Lane’ (another actual Liverpool location) of course, the penny (sorry!) will drop that the Beatles had released two songs about their pasts, their backgrounds, childhood, thus finally properly fulfilling Allsop’s suggestion of writing autobiographically. But Allsop could never have imagined that autobiography could mean something so non-linear, so unlike a ‘normal’ autobiography, so far from ‘I was born in so-and-so, went to school at so-

and-so'. Paul's 'Penny Lane' is, of course, full of people, characters, locations. John's 'Strawberry Fields' features no characters, is 'all in the mind', is all 'first person music.'

So, 'Strawberry Fields' is a sort of code-phrase for 'childhood'. One thing about this place/state is that Lennon is enamoured of it enough to make the plea? positive visualisation? of

Strawberry Fields Forever. [My emphases.]

He either wants it to last 'forever', or it *is*, in some way eternal. The other attributes of 'Strawberry Fields'/childhood is that there 'nothing is real', and there's 'nothing to get hung about'. At first this simply seems to stand for the fact that it is a fantasy place, where only fantasy things can happen, therefore, unlike 'real' life, there are no consequences for any course of action. A Nowhere Land.

However, I think the 'nothing is real' phrase points out that childhood is a state of heightened awareness in which one is closer to God, and the illusion of everyday reality can be seen through. (This would also explain the 'forever'.) The 'nothing to get hung about' meanwhile is a statement of implicit *innocence*. That children are closer to God in their innocence is a part of the Perennial Philosophy often alluded to. Even those who do not believe as such in God/an afterlife, etc. will refer to children as 'angels', an example of how our unconscious use of language undercuts what we believe our thoughts on a subject to be. The unsullied divinity of the child is alluded to in the Gospels, of course, in the famous phrase

*Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of heaven.*⁸²

William Wordsworth's 'Immortality' Ode (published in 1807) is perhaps the best example in Western literature of the belief that the journey into adulthood is a journey deeper and deeper into illusion and away from the essence:

*Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:
The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting,
And cometh from afar...
..trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, who is our home:
Heaven lies about us in our infancy!
Shades of the prison house begin to close
Upon the growing Boy,*

⁸² St. Mark, 10:14

*But he beholds the light, and whence it flows,
He sees it in his joy;
The Youth, who daily farther from the East
Must travel, still is Nature's Priest,
And by the vision splendid
Is on his way attended;
At length the Man perceives it die away,
And fade into the common light of day.*⁸³

Development is seen by the Romantics and mystics as having a downside, a losing of the ability to behold 'The Light', the Ultimate Reality; a loss of God. While obviously this violates any Horatio-mindset orientated view of the stages of development and maturity, the Perennial Philosophy is insistent upon this point, that the new-born child is, in a way, in a God-like state, only just separated from the realm of the essence, only just thrown into the arena of material reality. Here's *Emmanuel's Book III* on the subject:

*Isn't it poignant that people think
That a newborn baby cannot see clearly?
The truth is that the child can see more clearly
Than perhaps ever again in life.*⁸⁴

Naturally, we are dealing here with a different sort of 'seeing' than the physical functioning of the eyes, a form of 'seeing' that cannot be measured and quantified to satisfy the Horatio-mindset.

So, a child, then, is closer to 'cosmic consciousness' than an adult, for whom the 'shades of the prison-house' have come to obscure the perception of infinity. For Blake, as our senses designed to cope with this world sharpen, so our perception of the infinite dulls—

*How do you know but ev'ry Bird that cuts the airy way
Is an immense world of delight, clos'd by your senses five?*⁸⁵

The senses operate on a limited bandwidth which is suitable for our functioning in the material realm, but when the 'doors of perception' are flung open by fasting, meditation, drugs, or spontaneously, a glimpse of the larger reality is allowed. The implications of our being locked in a narrow perceptual bandwidth for most of the time, and of our ability to sometimes widen these frequencies, are discussed at length in Huxley's *Doors Of Perception* and *Heaven And Hell*.

⁸³ Wordsworth was later to write an apologetic prose gloss to explain his very obvious references in this poem to reincarnation, which flew in the face of orthodox 'Church-council' Christianity.

⁸⁴ Bantam, 1994.

⁸⁵ From *The Marriage Of Heaven And Hell*, written between 1789-90.

So, the ‘nothing is real’ of the child’s viewpoint is not, according to the Perennial Philosophy, a matter of living in a vague fantasy world without consequences. It is seeing through the illusion of our superficial perceptions. The Western mind often has a hard time grappling with this ‘nothing is real’ idea, the Eastern concept of *Maya*. For that matter, as Dr. Paul Brunton points out in *Essays On The Quest*, the Eastern mind misunderstands the concept also, reducing it to an assertion that ‘nothing really exists’, and therefore leading to mere quietism, the sort of state that the Horatio-mindset especially recoils from:

*The false opposition of Spirit and Matter, the disheartening tenet that the material universe is without significance, and the pitiful belief that all existence is mere illusion represent the lamentable result of the impact of the full truth upon half-prepared minds.*⁸⁶

And what is ‘the full truth’? Not that ‘nothing exists’, as those who misunderstand *Maya* would say, nor that ‘only that which we can touch and prove scientifically’ exists, as the Horatios would have it, but that there is an

All- unifying universal Mind

behind or beneath manifested reality, the Clear Light, The Void, Ground Luminosity, The All-Good Buddha, God...call it what you will. As Dr. Brunton further explains in *The Wisdom Of The Overself*:

Things are not to be denied but understood. They are certainly there but they are appearances which are doomed as forms to pass away but as essence to abide everlastingly. The world is actual. It is vividly present to our eyes, ears, fingers, and yet it is nothing else than an appearance! We achieve a measure of understanding only when we arrive at acceptance of this paradox. Mind is not mere emptiness but the very reality itself behind all our world-experience. The Void is only a blank nothingness from the materialist standpoint, whereas it is the fundamental reality, the basis of all manifested existence from the mentalist one. [My emphases]

Further clarity is provided by Gary Zukav in his excellent book *The Dancing Wu-Lei Masters*⁸⁷, a sort of companion to Capra’s *The Tao Of Physics*. He puts it simply like this:

The world of matter is an illusory one: illusory not in the sense that it doesn’t exist, but illusory in the sense that we do not see it as it really is.

⁸⁶ Rider & co, 1984.

⁸⁷ 1979, William Morrow.

Dr. Brunton points to the inadequacy of language when dealing with these sorts of concepts, in this passage:

We have to find a better term than 'unreal'. The world's nature is as though covered by a veil and ordinarily hidden from us. But that does not render it non-existent, null, void, and a sham, which is one of the unfortunate suggestions that the word 'unreal' brings to those who have not analysed it—which means ninety-nine persons out of a hundred.

We are often dealing in these matters with concepts for which no equivalent words actually exist in the West. For example, when we come to the problem of how a sage functions in the world, Western translations come up with such formulations as 'non-doing' or 'inaction'. But these formulations are also far from the truth. A sage still acts in the world, but he does so in a qualitatively different way from the ordinary person. His 'doing', because it is in alignment with the Tao, *appears* to an inadequate materialist linguistic framework as 'non-doing', but would perhaps be better rendered as 'action-in-accordance-with-the flow of life', as opposed to our norm of 'doing', which always involves effort, striving—'action-that-goes-against-the flow of life', you might say. Thus the misleading notion that meditation and enlightenment merely becomes a dead-end of inertia ('navel-gazing' is the pejorative term the West has come up with), a matter of, as Dr. Brunton continues

...refraining from action by living in monastic retreat. The correct meaning is the inner realisation of the basic voidness, the immateriality of existence, while outwardly taking that materiality as real for practical purposes. To practice inaction, in the sense in which it has been used in oriental mystical works like the Bhagavad Gita and the Tao Teh Ching, does not mean physical inertia. This is a materialistic misapprehension. It means to effect an entrance into the Void and then to carry the sense of its emptiness into the very midst of activity, into the heart of physical existence.

The search for 'mystical' knowledge, while it may initially involve withdrawing from the world to some extent in order to ingest new information and practices, is not meant as a way of permanent withdrawal. Christ only spent forty days in the wilderness before going about his mission. As the Zen adage has it,

*Before enlightenment, chop wood and carry water.
After enlightenment, chop wood and carry water.*

Lennon, a Westerner with no maps to guide him through these inner territories, struggled with all that he was ingesting, ideas-wise and

chemically, for two or three years. His reaching towards Taoistic ideals such as outwardly apparently inactive action prompted him to write songs such as ‘I’m Only Sleeping’ and ‘Rain’, both songs which could be taken by Horatio critics as embodying mere quietism and a smug sense of spiritual superiority, but for the fact that Lennon’s observation of our efforts and actions, usually all fuelled by the personal ego, are horribly accurate. We remember ‘I’m Only Sleeping’, with its declaration

*Ev’rybody seems to think I’m lazy,
I don’t mind, I think they’re crazy,
Running ev’rywhere at such a speed,
‘Til they find, there’s no need.*

Then there’s ‘Rain’, with its portrait of a humanity endlessly avoiding either the sun or the rain—at what point do they actually get around to *living*? As Lennon points out, in accordance with many a spiritual teacher, ‘They might as well be dead.’

So, ‘Strawberry Fields’ as a song has some elements of a message, but they are merely obscurely alluded to. The song swings from the childhood ideal of the repeated chorus, to the convolutions (again, deliberate, and preserved through the various versions of the song) of the verses, where Lennon seems to be struggling *in the present* with only the memories of childhood’s transcendent vision to help him—that vision alluded to in the insistence in ‘She Said She Said’ on *Revolver* that ‘When I was a boy/Ev’rything was right’. The first verse is:

*Living is easy with eyes closed,
Misunderstanding all you see.
It’s getting hard to be someone, but it all works out,
It doesn’t matter much to me.*

In ‘The Word’ Lennon admitted that he previously ‘misunderstood’, and the visionary and joyful moment encapsulated in that song overturns the past. Here there is a sense of regret, as it is admitted that living with the ‘shades of the prison house’ on, living blindly, makes life, in a way, easier. But Lennon’s eyes have been opened through LSD, spiritual/mystical experiences and perception of ‘The Void’, and instinctive knowledge that his life had become inauthentic. Actually, as someone for whom ‘psychedelic vision’ had always been a reality, his eyes had only ever been partially closed, he had only partially accepted the Horatio-mindset. This awakening isn’t an easy matter, however, and it’s interesting that this cornerstone statement of the psychedelic era has such a heavy, deep musical feel, reflecting its concern with material from psychological depths which have not yet been processed and integrated. It’s a far cry from the upbeat message of ‘The

Word' or 'All You Need Is Love'. While missing the lost innocence of youth, Lennon is also missing the easiness of living a spiritually blind life, pointing out that the loss of this illusion is a shock, and the path doesn't now appear easy. This is in absolute contrast to 'All You Need Is Love', which is a song delivered from a place of absolute knowing, from a place of visionary insight, which makes it possible for Lennon to declare categorically 'It's easy', and to alienate, almost to declare war on, the Horatio-mindset and the Protestant Work Ethic in doing so. As Socrates, the guru figure in Millman's *Way Of The Peaceful Warrior* points out:

Better never begin; once begun, better finish.

This passage quoted in *The Perennial Philosophy* points out *why* it is that spiritual awakening takes us away from an easy life:

While we go with the stream, we are unconscious of its rapid course, but when we begin to stem it ever so little, it makes itself felt.

Fenelon

Of course, *ultimately* the aspirant will find himself as one with a far greater 'stream' than one's cultural conditioning, the Protestant Work Ethic, the Horatio-mindset, etc., namely the way of the Tao, or 'the will of God' as Christian writers would put it.

As I have stated before, Lennon's childhood circumstances actually were such that he was always on a journey—there was never, really, any going back, despite the fact that he was acutely conscious of the pull of the past, and wrote about it in invocations/evocations such as this song and 'In My Life'. By the stage of 'Strawberry Fields' he had reached an impasse in his personal and private life, and the song is an attempt to write his way out of it. The tangled verses are, however, inconclusive, and we are left only with the chorus's statements hinting at the power of childhood vision to see through the illusion (which we have to take on trust) to offer any hope. This rings true psychologically: one cannot *think* oneself out of a tangle such as this, one has to surrender to a Higher Will, a Higher (or deeper) level of knowledge, such as that lodged within the subconscious, for example.

'It's getting hard to be someone...'—as we have seen, Lennon has realised that with all the success and accomplishment in the world one can still be a 'no-one', a 'Nowhere Man', which is not something that seems to occur to today's pitiful pop-stars, couched entirely in the mentality of absolute materialism. The fact that ultimately 'it all works out', might seem to posit a faith in a Higher Power, but the 'it doesn't matter much to me' seems more like despairing resignation.

In verse two we have the famed lines

*No-one, I think, is in my tree,
I mean it must be high or low.
That is, you can't, you know, tune in,
But it's alright,
That is I think it's not too bad.*

We have Lennon's own explanation in the 1980 *Playboy* interview of these lines:

Well, what I was trying to say in that line is 'Nobody seems to be as hip as me, therefore I must be crazy or a genius.' It's the same problem as I had when I was five.

We can take this as pretty much explaining everything, although Steve Turner in *A Hard Day's Write* points out the aptness of using the idea of climbing trees, obviously pertaining to idyllic childhood games, as well as introducing the idea of people being on different levels. Feeling isolated as he did was part of what propelled Lennon forwards on his spiritual journey—the isolation that comes when one is blessed/cursed with that artistic or, as he put it, 'psychedelic' vision⁸⁸. (Lennon was still singing directly about this isolation on the *Plastic Ono Band* album, with the song 'Isolation'.) Other people can't quite 'tune in', and this isolation leads directly to the formulation of the 'dream-girl' who is equal, someone who at last *is* in the same tree, so to speak. Perhaps this explains why, 'it's alright', or at least 'not too bad'—someday the ideal woman will come to share in his visions. Also climbing trees is a very real example of being in touch with Nature, and we will be hearing more from Lennon on the subject of Nature in a spiritual context later.

The convolutions of the third verse, I think, deliberately defy analysis: there is certainly enough disagreement on what the words actually are, let alone what they mean. I read it as:

*Always, no, sometimes, think it's me—
But you know I know when it's a dream.
I think I know, I mean, eh yes,
But it's all wrong.
That is I think I disagree.*

We are dealing with trying to sort out dreams from reality, and the form reflects the content: these words to me seem to be written to reflect the mind's stumbling over itself and tying itself up in knots. It's a good example of the mind attempting to express the inexpressible, and the poor job it makes of it. I have said before Lennon has an almost journalistic ability to report on himself and, his own thought processes is what we

⁸⁸ Around this time he is quoted as saying 'Psychedelic vision is reality to me and always was.'

have here caught in the camera, as it were. He is once again functioning as an artist from the level of the Witness Self. I'm sure, for example, that the 'But it's all wrong' is simply thrown in to balance the earlier verse's 'But it's alright', rather as he liked balancing 'It is not dying' with 'It is not living' in 'The Void'. It is pointless to ascribe meaning to something that is a deliberate evocation of the mind's ability to sometimes produce that which is meaningless. After all, 'Half of what I say is meaningless', Lennon later admits in 'Julia'.

It is hardly surprising that the music to accompany all this is so densely textured. What we have here is a split between the subconscious mind, with its inexplicable symbols, and the conscious mind, attempting to express that which it does not understand. In fact I would go further, and say that the amazing box of musical/technical tricks that constitutes 'Strawberry Fields Forever' is not a mere accompaniment to the song, but the aural equivalent of the lyric. The finished version is, as is now well known, actually a splicing together of two different recordings of the song. Lennon airily asked George Martin to stick the two together in some way must have been simply infuriating to someone of the Horatio-mindset, but Lennon just *knew* that 'it all works out', at least in this instance, in a way that is alien to the Horatio-mind. I find this an excellent example of how the two types of knowledge can co-exist: in fact, if they work together in this way, great things can be achieved. Martin would never have thought of putting the two together in that way as it would have seemed 'impossible'. Lennon's mindset, when he's functioning fully as an artist, really listening to the 'impulse voices from within', and not caring a damn whether others not in his tree can understand or not, grants him knowledge that such a thing *can* be done—but he needs Martin's technical accomplishments in order to actually realise his vision. The coming together of the two types of knowledge in this way in this song might explain its extraordinary spell. It might also point a way out of our dilemmas for all of us—Wilber's view is that the two types of knowledge, the interior/intuitive and the rational-scientific, need to be merged.

Lucy In The Sky With Diamonds

Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band is to many people the pinnacle of the Beatles' artistic achievement. However, not all of the parts that go to make this whole stand so well on their own, and only a handful of songs on the album are relevant to our study. Two of them, interestingly, are collaborative Lennon-McCartney creations. To take the relevant songs in listening order, first we will examine John's 'Lucy In The Sky With Diamonds'

In this song, Lennon finally gets down to describing a 'place' which exists only within his own mind. William Blake used words and also painted his visions, Lennon uses music and words. Words themselves, as Lennon with his pun-laden books *In His Own Write* and *A Spaniard In The Works* knew well, can take on a life of their own. 'Lucy', I feel, employs both words describing visions, and words which themselves mutate into visions. This reflected Lennon's love of the word-pictures painted by the Goons on the radio, and he pointed out as much to Spike Milligan, who sat in on some of the *Pepper* sessions.⁸⁹ The Goons' humour, multifaceted as it was, partly involved genuine surrealism, the placing of words in logically inappropriate contexts, and Milligan cites this example:

We used to talk about 'plasticine ties' in The Goon Show, and this crept up as 'plasticine porters with looking-glass ties'.

The other subconscious influence is Lewis Carroll, specifically the 'Wool And Water' chapter in *Through The Looking Glass*, as Lennon pointed out in the 1980 *Playboy* interview.

Meanwhile the starting point for the whole song was, indeed, a drawing made by Julian at school of his classmate Lucy⁹⁰. A child's vision, we have heard before, is unsullied by adult values and logic, so it was no problem for Julian to put his classmate 'in the sky, with diamonds.'⁹¹ It is highly appropriate for what is, even more than 'Strawberry Fields Forever' the great psychedelic song, to be inspired by a child's painting. 'Lucy' doesn't just use a symbol of childhood, like 'Fields'. It takes us into the world of a child's vision, shows us around, describes the landscape and inhabitants.

Lennon invites us this time not to go 'down' with him, but to share a visual experience:

Picture yourself in a boat on a river,

⁸⁹ As quoted in *A Hard Day's Write*.

⁹⁰ The actual picture can be seen reproduced in Steve Turner's *A Hard Day's Write*.

⁹¹ Hopefully this will finally put to rest the view that Lennon was deliberately promoting LSD by inserting this 'message' in the title. Anyway, this argument would mean that Lennon was actually promoting not LSD but LITSWD, a drug that has yet to be discovered or synthesised!

With tangerine trees and marmalade skies.

Notice here once again Lennon is in the present tense, and giving instructions/injunctions directly to the listener.

The transformation of earthly landscapes into more vividly coloured other-worldly ones is a common element in the eschatological writings of all cultures, from Moslem to Aztec to Christian. From artists such as Max Ernst, to magicians such as Aleister Crowley, from poets such as Dante and Coleridge (with special reference, of course, to ‘Kubla Khan’), to the St. John of the *Revelations*, apprehension by means of an opening of the gates of consciousness of another, more splendid, realm of reality appears actually to be an archetypal experience. ‘Lucy’ is one of its first concretisations in a popular song. As in most of these encounters, the enchanted, fabulous other realm/landscape/city is peopled, and in this case we note with interest that it is, of course, for Lennon a ‘girl’ who is the main figure in this landscape:

*Somebody calls you, you answer quite slowly,
A girl with kaleidoscope eyes.*

We are obviously, once again, dealing with the ‘dream-girl’ of Lennon’s previous musings, this time transformed into having, appropriately enough, ‘kaleidoscope eyes’. (The correct term for the kaleidoscopic light patterns experienced by the mind or brain—however activated—as ‘discovered’ by Heinrich Klüver in the 1920s, are ‘entoptic patterns’.)

Again, Lennon is specific about Lucy’s origins in the *Playboy* interview, saying that she is

..the image of the female who would one day come save me.

After another bit of observation of this new world’s

*Cellophane flowers of yellow and green
Towering over your head,*

the lady vanishes, at least for a while:

*Look for the girl with the sun in her eyes
And she’s gone.*

That she ‘has the sun in her eyes’ is significant—the sun is the source of all life on earth after all. This makes ‘Lucy’ not just a dream-girl, but a mythical, divine, life-giving figure, a creator goddess...hence

her unavailability, incorporeality. The chorus is an incantation of her name, exalting her, listing her attributes:

*Lucy in the sky with diamonds,
Lucy in the sky with diamonds,
Lucy in the sky with diamonds.*

She is, we note, not hanging around in a playground drinking free school milk, but is in ‘the sky’, the domain of divine beings, like the gods and goddesses of ancient Greece, the Valkyries of Norse mythology, the *dakinis*, or ‘Skywalkers’ of Buddhism. Compare what we know of ‘Lucy’ so far with these contemporary Tibetan prayers to the *bodhisattva* Tara, (otherwise revered in pre-communist China as Kwan-Yin):

*She with the intensely vivid light
Of the full sun and moon in both eyes.*⁹²

Then there is Arjuna’s description of Krishna in the *Bhagavad-Gita*:

*...the sun and the moon are among Your great unlimited eyes.*⁹³

If there were any more doubt about Lucy’s divine origins, what about these ‘diamonds’ in the sky? We could think of this as simply a poetic name for stars, as in the nursery rhyme ‘Twinkle Twinkle Little Star’. But Huxley in his essay ‘Why Are Precious Stones Precious?’ points out that jewels and gold are symbols in the material world for the ineffable radiance of mystical experience, and that our craving for and interest in them reflect a desire for, and are vestiges of a memory of, transcendental experience. Specifically, diamonds are unique among jewels for their qualities of enduringness and radiance, and are used symbolically in Buddhism. Here’s Sogyal Rinpoche from *The Tibetan Book Of Living And Dying* again, explaining the VAJRA GURU PADMA mantra:

Vajra is compared to the diamond, the strongest and most precious of stones. Just as a diamond can cut through anything but is itself completely indestructable, so the unchanging, non-dual wisdom of the buddhas can never be harmed or destroyed by ignorance, and can cut through all delusion and obscurations.

There are various Buddhist deities which are identified with the ‘vajra’ or diamond, including Vajradhara, the supreme essence of all Buddhas, and, ‘Vajra-Yogini’, ‘Diamond Skywalker’. To explain *dakinis*, they are

⁹² From the pamphlet *The Praise To The Twenty-One Taras*, UK Tibetan Women’s Association.

⁹³ *Bhagavad-Gita*, 11:19.

*..in some cases celestial female beings, and sometimes earthly women who possess supernatural wisdom and powers. They have initiated, taught, and assisted many great Indian and Tibetan yogis...*⁹⁴

Does this not sound more and more like Lennon's dream-girl, someone/thing who, finally, is also in his 'tree', possessed of superior wisdom, possessed, in fact, of 'genius'?

The Horatio-minded might find encounters with goddesses in a psychedelic experience a bit too much to take on board, but how about Jungian dream symbols? (They won't have much time for these either, but who cares?) 'Lucy' obviously corresponds also to the positive manifestation of the 'anima', the eternal female principle as manifested in the dreams of the male. Here is Marie-Louise von Franz on her role:

*...the anima takes on the role of the guide, or mediator, to the world within and to the Self. That is how she appears in...the initiations of shamans...this is the role of Beatrice in Dante's Paradiso.*⁹⁵

So, does 'Lucy' fit this role? I think she does. He'd been called by her in the first verse, and we notice how Lennon is led further into this inner/dream world by her in the second verse:

*Follow her down to a bridge by a fountain
Where rocking-horse people eat marshmallow pies,
Ev'ryone smiles as you drift past the flowers
That grow so incredibly high.*

Note here also how Lennon (and the listener as sharer of this vision) is still in his boat and going downstream, obviously following his own (and Leary's) earlier injunction in 'The Void' to

Turn off your [little] mind, relax and float downstream.

Lennon is surrendering to the current of this 'stream of consciousness', and in doing so obeying the wishes of his inner guiding anima/goddess. The surreal world he is now visiting seems benign enough, 'everyone smiles', but we wonder if the journey 'downstream' is about to end, as

*Newspaper taxis appear on the shore
Waiting to take you away.*

⁹⁴ Quoted in *Wisdom And Compassion: The Sacred Art Of Tibet*, Royal Academy Of Arts exhibition catalogue, 1992.

⁹⁵ From *Man And His Symbols*, C.G. Jung, M.L. von Franz, et. Al., 1964, Aldus Books.

The river is significant. As well as symbolising the ‘stream of consciousness’, in this case, rivers often feature in journeys to other worlds. The river Styx in Greek mythology is the example most common to the Western mind, dividing the living from the dead, across which the soul must be ferried by the boatman Charon. Bunyan in his *Pilgrim’s Progress* has a river which must be crossed if one is to reach the heavenly Jerusalem, although he’d no doubt be horrified to know that he shares this symbol with mere ‘heathens’! ⁹⁶In Egyptian mythology the ‘Happy Fields’ of the afterlife are fed by the ‘Celestial Nile’, while Stanislav and Christina Grof in *Beyond Death*⁹⁷ cite the example of the Aztec otherworld in which the dead float downstream in a swirling river. In Dante’s *Paradiso* to which we referred earlier, Beatrice appears to Dante on the other side of a celestial river, which he must then cross in order to join her and the Blessed Virgin Mary. (Dante and Virgil must also cross over the Styx itself in the *Inferno* section.) In Buddhism a Buddha or enlightened one is often called a *tathagatha*, a ‘thus gone’ one, gone, that is, to the other shore.

So a river can act as a conveyance into the next realm, but also can act as a barrier which must be overcome if transcendence is to be achieved. We assume that in this song it is doing both. Surrendering and flowing downstream takes Lennon (and us with him) further into this other-world, but eventually a ‘shore’ is reached, presumably on the other side, and conveyances are provided that will ‘take [him] away’. This does seem to happen, and Lennon gets aboard:

*Climb in the back with your head in the clouds
And you’re gone.*

The ‘you’re gone’ would seem to me to point to ego-death, and thus spiritual rebirth. It is with a sense of triumph, then, that the invocation of the chorus is repeated here.

We remember also that *Alice In Wonderland* is framed by its opening poem in which Carrol relates his Wonderland story to the children while rowing ‘in a boat on a river’, and the story proper starts with Alice sitting by a river bank. In ‘Lucy’ we are obviously dealing with an ‘Alice-In Wonderland’ type experience, and I think Carrol provides a subconscious background structure to the song. In other words Lucy, child-goddess/anima ideal-female, and Alice herself may be rolled into one in this song. Carrol’s idealisation of the real Alice Liddel is well known—‘Child of the pure unclouded brow/And dreaming eyes of wonder!’

⁹⁶ Bunyan’s description of the body being a kind of garment that is discarded as one fords this river dividing the living (and fallen) from the dead (and saved) could also have come word for word from the *Bhagavad-Gita*.

⁹⁷ Thames and Hudson

Why ‘newspaper taxis’? Well, why not?—it’s Lennon’s vision/artistic reverie we are sharing after all. It’s interesting, however, that recently some London black cabs have been converted into advertisements for a well-known newspaper by being covered with headlines and newsprint—newspaper taxis indeed! The power of the word...?

It must also be pointed out how this whole experience is couched in the present tense, not just the opening. Not ‘I saw this and I did that’, but ‘somebody calls you’, ‘ev’ryone smiles’, etc. We have already noted Lennon’s predilection for the immediate, the present tense in ‘In My Life’, ‘The Void’ and even when ostensibly dealing with childhood past in ‘Strawberry Fields Forever’. It adds to the power of each song and points to an intuitive grasp of the Perennial Philosophy’s stress on, as Ram Dass puts it, the ability to *Be Here Now*, as, in the ultimate sense, there *is* only an eternal Now containing past present and future.

Also again we have the device of Lennon talking to the listener directly, (‘Let me take you down’ he says in ‘Strawberry fields’, ‘Can you hear me?’ he asks in ‘Rain’), inviting him/her to ‘Picture yourself’ in this dreamworld/alternative reality. Thus, rather than a story which is narrated, which we enjoy while experiencing at one remove, this experience is *happening to us as we hear it*, and a phrase like ‘climb in the back’ becomes not a description of a past event, but an *order* given in the present. We are subtly being told to turn off our conscious chatter-filled minds, as in ‘The Void’. So although not a message song in the obvious sense of ‘The Word’, say, (‘Say the Word and you’ll be free’), Lennon is still handing out instructions and injunctions, and posing what would normally be a recalled experience couched in the past tense (‘I had a dream I was on a boat in a river. And I saw a girl with kaleidoscope eyes...’etc.) as a vivid actuality in the *Now*. Not just his artistic productions, but his artistic technique is very much in line with the Perennial Philosophy. It’s not just what he does, but *how* he does it. We might even say that his way of ‘doing’, in this sense, is equivalent to the ‘Perfect/enlightened effort’, which is the 6th of the eight-fold Buddhist noble paths, or the equivalent of ‘giving up fruitive activities’ in the *Bhagavad-Gita*, simply being in the Now in what one does. Lennon, or his muse, is teaching here, through art, by example.

Finally, in verse three, the scene switches, somewhat inexplicably, or, should we say, with the inexplicable logic of a dream:

*Picture yourself on a train in a station
With plasticine porters with looking-glass ties,
Suddenly someone is there at the turnstile,
The girl with kaleidoscope eyes...*

A similarly abrupt and unexplained transition from one scene to that of a railway station occurs in the 'Looking Glass Insects' chapter of *Through The Looking Glass*, not long after Alice has had an idea (rather than an experience) of 'enormous flowers'. This is obviously another example of Carroll providing a subconscious background structure to Lennon's visionary 'dream'⁹⁸. Anyway, it seems plain that the river has been crossed, and the unattainable ideal dream-girl, the anima/goddess is now actually 'there', with him, or at least is close, 'at the turnstile', perhaps about to board the train with him. So transcendence may have been reached, achieved, but it is left a little ambiguous. The chorus incantation is then repeated over and over, fading as it does so—a magical effect, which results in this dream world fading from our ears/eyes. As is the nature of visionary experience, the vision fades and one is back in the everyday world of consensus reality—but more of the nature of that consensus reality later, when we get to 'A Day In The Life'.

Lennon's encounter with 'Lucy' is a transcendental experience. Although it is not a Clear Light experience, it is a powerful encounter with a feminine principle, a divine being, who may well be leading Lennon towards that ultimate goal where 'you're gone'. For a master to dismiss such an experience would be too harsh, too blind. As Jung points out,

The Buddhist discards the world of unconscious fantasies as useless illusions.

Jung then goes on to add

*We can no longer afford to be so God-Almighty-like as to set ourselves up as judges of the merits or demerits of natural phenomena,*⁹⁹

especially when natural phenomena such as a dream can be investigated for our benefit. Buddhism itself tacitly agrees with this. The *Bardo Thodol* is mainly taken up with descriptions not of the Clear Light, the Void, the indescribable, but the various subsidiary 'Bardo' states, visions of wrathful deities, peaceful deities, knowledge-holding deities, etc. If all that was important was the Clear Light experience itself, we would have no Buddhist art or sculpture. As it is Buddhist art, like Hindu art, positively swarms with pictorial realisations of multiple deities, buddhas, aspects of the Buddha, dakinis, bodhisattvas, and so on, in what *The Psychedelic Experience* characterises as 'ever changing forms and manifestations'. These are to be meditated on

⁹⁸ One of the insects is a 'Rocking-horse-fly'. Lennon's song, of course, features 'rocking-horse people'.

⁹⁹ Jung, op.cit.

..calmly in the knowledge that all these visions and fantasies are emanations of your own consciousness,
and that consciousness is, we can now see through the Jungian concept of archetypes, actually part of a greater human consciousness which we collectively share. To touch deeper levels of the psyche does, indeed, liberate you from the isolated ego, and so the fact that Lennon obeys the call of an archetypal female here is not a failure or an indulgence, but a move onto the path of liberation.

Lama Anagarika Govinda, who has already pointed out for us the facts that the images/beings encountered when the doors of perception are opened will be subject to our own cultural/historical ‘filtering’, yet remain archetypal, describes *dakinis* thus in his *Foundations Of Tibetan Mysticism*¹⁰⁰

...they are not ‘beings’ existing outside of ourselves, but spiritual impulses and realisation of all those forces and conformations, which until then [i.e. until the moment of encountering them] were dormant and hidden in the darkness of the subconsciousness.

He also describes the highest of the *dakinis* as *Vajra-Yogini* (one might say ‘Diamond Female Spiritual Teacher’), thus:

...she who embodies the synthesis of all Buddha Wisdoms...in whom the meditative experience reaches its climax.

I would stick my neck out here and say that Lennon’s ‘Lucy’, divine dream-girl-goddess-anima-dakini, is, in fact, his own experience of this archetypal female, *Vajra-Yogini*.

The Lama also goes on to repudiate the view of certain masters that all but the Clear Light experience is to be dismissed as more illusion, because, at least in the Tibetan tantric tradition,

The manifold forms of divine figures, which we meet on this path,...like Dakinis, Viras and Herukas, are particularly important from the point of view of yoga, because they depict experiences of meditation, events on the path of realisation and deliverance.

Further light on this subject is provided by Bokar Rinpoche, in his book *Tara: The Feminine Divine*¹⁰¹

In truth, if we realise the true nature of our minds, the deities reveal themselves as being not different from our own minds...In effect, their nature is such that practicing with deities leads to the realisation of the

¹⁰⁰ Rider, 1960.

¹⁰¹ Clearpoint press, 1999.

ultimate deity, that is, the mode of being of the mind. In this sense, they constitute a means...From the point of view of the path leading to our awakening, these deities appear as external to our mind, as an expression of the buddhas to help us in our progress, because of our dualistic thinking.

To Jung it would come as no surprise that a child in nursery-school could have in his mind an unconscious archetype of a sky-goddess. We have already discussed how the child's vision is, in fact, clearer than that of the adult, who has to resort to mind-expanding chemicals or borderline-consciousness states or, best of all, meditation, in order for the 'shades of the prison house' to be lifted from his or her vision. In a way you might say 'Lucy In The Sky With Diamonds' is as much a song by Julian Lennon as by his father, and, as it deals with archetypes, the stuff of the collective unconscious, is actually a song from the public domain. And it seems inevitable that the classmate had to be called, 'Lucy', not Eleanor, or Michelle¹⁰². 'Lucy' derives from the Roman Lucius, a derivative itself of *lux*, 'light'. Only the most stubborn of Horatio-mindsetters, I think, could dismiss this as 'pure' coincidence. Meanwhile, as science has itself evolved, such concepts as 'pure' coincidence have had to be abandoned, otherwise we'd have to accept that life is a statistical impossibility, an even more extreme stance than the misapprehension of *Maya* to mean 'meaningless illusion'.

Musically, in the first part of the verse sections, 'Lucy' features an ostinato over a drone, revisiting previous musical territory explored in 'The Void', with the *tambura*, presumably played by George, providing an especially apt, shimmering, Indian drone texture, the aural equivalent of a repeated mantra: a unifying underlying constant, reflecting, of course, the underlying oneness of the cosmos. *All* Indian classical music uses a *tambura* drone: it was then of course quite an extraordinary thing to hear it under a Western rock song structure. Harmonic movement, and a change up a semitone from the key of A to the key of B-flat, comes in the second half of each verse, reflecting the listener's journey, and we move from a count of three to a count of four for the rising I-IV-V chord sequence behind the ecstatic incantation, firmly now in the key of G major, rather than the G minor one might expect (G minor being the relative minor of B-flat).

¹⁰² In *A Hard Day's Write* Steve Turner actually tracks this 'real' Lucy down, one Lucy O'Donnel.

Getting Better.

As ‘Lucy’ fades poignantly back into the realm of the subconscious from which she came, we are brought back sharply into the everyday by the chopping opening chords of ‘Getting Better’. As many commentators have pointed out, this is a piece of chirpy McCartney optimism, occasionally tinged with more sour Lennonisms—it is a collaborative song. According to Ian McDonald’s generally Horatio-mindset orientated study *Revolution In The Head*¹⁰³ the music is all McCartney, but he invited Lennon to help with the lyrics. The song is about an individual’s evolution, about coming of age and leaving immaturity and wrong thinking behind. It’s about individuation, that blossoming of the self that ultimately leads to the realisation of our highest potential.

It sounds much more like a Lennon than a McCartney song to me in the verses. Would, or even could, McCartney have written this?

*I used to get mad at my school,
The teachers who taught me weren’t cool,
You’re holding me down, turning me ‘round,
Filling me up with your rules.*

These are surely the words of Lennon, the teenage rebel. If they are the words of McCartney he’s probably using a *persona* of a once rebellious person, probably based on Lennon. Then the chorus chimes in

*I’ve got to admit it’s getting better.
A little better all the time,
I have to admit it’s getting better,
It’s getting better
Since you’ve been mine.*

The chorus is clearly McCartney in ‘slogan’ mode, the same sort of sloganeering evident in the chorus of ‘We Can Work It Out’. Progress is being made in this individual’s life, it seems due to the intervention of a new love in his life—‘since you’ve been mine’. This relationship is bringing about spiritual progress. Schooldays with all its problems which made the narrator ‘mad’, is left behind. The second verse puts this progress into context even more:

*Me used to be angry young man,
Me hiding me head in the sand,
You gave me the word, I finally heard,
I’m doing the best that I can.*

¹⁰³ Fourth Estate 1994.

Again, when was McCartney an ‘angry young man’? Never. But Lennon definitely was—in fact a new ‘angry’ phase was yet to come *after* such things were apparently left behind on *Pepper*. The lack of respect for grammar is another trademark of Lennon’s writing, as we’ve seen.

This reference to the ‘angry young man’ is interesting, as it infers that the whole idea of being an ‘angry young man’, a la Jimmy Porter in Osborne’s *Look Back In Anger*, as popularised in the fifties, is something that needs to be moved on from, in an immature attitude, is an aspect of, as Dr. Brunton terms it, ‘incomplete vision’. The ‘angry young man’ has plenty of ideas about what’s wrong in the world, but little constructive advice as to how to improve things, because his is basically still a selfish materialistic outlook, and the vital element of compassion is missing. The exciting-seeming youth culture of the fifties is here being transcended by its successors.

John’s earlier song ‘The Word’ is obviously being deliberately evoked here, (‘You gave me the word, I finally heard’) and we all know what that ‘word’ is, since 1965, don’t we? ‘Love’, although the word isn’t actually mentioned, is the answer. Again, this might turn the supposed girl/woman of this song into a Higher Being or God, and the ‘you’ could therefore be a capitalised, ‘higher’ ‘You’. Meanwhile, back comes the positivism of the chorus, given a little depth by the fact that the narrator is having to

..admit *it’s getting better*. [My emphases.]

This ‘admit’ gives what would otherwise seem a bland statement some bite, and the whole thing is undermined by Lennon’s answering line

It can’t get no worse.

Verse three is sheer confessional-mode Lennon:

*I used to be cruel to my woman, I beat her
And kept her apart from the things that she loved.
Man I was mean, but I’m changing my scene,
And I’m doing the best I can.*

An older, wiser Lennon was not going to pass over the mistakes and problems of his own past—he was always too honest for that.

*I am a violent man who has learned not to be violent and regrets his violence.*¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ Quoted in *A Hard Day’s Write*.

The past and all its wrongs cannot be disowned, but it can be transcended and redeemed, through love, by whatever vehicle love arrives. We saw Lennon's belief in this stated in 'In My Life', and it is being reiterated here.

Within You Without You.

In the post-touring, pre-*Pepper* sessions period in 1966, George took the opportunity to actually travel to India, leaving his identity as ‘George Harrison, Beatle’ behind. Here’s another interesting thing George had to say about his LSD experiences:

It must be like that for people who have attained a ‘cosmic consciousness’...the essence and cause of everything in the physical world is that pure intelligence that [sic] is manifested externally as all these different parts. It’s the ego identity that fools us into thinking ‘I am this body’. LSD gave me the experience of ‘I am not this body. I am pure energy soaring everywhere, that happens to be in a body for a temporary period of time.’¹⁰⁵

He had obviously had at least an inkling of a ‘Clear Light’ experience, a ‘direct experience’ of capital ‘M’ Mind, capital ‘L’ Love. While in India he then came across the works of Swami Vivekananda, and quotes this important passage in the *Anthology* volume:

..one of the books said... ‘If there’s a God you must see him and if there’s a soul you must perceive it—otherwise it’s better not to believe. It’s better to be an outspoken atheist than a hypocrite’...For me, going to India and reading somebody saying ‘No, you can’t believe anything until you have direct perception of it...made me think ‘Wow! Fantastic! At last I’ve found somebody who makes some sense.’

Harrison contrasts this with the bloodless attitude of the Christian church, completely emasculated, in effect, by the dominant Horatio-mindset:

The whole ‘Christian’ attitude—and I say ‘Christian’ in inverted commas, because there are a lot of people who represent themselves as Christians who aren’t...seemed to be telling you to believe what they’re telling you, and not to have the direct experience.

We remember Huxley’s formulation of the two sorts of religion, and Ken Wilber’s exoteric/esoteric split between religions, and we see that both Harrison and Lennon are completely turned off by anything other than the religion of ‘direct experience’—i.e. that which pertains to the Perennial Philosophy. Harrison’s remarks are actually far more a matter of ‘fighting talk’ than the remarks Lennon made in 1966 that sparked off the furore in America. So, for Harrison, for many of us, what’s missing in established religion is lack of direct mystical experience, which would account for the decline of the church’s

¹⁰⁵ Quoted in *The Beatles Anthology*.

influence, a decline it has set itself up for by making itself the only arbiter of knowledge or apprehension of the divine, and denying people their own experience of making the experiment of meditation themselves, as we have already stated.

Such moments of insight are definitely life changing for those who have them. Those who do not tend to sound bitter and left behind once someone they knew has ‘seen the light’, of whatever sort, and can no longer keep playing the same games—and/or keep subjecting their bodies to the same levels of abuse in the name of having ‘fun’. Here’s one Tony King, a friend of Harrison’s at the time, who was present when the germ of the idea that became ‘Within You Without You’ was planted:

When I first met George in 1963, he was Mr. Fun, Mr Stay Out All Night. Then all of a sudden he found LSD and Indian religion and he became very serious. Things went from rather jolly weekends where we’d have steak and kidney pie and sit around giggling to these rather serious weekends where everyone walked around blissed out and talked about the meaning of the universe.¹⁰⁶

This is an excellent example of the Horatio-mindset at work—people can’t possibly want to evolve, or grow, or move on, or find meaning in life, can they? Those whose ‘false sense of having already arrived ...prevents them from starting out on a journey of spiritual discovery’, (to use Grof’s phrase again), feel left behind. Who can they go down the pub with now? King continues, specifically about that evening:

We were all on about the wall of illusion and the love that flowed between us, but none of us knew what we were talking about.

King can’t afford, of course, to think that actually he might well have ‘known what [he] was on about’, perhaps for the first time in his life. Once back safely behind the ‘wall of illusion’ and in the Horatio-mindset parameters, possibilities such as the fact that one might, at heart, be wise *must* be quashed. Otherwise one would have to alter one’s whole outlook—as Harrison obviously did. It’s really quite something for a young man in his twenties, a pop-star and a musician, to be making statements of this sort:

Be healthy, don’t eat meat, stay away from those nightclubs, and meditate.¹⁰⁷

What chiefly characterises the Horatio-mindset is its cowardice and its laziness. It doesn’t want to change, it doesn’t want to grow—and it

¹⁰⁶ Quoted in *A Hard Day’s Write*.

¹⁰⁷ From an interview with Miles reprinted in *Mojo* magazine, issue 24, November 1995.

doesn't want anybody else to do so, because that would make it insecure. Harrison captured this mindset perfectly in the 1973 song 'The Light That Has Lighted The World', on *Living In The Material World*, pointing out that such people are

So hateful of anyone that is happy or free

and how they

...just won't accept change.

Change is threatening, and the more change is touted, the more deeply the Horatio-mindsetters will dig in. We remember, once again, Huxley and Wilber's formulations—mystical experience and meditation result in change to the individual to whom they occur. Dylan encapsulates this mind set brilliantly also in 'It's Alright Ma, I'm Only Bleeding' on *Bringing It All Back Home*, pointing out that people of this sort 'Speak jealously of them that are free', and that such an individual

*Cares not to come up any higher
But rather get you down in the hole
That he's in.*

On to the song specifically then. That evening of talking of love between people, between all people, something you either have experienced and thus believe in, have experienced briefly but then shut yourself off from to avoid its implications (as King obviously did), or have never experienced at all and thus do not believe in, is very much the starting point of the lyric:

*We were talking about the space between us all,
And the people who hide themselves behind a wall
Of illusion, never glimpse the truth,
Then it's far too late, when they pass away.*

To those who have never had the sort of 'direct experience' Harrison refers to, this first verse, indeed the whole song, will simply sound, at best, nonsensical, at worst, holier-than-thou. Harrison is aware that there is a dividing line, an us-and-them, opening up between those on either side of the wall of illusion. We remember how Christ himself said

*I come not to send peace, but a sword.*¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ Matthew, 10:14

This is not an image of warmongering, but of separating the illusory from the real. As Robert Bly points out in his book *Iron John*¹⁰⁹, swords are for cutting, bisecting, rendering in two. In Buddhism the sword of such discrimination is often pictured as a *vajrasword*, a diamond-sword. In similar ‘fighting talk’ terms, Krishna, in the *Bhagavad-Gita* also has this to say to Arjuna:

*...the doubts which have arisen in your heart out of ignorance should be slashed by the weapon of knowledge.*¹¹⁰

Some things can’t be put pleasantly or inoffensively. It must be said, however, that Harrison’s assertion that it’s ‘too late’ for these people when they die counters any idea of reincarnation.

So, there is ‘space between us all’, presumably a bad thing if walls of illusion, or as the *Bhagavad-Gita* has it a ‘network of illusions’¹¹¹, can build up between us. However, it’s not all bad news in the second verse:

*We were talking about the love we all could share,
When we find it to try our best to hold it there.
With our love we could save the world,
If they only knew.*

So, the word of ‘The Word’, Love (the capitalised version), the underlying principle, unites us all...or it could if, once this has been realised through whatever means, we make the effort to ‘hold it there’. So many ‘hippy’ songs, so much of ‘hippy’ culture, attracts criticism from the Horatio-mindset for its so-called laziness. Here, though, Harrison is acknowledging that moments of insight are not enough, and effort and commitment are required for anything worthwhile to be sustained, we must ‘try our best to hold’ the love in place. If this were to happen, nothing less than the saving of the world would occur, but it is ‘they’, those in the illusion, that sabotage the idea. ‘If they only knew’, Harrison opines, they too would put their shoulders to the wheel ‘in the name of Love’, as U2 were later to put it. However, it’s not that simple, as King’s comments reveal. Some can even have moments of insight which allow them to perceive love flowing between us, but then revert back to their Horatio-mindset dominated way of looking at things, and where there was communion, suddenly see us all as isolated with ‘space’ around us again. Cynicism is the cornerstone of Horatio-ism.

The refrain has:

Try to realise it’s all within yourself,

¹⁰⁹ Addison-Wesley, 1990.

¹¹⁰ *Bhagavad-Gita*, 4:42.

¹¹¹ Op.cit, 16:16.

*No-one else can make you change,
And to see you're really only very small
And life flows on within you and without you.*

We remember again Christ's words from St. Luke:

*The kingdom of God is within you.*¹¹²

And here's how Wilber phrases it in *Grace And Grit*, expanding on the second of the seven points:

Spirit within, there is a universe within. The stunning message of the mystics is that in the very core of your being, you are God. Strictly speaking, God is neither within nor without—Spirit transcends all duality. But one discovers this by consistently looking within, until 'within' becomes 'beyond'.

Transcending duality, spirit is both, as George memorably puts it here, 'within you and without you', or as the *Bhagavad-Gita* puts it:

*The Supreme truth exists both internally and externally*¹¹³.

So, we have The Ultimate within us. Why the line then 'And to see you're really only very small'? Obviously this is referring to the little-'i' of the ego-bound self. Wilber again explains:

...the you that is God is not your individual and isolated self or ego, this or that self, Mr. or Ms. So-and-so. In fact, the individual self or ego is precisely what blocks the realisation of the Supreme identity in the first place.

However, as we've noted, not all those who have 'the direct experience' have the strength to make any change—bound as they are to this limited isolated ego as soon as the experience passes. Still, we all evolve at our own pace, in our own time, again something that only fits comfortably if we can say, like Harrison in 'I Want To Tell You' (a song on *Revolver*)

*I could wait forever,
I've got time.*

In other words, this is only an OK concept if we believe in reincarnation, which isn't really touched upon in this song, but is directly evoked in 'It's All Too Much' as we shall see. It's a bit of a task, trying to fit concepts

¹¹² Luke, 17:21

¹¹³ *Bhagavad-Gita*, 19:16.

which take up innumerable chapters of a large work like the *Bhagavad-Gita* into a popular song! George, rightly, abandons pop-song models and bases ‘Within You Without You’ on Indian structures—the resulting song being quite long.

That ‘life flows on within you and without you’ is clear only to those who’ve had the ‘direct experience’. We remember George’s earlier quoted reflection on how his experience enabled him to see that

‘I am not this body. I am pure energy soaring about everywhere that happens to be in this body for a temporary period of time.’

If ‘they’, the unenlightened, seemed to be getting a fair bit of stick in the earlier verses, verse three is even more pointed:

*We were talking about the love that’s gone so cold
And the people who gain the world and lose their soul,
They don’t know, they can’t see,
Are you one of them?*

We seem to be dealing with another category of ‘they’ here, the ones who are so embedded in and embittered by the illusion that their love becomes ‘cold’, and thus lose their souls. These are the ones who may ‘gain the world’ in terms of power and wealth, but who actually do harm through their loss of soul, who harm others, who harm the environment. Harrison is rephrasing Christ’s words here from the St. Mark Gospel, 8:36:

What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his soul?

The importance of these words is perhaps underlined by the fact that they are repeated in the Matthew Gospel, 16:26.

It is obviously politicians and their ilk that Harrison had in mind in his song ‘Think For Yourself’, on *Rubber Soul*, when he sings

*You’re telling all those lies
About the good things we can have if we close our eyes.*

and it is this strata of humanity that he is singling out. He even puts the listener on his/her guard with ‘Are you one of them?’, rather like a hellfire-and-brimstone preacher pointing to the congregation. (He’s obviously cottoned on to the power of Lennon’s oft-used technique of speaking to the listener directly in the lyrics.) Harsh, and themselves unloving words, perhaps, but the matter of moral and spiritual culpability is even more relevant now than it was fifty years ago. How much closer to either global ecological collapse and/or cultural and economic uniformity

have the Horatios got us? Lama Govinda's introduction to the *Bardo Thodol* points out that humanity has come to a crunch where it must decide on either embracing spiritual values, or continuing its mere 'subjugation of the material world', so much so that it's worth risking 'breaking the seals of silence' about sacred ancient texts (i.e. the *Bardo Thodol*) in the hope that more people will accomplish spiritual rebirth. We also remember Dr. Brunton's warning that those in the grip of only the limited ego have *failed* in life, however much outwardly and in worldly terms they are a success.¹¹⁴ 'You'll get yours yet,' Lennon was to say, thinking of this type specifically, (and the 'fallen idol' of the Maharishi in particular) in 'Sexy Sadie'.

Despite it being the album of the 'Summer Of Love', Harrison was aware that all the dressing up and mucking about *had* to have a higher spiritual and moral purpose, due to the fact that humanity, and therefore the planet, had reached a stage of crisis—a stage it is still in. Thus, I think, he is justified in his high-sounding sermonising. As Sogyal Rinpoche points out, again from *The Tibetan Book Of Living And Dying*,

In this time of violence and disintegration, spiritual vision is not an elitist luxury but vital to our survival.

You either agree with Rinpoche's words, or you don't—but even the Horatio-minded know they'd be lying to themselves if they were to say that there was no crisis: manifestly, there is.

Meanwhile, what, exactly, to do about 'they', especially the more destructive and dangerous 'they' of this third verse?¹¹⁵ The answer is pointed to in the culminating refrain's assertion that 'we're all one':

*When you've seen beyond yourself
Then you may find peace of mind is waiting there,
And the time will come when you'll see we're all one,
And life flows on within you and without you.*

If the fact that 'we're all one' could be apprehended by 'they', if 'they' were to realise that to hurt another is to hurt themselves, then 'they' will change, will become 'us' again. The Perennial Philosophy is very much concerned with an individual's apprehension of the underlying oneness of all things, after which that sense of isolation, from which springs fear, and thus all wrong-doing, is done away with:

One in all,

¹¹⁴ Perhaps this is what Dylan had in mind with the cryptic lines from 'Love Minus Zero/No Limit' (also on *Bringing It All Back Home*) 'She's knows there's no success like failure/And failure's no success at all.'

¹¹⁵ 'They', the ones in power, are referred to specifically, and grammatically incorrectly, as 'They' in the Rolling Stones' 'We Love You'. 'They' at the time were on the verge of giving the Stones lengthy prison sentences. It's hard to believe, now, that the Stones were once rebels.

*All in One—
If only this is realised,
No more worry about not being perfect.*¹¹⁶

*Behold but one in all things; it is the second that leads you astray.*¹¹⁷

No wonder Harrison says ‘If they only knew’! He has, through his own ‘direct experience’ of loss of ego, seen beyond himself, and the way that the last refrain is phrased makes it sound inevitable that this will happen for the listener, as for everyone. Enlightenment is a matter not of ‘if’, but of ‘when’. The Perennial Philosophy is firm in maintaining that all evil is in fact born of ignorance, due to us forgetting our inner divinity.

Peter Russel, in his book *The Global Brain Awakes*¹¹⁸, looks at the two sides of the idea of a crisis in the following way:

The idea that crises have both positive and negative aspects is captured in a word the Chinese have found for crises, wei-chi. The first part of the word means ‘beware, danger’. The second part, however, has a very different application; it means ‘opportunity for change’.

Capra, in his, *The Turning Point*, makes much the same contention—indeed this danger/opportunity pairing has become something of a truism among those interested in the emerging world-paradigm. The new ‘systems-theory’ view of reality states that

*The stability of living systems is never absolute. It will persist as long as the fluctuations [within the system] remain below a critical size, but any system is always ready to transform itself, always ready to evolve.*¹¹⁹

So this explains why ‘crises’ mean both ‘danger’ and ‘opportunity’. It seems to me obvious that the level of fluctuations within the living system we inhabit has been at a critical level ever since the dawn of the nuclear age, perhaps even since the rise of the industrial revolution in the West, and that our current ongoing period of crisis can be therefore seen as a period that will, ultimately, lead to our, and the planet’s, evolution, *if* we can come up with this ‘new structure’ that is needed. If we stick to the Horatio-mindset view of reality, these critical fluctuations will turn super-critical, and this living system will be a living system no more.

Musically Harrison was sticking his neck out as much as he was lyrically by writing a seriously intentioned ‘sermon’. This fully Indian piece, all on a drone, and yet musically fascinating, was too much for many Western ears at the time. Even George Martin only came to see

¹¹⁶ From ‘The Third Patriarch Of Zen’, quoted in *The Perennial Philosophy*.

¹¹⁷ Kabir, op. cit..

¹¹⁸ Global Brain Inc. 1995.

¹¹⁹ Capra, op. cit.

how beautiful a piece it was years later. Harrison knew he was writing something ahead of its time—indeed outside of time. Appropriate that a track about transcendence actually *is* transcendent. The long development of the melody in the middle section is probably the most accomplished piece of sustained instrumental writing in the whole of the Beatles' output. To dispel the serious mood of the song, a bit of taped laughter is tacked on to the end of 'Within You Without You', a similar bathetic ending to that of 'The Void'.

A Day In The Life.

Psychedelic vision is reality to me and always was.

There are two sides to this assertion of John's, mentioned in a previous chapter: 'psychedelic' or artistic vision is a two edged sword. The ability to cut through the illusion of everyday reality with the 'diamond sword' of Buddha-consciousness, and get to the shining Void, experience the Ultimate Reality, produces a state of transcendent awareness that 'Love is all'. However, the other side of vision is to be able to see the 'show', the 'game' for what it is, nothing but that, a pathetic sham. If the underlying 'love' cannot be perceived, rather than unitive 'heaven', all one is left with is this husk of meaning, dissociative 'hell'. As Dr. Brunton points out (again in *The Wisdom Of The Overself*)

It is as incomplete a vision to see the world as transitory alone without its underlying unity as it is to see the reality alone without its manifestation as the world.

No wonder, then, Lennon is left with the problem 'Am I a genius or am I mad?', as we saw earlier in the context of the lines from 'Strawberry Fields Forever': 'No-one I think is in my tree'.

Lyrically, 'A Day In The Life' is a song about the meaningless flood of disparate bits of information that is all we are left with if no underlying rhyme or reason can be discerned—in other words it is a song from the viewpoint of an 'incomplete vision'. It is the pop culture's equivalent of T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*. The clues to a possible resolution of this situation are in the wordless, purely instrumental passages, which is perhaps fitting because, essentially, the ineffable, the ultimate, cannot anyway be encapsulated in words.¹²⁰

Lennon is in observational mode again, once more

Keeping an eye on the world going by [his] window,

but this time the 'window' is, specifically, the media. He is either reading a newspaper report of events, or watching a film. In neither case is he having a 'direct experience', even of consensus reality. This might make the song into an indictment of experiencing reality at one remove, of living vicariously, which has, of course, become very much part of the 'nightmare of modernity'. However, the glimpse we are given of experiencing life in the flesh in McCartney's middle section to the song doesn't hold out much hope either, as it involves the mindless busyness

¹²⁰ Some of *The Waste Land*'s fragments do themselves point to resolution, just as Lennon's other cut-up triumph, 'I Am The Walrus' bears one message of hope afloat in its sea of dissociative imagery, namely its opening line.

of workday routine. This endless distraction is the only thing, in the context of the song, that keeps us from facing the nightmare of meaninglessness that is an unenlightened or unredeemed perception of life. Cue the advertising industry and the media. But of course, not facing the meaninglessness *is in itself an aspect of the meaninglessness*.

We have as a starting point Lennon reading about the death of Tara Browne, in a newspaper, itself a dry, cold, dislocated way to learn of the death of a friend. His 'psychedelic vision' further twists and distorts an event which is already robbed of meaning by being 'at one remove':

*I read the news today, oh boy,
About a lucky man who made the grade,
And though the news was rather sad,
Well, I just had to laugh.
I saw the photograph.*

Browne was a millionaire, but we know Lennon knows that one can be 'a lucky man who made the grade', and yet still be, somehow, a 'Nowhere Man', or a 'loser'. The fact that however rich or famous or admired you are, you can't escape death, must also have come home to Lennon. No-one is spared, and this puts a life lived inauthentically in its proper perspective. However, we note his detached reaction is to laugh. We remember his early inability to properly express grief at the funeral of his Uncle, and how it broke out instead into hysterics. Later on, through Primal Scream Therapy, Lennon managed to get in touch with his emotions, but here he is still in the grip of his 'macho' upbringing, the inauthenticity of which obviously contributes to this distancing, demeaning effect. Lennon was to hit out at this sort of mentality in *Lennon Remembers*:

Why shouldn't we cry? They tell us to stop crying about twelve: 'Be a man'. What the hell's that? Men hurt.

So, it isn't only the lens of the media that distorts our perceptions, but the false values of the society we live in. We remember the chorus of clowns with their societally-enforced masks on urging Lennon to hide his emotions in 'You've Got To Hide Your Love Away'.

The second verse continues on the same story:

*He blew his mind out in a car,
He didn't notice that the lights had changed.
A crowd of people stood and stared.
They'd seen his face before,
Nobody was really sure if he was from the House of Lords.*

Browne, in fact, died in a car accident, having driven through some red lights. Knowing that he was also an LSD user, it must have been foremost in Lennon's mind that this could be a death while under the influence of irresponsibly taken psychedelics.

If the story weren't bad enough, Lennon's own 'psychedelic vision', which includes a penchant for words, of course, makes things even weirder. He conflates the idea of 'blowing' one's mind, a catchphrase of the time associated with the use of hallucinogenics, with the idea of suicide by 'blowing your brains out'. Thus Lennon is himself fictionalising the event. Meantime the fact that a crowd of people gather at the accident, as people do, gives us an image of a humanity interested only in sensation and celebrity. Trivialised thus, a tragedy simply becomes a media event, and rather than hearing about a friend's death from a personal acquaintance, Lennon himself is colluding in this whole depersonalising, distancing process by reading about it in the newspaper, and further colluding by then using it as song-fodder. Literally this is: as an experiment in working in 'aleatory' mode apparently Lennon truly did sit with that day's edition of the newspaper in front of him in the studio to provide lyrical stimulus to the song, and must have been more than a little astonished to find it chronicled the death of an actual friend.

Scene shift to another media event, a film. Try explaining the difference between a work of fiction-for-entertainment like a film, and 'real' life-as-entertainment, what we call 'news', to an alien. Especially if the film is about a historical (i.e. violent) event:

*I saw a film today, oh boy,
The English army had just won the war.
A crowd of people turned away,
But I just had to look, having read the book.*

If life weren't alienating enough, we turn real-life events into fictions for our entertainment (the 'oh boy' makes the link obvious). This time the 'crowd of people' turn away—presumably an image of fickleness, (how quickly, after all, does yesterday's news become no longer headline worthy). Lennon, however, has to look, having already previously processed this information in another form, as a book. Film, book, newspapers, T.V. commercials (as in 'Good Morning Good Morning' another song on *Pepper*), all these media are firing their dissociative, fragmented streams of information at us all the time—at least if we let them.

Now comes the important line

I'd love to turn you on...

This seems to suggest that there might be something beyond this ‘tale told by an idiot’ (to use Macbeth’s memorable phrase). To be ‘turned on’ means to have opened the ‘doors of perception’, (initially from Leary’s famous formula ‘Tune in, turn on, and drop out’), and it is the listener that is being addressed here again. No verbal antidote to the dissociative nightmare of the verse is invoked as such, but if we’ve been listening closely we should know by now what Lennon means: surrender to ‘the Word, Love’, ‘Turn off your mind relax and float downstream’, ‘It’s just a state of mind’ etc. The banality and dissociated surrealism of the everyday can only be redeemed by ‘turning on’, by taking visionary action, as it were.

Now comes the astounding orchestral ‘rush’. Lennon requested from Martin ‘a sound like the end of the world’, but it was *McCartney’s* idea to have an orchestral glissando here. The effect might be meant to represent the reported reliving of one’s entire life in just a few seconds of ‘real’ time just before death or an accident, or moving up a tunnel towards the light reported in many Near-Death-Experiences. It certainly must represent a switch from one mode of consciousness to another, being ‘turned on’, in other words. As Stanislav Grof points out in *Beyond Death*

Most individuals are taken to the underworld without their choice or even against their will.

Violent death, such as a car accident, or deaths in a war, whichever army ‘won’, would fit that bill perfectly. Death *is* the end of the world for the individual ego personality involved. The journey to another realm is usually pictured in afterlife traditions around the world as violent and cataclysmic, being swallowed or engulfed, for example, in the Mayan tradition, (corresponding to the cataclysmic nature of the termination of a physical life), and this famed 24-bar build-up seems to me to be the epitome of cataclysmic sound. The music of Giorgi Ligeti is used in the film *2001: A Space Odyssey* to similar effect, especially in the ‘stargate’ sequence, in which the astronaut is rocketed through other dimensions. Somehow, then, the idea of being ‘turned on’, of achieving some sort of transcendence, is once again equated with death. Despite the assurances of *The Psychedelic Experience* that it is ‘only’ a matter of ego-death, despite the repeated ‘It is not dying’ of ‘The Void’, here it seems to be made plain that it *is* dying, and that the matter of whether it’s ego-death or ‘real’ death is just the conscious mind’s nit-picking. Castenada’s Don Juan would certainly not make such a distinction, and we remember Lama Govinda’s assurance that we are ceaselessly dying and being reborn, even in this life.

The joke is that the ‘otherworld’ we get to, at least in this first instance, is actually the time-bound world of consensus reality. We hear

an alarm going off, as if we've just woken from a dream, and then we're into Paul's frantic, mundane activity section (a form of hell?):

*Woke up, fell out of bed,
Dragged a comb across my head.
Made my way downstairs and drank a cup,
And looking up, I noticed I was late.
Found my coat and grabbed my hat,
Made the bus in seconds flat,
Found my way upstairs and had a smoke,
And somebody spoke and I went into a dream.*

This absolutely non-surreal banality works perfectly as a contrast to the flow of dissociative images of the verses, but, as already stated, it shows how vacuous most of our activities, our engagement with life, rather than detached observations of life, are. No redemption there then.

By now the listener has already passed from one aural reality, which has turned out to be a dream, into another, the 'dream' of everyday life. Now we are projected into yet another 'dream' section, vocalised wordlessly by John, whose voice pans from side to side, journeying again into other realms, slowly being engulfed by huge orchestral chords, until we find ourselves once again in the verse structure:

*I read the news today, oh boy,
Four thousand holes in Blackburn, Lancashire.
And though the holes were rather small
They had to count them all,
Now they know how many holes it takes to fill the Albert Hall.*

In the same newspaper which featured a story on the death of his friend, Lennon only had to turn a few pages to find a genuine article about the discovery of these four thousand holes, and a bureaucratic attempt to turn them into statistics. Who needs any level of psychedelic (dissociative) vision when so-called 'reality' itself is so strange? 'Truth is stranger than fiction', as the old adage says it. Spike Milligan, when asked to comment on the 'craziness' of his Goon Show scripts, pointed out that what passes for everyday living is what is actually crazy.¹²¹ Life is pretty much unknowable, makes no sense, is a series of random scraps, Macbeth's

*..tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.*

¹²¹ Source unknown.

This ‘four thousand holes’ is an image of the emptiness at the heart of an insane society. Only the mad would attempt to quantify that which has no quantity, would attempt to stack up holes and fill the Albert Hall with them. And only an idiot would bother to tell the tale in a newspaper story.

‘A Day In The Life’ points out that life is madness, that ‘reality’ is a dream, more surreal, once the blinkers that allow us to function in this realm are removed, than any sleeping dream or fantasy or illusion, and that our everyday busy frame of mind only serves to distract us from this fact. The one hope the song offers is in being ‘turned on’, and the line is repeated once more, before another, even more frightening, chaotic orchestral ‘rush’. The rush this time breaks off, briefly, into silence: then comes the song’s explosive final chord, which reverberates for as long as the recording techniques of the day would allow. The chord obviously offers a sense of resolution, of arrival, perhaps of overview of this whole crazy bundle of realities within other realities. As it fades out, one feels that one is looking back down on earth, slowly leaving it behind. Another passage from the *Anthology* interviews with George Harrison on the subject of his LSD experiences sums this up perfectly:

...my brain and my consciousness and my awareness were pushed so far out that the only way I could begin to describe it is like an astronaut on the moon, or in his spaceship, looking back at earth.

This all-encompassing view, looking down on earth and all that passes on it, including activities in other, non-physical realms, such as the Bardo states, or realms purely within the mind—*this is the state of ‘pure awareness’, of ‘cosmic consciousness’*. This is the Clear Light experience, the Void experience. This superb Lennon-McCartney collaboration, thought by many to be their greatest achievement, seems to me to be their attempt to aurally encapsulate that experience, and it is appropriate that the lyrics only *pertain* to the unrealities that exist, bubble like, within this Greater Reality. The Greater Reality, finally reached through the free-form orchestral passages up which the listener travels in a manner that parallels the soul’s journey into other realms, is symbolised by the album’s final chord. The ineffable cannot, finally, be described or labelled by words. Lennon and McCartney wisely here avoid any such attempt, and let music, in the form of one final great resounding ‘Om’, do the job instead.

While lyrically mostly dealing with the very opposite of the unitive vision of the Ultimate Reality, ‘A Day In The Life’ musically *is* a statement of that Higher Reality. Its form contains its content just as the perfection of unrealised potential enfolds the manifested universe. It is a reflection of All That Is. The almost universal admiration this piece of music attracts seems to me to betray an unconscious grasp of this.

The fact that the song was also banned by so many radio stations, including the BBC, supposedly for its ‘drug references’, highlights its importance also. A song which shows that modern life is an empty jumble of meaningless ‘events’, and that we distract ourselves from this fact by meaningless activity, is hardly the sort of thing those in power want going out over the airwaves—especially when the listener is then invited to ‘turn on’, to break through the ‘wall of illusion’, as defined in ‘Within You Without You’. As McCartney later said of the song,

*..what we want to do is turn you on to the truth*¹²²

and the truth is that most of what passes for living in the modern world is a spiritually arid illusion, riddled with death. Death is the big taboo of the Horatio-mindset, as it represents a defeat for the scientist and the physician, it undermines all our wonderful technological advances. It is the inevitable event for which modern man is left totally unprepared. On the deathbed, the average Westerner with no specific beliefs and a lifetime of being directed to material goals and surface-only realities finds he or she is suddenly abandoned by everything which the Horatio-mindset has to offer and left in a state of total terror. The song’s orchestral ‘rush’ and final chord *is* symbolic of actual death as well as ego-death, but we might surmise that those who have been ‘turned on’ to the truth, who have, in this life, experienced ego-death and a taste of the oneness, the Clear Light, The Void, All That Is, will at least be less terrified by the prospect of achieving this unitive state through dying.

For people to ‘turn on’ to a higher state is exactly what those in power do not want people to achieve. They might then leave their production lines and offices and stop making money for ‘they’, the people at the top of the pyramid, and search for real meaning and value in their lives, and in doing so transform the planet—

With our love we could save the world.

¹²² Quoted in *A Hard Day’s Write*.

It's All Too Much.

A psychedelic hymn to love, and an aural evocation, like 'The Void', of the psychedelic experience, 'It's All Too Much' is Harrison's next major statement after 'Within You Without You'. It arrived a little too late for Pepper, but made a suitably uplifting final altar-piece for the *Yellow Submarine* movie. Its mixture of the profound and the playful makes it both a perfect evocation of the psychedelic experience, and, therefore by definition, an obvious target for 'straight' criticism. However, its playfully cosmic assertions are now the stuff of physics itself, so it's the 'straights' who have missed the boat.

The person being addressed throughout, the 'you' of the song, is obviously a lover, and very probably Pattie Harrison—signalled by the borrowing of the line 'With your long blonde hair and your eyes of blue,' from the Merseys' song 'Sorrow':

*When I look into your eyes your love is there for me,
And the more I go inside, the more there is to see.*

We have the beautiful image of two lovers gazing in each other's eyes here, and discovering something unlimited, infinite. This is the first Beatles song which successfully unites sexual man/woman love, with the higher sense of capital-L Love, that which is potentially 'between us all' in 'Within You Without You', the underlying universal force or principle of 'The Word' and 'The Void'. The higher nature of this love, embodied in a perfectly valid form as a one-to-one romantic relationship, is made more evident in the first chorus:

*It's all too much for me to take,
The love that's shining all around you,
Ev'rywhere it's what you make,
For us to take it's all too much.*

This gives us an image of Harrison's lover effectively haloed by a Love that is visible, that is 'shining'. (We remember, of course, that in 'The Void', the Void itself is 'shining'.)

The third line of the chorus may have two meanings, 1) reality is what we make of it, or 2) that we actually make, or construct, reality itself with our thoughts, a concept that is now almost a commonplace in so-called 'New Age' circles. Here is Emmanuel again on the subject:

*You are the creator
Of your planet*

*As well as your life.*¹²³

Although perhaps to be more precise the formulation should be, as Paul Brunton would say, that we are co-creators of reality, as all our minds partake of the creative grandeur of the World-Mind, but on a smaller scale:

*We are not only the self-absorbed witnesses of our own impressions but also the co-sharers of a common experience...The fact that similar perceptions of the external world exist for others as for ourselves shows that we are all bedded in one and the same constantly perceiving permanent Super-Mind.*¹²⁴

The declaration that everything is ‘too much’ was a similar coinage to ‘fab’ or ‘groovy’, i.e. something is wonderful, good, excellent. However, the very choice of the words ‘too much’ is interesting, as if the experience is overwhelming—and we have come across plenty of evidence in this study of the Western mind finding the opening of the doors of perception a revelation but also a shock, ‘too much’ to cope with. George himself found it to be so in his first calculated LSD episode as we learned, and the exchanges around this between the John, George, and Peter Fonda became the lyrics to ‘She Said She said’.

In the second verse, the possibility of reincarnation, of karmic bonds between souls stretching back from past lives into the present, and on into the future, is posited clearly for the first time in a Beatles song:

*Floating down the stream of time
From life to life with me.*

Very little needs to be added to this, other than that it’s interesting to note how far the Beatles had come from the recordings of a few years previously. The idea of reincarnation is presented here almost in passing, as something self-evident and no big deal!

We note again the use of the image of floating downstream, again from ‘The Void’ and *The Psychedelic Experience*, a matter of surrendering the will to vaster natural forces. This is followed by

*Makes no diff’rence where you are
Or where you’d like to be.*

To the expanded mind in a state of cosmic consciousness, if ‘pure energy soaring everywhere’ is what ultimately one is, then one can be ‘everywhere’ at once. This idea of what one might call multi-location, or

¹²³ From *Emmanuel’s Book*.

¹²⁴ Brunton, op. cit.

omni-location, is also taken up in his song ‘The Inner Light’, where Harrison found centuries-old validation for it in the *Tao Teh Ching*. The Moody Blues refer to the same phenomenon in their ‘Thinking Is The Best Way To Travel’, on *In Search Of The Lost Chord*. Of course, to a Horatio, such an idea is arrant nonsense, but as Horatios don’t have the courage or faith to make journeys of this sort through the doors of consciousness, as their view is cyclopic, consisting only of the ‘monological gaze’, we need take them no more seriously than they take us, even if their methodologies are enshrined in universities and backed by the power of the military-industrial complex’s almighty dollar.

However, for them to be still locked in this mindset they are ignoring the implications of modern physics, and therefore being most un-scientific. The further physics has probed into the world of the atom, the more it has become metaphysics, and, as Fritjof Capra puts it, modern physics reveals the universe to be a basic oneness which cannot be divided up and separated:

*The universe is no longer seen as a machine, made up of a multitude of objects, but has to be pictured as one indivisible, dynamic whole whose parts are essentially interrelated and can be understood only as patterns of a cosmic process.*¹²⁵

Although the new physics violates our normal sense-perception dominated view of the world, we shouldn’t be too surprised, because we now have quite a good idea of how limited our sense perceptions are anyway. So the statements of mystics through the ages, and pop-singers of the sixties, which appear nonsensical are, in fact, nearer the Ultimate Truth than the ‘common-sense’ view of the world presented to us by our senses in terms of spatial relationships. The new physics has demolished the object-subject relationship that the Cartesian-Newtonian paradigm is built on. Here is Gary Zukav on the subject again:

Scientists using the ‘in here-out there’ distinction, have discovered that the ‘in here-out there’ distinction may not exist! What is ‘out there’ apparently depends, in a rigorous mathematical sense as well as a philosophical one, upon what we decide ‘in here’.

In another passage from *The Dancing Wu-Lei Masters* he points out again that

There is no such thing as the independent observer who can stand on the sidelines watching nature run its course without influencing it.

¹²⁵ Capra, op. cit.

The 1982 Aspect experiment, which validated Bell's theorem about non-local connections between all particles in the universe, has revealed that this vastly expanded 'unbroken wholeness', (to use David Bohm's phrase¹²⁶), although it is spread out over space-time, is still an unbroken wholeness, intimately connected to the extent that its parts can exchange information faster than the speed of light. Capra points out in *The Turning Point* that

Every particle consists of all other particles...in a way that can be given precise mathematical meaning but cannot easily be expressed in words.

Thus it turns out that poetic 'fancies' such as Harrison's statement that he can be at one and the same time (or do I mean 'space?') 'everywhere', are in fact profound truths on a level beyond appearances.

An interesting aspect of this song is that the lyrics of the chorus change. The second chorus, for example, includes the lines

*All the world is birthday cake,
So take a slice, but not too much.*

It's interesting also to note the element of restraint invoked here:

..take a piece, but not too much.

There is more 'childish' (to Horatius a perjorative term) cosmic/comic bathos in the last verse:

*Sail me on a silver sun where I know that I'm free,
Show me that I'm everywhere—and get me home for tea.*

If 'Love is all and love is everyone', as Lennon insists in 'The Void', then any individual, once he or she realises this, through whatever means, can partake of this 'all', can identify him/herself with the entire cosmos—'Show me that I'm everywhere'. However, as George's oft quoted words point out, that 'pure energy soaring everywhere' is still

...in a body for a temporary period of time,

and any experience of inner illumination and cosmic identification, at least on this side of the great divide, will involve a sort of come down into the body with all its wants and drives, and into the confines of one's life on a 'mundane shell' level. One may have touched the cosmos, and been on an inner journey that would challenge the experiences of astronauts—but you still have to go to work on Monday morning, and so

¹²⁶ Note that the originator of this mystical sounding phrase is a physicist!

on. The lack of a philosophical framework, in the West, for psychedelic experiences, whether spontaneous, drug induced, or arrived at through meditation, is, as I have pointed out before, a problem. Books like Huxley's *Doors Of Perception* and Leary/Metzner/Alpert's *The Psychedelic Experience* were attempts to redress this balance, and prevent either paranoia, or its twin, delusions of grandeur. As the Zen saying we mentioned before has it:

*Before enlightenment, chop wood and carry water.
After enlightenment, chop wood and carry water.*

At its best an experience of cosmic consciousness renders such a 'comedown' into the confines of the body and the personality actually merely amusing, another aspect of the 'cosmic giggle' that Horatios are so mistrustful of. However, we must remember that the 'comedown' into normal sense-perception is also a comedown into illusion, because even science now agrees that, as Capra puts it

Each event is influenced by the whole universe...

Our sense perception is, as Blake knew, as the Perennial Philosophy confirms, essentially limited, allowing us to perceive some things only by shutting out others. Even more astonishing is the conclusion reached by quantum physics allied to relativity theory. Capra again:

The crucial feature of quantum theory is that the observer is not only necessary to observe the properties of an atomic phenomenon, but is necessary even to bring about these properties...The electron does not have objective properties independent of my mind.¹²⁷

In other words, not only do we alter what we observe, but we create it, as Dr. Brunton has already pointed out for us. The inference in 'Rain' that everything is 'just a state of mind' is, and has been for some time, established as scientific fact. But this fact is just too difficult for those of inferior intelligence, i.e. those still dominated by the Horatio-mindset, to take on board. They would still reject Paul Brunton's doctrine of 'mentalism', derived from the assertions of the Perennial Philosophy, whether Buddhist, Hindu, Taoist, Mongolian, or Ancient Egyptian—even though Brunton is at pains to point out that science itself has reached the same conclusions. The Horatios are not so much living in a Nowhere Land, as living in the century before last, and all of mankind, indeed all life on earth, are having to pay the price for this ignorance and wilful blindness. The materialist-only philosophy, blandly ignores the fact that

¹²⁷ From *The Turning Point*.

science has proved that the existence of an entity or object depends on our observation of it, and that therefore there is no such thing as matter in the classical sense:

*...quantum theory [makes] it clear that even the subatomic particles...[are] nothing like the solid objects of classical physics. These subatomic units of matter are very abstract entities which have a dual aspect. Depending on how we look at them, they appear sometimes as particles, sometimes as waves;*¹²⁸

Another important line in the song is the paradoxical sounding

The more I learn, the less I know.

Again, the Perennial Philosophy is frequently concerned with pointing out the dangers of the ‘wrong’ sort of knowledge, which can act as a distraction from the truth. My translation of the *Tao Teh Ching*¹²⁹ cites this very appropriate saying in the foreword (by academic Arthur Hummell):

Learn to unlearn one’s learning.

Meanwhile, chapter 20 puts it as bluntly as this:

*Have done with learning,
And you will have no more vexation.
How great is the distinction between ‘eh’ and ‘o’?
...What abysmal nonsense this is!*

A warning, then, that learning can become so arcane, so divorced from functional reality, so divorced from wisdom, as to be a waste of time—academics living in ivory towers please note! And again, in chapter 71 Lao Tzu (if he existed) says

*To realise that our knowledge is ignorance,
This is a noble insight.
To regard our ignorance as knowledge,
This is mental sickness.*

The Horatio-mindset concept of learning is merely a matter of that which it views as ‘facts’ (we are reminded of the joyless Gradgrind and his life-denying suppression of ‘fancy’ in Dickens’ novel *Hard Times*.)

¹²⁸ Capra, op. cit.

¹²⁹ Translated by John Wu, St. John’s University press, 1961.

These ‘facts’ are merely part of the surface view of multiplicity, and go against the grain of the mystics’ perception of underlying unity:

*When the ten thousand things are viewed in their oneness, we return to the Origin and remain where we have always been.*¹³⁰

Science, which during the era of the apparent triumph of the Cartesian-Newtonian paradigm was concerned only with the fragments of reality, the ‘ten thousand things’, has now made the underlying ‘oneness’ not a matter of assertion, but of fact! Meanwhile, knowledge in the Western Horatio scientific-industrial sense has become dangerous in the extreme, the basic foundation-stone of the ‘nightmare of modernity’. Loveless and unevolved ways of looking at the world produced enough human misery in the era of the bow-and-arrow, but married to technology it has given us the wonders of trench-warfare, the ‘final solution’, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, germ-warfare...the list is endless.

Lyrically, then, ‘It’s All Too Much’ is one of the Beatles’ most all-embracingly ‘cosmic’ songs, touching on all sorts of areas of the Perennial Philosophy, from cosmic oneness as a matter of direct experience, to the ‘child-like’ vision that makes this possible, and it expresses these things in a genuinely humorous way—humour being the mark of an enlightened master. Harrison was clear about the source and the intention of the song, saying it was written

*..in a childlike manner from realisations that appeared during and after some LSD experiences and which were later confirmed in meditation.*¹³¹

Musically, ‘It’s All Too Much’ has a sense of uplift all the way through. As with ‘The Void’, a basic bass/drum drone acts as the core of the track, like a ‘silver sun’ itself, and it’s mixed centrally in the listener’s sound-picture again, i.e. in the 6th chakra position. From this centrally positioned ball of radiant energy emanate all the other sounds, including the feedback drenched guitar part (a nod to Jimi Hendrix), which harmonically extends, but does not interrupt, the drone with its triumphant sounding figure in the choruses. The playful use of a far earlier fanfare, Jeremiah Clarke’s ‘Trumpet Voluntary’, may well have coloured George Martin’s thinking when it came to arranging ‘All You Need Is Love’. ‘It’s All Too Much’ is, in effect, Harrison’s equivalent of its more celebrated anthemic twin.

¹³⁰ Sen T’sen, quoted in Huxley’s *The Perennial Philosophy*.

¹³¹ Quoted in *A Hard Day’s Write*.

All You Need Is Love.

Knowing Pepper only by reputation as a child, I assumed ‘All You Need Is Love’ was actually on it, being, as it is, *the* anthem of the ‘love generation’. What Pepper does lack is a piece of such unambiguous sunniness, something anthemic and hymn-like. When a ‘millenium’ song had to be chosen a few years ago, the only other contender for the title was another Lennon song, the more contentious ‘Imagine’. Having the Archbishop of Canterbury singing

Imagine no religion

might have been amusing, but, as it was, ‘All You Need Is Love’ was chosen instead.

But ‘All You Need Is Love’ is as revolutionary in its way. Lennon very much thought of it as one of his revolutionary slogan songs. When asked whether ‘Give Peace A Chance’ and ‘Power To The People’ were propaganda songs, he replied

*Sure. So was ‘All You Need Is Love’. I’m a revolutionary artist. My art is dedicated to change.*¹³²

Critics usually dismiss the song, especially its avowal that ‘It’s easy’, which flies in the face of the Protestant Work Ethic. But ‘All You Need Is Love’ is the culmination of Lennon’s series of spiritual insights and invocations of capital ‘L’ ‘Love’ that began with ‘The Word’. The Perennial Philosophy is on Lennon’s side. If ‘love is all’, is the ‘underlying theme of the universe’, is the truth underlying all manifested appearances, is the ‘shining’ ‘Void’, then all one need do is align with that principle, realise that truth, and henceforward one may discover what the Buddhists call the eightfold path, and Taoists espouse as The Great Way. Here’s Huxley:

*..it follows that charity is the root and substance of morality, and that where there is little charity there will be much avoidable evil. All this has been summed up in Augustine’s formula: ‘Love, and do what you like’.*¹³³

Huxley uses the word ‘charity’ rather than ‘love’, following St. Paul’s famous formulation in Corinthians, 13:13

And now abideth faith, hope and charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.

¹³² Op. cit.

¹³³ Quoted in *The Perennial Philosophy*.

(Our modern use of the word ‘charity’ has become demeaned, so that it means only giving money to deserving causes. While that is an aspect of love/charity, it is not the whole story by any means.)

Love is identification with All That Is, and realising that Thou Art That. Love is realisation of one’s own God consciousness, and acting from that realisation. After aligning oneself with God/Love, the ins and outs, the minutiae, are mere details. This is why Lennon can say ‘It’s easy’. It isn’t a matter of glibness or impracticality. From a moment of God-realisation, from a visionary height, even the darkness and wrong in the world are perceived as part of a holy design, the like of which is usually beyond our conscious ability to comprehend. From that point of view, there is a sense of inevitable rightness about everything, even that which seems bad, and it is from that celebratory higher ground, as it were, that the song is being delivered:

*There’s nothing you can do that can’t be done,
Nothing you can sing that can’t be sung,
Nothing you can say, but you can learn how to play the game—
It’s easy.*

This sort of realisation drives the Horatio-mindset mad. It’s even upsetting to those who have good and noble intentions to help mankind, but to whom it’s all a matter of practicalities. However, to the mystic, God is one, all is one, and all is perfect. Here are just a few examples in support of a ‘shining’ view of creation and God’s love from *The Perennial Philosophy*:

He that loveth not knoweth not God, for God is love.

I John, iv

Love is infallible; it has no errors, for all errors are the want of love.

William Law

The Identity out of the One and into the One and with the One is the source and the fountain head and breaking forth of glowing Love.

Meister Eckhart.

There is no doubt in my mind that Lennon’s song is not just a passing hippy cliché, but an invocation of this divine principle, alluded to by mystics through the ages, but never entirely encapsulated in words and intellectual definitions, because, as the Perennial Philosophy points out, a mere intellectual grasp of the truth would be a complete missing of the point: we remember Huxley’s earlier point that real cleverness lies in going beyond that cleverness. The Ultimate Truth is something that can only be found within—thus rendering it beyond the grasp of the surface-only orientated Horatio mindset. Here’s another aphorism from *The Perennial Philosophy*:

The truth indeed has never been preached by the Buddha, seeing that one has to realise it within oneself. [My emphases.]

Sutralamkara.

We note that Lennon has so abandoned Leary by this point that he uses the word 'game' in the first verse without any evocation of the false inauthentic life of the West defined and critiqued by Leary, the 'game reality'. That life is, in part, a game is OK, as, underneath it all, is a sense, (as in the most hopeful line in 'Strawberry Fields'), that 'it all works out', and therefore

There's...

Nowhere you can be that isn't where you're meant to be.

Perhaps by now Lennon was more under the influence of Herman Hesse than Timothy Leary. We remember Harry Haller's realisation of the fact that life is a sort of divine game at the end of *Steppenwolf*:

One day I would be a better hand at the game. One day I would learn how to laugh.

The sense of total acceptance embodied by the line in the third verse 'There's nowhere you can be that isn't where you're meant to be' surely also reveals an insight into the workings of karma. Very often in our lives we find ourselves in places, situations, or mind-sets that are anything but where we think we want to be, but the Perennial Philosophy points us to a sense of a Higher Knowing. One thinks of Boethius' *The Consolation Of Philosophy*, written even while its author was imprisoned on a trumped-up charge which eventually culminated in his cruel execution. One thinks of Victor Frankl, who turned his experiences in concentration camps into the basis of his philosophy, encapsulated in *Man's Search For Meaning*. Only those who have experienced terrible things and can have a philosophical attitude to them, perhaps, have the authority in our eyes to make a statement such as Lennon is making here. But then Lennon himself, while obviously on some sort of high from which the song is being delivered, has had plenty of 'sorrow' in his own life, as we have already discovered. Yet when new sufferings come he all-too-humanly forgets what he has said in this song, as we will see. Here is Paul Brunton on karma:

The real nature of karma is not grasped if it is believed to be a power external to the self...On the contrary...it is a power working in everything and everyone. This yields the clear implication that what happens to him happens by the secret will of his own innermost being. From this standpoint the sufferings he may have to endure are not evils in the ultimate but only in the immediate sense and what appears as a blind

*external and ruthless force is really a conscious internal and purifying one.*¹³⁴

To accept the above statement, and therefore to make a statement as outrageous to Horatio-sensibilities as ‘There’s nowhere you can be that isn’t where you’re meant to be’, implies also a belief in re-incarnation, another tenet of the Perennial Philosophy, as we have seen, because, of course, an acceptance of a Higher Will does not necessarily mean that one will be ‘saved’ in the external worldly sense in this life, that the misfortune will pass, the disease will be cured, that a miraculous escape will set one free from prison, and so on. Many a saint’s life—and death—is proof of this fact, as is that ultimate sacrifice and act of acceptance: Christ’s crucifixion.

This sense of the inherent rightness of all things that comes out of a moment of visionary expansiveness is reinforced by the repeated formula of the verses, ‘There’s nothing you can do’, etc. These statements could be almost anything. The most arresting of them in the second verse is

There’s nothing you can do but you can learn how to feel in time...

This is interesting because it shows Lennon, appropriately, using a musical metaphor for the sense of alignment with the Higher Self. A poet of the time of the first Elizabeth might have been more concerned with cosmic harmony, as in the passage in Shakespeare’s *Troilus and Cressida* in which Ulysses expands upon the music of the spheres:

*...untune that string
And hark what discord follows.*¹³⁵

It is perhaps revealing that for a rock musician-poet of the latter half of the twentieth century what is more important than harmony is rhythm, is keeping ‘in time’. However, an investigation into the nature of sound reveals that rhythm is indeed the basis of all music. Speed a rhythm up enough, and you create a tone.

Verse three deserves more attention:

*There’s nothing you can know that isn’t known,
Nothing you can see that isn’t shown,
Nowhere you can be that isn’t where you’re meant to be.*

We have already dealt with the last line as articulating absolute acceptance—a virtual re-statement of the famous formulation from the

¹³⁴ Brunton, op. cit.

¹³⁵ *Troilus And Cressida*, I, iii.

Lord's Prayer 'Thy will be done'. But the first line also calls attention to itself. Now, our little minds obviously can't 'know' everything, so Lennon seems to be moving toward a grasp of mentalist doctrine once again. That which is beyond our knowing must be known by a Higher Mind, or God. As Capra has pointed out, a thinking mind is essential for any 'object' not only to be perceived, as such, but to exist at all. We are constantly discovering new things that were previously 'unknown' to us—but they still existed. As Brunton points out

*Whatever is thought, felt or observed is somehow related to a mind that thinks, feels or observes. To believe that ideas can exist separately without a thinking being to hold or generate them is an absurdity.*¹³⁶

So the mind that is thinking what is beyond us must be God, or, as Brunton puts it, the World Mind. He argues very lucidly that our finite consciousness and set of perceptions cannot be the last word in Nature—and our continuing exploration of space, the unveiling of the astonishing numbers of stars even in our own galaxy, let alone outside it, posit it as impossible that mankind is the be-all and end-all:

It is an error to limit existence to being a mere content of the limited human consciousness...That a being superior to man may have a place in this varied universe, must be granted by the intelligent...

*...it must be a universally diffused mind or it could not carry the consciousness of the myriad things and beings in the world. It must be a primal, permanent and self-subsistent one...It must always be linked with the universe or it could not be an observer of the universe. It is such a boundless mind which would be the necessary observer of an uninhabited world or an unvisited scene. And not merely on the basis of right reasoning alone but on the basis of ultra-mystic insight also, the hidden teaching affirms the existence of such a supreme Mind.*¹³⁷

So, all things are 'just a state of mind', but not a state of our mind only, but a state of the cosmic Super-Mind, of God:

*The world which spreads itself out before our gaze is thus an intimation of the presence of an omnipresent Mind which imprints it on our senses from within.*¹³⁸

Sogyal Rinpoche puts it like this:

¹³⁶ Brunton, op. cit.

¹³⁷ Brunton, op. cit.

¹³⁸ Brunton, op. cit.

*Realisation of the nature of mind, which you could call our innermost essence...is the key to understanding life and death...This essential nature of mind is the background to the whole of life and death, like the sky, which holds the whole universe in its embrace.*¹³⁹

Lennon's most lucid and all-embracing summing up of his spirituality, which could be almost a mini-manifesto for the Perennial Philosophy, comes from a 1969 interview, quoted in the introduction, and it may perhaps be relevant to look at it again:

I think a lot of bad things have happened in the name of the church and in the name of Christ...I think people who need to go to church should go. And the others who know the church is in your own head should visit that temple because that's where the source is. We're all God. Christ said 'The Kingdom of Heaven is within you'. And the Indians say that and the Zen people say that. We're all God. I'm not a god or the God, but we're all God and we're all potentially divine—and potentially evil. We all have everything within us and the Kingdom of Heaven is nigh and within us, and if you look hard enough, you'll see it.

We saw at the start of this study how an interest in 'the church in your own head' was sort of smuggled through the teenybop-censor of 1963 to be embodied in 'There's A Place'. Now, with 'All You Need Is Love', the Beatles had, in a mere four years, turned popular music on its head, so that the inner church, and spiritual values, had become the subject of popular songwriting over and above, indeed to the exclusion of, boy/girl teen love. Realising how subversive a concept this is, the money men have since successfully re-confined pop to its straightjacket, with the domination of the market place by cynically manufactured acts, spouting rubbish which cannot be said to have any content at all. And the hacks who comment on all this are uniformly, it seems, uninformed about the Perennial Philosophy. As Frank Zappa famously put it, 'People who can't write writing for people who can't read.'

'All You Need Is Love' is the fourth, (or fifth, if you include 'A Day In The Life'), chapter in the Lennon gospels, written at speed and in a direct and simple-to-understand way for the world's first global satellite linking broadcast. That Lennon and the Beatles responded to the honour of being chosen to 'represent' Britain in this event by writing a hymn to love, stressing *international* understanding by ensuring the 'All You Need Is Love' slogan was expressed in various languages, seems in itself a divinely guided event. Sour grapes and dismissals of the song's lyric content by the Horatio-minded are beside the point. Love is all you need because, basically, apprehended from the expanded viewpoint of a moment of spiritual insight, Love is all that there is anyway. It is

¹³⁹ From *The Tibetan Book Of Living And Dying*.

interesting that in the 1987 TV documentary *It Was Twenty years Ago Today*, when Paul and George were asked if they still thought ‘all you need is love’, Harrison gave a firm and resounding ‘Yes’, while McCartney, back in Horatio-land, came up with various ‘practical’ additions and qualifications.

The song musically supports its premise, with

Love, love, love

being chanted as a *mantra* all the way through the verse sections. It’s obvious to spot ‘Love, Love, Love’ as a mantra in this context, but it also seems to me that this mantra is but a stone’s throw away from the ‘Yeah yeah yeah’ chorus of ‘She Loves You’, itself a sort of mantra of sheer positivism. As if to acknowledge this unconscious debt, ‘She loves you, yeah yeah yeah’ is sung over the fade out.

It’s interesting also that the verses break away from the usual three-four or four-four format of Western music, and are in a count of seven. I doubt that any other No 1 single in the history of pop has such a distinction—another way in which we can say this song is revolutionary. (The most significant departure into interesting time-signatures before this was the 5/8 middle section of Harrison’s already exotic ‘Within You Without You’.) George Martin’s liberal peppering (sorry) of the song with musical quotations from different times and genres are an attempt to move towards a transcending of time, place and culture, as well as an example of that bathetic sense of humour which was evident in ‘It’s All Too Much’.

Pepper having been released to an amazed world on June 1st 1967, ‘All You Need Is Love’ was broadcast on the 25th of that month, and subsequently released as a single, which got to No 1, of course. It was the Beatles’ great statement of faith and belief, the most public and unambiguous message-in-song that the Beatles, and Lennon in particular, were ever to make. It was possibly the most public message of all history up until that time, being part of the world’s first global satellite broadcast. Lennon had certainly seized the moment, all in the name of ‘Love’ as the Ultimate Reality.

However, as most of us know, after the visionary moment on the mountain-top comes the descent back down into the world—can the vision then be sustained? Can we, as Harrison hoped, ‘try our best to hold it there’? This is when the true time of testing comes, and the visionary moment may be followed by much more protracted periods of time in which the vision seems to have been lost, as Wordsworth well knew:

Whither is fled the visionary gleam?

*Where is it now, the glory and the dream?*¹⁴⁰

The Beatles were at their height, the world was looking increasingly like one great love-in, and the words 'All You Need Is Love' had hardly left Lennon's mouth when fate stepped in, as if to say 'So this is what you believe in, is it? OK, prove it!'

¹⁴⁰ From the 'Immortality' ode.

I Am The Walrus.

One falsity that I hope this study will dispel is the vague idea that the Beatles ‘got spiritual’ after meeting the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. All the spiritually orientated songs we have so far covered, from the well known like ‘All You Need Is Love’, to the less well known like ‘Rain’ and ‘There’s A Place’, were written and recorded *before* the Beatles met the Maharishi. It wasn’t until after the release of Pepper and ‘All You Need Is Love’ that, on Harrison’s prompting, ‘the fabs’ attended a lecture given by the Maharishi in London. So impressed were they that a scheduled recording session was cancelled, and instead the Beatles and their wives caught the train to Bangor to attend a weekend seminar by the Maharishi there. And then came the news of Brian Epstein’s death.

Lennon was later pointedly aggrieved with the Maharishi’s inability to offer comfort or support on tap in Lennon Remembers:

..he was sort of saying ‘Forget it, be happy,’ fuckin’ idiot.

Under pressure then, Lennon was unable to maintain the attitudes of peak visionary experiences, such as that embodied in his statement in ‘The Void’ that to ‘mourn the dead’ is to be in a state of ‘ignorance and hate’. Like all of us he has trouble making insight a matter of practice—‘turning altered states into permanent traits’, as Wilber puts it. The wheel of fortune had turned, and instead of visionary insight, Lennon reacted in a typically human way. It is especially, one finds, at times of crisis that the limited ego comes to the fore.

Lennon was perceptive enough to conclude that without Epstein acting as some sort of glue between elements pushing apart in the process of their own individuation, the Beatles’ days were numbered:

I thought, ‘We’ve fuckin’ had it’.

Cutting short the Bangor trip, they reconvened at McCartney’s house, and Paul argued that they now needed to focus on something...and it was the Epstein sanctioned *Magical Mystery Tour* project that was used. Perhaps conscious of a need to string Lennon along, ‘I Am The Walrus’ was the first song they turned to.

‘I Am The Walrus’ was written by Lennon in August. The fragmentation evident in ‘A Day In The Life’ is accentuated in this song, and taken to new lengths. Lennon’s penchant for word-play, his innate ‘psychedelic vision’ here in its entirely dissociative form, and his angry distrust of intellectualism, all combined to make this the most vitriolic ‘nonsense-song’ of all time. It’s on the same level as much of Dylan’s work in 1965-66, where Dylan’s anger at the random chaos of the world

is evident and only just kept in check, despite his claim on the liner notes of *Bringing It All Back Home*

i accept chaos. i am not sure whether it accepts me.

The song was an amalgamation of three different parts, the first time that Lennon seems to have mirrored the disjointed nature of modern life by using separate scraps entirely from his own songbook—no down to earth McCartney section as in ‘A Day In The Life’ here. Impetus came from the fact that Lennon found out through an old school-friend that his lyrics were now being analysed (quite rightly) as poetry, and he became anxious to ‘beat them at their own game’, as it were, by producing something so wilfully obscure that the ‘expert-textpert’ analysts would tie themselves up in knots:

Let the fuckers work that one out

he said gleefully to the friend in question, Pete Shotton, once he’d finished. His attitude in the 1980 Playboy interview is even more forthrightly cynical:

In those days I was writing obscurely a la Dylan, never saying what you mean but giving the impression of something.. ‘It’s a good game’, I thought, ‘They get away with this artsy-fartsy crap...I thought ‘I can write this crap too’.

With typical Lennon inconsistency, he meanwhile ventured in a 1974 interview that ‘Walrus’ was one of his favourites because it was ‘weird’, and because

..it’s one of those that had enough little bitties going to keep you interested even a hundred years later.

So, initially Lennon is taking the sort of indignant stance Hamlet takes with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, a disgust at anybody who thinks they can ‘reduce’ one by intellectual means into a sort of formula (which is, after all, what bad, Horatio-mindset criticism seeks to do):

You would play upon me; you would seem to know my stops; you would pluck out the heart of my mystery.¹⁴¹

However, he becomes involved and engaged in his own ‘baffle the critics’ game, and, wilful obscurity or not, therefore invites analysis. In

¹⁴¹ *Hamlet, III, ii*

the meantime, there is some substance and real feeling in the piece, sometimes hard to find behind the smokescreen, but there nonetheless.

From a ‘spiritual message’ point of view, the song’s opening line might be said to be all that matters in this song:

*I am he as you are he
As you are me and we are all together.*

This is a statement of the one-ness of humanity, on a par with ‘love is all and love is everyone’ from ‘The Void’, paralleling his 1969 statement about all of us being God. The line could be interpreted as

I am He,

the sort of ‘delusion of grandeur’ that horrifies the Horatios, which is then given a further twist by stating that the listener is also ‘He’—so we are all one, and all God. This is reminiscent of the opening of Blake’s Jerusalem, in which ‘the Saviour’ addresses the poet thus:

*I am in you and you in me, mutual in love divine...
I am not a God afar off, I am a brother and a friend,
Within your bosoms I reside, and you reside in me...*

Blake notes though that usually the Horatio-mindset wins out, and unable to cope with this revelation,

The perturbed man away turns down the valleys dark:

This song could be seen as the sixth of Lennon’s message songs, just from that one line alone, notwithstanding the fact that this ‘sermon’ then turns into an absurdist diatribe against the absurdity of modern life—or even because it does so, holding up a mirror, as did ‘A Day In The Life’, to the ‘waste land’ that is our fragmented modern existence. The ‘police siren’ two-semitone effect of the verse seems to be a deliberate parody of that particular aspect of authority—and, of course, the police are name-checked later with obvious sarcasm. This ‘siren’ effect is also an interesting musical inversion of the line ‘I’d love to turn you on’ from ‘A Day In The Life’.

Not everything in this melange of imagery is worth comment, but we will delve in nevertheless, mainly because Lennon pauses the song frequently to tell us

I’m crying.

Without this, we might not care. With its inclusion, the song is less a self-absorbed game of ‘beat the critic’, more an anguished piece of breast-beating. The parade is still going by Lennon’s ‘window’, but he is now no longer so detached as to be immune to the folly of it all—it seems certain that this shedding of tears for the plight of mankind was prompted by Epstein’s death. ‘I Am The Walrus’ is definitely a turning point. While moments of inspired spiritual insight allow one to say ‘It’s easy’, a lot of the time it does not appear that life is easy or makes any sense at all. Paradoxically, it is the anger of ‘I Am The Walrus’ which points to its compassion. It is the beginning of Lennon caring about the sorrows not just of himself, but of others, and it is the next stage on his never-ending spiritual journey. In ‘Getting Better’ he had disavowed anger, but with ‘Walrus’ he discovered that there was still a lot there, and that it could not be denied, anger about the human situation, anger about the incontrovertible fact of death. Working on this anger, confronting it, expressing it, is what was to shape his work in the future.

So, after the unitive vision of the opening line, we then jump-cut to

See how they run like pigs from a gun,

an unsettling image of mankind at the mercy of death. No wonder Lennon then says

I’m crying.

The next verse is all nonsensical juxtaposition, (perhaps that day he really did end up inadvertently ‘sitting on a cornflake’ while ‘waiting for the van to come’), leading to the refrain

*I am the eggman, they are the eggmen,
I am the walrus, goo goo g’joob.*

One can imagine Lennon enjoying himself hugely at people trying to unpack ‘Goo goo g’joob’, and I don’t intend to try.

Eggman/eggmen is another matter. Eggs are, of course, a symbol of birth, and/or rebirth, which is why we give each other eggs in the great rebirth festival of the (Christianised) pagan year, Ostara, or Easter. We all begin as a fertilised egg. Lennon is delving well into the depths of the subconscious again here, going even beyond the levels of personal history reached in ‘Strawberry Fields’, and into archetypal territory. The eggman also recalls that fragile entity from childhood nursery-rhyme, (and *Through The Looking Glass*), Humpty-Dumpty. The fact that Humpty falls and is broken makes him both a symbol of death and, being an egg, rebirth. The Christian religion’s elevation of Jesus as a symbol of death/rebirth is a comparatively recent instance of the archetypal myth of

the hero-god who dies and is reborn again: the Egyptian Osiris being one earlier example that is relatively well-known to the Western mind¹⁴².

We then have the sneering

Mister city p'liceman, sitting pretty little p'licemen in a row

which is effective, but to have them flying, and then to invoke, inappropriately 'Lucy in the sky' is just a piece of wilful obscurantism, as is the inclusion of the revolting children's rhyme about 'yellow matter custard'. Oh, wait a minute—pigs might fly. Geddit?

The mixture of pointless wordplay and genuinely arresting images continue. 'Pornographic priestess' is interesting, perhaps a critique of the way we are willing in the West make heroes out of anybody as long as they are in the public eye: thus porn stars have even managed to become icons of a sort to some. Let's be honest, modern pop-singers do effectively tout soft-porn and perhaps have done so ever since the 70s.

Then in the song's middle section, appropriately inappropriate, we have a quick surreal snapshot of the British holiday maker, confronted with the unpredictable climate of these islands,

*If the sun don't come you get your tan
From standing in the English rain.*

'Rain' may be being alluded to here, fleetingly—an altogether more controlled song with a specific message and a logical layout to help bring that message home. The 'expert-texpert' intellectual analysts are then name-checked in the same breath as 'choking smokers' (one destructive instance of drug use Lennon was never able to put behind him), and I feel it is all of us, rather than simply the experts or the smokers, that Lennon addresses when he says

Don't you think The Joker laughs at you?

We are all prone, at times, to feel ourselves the butt of some cosmic joke—and Lennon was obviously feeling just such a reaction. This is a sharp volte-face indeed from the heights of 'All You Need Is Love'. The wheel of external fortune, and the wheel of internal feeling about it, had turned—as the wheel must.

Lennon then turns an adjective into a verb with 'see how they snide'. By the time we get to 'semolina pilchards' etc. we've lost interest in any more deeply analytical sense. Who cares if the 'elementary penguin singing Hare Krishna' was supposed to be Allen Ginsberg, as

¹⁴² Another 'eggman' interpretation from the accompanying video: Lennon et. al. are wearing egg-like skull caps as worn in 18th century lunatic asylums. The madness of life being also a part of what Lennon is 'crying' about in the song, this would also fit perfectly. (If the madman's cap fits...)

Lennon later claimed? It's buried too deep to matter. (Looking at the song optimistically, at least it thereby contains the mantra 'Hare Krishna'—possibly the first time this, to devotees of the Krishna consciousness movement, all-important mantra crept into the consciousness of the Western world.)

The image of the Walrus itself I've left until last. It comes from *Through The Looking Glass*, once again, as Lennon later intimated. As recited in a poem by Tweedledee, the Walrus and his friend the Carpenter trick the young oysters, who are all very much described as being like human children, into being eaten, by appearing to give them a lecture on wisdom—although in absurdist terms, naturally:

*'The time has come', the Walrus said,
To talk of many things:
Of shoes—and ships—and ceiling wax—
Of cabbages—and kings...*

When the little oysters, hoping they are not being referred to when the Walrus says he is about to feed, try to ask if that is to be their fate, the Walrus simply changes the subject:

Do you admire the view?

The Walrus then is an image of the betrayal of, indeed the devouring of, the innocent by the old and the greedy, all done in a sinister, terribly polite, English way, and under a cloak of seeming wisdom. For Lennon to say 'I am the Walrus' in the same song in which he also says 'I am He', and 'I am the eggman' (with its symbolism of Christ/Easter/resurrection) points to the yin/yang, Christ/Hitler, dark/light duality which is at the heart of all our moral dilemmas. Lennon is 'crying' indeed in this poem-song, despite its other function as a sort of smokescreen, a decoy to mislead any so-called intellectual experts. He is struggling with the 'fallen' state of humanity, as outlined by Wilber, the fact that we live in a world of 'delusion', of duality, of time, change, death and decay, as well as, in that one redemptive opening line, celebrating our potential divinity.

The song is aggressively spat out, and a lot of credit must go to George Martin's string and vocal arrangements, without which the song barely works at all (as the stripped down version released on *Anthology II* reveals). It's another example of Martin as the superior trained musician being able to realise concepts he could never himself come up with, as they come from the intuitive, subconscious realm, and are illogical—the two kinds of knowledge, interior and exterior, working together again to astonishing effect, as was the case with 'Strawberry Fields Forever'. The

very literalness of his illustrations, the ‘hohoho, heeheehee, hahaha!’ of the laughing joker, for example work perfectly in their absurdity.

Lennon was never generous enough to acknowledge how important George Martin’s contributions to these works were, not perhaps understanding where Martin was ‘coming from’ with his rationalistic trained musical mind. The partnership represents a perfect illustration I think of the two forms of mental approach, with (to give them their Qabbalistic terms) BINaH, Understanding, Intellect, being in the service of ChoKhMaH, Wisdom, Intuition. Lennon was never again to find a working partner of such value, and his empathy with other ‘intuitive-only’ types such as Yoko and Phil Spector, meant that however good the songs were in his solo career, their arrangements and realisation as recordings never attained the height of his work with the Beatles.

Meanwhile, back on the lyrical analysis, my frustration at a lack of meaning in many of the lines doesn’t mean that ‘I Am The Walrus’ is artistically unsuccessful, as lack of meaning is its very subject. It is an attempt to spit back at the world the flood of meaninglessness with which we are all bombarded in modern civilisation, and it is an inevitable aspect of its matchless marriage of form and subject that, while there are many symbols and messages buried within the song, some of it is mere word-play, or rather, word-collage. Popular song being an intrinsically conservative form it took fifty or so years before any sort of popular songwriter attempted to do what the Dadaists and Surrealists had done in the early part of the century. Lennon was only pipped at the post by Dylan and Frank Zappa, and then only by a few years. Even as a B-side, it was the first real outbreak of dissociative Surrealist writing in the singles charts...and since Lennon broke that mould, there have been precious few to follow suit, if any.

The coda, lyricless as it is, deserves close scrutiny with its endlessly circling, never resolving chord sequence, like a fairground carousel that never stops, acting as a musical equivalent of a ‘bad trip’. But what, exactly, is a ‘bad trip’? If you believe, as I do, that what psychedelic drugs do is release buried subconscious (even super-conscious) material, rather than impose a false ‘reality’ on the subject, then the work of Stanislav Grof is extremely interesting. From extensive work both with LSD subjects, and from having developed his own non-drug approach to inner journeying called Holotropic Breathwork, Grof has concluded that the material which comes up is dictated by what he calls ‘Perinatal Matrices’, that is our womb and birthing experiences, memories of which we somehow retain on a subconscious and/or biological level. He divides these matrices into four, and it is the second one, ‘Cosmic Engulfment And No Exit’ that concerns us here. In labour, the foetus experiences tremendous crushing pressures and, as at this stage the uterus is not dilated, there seems no way out of this predicament:

*The symbolic counterpart of a fully developed first clinical stage of delivery is the experience of no exit or hell. It involves a sense of being stuck, encaged or entrapped in a claustrophobic, nightmarish world, and an experience of incredible psychological and physical tortures. The situation is typically unbearable and appears to be endless and hopeless. The individual loses the sense of linear time and cannot see the possibility of an end to this torment, or any form of active escape from it.*¹⁴³

While this is about as good a description of a ‘bad trip’ as you are likely to get, we must remember here that these experiences can be brought up without psychedelics, and even occur spontaneously. Grof believes that all aspects of our psyche are governed by these Perinatal Matrices, some of which are positive, some negative. A good ‘trip’ or experience draws on material from the first matrix, the ‘Amniotic Universe’, where the child is at one with the mother, for example.

This contention of Grof’s goes a long way to explaining inter-cultural, archetypal depictions of hell and heaven. He further contends that a person’s basic outlook on life can be dominated by one particular matrix, which might well explain why Sartre with his *Huis Clos*, *Nausee*, and so on seems to see the world in such negative terms. My own hunch is that a person’s moods may, in the course of a day be under the influence of each matrix at various times. Here is Grof’s description of one of his own ‘No Exit’ psychedelic experiences:

*I felt caught in a vicious circle of unendurable emotional and physical suffering that would last forever.*¹⁴⁴

A Horatio-mindset scientist would say Grof’s findings and testimony are ‘unscientific’ because he himself has subjectively undergone the experience. I would say *only* a scientist who has himself undergone this experience is qualified to say anything about it, and that the Horatios view of what is and what is not scientific or rational is in itself unscientific and non-rational. It cannot be rational to ignore what cannot yet be explained simply because it doesn’t fit into existing theories and models—especially if those models in themselves have been exploded and superseded.

How Lennon hit upon the device of a never resolving sequence shows how intuitively in touch he was as an artist. He was proud to call himself a ‘primitive’ and this is one of those instances where his primitivism pays off. For anyone who had been taught harmony in ‘proper’ musical terms, one harmonises the Major scale of the key one is using in a specific way, with the chords built on the first, fourth and fifth being Major, and those on the second, third and sixth being Minor. The

¹⁴³ From *The Adventure Of Self Discovery*.

¹⁴⁴ Grof, op. cit..

attractive ascending movement of Paul's 'Here, There And Everywhere' is a good illustration of this, moving from I (Major), to II (Minor 7th), III (Minor), IV (Major). Lennon dispenses with this formality throughout the song, as well as in the coda, substituting a Major chord on the flattened third note of the scale, instead of the usual Minor chord on the Major third note. Thus the coda, for example, begins to descend towards the tonic from the dominant, moving from E Major to D Major. If it then went to what should be the logical next chord in that progression in that key, C#Minor, we would have an obvious, resolving, if descending sequence. Instead the C Major which Lennon uses displaces the ear's sense of tonality, so that when the tonic (A Major) is reached, it does not feel as if we have arrived 'home'. We then move to the V, the dominant (sorry, too many names for things in musical terminology) again, and around goes the merry-go-round once more...

There is no 'home', no place of rightness and safety, in this song, either musically or lyrically. The world of 'I Am The Walrus' is one of dissociative hell, with the one exception of that unitive opening statement—but that gets all but lost in the rip-tide of imagery that follows.

To add to the sense of 'hell' or 'no exit', George Martin's arrangement at the end has both an endlessly ascending treble line and an endlessly descending bass line, giving an impression of the musical universe somehow coming apart at the seams. One is reminded of Yeats' lines in 'The Second Coming':

*Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world.*

If all this were not enough, we have the absurdisms of the choral work, and a plethora of random sound effects, including the radio signals and broadcasts. A roam through different radio frequencies, like channel hopping through TV stations, is a pretty good exercise in the dissociative. Ironic that that first world-wide satellite broadcast in which the Beatles sang 'All You Need Is Love' and which seemed briefly to unite the world, has led to the flood of senselessness, the fragmented electric-visual-aural bombardment, that we now take for granted.

One of those fragments of found radio sound is a section from Shakespeare's *King Lear*. It's difficult to pick it out of the mix while listening, but we now know that we're hearing the section of Act IV, scene vi in which Edgar and Gloucester meet Oswald, and Edgar kills him:

O! untimely death.

‘Untimely death’ might well be the sub-title of this song. Epstein’s death, and Lennon’s probable guilt over it, given the fact that once the touring was over Epstein had felt himself to be no longer of use and an outsider, acts as a sort of backdrop to this amazing musical-aural event/collage, with its sinister ‘joker’ laughing at all of us, the ‘choking smokers’ slowly killing themselves, the ‘yellow matter custard/Dripping from a dead dog’s eye’, and, it seems, all of humanity, including the ‘expert-texpert’s on the run ‘like pigs from a gun’, from death. If we listen hard, in the background of ‘I Am The Walrus’ Kali can be heard laughing triumphantly.

From the visionary heights which allows one to write a song like ‘All You Need Is Love’, the wheel had turned. As Dylan was later to say in ‘Idiot Wind’ on *Blood On The Tracks*:

*...you find out when you reach the top
You’re on the bottom.*

This sort of imagery of Fortune’s wheel is archetypal, and is featured in Dante, Chaucer and Boethius, as well as having its Buddhist form in the Tibetan World Wheel.

It seems remarkable to me the swiftness with which, having made their great statement with Pepper and ‘All You Need Is Love’, the Beatles were confronted by the more demanding aspects of reality, including mortality. ‘Untimely death’, that which had caused Lennon’s suffering in the first place, from which he then—as do we all—had to construct some sort of defence or psychological functionality, had seemed to be transcended by great leaps forward and spiritual discoveries...but then had struck again as the ultimate reality-tester of the new found state or belief system. Lennon then had not been able to relate to the Maharishi’s statements—entirely in accord with the Perennial Philosophy—that indeed there is no death as per the Bhagavad Gita verse, which is true on the ultimate level of ‘Big Mind’, Being, but which makes no sense on the level of the ‘little-‘i’, *sem*, the ego-mind of the still fallen and unenlightened human being.

‘The dream is over’ Lennon was later to sing on the cathartic rejection of all philosophies, gurus, and creeds that was the song ‘God’ on *Plastic Ono Band*. But essentially ‘I Am The Walrus’ had already made this statement, written three years earlier, and marking, essentially, the collapse of the ‘Summer of Love’. The song is an anti-celebration of the bursting of that bubble, an admission of the fact that it’s actually very difficult to turn ‘altered states into permanent traits’, and flying in the face of the statement in ‘All You Need Is Love’ that ‘it’s easy’. ‘Easy’ was probably the wrong word to use: ‘simple’, yes, as in uncomplicated: one returns again and again to Love, unswervingly, unremittingly. But for us ego-bound mortals in the sway most of the time of the little-‘i’, faced

with ‘sorrow’, with change, death, decay, old age, all the suffering of samsara, this is the hardest thing to do of all.

‘I Am The Walrus’ was the standout track of the *Magical Mystery Tour* fiasco, but its extremity was too much for the other Beatles to think of it as a single in its own right. It was relegated to the B-side of the appalling ‘Hello Goodbye’, a harmless bit of McCartney whimsy that was considered much more what was needed as Beatle product as a Christmas single—although it’s my suspicion that many were buying it for that B-side. This downgrading of Lennon’s talent in the McCartney dominated, post-Epstein era was in my opinion the real cause of the Beatles’ split: it was just a matter of time.

The Fool On The Hill.

And, actually, in terms of our study, what *of* Paul?

Allsop's idea of writing autobiographically had also been taken up by him, once (circa 1965) he realised Lennon was outstripping him and writing songs with genuine depth. However, rather than this leading to anything like transcendence of the ego, his attempts to do so end up revealing an entirely egocentric sensibility—the exception being quite a bruiser, the already-discussed 'Yesterday'. For example the apparent positivism of the chorus of 'We Can Work It Out' is undercut by the complete egocentricity of the verses—'Try to see it *my* way...While you see it your way/Run the risk of knowing that our love may soon be gone'. In 'I'm Looking Through You', the fact that the girl has 'changed' means that, to him, she disappears.

However, with Paul finally 'turning on', suddenly he starts to open up. There's 'Eleanor Rigby', a superbly compassionate piece of character writing—which also implicitly criticises exoteric religion, as 'Father McKenzie' cannot offer any support or help to 'Eleanor', who dies and whose funeral is pathetic: 'Nobody came...no-one was saved.' McCartney's closed mind-set has opened up so much that on 'Got To Get You Into My Life' he is singing:

Another road, well maybe I could see another kind of mind there.

McCartney was quoted at about this time as saying

After I took it, [LSD] it opened my eyes. We only use one tenth of our brain. Just think what we could all accomplish if we could only tap that hidden part. It would mean a whole new world. If the politicians would take LSD, there wouldn't be any more war or poverty or famine.¹⁴⁵

This is pretty radical stuff, as is this quote from the same interview:

God is everything and everywhere and everyone.¹⁴⁶

So despite the Horatio-mindset side of him, Paul was still actively engaged with the spiritual at the time—he had gone to Bangor, after all, with the others, and he also went to Rishikesh with them the following year. However, with 'Fixing A Hole' McCartney shows this closed mindset side of him about to become dominant again. It uses the metaphor of a house, but McCartney can't understand the 'silly people' who 'disagree and never win/And wonder why they don't get in my door'. Why should they want to? Because, according to Paul, he's

¹⁴⁵ Quoted in the *Anthology*.

¹⁴⁶ Quoted in *The Politics Of Ecstasy*.

infallible: ‘It doesn’t really matter if I’m wrong, I’m right.’ Rather than psychedelics shattering the ego, it has obviously here merely expanded it!

‘The Fool On The Hill’ is his best song from the *Magical Mystery Tour*, although, in fact, it was written earlier while *Pepper* was in full swing. This evocation of the wise fool, the idiot savant, seems to have been inspired by an interestingly meaningful encounter, as recounted in Alistair Taylor in his book *Yesterday*. A middle aged man appeared out of nowhere behind McCartney and Taylor on Primrose Hill in London at dawn. After exchanging pleasantries with them, he vanished. This was just after the pair had been debating the existence of God, having been watching the beauty of the sunrise. Says Taylor:

*Paul and I both felt the same weird sensation that something special had happened. We sat down rather shakily on the seat and Paul said ‘What the hell do you make of that? That’s weird. He was here, wasn’t he? We did speak to him?’...We both felt that we’d been through some mystical religious experience, yet we didn’t care to name even to each other what or who we’d just seen on that hilltop for those few brief seconds.*¹⁴⁷

With a meaningful and inexplicable experience such as this behind it, the song certainly stands out as an inspired piece, set against McCartney’s growing complacency—yet it’s interesting to note the Horatio-mindset still at work here, with the two men not daring to say too much about the significance of the event.

The ‘fool on the hill’ is shunned by society, but relates to the natural world around him, indeed with cosmic forces:

*Day after day, alone on a hill
The man with the foolish grin is keeping perfectly still.
But nobody wants to know him, they can see that he’s just a fool,
And he never gives an answer,
But the fool on the hill sees the sun going down
And the eyes in his head see the world spinning ‘round.*

The fact that the fool is ‘still’ reminds us of meditative posture, and the fact that ‘he never gives an answer’ reminds us of the sort of wisdom evoked in ‘Rain’. Sure enough, later on we hear that the fool himself knows that it is the others who are the fools—thus he would be wasting his breath to speak to them. The fool is deliberately contrasted favourably in the second verse with

The man of a thousand voices, talking perfectly loud.

Although this man does talk,

¹⁴⁷ Quoted in *A Hard Day’s Write*.

*..nobody ever hears him, or the sound he appears to make,
And he never seems to notice.*

It seems to me that in ‘The Fool On The Hill’ effectively what McCartney is doing is contrasting the two sides of himself. The Fool represents the Witness Self, which we have previously encountered in this study. This Witness Self is that deeper self that sees and notes, but does not judge, the actions and words of the superficial self—the ‘man of a thousand voices’. The Fool is depicted, after all, as doing nothing but watching, seeing the sun going down and the world spinning around. He doesn’t act, and has nothing to say. Here is a famous description of the Witness Self from the *Mundaka Upanishad*:

*Two birds,
Inseparable companions,
Perch on the same tree.
One eats the fruit,
The other looks on.
The first bird is our individual self,
Feeding on the pleasures and pains
Of this world.
The other is the universal Self,
Silently witnessing all.*

Here is Paul Brunton on the Witness Self:

...[it] is the fundamental observer who notes the comings and goings of the other three states [sleep, dream and waking] because it can stand beside from them in unbroken beatitude. It is our truest deepest self because it alone outlives unchanged the surface self of changing personality.¹⁴⁸

It is indeed the God within that Lennon refers to in the interview. It is the Thou Art That which through meditation we attempt to reach and align ourselves with. With the ‘inexplicable’ man on Primrose Hill at the back of his mind McCartney is finally presenting us with material from the depths of the psyche in a similar way Lennon had with ‘Strawberry Fields Forever’. In many ways it is Paul’s most spiritual song, provoked by a numinous encounter which had briefly penetrated his habitual Horatio-mindset mental armouring.

In this song at least McCartney seems to have had the insight to delineate a portrait of the Horatio-mindset small-ego dominated side of himself, and, indeed, of all of us, in the shape of the ‘man of a thousand voices talking perfectly loud’. We note that for all his thousand voices,

¹⁴⁸ Brunton, op. cit.

*Nobody really hears him, or the sound he appears to make,
And he never seems to notice*

What a brilliant portrait of this aspect of all of us! It's a pity that in the course of subsequent events McCartney didn't pay more attention to the wisdom he embodied in this song. As we have already seen, both Lennon and McCartney touchingly, humanly, and frustratingly often fail to live up to the level of insight encapsulated in their songs, fail to turn altered states into permanent traits. This does not invalidate the message, but simply underlines the gap between practice and theory, between insight and implementation.

As for the sage being perceived by the world as a 'fool'—this is almost a commonplace of the Perennial Philosophy, and that it will be so is inevitable given that the world values agitated and intense mind activity and 'cleverness' over the sublime state of tranquillity that a sage knows due to identification with, and absorption in, not this agitated ego-mind of 'the man with a thousand voices', but the Witness Self. The Zen master Hakuin described a moment of satori thus:

*I was like an idiot, like an imbecile...*¹⁴⁹

Now, why should such a state be the goal of all mystics? We notice that Hakuin doesn't say 'I was an idiot', but 'I was *like* an idiot.' This distinction is very important. What a student of meditation aspires to is the so-called 'fourth state', beyond waking, sleeping and dreaming, the three 'normal' states of our mind. This fourth state is a paradoxical one in that it is a conscious awareness of an empty state of mind—as empty, that is devoid of mental activity, as deep sleep. A conscious accessing of what Buddhism categorises as the mind in its natural state, of capital-'M' Mind—empty and free of obstructions as a clear sky.

Huxley in this passage makes the link between the 'holy fool' and the child-like qualities of perfect spiritual vision that we have already mentioned:

...when Christ says that the Kingdom of Heaven cannot be entered except by those who are as little children, we are apt to forget...that a man cannot become childlike unless he chooses to undertake the most strenuous and searching course of self-denial.

In other words, in order to recapture our pure vision and to tear off the 'shades of the prison house' which fell upon us due to our descent into this corrupt and fallen 'adult' world, in order to be aligned with the universal capital 'M' Mind, the 'big mind' of Zen, rather than our own grasping, compulsively hyper-active 'little mind' or ego-mind, we have to

¹⁴⁹ Quoted in *Zen; Direct Pointing To Reality*, Thames and Hudson, 1979.

undertake spiritual training, we have to turn every moment into a state of meditation, we have to 'be here now'. A sage/saint/enlightened master is one who has reached the point in his/her spiritual training and progress where life is lived from the point of view of that Higher Mind, at all times. In this passage Huxley also points out the relationship between the purity of vision of the sage and that of the artist:

The simplicity and spontaneity of the perfect sage are the fruits of mortification—mortification of the will and, by recollectedness and meditation, of the mind. Only the most highly disciplined artist can recapture, on a higher level, the spontaneity of the child with its first paint-box. Nothing is more difficult than to be simple.

That the sage's 'foolishness' and that of the (true) artist are at a higher level, that we pass on an upward spiral from innocence to experience to innocence again, is made clear by yet another passage in *The Perennial Philosophy* which basically summarises the spiritual path:

Spiritual progress is a spiral advance. We start as infants in the animal eternity of life in the moment, without anxiety for the future or regret for the past; we grow up into the specifically human condition of those who look before and after, who live to a great extent...in memory and anticipation...and we can continue, if we so desire, up and on in a returning sweep to a point corresponding to our starting place in animality, but incommensurably above it. Once more life is lived in the moment—the life now not of a sub-human creature, but of a being in whom charity [spiritual Love] has cast out fear, vision has taken the place of hope, selflessness has cast out the positive egotism of complacent reminiscence and the negative egotism of remorse.

Limitless Undying Love

Across The Universe.

This is a classic Beatles song, an acknowledged favourite with fans, and one of the most overtly spiritual and ‘cosmic’ statements Lennon made. It *should* have been the next Beatles single, and would have made an excellent anthem for early 1968, establishing the idea that the Summer Of Love may have been over, but what it stood for and expressed was by no means a passing fad. An encapsulation of a ‘peak’ experience, of psychedelic vision, as per ‘The Void’, but based on no previous lyrical model, apparently appearing ‘channelled’ or accessed by some higher aspect of mind, and indeed a vision of the ‘limitless undying Love’ which is the ground of all being, its rejection as the next single came due it seems to a reaction on McCartney’s part against anything too mystical or cosmic at this point. After *Magical Mystery Tour* was such a flop, he seems to scuttle back into the safety of the ‘house’ of ‘Fixing A Hole’, becomes cautious, anti-mystical, obsessed with the idea of ‘getting back to basics’ (cue ‘Get Back’). He was still uninterested in ‘Across The Universe’ when it came to the *Let It Be* sessions. Interviews reveal that Lennon was extremely hurt by this reaction, especially as it came so fast on the heels of the ‘downsizing’ of ‘I Am The Walrus’, and from this point on the rift between the two men was irreconcilable. The Beatles had, by this point, become no longer a properly functioning vehicle for Lennon’s talents. Indeed, he was now working effectively within a context of censorship—not from some outside agency, but from within the band itself.

This had always been so for all writing members of the band due to their tacit agreement that all members of the band agree on which songs were to be single releases. The boot had been on the other foot earlier in their career when, for example, the others mooted Paul’s ‘Michele’ and even ‘Yesterday’. In a way then, like ‘I Am The Walrus’, the song is pivotal in terms of the Beatles’ functionality, as it were, as a band...one might even say it is the song that split the band. Written before the trip to Rishikesh and Lennon’s next ‘big statement’ song, it languished unreleased other than via a charity album until the release of *Let It Be*—the album and film that the band’s demise and, in many ways, also marked the end of that era.

Here is John on the way in which the song was inspired, virtually channelled:

*The words are purely inspirational and were given to me—except for maybe one or two where I had to resolve a line, or something like that. I don’t own it, it came through like that.*¹⁵⁰

¹⁵⁰ Quoted in the *Anthology*.

So, material from the depths—quite out of the gaze of surface-fixated Horatios. Even more interesting is the fact that the original impetus for the song was so negative:

*I was lying next to my wife in bed...it started off as a negative song and she must have been going on and on about something. She'd gone to sleep, and I kept hearing 'Words are flowing out like endless streams...' I was a bit irritated and I went downstairs and it turned into a sort of cosmic song rather than 'Why are you always mouthing off at me?'*¹⁵¹

Remarkable indeed that the tensions within Lennon's marriage, which were soon to surface unambiguously, should spark off what is a revelatory song. Perhaps it was this pivotal word 'streams' that turned it around, with its connotations of 'streams of consciousness', and its use in earlier visionary epics such as 'The Void'—

Turn off your mind, relax, and float downstream.

The stream of, presumably, verbal abuse or nagging gets transmuted into visionary gold, although it's interesting that Lennon didn't keep to his 'endless streams', and instead we have the song's first line as

*Words are flowing out like endless rain into a paper cup,
They slither wildly as they slip away across the universe.*[My emphasis]

We must remember that Lennon is acutely aware of the power of words. He called a song 'The Word', in which 'Love' is held up as a word of power, a mantra, and in which he states categorically that all one need do is say it and one will be free. This song, like its predecessor of 1965, has the opening of the St. John Gospel resonating all through it:

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*¹⁵²

We remember how all through 'All You Need Is Love' the mantra 'love, love, love' is repeated. Here's Lennon in a 1969 interview stating his faith in the power of words as mantras explicitly:

*..I believe in the power of mantras. I think all words are mantras and some are more powerful than others.*¹⁵³

¹⁵¹ Op.cit.

¹⁵² John, I:i

¹⁵³ Interview with Barry Miles, published in MOJO magazine issue 24, 1995.

Bearing in mind that we are dealing with something so powerful, that from which the universe itself is manifested and bodied-forth, here we have not just a word, but ‘words’ plural, ‘flowing out like endless rain’, erupting like a natural force. To Lennon, words have characteristics like physical entities, thus, rather like fish, they can

..slither wildly as they slip away across the universe.

So, words come from some inexhaustible inner source, they emanate out into reality in the same way as manifested objects and living beings, and they are apparently unstoppable, and cover vast physical distances—‘they make their way across the universe’. This song, like many of Lennon’s songs, (e.g. ‘In My Life’) seems to anticipate ‘New Age’ theories about the power of thought, the belief that thoughts expressed as words actually have an effect of our physical universe. This view is, naturally, scoffed at by Horatio-mindset orientated scientists...but can they disprove it? Of course, the ‘New Agers’ are dealing with concepts that are far from new, that are part of the Perennial Philosophy. In the John Gospel, God, the Creator, the creative impulse that ‘in the beginning’ bodies forth the cosmos, is, as we have seen ‘The Word’. (‘The Word’ is, as I understand it in theological terms, the Logos, the Second person of the Holy Trinity.) We also had the example of Lennon’s fanciful ‘newspaper taxis’ in ‘Lucy’ becoming a hard and fast reality!¹⁵⁴

Lennon’s ‘endless streams’ and/or ‘endless rain’ of language is also reminiscent of the Pierian Spring, sacred to the Greek muses, the fount of poetic inspiration. In invoking watery symbols of inspiration, he seems to be once again dealing with archetypal material—thus giving credence to his avowal that the song was ‘given’. The ‘paper cup’ is an arresting insertion of modern life and imagery. A mere cup, however large, wouldn’t be able to contain ‘endless rain’. I think the cup might represent this song-poem itself, a container for a finite amount of the words that can be caught as they emanate from this fount of infinite inspiration. Lennon was clear that this song was one of his best, and that it stood up as a poem:

*...it’s one of the best lyrics I’ve written...it’s good poetry...the ones [songs] that I like are the ones that stand as words without melody...it’s a poem, you know, you could read ‘em.*¹⁵⁵

Thus, from the opening lines at least, it seems that ‘Across The Universe’ is an inspired song *about the process of inspiration itself*. Not something

¹⁵⁴ ‘Lucy’ as we have already seen, is another song in which water/streams/a river feature prominently.

¹⁵⁵ Quoted in *Lennon Remembers*. This despite the fact that with ‘I Am The Walrus’ we looked at Lennon’s dislike of being ‘studied’, which is, of course, what anything that proclaims itself to be poetry will have to endure!

one can write about from an objective-surface viewpoint: you have to have it from the fountainhead, as it were.

As we have already seen, Huxley gave us a useful description of what, exactly, inspiration is in *The Human Situation*:

What may be called genius is the uprush of helpful material from the deep levels of the unconscious, which is then worked up by the conscious self into an appropriate form...Genius is the harmonious collaboration of the two parts of our being; it is openness to what lies below us on the unconscious level and the capacity to mould this material into forms which shall communicate to other people...

By this very definition, then, a person dominated at all times by the Horatio-mindset cannot have access to genius, as the Horatios dismiss these ungraphable and mysterious ‘deep levels of the unconsciousness’. On the other hand, John Lennon, Paul McCartney and George Harrison, when writing in this way where the surface self and the interior self are in the sort of harmony Huxley here describes, are, I think, by this definition, exhibiting genius. As we have seen, all three writing Beatles sometimes are in alignment with this deeper power, are ‘Amadeus’, and sometimes they are not. It is a rare artist indeed, and probably not one who labours under any commercial pressure, who produces the goods *every* time. And we must also be aware of Brunton’s assertion that art, even genuinely inspired art, because it still deals with symbols and concepts, can at its best point to, but cannot actually come from, the very highest level of spiritual insight: that faculty, we may say, is the preserve alone of a Jesus or a Buddha, a fully realised and enlightened being.

The following lines of the first verse are, to me, among the most moving in the whole Beatles/Lennon songbook. They have an almost visceral emotional impact upon one, and I would go so far as to question the perceptual and intellectual credentials of any ‘critic’ who is unmoved by them:

*Pools of sorrow, waves of joy are drifting through my opened mind,
Possessing and caressing me.*

We are now at an even deeper level than that of words, the level of *feelings*. This phrase sums up nicely the alternating ‘waves’ of buried subconscious feelings which are released in any ‘opening’ of the mind, whether achieved through psychedelics, meditation, or whatever—any opening of the doors of perception¹⁵⁶. We notice that Lennon continues the water-imagery, and, appropriately for a deeper level, the imagery is deeper as well. ‘Rain’ and ‘streams’ are aspects of water on the surface

¹⁵⁶ The breakaway Sufi sect called The Sibbud call their mystical initiations for new members ‘the opening’.

level, while ‘pools’ give an impression of more depth, and ‘waves’ are, of course, associated with the underlying source of all water, the ocean. Lennon has sustained his metaphor, and taken us down with it (‘let me take you down’) to a deeper level. We are dealing with released subconscious material, the level of super-personal and archetypal experience, levels of depth well below the personality. I am reminded of a phrase from the 66th chapter of the *Tao Teh Ching*:

*How does the sea become the king of all streams?
Because it lies lower than they!*

Both Grof and Leary report that once an inner voyage has begun it can take the subject into the realms of cellular memory, way below even the levels of human archetypes, and produce experiences of identification with ‘lower’ forms of life—and life, as we know, evolved on this planet in the oceans. The ocean is the great mother of all. Grof’s first ‘Perinatal Matrix’, stemming from the infant’s uterine experience, if it is a positive one, can give rise to a state of *unio mystica*, and what he terms ‘oceanic ecstasy’.

There is no doubt in my mind that ‘Across The Universe’ deals with such an experience, and that we can take Lennon’s assertion that the song was ‘given’ to him on trust. A great artist is great when he gets his/her personality out of the way in order for inspiration to come from deeper levels, as we have already discussed, and this seems to be as obvious an instance of this happening as, say, Coleridge’s ‘Kubla Khan’ vision. I am reminded of D.H. Lawrence’s feeling of and hope for a perfect alignment with a Higher creative power in his poem ‘The Song Of A Man Who Has Come Through’:

Not I, not I, but the wind that blows through me!...

*Oh for the wonder that bubbles into my soul,
I would be a good fountain, a good well-head,
Would blur no whisper, soil no expression.*

Lennon in this song is, I feel, supremely successful in being ‘a good fountain’—and we note the continuity here of the archetypal water-imagery. It takes an ‘opened mind’ to be able to do this, and it is rare even for an artist to achieve such a state when we live in a generally closed-mind (Horatio-mindset) reality. We shouldn’t be surprised that those with closed minds see nothing of value in a song such as this, especially when they use a term such as ‘babyish’ in a pejorative way—we might argue that ‘babyish’ is a term of the highest honour. Here is the *Tao Teh Ching* again (chapter 49):

*All the people strain their ears and eyes:
The Sage only smiles like an amused infant.*

Our sage here sounds very much like Paul's 'Fool on the hill', doesn't he? From an ancient proponent of the Perennial Wisdom, to a modern 'channel'—here is Emmanuel again:

*As infants newborn you are all very wise.
Though you may have seemed to look around
With eyes still myopic
From intrauterine experience,
I promise you that you saw much more
Than you do now. You saw essence.¹⁵⁷*

It is rare in adult life, the 'shades of the prison house' having fallen upon us at quite an early age, that we can see 'essence'. It happens only in moments of vision, and this song is a tiny 'paper cup' full of words of one such vision. We notice too how the inner states of emotion now being described ('sorrow' and 'joy') have a life of their own and cannot be controlled or directed. They 'drift' through Lennon's mind, then are felt to be 'possessing' and 'caressing' him—at this point they take on sexual/physical characteristics, rather like the fish-words that earlier we saw could 'slither wildly'. (We have discussed on a number of occasions in this study our need to ascribe physical descriptors, as we are beings inhabiting a physical reality, to non-physical entities.)

The second verse's imagery seems to be archetypally 'psychedelic', pertaining specifically to the 'Retinal Circus' (as Herman Hesse called the entoptic patterns) aspects of a psychedelic experience:

*Images of broken light which dance before me like a million eyes
They call me on and on across the universe.*

This is, obviously, a very visual image, again the sort of thing a Buddhist master might dismiss but which is of value to an artist. One thinks of Blake's works, his *Beatrice Addressing Dante From The Car*, for example (and we remember how Beatrice in Dante's *Paradiso* acts as an anima-guide to the visionary world in the same way as Lucy in 'Lucy In The Sky With Diamonds'). The *Sophia* of contemporary artist Alex Grey provides a similar example of 'images of broken light which dance before [one] like a million eyes'¹⁵⁸. A visual experience/image such as this cannot be 'explained' as such. Like 'Strawberry Fields' standing as a symbol of childhood, it cannot be unpacked: it just *is*. What is interesting though is that these eyes are calling Lennon himself 'on and on across the

¹⁵⁷ Emmanuel's *Book II*.

¹⁵⁸ See *Sacred Mirrors: The Visionary Art Of Alex Grey*, Inner Traditions International, 1990.

universe’, so we are given here the idea of existence as a journey, an exploration. Physically one cannot transverse the (physical) universe—or can one? George’s ‘The Inner Light’, offers quite the opposite view, and our knowledge that the universe can only be viewed as an unbroken whole from modern physics, added to our grasp of Dr. Brunton’s ‘mentalism’ and Buddhism’s assertion that Mind is the ground of all, blurs and makes irrelevant anyway any division between purely ‘physical’ and purely ‘mental’.

We return to words in the second half of the verse with

*Thoughts meander like a restless wind inside a letter-box,
They tumble blindly as they make their way across the universe.*

Here we have an image of words already made manifest in written form suddenly being re-animated by thought. While the Perennial Philosophy honours *the Word*, sometimes words themselves are seen as an ossification of true thought or wisdom, as in St. Paul’s

*The letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.*¹⁵⁹

which we have had many occasions to mention in this study. Time and time again in spiritual writings we come across warnings against over-intellectualisation, and it is a debate which rages through all ages. As Huxley points out in *The Perennial Philosophy*

Even the most ordinary experience of a thing or event in time can never be fully or adequately described in words...But for all their inadequacy and their radical unlikeness to the facts to which they refer, words remain the most reliable and accurate of our symbols.

So we are, effectively, stuck with them, despite Lao Tzu’s

*He who knows does not speak.
He who speaks does not know.*¹⁶⁰

Words might be especially inadequate to the task of describing that which is beyond time and physicality, as we again, have had occasion to note frequently in this study. However, Lao Tzu’s position seems too extreme, and we agree with Huxley that words give us maps. We often mistake the map for the territory, but

*...a map is indispensably useful as indicating the direction in which the traveller should set out and the roads which he must take.*¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁹ Corinthians 3:6.

¹⁶⁰ The *Tao Teh Ching*, chapter 56.

It should be noted also that the word ‘words’ doesn’t actually occur in this section, only ‘thoughts’—it is their being in a ‘letter-box’ which infers that these thoughts have taken form as written words in the letters in the letter box. The ‘thoughts’ in Lennon’s song are again given as a force of nature, a wind this time, and they are seen to re-animate, to make once more alive, the ‘dead letters’ of the words sealed up in the inanimate objects that are letters in a post-box. These ‘thoughts’ have the divine power of life, are an aspect of God, reminiscent of God speaking to Job out of the whirlwind, or breathing life into Adam. The ‘dead letters’ which are our normal forms of communication are thus freed from earthly restraints, and they too can travel, can ‘make their way across the universe’, that is across both space and time. In a mentalist view, all manifested things are thoughts, brought about by the World Mind, that is, God, just as our own thoughts exist and have an impact on manifested reality. Lennon’s song from the depths is dealing head-on with some of the fundamental mysteries which sustain this incredible universe of ours.

With verse three, we have a different sense being appealed to, hearing:

*Sounds of laughter, shades of life are ringing through my opened ears
Inciting and inviting me.*

The ear can become ‘opened’ to new levels in an episode of consciousness expansion, again revealing to us the truth of Blake’s dictum about our senses largely being a matter of closure in order for us to operate within survival parameters. Lao Tzu puts it this way:

*The five colours blind the eye.
The five tones deafen the ear.*¹⁶²

Huxley in *The Doors Of Perception* puts it like this:

*To make biological survival possible, Mind at Large has to be funnelled
through the reducing valve of the brain and nervous system.*

We can say that in an episode of consciousness-expansion, however brought about, this ‘reducing valve’ is temporarily put out of action, and Mind at Large, Suchness, Isness, Thou Art That, experienced. There will always be inappropriate circumstances for such a relaxation of this ‘reducing valve’, but what we get when it is relaxed is genuine visionary experience. Lennon’s ‘opened ears’ allow him to be ‘invited’ by the greater possibilities he is now encountering—he is lured on by these

¹⁶¹ Huxley, op. cit.

¹⁶² Lao Tzu, op.cit.

new auditory experiences in the same way that the ‘million eyes’ lured him on visually. As for ‘inciting’, my OED definition of incite is

Urge, stir up, (person etc.) to action, to do.

Although it’s a word we usually use in the plural in connection with crowds, it is by no means inappropriate here, and it is a long way from the ‘quietism’ sometimes associated with mysticism. This vision, far from being a matter of navel-gazing, is acting as a catalyst to action—and action is exactly what Lennon starts to take from here on, for example, ending the inauthenticity of the Beatles, and his campaigning for peace outside of the world of music.

‘Shades of life’ is interesting, especially as it is a visual word, here used in a predominantly auditory context (an example of synaesthesia). By a ‘shade’ we usually mean a gradation in intensity of colour. By inference, life itself is here being ascribed different shades.

The last line of this final verse is perhaps the most visionary moment of the Beatles’ or Lennon’s entire output, and is the culmination of the song:

*Limitless undying love which shines around me like a million suns,
It calls me on and on across the universe.*

These lines are reminiscent of the description of Krishna’s revealed divine effulgence in the *Bhagavad-Gita*:

*If hundreds of thousands of suns rose up at once into the sky, they might resemble the effulgence of the Supreme Person in that form.*¹⁶³

Here, in lyrical form, Lennon is offering us unambiguously a vision of the Clear Light experience, the shining Void, the Inner Light which is dazzling beyond all normal comprehension: The Buddha Amitabha, the Buddha of Infinite Light. Perhaps such a vision is simply too much for the Horatio-minded, and thus the song has to be dismissed as ‘babyish’ fancy. This is a vision of light and, we notice, *love* which is both infinite (‘limitless’) and eternal (‘undying’). Lennon has been consistent with his vision since 1965 in ‘The Word’. Love is the underlying principle of everything, and is therefore ‘All you need’. For those who think of such a vision of ‘a million suns’ as merely fanciful, we would urge them to look up at the Milky Way, if possible, on a clear night. The statistics which space exploration is beginning to come up with are mind-boggling. Even our own galaxy is estimated in it to have not just a million suns, but several hundred *billion*—and there are, of course, a seemingly countless number of galaxies ‘across the universe’. The cosmic reality makes even

¹⁶³ *Bhagavad-Gita*, 11:12.

our attempts at hyperbole (which is all the Horatio-minded would think of a phrase like ‘a million suns’) seem puny.

Lennon is here beginning indeed to move toward ‘cosmic consciousness’, grander, larger perspectives. By placing himself at the disposal of larger forces within all of us, by being ‘a good fountain, a good well-head’, he is at the forefront of human evolution. He is a true visionary with the sort of ‘opened mind’ (at times) which terrifies the Horatio-mindset in the same way that the mediaeval Church was in denial about the new realities being revealed by Galileo—or indeed the current Horatio mindset is terrified of the huge implications of quantum physics, as already discussed.

The song’s refrain becomes a mantra:

J’ai Guru Dev(a) Om.

Nothing’s gonna change my world,

Nothing’s gonna change my world.

‘J’ai’ is a Hindu word which simply means formally ‘Long live’, but is actually an *invocation*, like the ‘Fiat’ in ‘Fiat Lux!’ (‘Let There Be Light’) of Genesis 1:3. Guru Dev was the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi’s own guru. Thus we have a sort of spiritual slogan in this line, with ‘Long live Duru Dev!’ This shows how, at this stage, Lennon was grateful for the technique of meditation, and how much he endorsed the whole Buddhist/Hindu tradition of knowledge being transmitted through trained ‘masters’. By the end of the Rishikesh trip, and then *Plastic Ono Band* he was repudiating gurus altogether. Typically with Lennon the word ‘Dev’ is conflated/confused/extended with ‘*devā*’, a word meaning really any kind of light- or spiritual- or higher being, and the root of English words such as ‘Divine’, ‘Divinity’: *devā* is mostly used currently in spiritual circles in connection with the presiding angel or nature spirit of a certain plant or species. Due to Lennon’s predilection for Joycean word-play, both in his songs and prose-writings, words often take on a life, and multiple meanings, of their own, as we saw with ‘Lucy’.

‘Om’ is imperfectly understood by Westerners, mainly due to its prevalence—any parody of a mystic or a meditator will have him or her chanting ‘Om’. It is the most powerful and significant of ‘seed mantras’, forms of mantras so concentrated they only comprise of one syllable. We would perhaps do well here to remind ourselves what a mantra really is—the term has been devalued in the West (like most terms, perhaps like language itself) through the distortions of the media. Here is an explanation of mantras in general, and seed mantras, from *The Tantric Way*, by Ajit Mookerjee and Madhu Khanna:

The oldest and perhaps most widely used concentrative technique is the mantric sound. Mantra is primarily a concentrated ‘thought form’

composed of nuclear syllables based on the esoteric properties believed to be inherent in sound vibrations....The very sound of a mantra or a combination of them has the capacity to arouse the divine forms or their energies...The seed mantra is considered to contain the entire potentiality or full significance of a doctrine. A treatise running to several thousand verses, for instance, may be...abbreviated to a bija [seed] mantra which, though the smallest sound unit, will still retain the full power of the doctrine.

As for ‘Om’ itself, the authors of *The Tantric Way* have this to say:

Om, the most powerful of all sounds, is the source of all mantras...It is made up of three sounds, a, u, m, which symbolically represent the three ultimate tendencies or gunas—creation, preservation, dissolution¹⁶⁴—and encompass all the knowledge of the different planes of the universe. It is referred to as ‘the quintessence of the entire cosmos’, ‘monarch of all sounded things’, ‘mother of vibrations’ and ‘key to eternal wisdom and power’.

Note though that the letter represented by and ‘m’ with a dot above it, the *anusvāra* represents a nasalisation of the preceding sounds (ultimately into an overtone-producing sound) and not the standard closed lipped labial ‘m’ sound used in all the English word examples cited. Lennon’s pronunciation of the vowel as an open ‘oh’ as in ‘go’, ‘slow’ is correct, as opposed to the short-o often used by people incorrectly (as in ‘got’, ‘lot’). There is no short-‘o’ in Sanskrit, which, unlike English and all the de-sacralised languages which it has spawned, is a strictly phonetic language where every letter corresponds to one unit of sound *only*. This is the why and how of its function as a *sacred* language.

Lennon knew what he was doing by putting ‘the source of all mantras’ in his song. Despite the rebuffs, nay, the censorship of his colleague, he knew this was an important song. It surfaced in 1969 on a fund-raising album for the World Wildlife Fund, the only time, to my knowledge, that the world’s biggest band lent its weight directly in this way to a particular cause. That album took its title from ‘Across The Universe’, *No-One’s Gonna Change Our World*. By the time of the *Let It Be* sessions Lennon raised it again as we said, and McCartney, usually held up to be supportive of his partner and thus the unjust recipient of Lennon’s later barbs, mooted it again. The original *No-One’s Gonna*

¹⁶⁴ These three ‘ultimate tendencies’ are symbolised in Hindu mythology by the division of the Godhead up into three, Shiva the creator, Vishnu the preserver, and Brahma the destroyer. Eastern philosophy’s grasp of the dual aspect of creation and destruction is further emphasised by the fact that both Shiva and Brahma’s roles are reversed depending upon which authority you read, as both deities have both destructive and creative aspects. Shiva as ‘Lord of the dance’ dances the manifest universe into being, but holds in one hand the fire of destruction, while Brahma’s waking ‘day’ represents the era of a manifested universe, while in his ‘night’ all slips back into the potency of the un-manifest Void.

Change Our World version was then handed over to Phil Spector, and it duly appeared in altered form on *Let It Be*. We also now have the jewel-like clarity of the all-acoustic version on *Anthology II*, which, as usual with Lennon, is a testament to how finished lyrically his songs were, despite the existence of different recorded versions.

This brings us to the last part of the refrain/mantra, the

Nothing's gonna change my world.

This seems to contradict the Lennon who thinks of himself as a 'revolutionary' artist, dedicated to change. However, this is another example of a song being delivered from visionary heights, from which the world, indeed the universe, even with its imperfections, is perceived as perfect. It is from these same heights that Lennon had earlier declared that 'It's easy'. So the statement 'Nothing's gonna change my world' is a statement meaning the world is perfect anyway, and this perfection cannot be destroyed or damaged. The paradoxical 'perfection-in-imperfection' often discussed in spiritual discourse. Perhaps we might restate it more in a way that would make it more easily comprehensible thus:

Nothing's gonna change my [inner] world ?

When one is no longer looking at the world from such a height, statements such as these can seem, on a human level, almost cruel and unfair. The world obviously needs changing. It is the sort of paradox that the spiritual path, the Perennial Philosophy, often confronts us with. Here is healer and psychic Barbara Ann Brennan on the subject:

It is difficult to be told that we must free ourselves from the prison of our humanness and, at the same time, we must trust the human condition. It is difficult to be told that the material world is an expression of the divine, in fact, is divine, and yet to see the chaos, anger and hatred there. It is difficult to be told that to become more spiritual, we must spiritualise matter and that the only way to do that is to accept the material world. It is most difficult to accept the basic nature of duality of our physical world, and yet try to move through that duality to a state of oneness with it.

The way to do this is through self-love and through the acceptance of the universe as it is, of our lives as they are, knowing that always and ever there is a guidance and a protection and that there is always a higher reason for everything that happens.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁵ From *Light Emerging*, Bantam Books 1993.

This is very similar to the sort of thing McCartney, back in 1967 and still on a high before the death of Epstein and the *Magical Mystery Tour* fiasco, was able to say:

*At the back of my mind somewhere...there is something that tells me that everything is beautiful...I know really that it's all great and that everything's great and there's no bad ever if I can think of it as great.*¹⁶⁶

This is the total acceptance implicit in the line in 'All You Need Is Love':

There's nowhere you can be that isn't where you're meant to be...

Does that mean even if one is in an apparently terrible karmic situation which robs one of life itself? If reincarnation is a reality for one, then the answer to that, although the human personality trembles at the prospect of its demise, is 'Yes'.

Declarations such as these are put to the test in times of terrible human suffering. We often recoil from such 'wisdom' when the human price seems too high—we remember how inappropriate Lennon felt that such a response was from the Maharishi on the news of Epstein's death, and that 'I Am The Walrus', apart from its opening line, is one long howl of chaos in response. 'Times of trouble', as McCartney was later to put it, force us to look at the very core of our beliefs. Do we really think that there's 'no bad' and that there is a 'higher reason for everything that happens'? Consider this: *the only alternative to there being a higher reason for what seems like unacceptable suffering, is that there is no reason, which would mean that all suffering, as well as being in and of itself painful, is also pointless.*

This latter assertion is the basic premise of materialism. Life is painful and the pain is pointless—an assertion which, in itself, is the cause of more fear and existential terror, a self-fulfilling negative prophecy. The truth to one who does not accept the materialist lie is that we reap what we sow. Lennon was later to write in 'Instant Karma'

*Why on earth are we here?
Surely not to live in pain and fear?*

To end this section, I would like to quote Deepak Chopra from his *Ageless Body, Timeless Mind*¹⁶⁷. Pointing out the new paradigm's ideas of all of space-time being an unbroken wholeness, a 'quantum soup', or 'the field', he then goes on to say:

¹⁶⁶ Quoted in *A Hard Day's Write*.

¹⁶⁷ Rider, 1993.

Your awareness and every intention that springs from your awareness are enmeshed in this continuity. This means that when you have a desire, you are actually sending a message into the entire field—your slightest intention is rippling across the universe at the quantum level.

The Inner Light

As it turns out, this is the song that became the B-side of Paul's 'Lady Madonna', Lennon probably having given up, for the meantime, in disgust and probably unwilling to let so great and important a song as 'Across The Universe' be so downsized as to be a B-side: the fate of other major Lennon songs/statement such as 'Rain' and 'I Am The Walrus'. So at least the Beatles gave the world one cosmic statement before disappearing (for who knew how long?) off to Rishikesh to study meditation with the Maharishi. It is essentially an out-take from Harrison's *Wonderwall* album, an excellent, atmospheric piece of soundtrack music—and also the first solo Beatles release. Surprisingly, it is the last of Harrison's full-scale forays into Indian music until while with the band.

As already stated, the song is lyrically a setting of the 47th chapter of the *Tao Teh Ching*. The lyrics are:

*Without going out of my door I can know all things on earth,
Without looking out of my window I can know the ways of heaven,
The farther one travels, the less one knows,
The less one really knows.*

*Without going out of your door you can know all things on earth,
Without looking out of your window you can know the ways of heaven,
The farther one travels the less one knows,
The less one really knows.*

*Arrive without travelling,
See all without looking,
Do all without doing.*

My version of the *Tao Teh Ching*¹⁶⁸ puts it like this:

*Without going out of your door
You can know the ways of the world.
Without peeping out of your window
You can see the Way of Heaven.
The farther you go
The less you know.*

*Thus, the Sage knows without travelling,
Sees without looking,
And arrives without Ado.*

¹⁶⁸ Shambhala, 1989.

We can see that Harrison has kept pretty close to the original. The only real difference is in his use of an additional verse at the beginning, using 'I' instead of 'you', and in the addition of 'the more one *truly* knows'. There is also a difference between his plural 'ways of heaven' and Taoism's singular 'the Way'. Other than that, like Lennon with 'Across The Universe', Harrison is simply acting as a channel, in this case to wisdom already enshrined in print, and handed down through the ages. His original source was Professor Juan Mascaró's *Lamps Of Fire*¹⁶⁹, a collection of spiritual wisdom on a par with Huxley's *The Perennial Philosophy*. Even the title 'The Inner Light' had been ascribed to this passage in Mascaró's book. An emphasis on 'inner awareness' had, as we have seen, been part of the Beatles' musical/lyrical agenda (thanks to Lennon) from as early as 1963 with 'There's A Place'. Now they were delivering verbatim fairly large chunks of the Perennial Philosophy intact.

The gnomic and paradoxical nature of the *Tao Teh Ching* leaves the practically minded somewhat livid. One can only say with certainty, along with Dr. Brunton's earlier insights, that to take such a treatise literally and never leave one's room, would be to miss the point. However, inner voyaging, experiencing oneself as 'pure energy soaring about everywhere', as George put it in that oft quoted interview, through whatever means of consciousness-expansion, is something that usually occurs while one's body is in one physical location. And as we have already seen, modern physics is confirming as fact what used to be passed off as mere poetic fancy, or the domain of other-worldly 'mysticism', the indivisibility of the physical universe, the fact that there are no hard-and-fast isolated 'bits' of 'matter', but only relations between, ultimately, all things in the universe:

*Quantum theory has shown that sub-atomic particles are not isolated grains of matter, but are probability patterns, interconnections in an inseparable cosmic web that includes the human observer and her consciousness...the image of the universe as a machine has been transcended by a view of nature as one indivisible, dynamic whole whose parts are essentially interrelated and can be understood only as patterns of a cosmic process.*¹⁷⁰

So, in a sense, George's insight in 'It's All Too Much' that '[he's] ev'rywhere' is true not only while the mystic is in a state of expanded consciousness, but is true for all beings in all states at all times! As the Perennial Philosophy confirms time and time again, a state of expanded consciousness merely gives one an insight into what already *is*.

¹⁶⁹ Methuen, 1958.

¹⁷⁰ Capra, op. cit.

Late Flowerings

Revolution.

After ‘Across The Universe’ and ‘The Inner Light’, there were many more important spiritual songs to come in the latter years. For reasons of space, we may have to truncate our study a little here, but at least point you in the direction of the relevant songs.

The main musical result of the Rishikesh trip was a landslide of songwriting which produced the so-called ‘White Album’, the album (almost ironically) officially entitled *The Beatles* that came out in November 1968. Also, it produced Lennon’s ‘Revolution’, and ‘Child Of Nature’, a purely pantheistic piece of writing that later mutated into ‘Jealous Guy’.

Lennon, before setting out, had this to say:

*We’re all going...to study Transcendental Meditation properly...so we can propagate it and sell the whole idea to everyone. This is how we plan to use our power now. They’ve always called us leaders of youth, and this is a good way to give a lead.*¹⁷¹

Lennon, then, was obviously taking seriously his role as a leader, something he had been aware of at least since the ‘Bigger than Christ’ statement. Perhaps this explains some of his bitterness towards the Maharishi when, later, Lennon felt he had ‘made a fool of everyone’. For his part, the Maharishi was looking forward to the Beatles spreading the word, as it were, about his system—and who can blame him?

*I can train them as practical philosophers of the present century, something very great and of use to the world. I see the possibility of a very great future for them.*¹⁷²

Whatever the results on any expected level in terms of self-awareness, the Rishikesh experience produced a highly prolific level of creativity on Lennon’s part. Meditation seemed to enable him, as had psychedelics, to access deeply buried subconscious material, including that which was connected with his own pain and early losses, hence such painful songs as ‘Yer Blues’, and the exquisite ‘Julia’. Another interesting strand emerged in his songwriting which was almost polarised against his emerging predominantly ‘confessional’ mode, that of a more ‘dramatic’ approach involving various characters: ‘Polythene Pam’ and ‘Mean Mr. Mustard’. Of course, even within his inner journeyings he had, unsurprisingly, encountered beings such as ‘Lucy’ who were emphatically not ‘John Lennon’ as such, even though they must have been a part of him as, like the elements in a dream, they came from within

¹⁷¹ Op. cit.

¹⁷² The Maharishi, op. cit.

his own psyche. This does not negate my earlier contention that ‘Lucy’ is an anima-figure and an archetypal sky-goddess. After all, as Blake said:

*...All deities reside in the human breast.*¹⁷³

The downside, in my view, of this trip was Lennon’s abandonment of the Maharishi in favour of Yoko Ono. This is due to his own Horatio-mindset side, which expects quick fixes. Despite studying with him for TWO WHOLE MONTHS Lennon hadn’t become enlightened, and, under the pressure of constant contact from Yoko back in England (‘my thought return to home’, he confesses in the otherwise pantheistic ‘Child Of Nature’), he eventually chose his new lover over his new guru, conflating Ono into a combination of both. After someone made a complaint about the Maharishi making a pass at her, Lennon confronted him:

*I said ‘We’re leaving.’ – ‘Why?’ — ‘Well if you’re so cosmic, you’ll know why.’ Because all his right hand men were intimating that he did miracles...And he gave me a look like ‘I’ll kill you, you bastard.’ He gave me such a look. And I knew then, when he looked at me, because I’d called his bluff. I was a bit rough to him. I always expect too much—I’m always expecting my mother, and I don’t get her, that’s what it is.*¹⁷⁴

Lennon is obviously, and rather naively, expecting his guru to be not just a guru, but an omniscient God, if he expects him to know everything. Lennon is indeed ‘expecting too much’.

Harrison dismisses the alleged ‘pass’ as ‘bullshit’, McCartney doesn’t have any time for it wither, and this is what flautist Paul Horn, who was at the camp at the time, has to say about it:

*The big fuss came because there were some people there who were more interested in the Beatles than in learning to meditate and they became hangers-on...There was one girl, a school teacher from New York, who was really into the Beatles, and she started all this crap about the Maharishi making passes at her. She told the Beatles this and they got upset about it and left.*¹⁷⁵

There is nothing more credulous than a cynic who has been momentarily been won over: his/her cynical side (emanating from the mask self) needs to reassert its dominance. Lennon seems to have judged the Maharishi on little more than a look—hardly evidence admissable in a court. But, as I say, I think this simply presented him with an opportunity

¹⁷³ In *The Marriage Of Heaven And Hell*.

¹⁷⁴ Op. cit.

¹⁷⁵ Quoted in *A Hard Day’s Write*.

to decamp to England in order to take up with Ono. This is, I believe, an egoistic error on his part—to expect a person one is involved with in terms of an earthly love to also be one’s spiritual master. It’s an egoistic error that Lennon set himself up for with the writing of ‘In My Life’, *unless*, as I said in the relevant chapter, one were to turn the ‘you’ addressed in that song into a ‘You’, and the ‘love’ that is mentioned into capital ‘L’ spiritual ‘Love’.

Harrison had already decided to leave anyway, and went with Lennon. The song ‘Sexy Sadie’ on the white album which obviously was the artistic result of all this seems to have evolved from a state of mind not merely comprising of disappointment in (supposedly) finding something/one to be ‘false’, but of actual paranoia:

*That [‘Sexy Sadie’] was written just as we were leaving, waiting for our bags to be packed in the taxi that never seemed to come. We thought ‘They’re deliberately keeping the taxi back so as we can’t escape from this madman’s camp’.*¹⁷⁶

This is an example of Lennon ascribing his own state of mind to others—one wonders who the ‘we’ referred to here are supposed to be. On return to the UK, Lennon more or less denounced the Maharishi, while stressing that meditation itself was still important:

We made a mistake there. We believe in meditation, but not the Maharishi and his scene. But that’s a personal mistake we made in public...I think we had a false impression of Maharishi, like people do of us...

We thought he was something other than he was. But we were looking for it and we probably superimposed it on him. We were waiting for a guru, and along he came. But he was creating the same kind of situation for which he giving recipes out to cure...

*We’re still a hundred per cent in favour of meditation...*¹⁷⁷

Lennon here is taking it upon himself to act as spokesman for the other Beatles, which is highly inappropriate. He does at least have the grace to mention his own culpability, to some extent, and, crucially, that he still believes in meditation.

Meanwhile, the clashes between the counter-culture and the establishment that had been going on all through 1967 came to an even more visible head in 1968, the year of student unrest across the world, and the anti-Vietnam war demonstrations in the UK. Student radicals in the West were turning away from inner knowledge and awareness and embracing Maoism, perhaps unaware just how ruthless Mao, like Stalin, was prepared to be with his own people.

¹⁷⁶ *Anthology.*

¹⁷⁷ *Op. cit.*

Lennon weighed into the debate with ‘Revolution’, much to the dismay of the cautious McCartney. Version one having been vetoed as a single (it became ‘Revolution 1’ on the *White Album*), version two, just called ‘Revolution’ came out as the B-side of ‘Hey Jude’—more ‘downsizing’ of Lennon’s talent. This version’s powerful, upbeat, incredibly distorted sound actually masked the fact that this was, like all Lennon’s previous message songs, a song about ‘Love’:

*I had been thinking about it in the hills in India. I still had this ‘God will save us’ feeling about it: ‘It’s going to be alright’.*¹⁷⁸

The most ‘rocky’ of his message songs so far, ‘Revolution’ is another song delivered from the visionary heights, from a moment of spiritual insight. Against such a feeling, comparable to the positivism, perhaps part of the positivism, encapsulated in the pantheistic ‘Child Of Nature’, the calls for revolution from the far-left in the West must have seemed pretty irrelevant.

Apart from the refrain’s repeated declaration of Lennon’s ‘God will save us’ feeling,

Don’t you know it’s gonna be alright?

the tone of the song is generally sarcastic—at the expense of the radicals:

*You say you want a revolution, well, you know
We all want to change the world,
You tell me that it’s evolution, well you know
We all want to change the world,
But when you talk about destruction,
Don’t you know that you can count me out...
You say you got a real solution, well you know
We’d all love to see the plan.
You ask me for a contribution, well you know
We’re all doing what we can,
But when you want money for people with minds that hate,
All I can tell you is brother you have to wait...*

How does this sit with the Lennon who saw himself as a ‘revolutionary artist’, one whose art was ‘committed to change’? Quite simply, Lennon is stating the idea that *violent* revolution is no revolution at all, is simply keeping the same old game going. Lennon attracted a great deal of criticism for being against violent revolution in this song, and had a lot to say in his defence which proved his point that it was time

¹⁷⁸ Quoted in *Lennon Remembers*.

to dare to say something that mattered, time to engage in debate, rather than simply providing a soundtrack to what was going on in the world.

In an interview in a student magazine at the time, (Keele University), Lennon weighed into debate, refuting those who were prepared to kill, supposedly for ‘love’ (!):

*All I'm saying is I think you should do it by changing people's heads, and they're saying we should smash the system. Now, the system smashing scene has been going on forever. What's it done?...It's the same old game. Who's going to run the smashing up? Who's going to take over? It'll be the biggest smashers. They'll be the ones to take get in first and, like in Russia, they'll be the ones to take over.*¹⁷⁹

Lennon obviously had some grasp of the history of the Russian revolution, and how the Communists under Lenin were only one among many initially involved in the ‘smashing-up’ of Tsarist Russia: but they were the most committed to achieving power, and the most ruthless. Further down the line historically, at least ten million Russians died in Stalin’s paranoid purges of his own people. It’s in the third verse that Lennon tells the revolutionaries, bluntly, and, in my view, correctly

You'd better free your minds instead.

The problem with revolutions is that they *aren't* revolutionary at all, just ‘the same old game’, and the old oppressors are simply replaced by new oppressors who have got into that position by acting ‘ruthlessly’. A *real* revolution would not lose the sense of compassion which seems to be the first thing that is lost in any violent revolution. As the William Burroughs put it:

*He who opposes force with counterforce alone forms that which he opposes and is formed by it.*¹⁸⁰

As well as restating his position, in *Lennon Remembers*, Lennon points out the appeal of violent revolution to some, inferring that it stems not from a real sense of social justice, but simply from being an ‘angry young man’, from personal unhappiness or grievance—something which is not really enough to base a society on:

...when I was at college at nineteen or twenty—I would have been for complete destruction. I always hoped for it anyway, just as a happening, just to go on the loot...That's how I felt then...

¹⁷⁹ Quoted in the *Anthology*.

¹⁸⁰ From *The Job*.

If you want peace, you won't get it with violence. Please tell me one militant revolution that worked. Sure, a few of them took over, but what happened? Status quo. And if they smash it down, who do they think is going to build it up again? And when they've built it up again, who do they think is going to run it? And how are they going to run it? They don't look further than their noses.

We have already seen how the song 'Getting Better' views the state of mind of the angry young man as something that one moves on from in the process of maturity and individuation.

For Stanislav Grof, who grew up under a communist regime, revolutionary fervour of the destructive sort is merely the outcome of being mostly under the influence of certain of his 'Perinatal Matrices', especially BPM II, the 'Hell, or No Exit' matrix we discussed in the 'bad trips' context of 'I Am The Walrus', and BPM III, which is characterised as the 'Death /Rebirth struggle'. He has this to say:

The murderous entanglement of oppressor and revolutionary...seems to be an externalised expression of the turmoil experienced in the birth canal.¹⁸¹

He brings a level of psychological depth to the superficially fairly easy to observe truth that revolutions aren't revolutionary at all:

Acting out unconscious impulses—whether these occur individually...or collectively, through wars and revolutions—does not result in transformation, as would occur by bringing the same material to full consciousness, since insight and therapeutic intention are missing.

Here, perhaps, Grof is offering more than most artists or commentators on violence and violent revolution—a way to transform it.

Lennon's insight in India is in keeping with his message all along. Meanwhile here is what Paul Brunton has to say on the subject:

The belief that justifies immediate tyranny as a road to ultimate freedom, present falsehood as a road to subsequent truth, temporary terror as a road to permanent peace, and contemporary cruelty as a road to eventual welfare, is held by those who begin by deceiving themselves and end by deceiving others. Long ago Jesus pointed out that one does not gather grapes off a thistle tree...¹⁸²

And I think Dr. Brunton has again hit the nail on head when he says that

¹⁸¹ From *The Holotropic Mind*, with Hal Bennett, Harper 1993.

¹⁸² Brunton, op. cit.

...the social crisis returns always in the end to the personal crisis,

and that therefore

*If we try to get a new and better world without trying to get new and better men to inhabit it, we shall find in the end we have succeeded in getting a new edition of the same old defective world from which we want to get away.*¹⁸³

In Lennon's words, we all need to free our minds instead of recycling the same old 'smashing-up' game.

Lennon's own Janus-like nature had led him to change the lyric to 'count me in', rather than 'count me out', on one refrain only of the version of the song released on *The Beatles*. Later, Tariq Ali managed to recruit Lennon briefly to the Marxists, pushing on the exposed nerve of a rich man's guilt, and persuading him that his non-violent stance was reactionary (which is what he'd been accused of on the release of 'Revolution', most famously by Nina Simone). Lennon was perhaps the most obvious beacon/target of the sixties for anybody with any supposedly anti-establishment agenda, hence the line 'you ask me for a contribution'. However, by the late seventies he had returned to his instinctive earlier position, and in the prose piece 'The Ballad Of John And Yoko' in *Skywriting By Word Of Mouth* identifies the violent revolutionaries as being in the grip of mere 'macho' attitudes, attitudes snoopied at in such satirical Lennon songs as 'The Continuing Story Of Bungalow Bill' and 'Happiness Is A Warm Gun', on the *White Album*. With maturity, he had also gained awareness as to how to view the forces of oppression:

*If you think of the Establishment or whoever 'they' are, the Blue Meanies, you've got to remember that they're the sick ones. And if you've got a sick child in the family, you don't kick it out the door—you've got to try to look after it, or extend a hand to it...it's up to us, if we're the aware generation, to extend a hand to the retarded child, and not just kick its teeth in because it happens to be a very big child.*¹⁸⁴

As usual, Lennon is in line with the Perennial Philosophy. In the St. Matthew Gospel we are told to

*Love your enemies.*¹⁸⁵

¹⁸³ Brunton, op. cit.

¹⁸⁴ 1980 interview, quoted in *Anthology*.

¹⁸⁵ Matthew 5:44.

The reasons why we should do so given in that Gospel perhaps don't cut much ice to the modern mind, but a more recent embodiment of the Perennial Philosophy, like Emmanuel, rings truer for us today: those doing what we call evil are doing so out of *ignorance*—as we've stated before. Emmanuel is very clear on this point:

*You would not walk into a kindergarten
And denounce the children as lost souls
Because they cannot read and write...
Evil is only ignorance
Of Divine Will and Divine Law.*¹⁸⁶

Lennon's quote and that of this channelled Higher being are in agreement that the aggressors who dangerously are both in power and are the sorts of people who wish to attain power are infantile, immature, not yet fully developed. This is not to be confused with the state of the child who is still in touch with his/her eternal beingness as pointed out in other quotations in this work, and hasn't yet moved on into the intermediate stages where 'shades of the prison house' fall upon him.

The sarcasm of 'we'd all love to see the plan' points to the lack of thinking-through that often accompanies the 'violent' revolutionaries:

*The lyrics stand today. They're still my feeling about politics. I want to see the plan. That's what I used to say to Jerry Rubin and Abbie Hoffman. Count me out if it's for violence. Don't expect me on the barricades unless it's with flowers...I want to know what you're going to do after you've knocked it down.*¹⁸⁷

By being anti-violence, by inferring that even the 'Blue Meanies' are human because, after all, 'we're all one' (as Harrison had stated explicitly in 'Within You Without You') Lennon's 'Revolution' was *truly* revolutionary. Lennon was clear sighted enough, unlike those agitating for violent revolution, to see that it would be hatred, not love, that would fuel a violent revolution, and in 'Revolution' he puts his balls on the line for the belief he had enshrined in song the year before, namely that 'All You Need Is Love'. By the end of the song he is screaming 'alright' almost like a mantra, certainly with the sort of focussed vocal ferocity that he had first shown to the world in 'Twist And Shout'. Meantime that Lennon was spot-on in his satirising macho attitudes in, say, 'Happiness Is A Warm Gun', with its obvious sexual pun, can be inferred from this statement from Ken Wilber:

¹⁸⁶ From *Emmanuel's Book*.

¹⁸⁷ *Anthology*. I believe the 1980 *Playboy* interviews.

Studies on testosterone...all point to a simple conclusion. I don't mean to be crude, but it appears that testosterone has two, and only two, major drives: fuck it or kill it...Worse, men sometimes fuse and confuse these two drives, with fuck it and kill it dangerously merging¹⁸⁸.

A purely acoustic, upbeat rendering of the song, the original demo, with backing vocals and very much a celebratory communal feel to it, has long been available in bootleg-land, and it's a pity in a way this version despite its shortcomings audio-wise wasn't 'the' version most heard: the added guitar-distortion texture of the well-known version points to an auditory darkening of Lennon's lyrical vision which was inappropriate to the original spirit of the song and its lyric.

¹⁸⁸ Quoted in *A Brief History Of Everything*.

Child Of Nature.

Perhaps the most important unreleased Beatles song (now on box-set versions etc.) it's an entirely pantheistic piece of writing on a par with its more famous siblings 'Dear Prudence' and Paul's 'Mother Nature's Son'. Certainly the Horatio-mindset is happier with the confession of jealousy and regret that the song later became in the form of 'Jealous Guy'. As most readers won't have heard the song, I'll give the lyrics in full:

*On the road to Rishikesh
I was dreaming, more or less,
And the dream I had was true,
Yes the dream I had was true.*

*(Chorus)
I'm just a Child of Nature,
I don't need much to set me free,
I'm just a Child of Nature,
I'm one of Nature's children.*

*Sunlight shining in my eyes
As I face the desert skies
And my thoughts return to home,
Yes, my thoughts return to home.*

(Repeat chorus)

*Underneath the mountain ranges
Where the wind that never changes
Touched the windows of my soul,
Touched the windows of my soul.*

(Repeat chorus.)

Pantheistic means *pan*-everywhere, *theos*-God, or The Divine. So 'Child of Nature' is a song in which God is perceived everywhere, in everything (remember the briefly converted McCartney's rants to that effect, back in the different universe of the year before?). The Romantic poets, chiefly Wordsworth and Coleridge, who saw themselves as 'priests of Nature', had promulgated this view, even as the Horatio-mindset took over the Western world in general on the coat-tails of the 18th century's 'Enlightenment'. Here is a passage by Wordsworth from 1798 that was later included in his long philosophical poem *The Excursion*:

There is an active principle alive in all things;

*In all things, in all natures, in the flowers
And in the trees, in every pebbly stone
That paves the brooks, the stationary rocks,
The moving waters and the invisible air.*

Succinctly, Blake puts it thus:

*For everything that lives is holy, life delights in life.*¹⁸⁹

This view of the world as sacred and alive is, of course, diametrically opposite to the Horatio-mindset's view of some things being alive, but others being inert, and merely exploitable by the living, (chiefly, Man). In this Romantic/holistic view, man is part of Nature, not something separate from it and therefore superior to it. Again, as we have stated before, modern physics has transcended this view and sees the universe as dynamic: there are no solid 'bits' of matter at the sub-atomic level, only dynamic patterns of energy. *There is no inanimate matter.*

In terms of the song itself, we don't have access to the text of the Maharishi's lecture that spawned both 'Child Of Nature' and Paul's 'Mother Nature's Son', (which appeared on the *White Album*), but it is obvious that in it the idea that we are connected to Nature in the same way that a child is connected to its parents must have been raised. A phrase almost identical to 'Child Of Nature' can be found in Wordsworth's poem 'Resolution and Independence':

*I heard the Sky-lark singing in the sky;
And I bethought me of the playful hare:
Even such a happy Child of earth am I;
Even as these blissful creatures do I fare; [my emphases].*

To look at the chorus first, while McCartney couches his 'Mother Nature's Son' in dramatic form, so that it is delivered not as a statement of any sort of creed by Paul McCartney, but through the medium of a 'poor young country boy', 'Child Of Nature' seems to be a straight first-person statement, making it a song which has the impetus of personal revelation. It's also a fairly straightforward statement, emphasising simplicity—'I don't need much to set me free.' We are in the realms of the 'living simply' ethos in material terms here, of course, but also in terms of ideology: one doesn't need complicated religions, rituals or practices in order to achieve freedom. This is perhaps another way to interpret Lennon's earlier declaration in 'All You Need Is Love' that 'It's easy', and if he means it in this sense he is again in line with the Perennial Philosophy. The practice of mindfulness can be implemented in our lives by simply thinking of one's mantra, and therefore of Mind/God/Spirit

¹⁸⁹ From *America, A Prophecy*.

both within and without, not just during formal periods of meditation, but in the course of everyday activities, thereby, as Dr. Brunton puts it, providing

*...the unannounced and impersonal centre of [ones] personal gravity, the unmoved pivot upon which the pendulum of external activity swings to and fro.*¹⁹⁰

So rather than any complicated abstruse intellectual cogitations, one need only insert a mantra, or part of a mantra, as something which reminds one of our Higher Selves and the ‘true nature of Mind’, into the everyday.

The weakness of the third line, merely repeating the first (and there is already an inverted repeat of the first line in the fourth line) shows that the song did need working on. Perhaps this is the reason that Lennon abandoned it at this stage, as McCartney seemed to have thematically pipped him at the post with something already finished.

In the first verse, we notice the ambiguity of

*I was dreaming, more or less,
And the dream I had was true.*

All the ideas contained in the song can be thought of as simply a dream, yet that dream, Lennon insists, is true. This anticipates, of course, ‘Imagine’, where we are invited to imagine all the things posited in the song—we have to imagine them, because things are completely unlike that in the ‘real’ world as it stands. Lennon ends that song by pointing out that his ideas are a dream, yet a dream that *must* come true if we are to evolve as a species, indeed, the implication is, even if we are to survive:

*You may say I’m a dreamer, but I am not the only one,
I hope someday you’ll join us, and the world will live as one.*

The ‘dream’ of ‘Child of Nature’ only seems like a dream due to the dominant Horatio-mindset, the perspective we in the West have inherited that Wilber refers to as the ‘nightmare of modernism’, which tends to dismiss any such ideas as fantasy or wish fulfilment. The ‘dream’ is simply outlined then by the chorus, by its simple insistence that Lennon is a part *of* Nature, rather than apart *from* Nature, and that we all are. Such a revelation doesn’t really need enlarging upon in terms of constructing a philosophical system. Being in the presence of nature, realising one is part of it, will necessarily bring about wisdom and right action. In the same way that we earlier encountered St. Augustine’s dictum

Love, and do what you like.

¹⁹⁰ Brunton, op. cit.

further elaboration is unnecessary. The mystics and the Romantics encounter upon their inner journeys a level where all is harmony, all is 'Love', and, having had that experience, for them it is a reality, while the Horatio-minded look on in disbelief at what they can only assume to be self deception. Lennon is obviously, in 'Child Of Nature', writing about such a moment of revelation of cosmic harmony, one of those moments where, to use Lennon's other musical analogy, as embodied in 'All You Need Is Love', one can 'feel in time'.

On the other hand, if the Horatio-scientist can't see order at the heart of the universe, then what, exactly, is he looking at? As Dr. Brunton points out

...anyone with an eye to see can see that the universe reveals that it is being held in intelligent and intelligible order.

He also adds

The materialist who sees only blind and unreasoning forces living in the universe is to be pitied for his own blindness and unreason.¹⁹¹

As we've pointed out before, science itself has overturned the out-of-date views of the Horatio-mindset, for example, the statistical improbability of life occurring as it has done being incalculable. But to think that there is, after all, a God might require a change of thinking and a complete personal re-orientation that, however apparently outwardly busy, Horatios are too lazy or afraid to want to do.

In the second verse, as Lennon says, his thoughts 'return to home'. We know biographically that this wasn't merely nostalgia, but an eagerness to get on with the next phase of his life, the one where the dominant influence was to be his new all-transforming love for Yoko. In the last verse we have the archetypal Romantic image of the Eternal, of Spirit, taking the form of a wind:

*..the wind that never changes
Touched the windows of my soul.*

Spirit-as-wind occurs in so many instances in Romantic poetry one is overwhelmed with examples. Coleridge, in 'The Aeolian Harp' puts it like this:

*And what if all of animated nature
Be but organic harps diversely framed,
That tremble into thought, as o'er them sweeps
Plastic and vast, one intellectual Breeze*

¹⁹¹ Brunton, op. cit.

At once the soul of each, and God of all?

Huxley, probably with this poem at the back of his mind, provides a prose equivalent, in *The Perennial Philosophy*:

*Deliverance is out of time into eternity, and is achieved by obedience and docility to the eternal Nature of Things...We are, as it were, aeolian harps, endowed with the power either to expose ourselves to the wind of the Spirit, or to shut ourselves away from it.*¹⁹²

In the Jewish tradition, the word *ruach* means both ‘wind’ and ‘the breath of God’. The force of Nature that is wind is thought of, then, as Inspiration, as Being, as Life itself, as Spirit: to a Horatio, it’s merely a matter of barometric pressure. Lennon’s ‘the wind that never changes’ is obviously a spiritual wind, something other than simple air pressure as registered by the senses of the body, and is something on the same level as his earlier ‘wind inside a letter-box’ in ‘Across The Universe. The fact that it ‘never changes’ links it to his definition of ‘Love’ that we looked at in the context of ‘The Word’:

*I think that whatever else love is—and it’s many, many things—it is constant. It’s been the same forever. I don’t think it will ever change.*¹⁹³

To me it’s a great pity that so few people have heard this song, and, even if they do get the opportunity to hear a bootleg version, will probably be programmed to think of it merely as a ‘dry run’ for ‘Jealous Guy’, one of Lennon’s best loved songs. With a bit of work, ‘Child Of Nature’ would have been perfectly fit for consumption. It says something about us as a culture that we’re generally more at ease with a song about jealousy than with one celebrating the presence of God in all things, and emphasising our own place in the universe. It’s interesting also that Lennon sings this as using a degree of vibrato. It’s if he is singing using a different voice, from some other, perhaps deeper part of his psyche, less-cluttered with personal pain, where all is, was, and ever will be ‘healed and harmonised’ (to quote the Coleridge of ‘The Dungeon’): that part where one can feel a wind that is beyond a wind, a ‘wind that never changes’, and can perceive the ‘limitless undying love’ that is ‘the underlying theme of the universe’. ‘Child Of Nature’, unfinished as it is, is another of Lennon’s great message songs, in the same domain as ‘The Word’, ‘Rain’, ‘The Void’, ‘All You Need Is Love’, ‘Across The Universe’, and ‘Revolution’.

¹⁹² An aeolian harp is a simple box harp hung in exposed places and ‘played’ by the action of the wind on it. Rarely seen these days, it produces an eerie, moaning sound. Aeolus was the Greek god of the winds.

¹⁹³ Quoted in the *Anthology*.

Dear Prudence.

One of Lennon's most beautiful songs, it was written to coax Prudence Farrow out of her too-fanatical attempt at, as Lennon put it,

*..trying to reach God quicker than anyone else.*¹⁹⁴

Lennon's following comments, from much later on (the 1980 *Playboy* interview), are also telling:

That was the competition in Maharishi's camp: who was going to get cosmic first. (What I didn't know was I was already cosmic.) [My emphases.]

This is a point often repeated in the Perennial Philosophy, that embarking on a spiritual journey, consciously treading a spiritual path, is a matter not of becoming something other, but of instead realising what we truly are, the 'Thou Art That'. Lennon says as much in this passage quoted in the introduction. The 'Thou Art That' is not something we acquire, but something already within that we may discover, as we repeatedly find in *The Perennial Philosophy*:

The image of God is found essentially and personally in all mankind.

Ruysbroek.

Goodness need not enter into the soul, for it is there already, only it is unperceived.

Theologica Germanica.

The seed of God is in us...Pear seeds grow into pear trees, nut seeds grow into nut trees, and God seed into God.

Meister Eckhart.

The point that spirituality is an attempt to remember what has been forgotten, rather than for us to become something different, has been made at several points in this study—it's the second point in Wilber's seven point summary of the Perennial Philosophy that spirit or God is to be found *within*. He puts it like this in another passage in *Grace And Grit*:

You are already aware, you are already enlightened. You might not always be already mindful, but you are already enlightened.

¹⁹⁴ Op. cit.

Of course, most of the time we are *unmindful* of this due to the ego-bound mind, the separate little-‘i’, the *sem*, the ‘little mind’. Here is Sogyal Rinpoche once again:

*..even though we have the same inner nature as Buddha, we have not recognised it because it is so enclosed and wrapped up in our individual ordinary minds.*¹⁹⁵

Lyrically ‘Dear Prudence’ is as simple as a child’s song—indeed, in inviting ‘Prudence’ to ‘come out to play’, the addressee is treated as a child. By inference, as we know from many examples seen in this study so far, Prudence is therefore being seen as *holy*, as a child is less exiled from the inner Buddha-nature that becomes ‘enclosed and wrapped up in our individual minds’, has vision which is less obscured by the ‘shades of the prison-house’.

*Dear Prudence, won't you come out to play?
Dear Prudence, greet the brand new day.
The sun is up, the sky is blue,
It's beautiful, and so are you,
Dear Prudence, won't you come out to play?*

The most basic forces of Nature are invoked, described as beautiful, and ‘Prudence’ is directly made to feel a part of that beauty, an aspect of those larger cosmic forces. This is made more apparent still in the second verse:

*The wind is low, the birds will sing
That you are part of everything.*

This is pantheism pure and simple, and ‘Dear Prudence’ is the most directly and simply pantheistic song in the Lennon/Beatles output. The only serious rival to that claim is Lennon’s cancelled ‘Child Of Nature’, covered in the previous chapter, and indeed in ‘Dear Prudence’ we are being offered a portrait of a ‘child of nature’:

*Dear Prudence, let me see you smile,
Dear Prudence, like a little child.
The clouds will be a daisy chain
So let me see you smile again,
Dear Prudence, won't you let me see you smile?*

It isn’t that ‘Prudence’ herself is anything special—she isn’t described, as such, nor has she any specific attributes that makes her particularly a ‘child of nature’. Therefore, by inference, we are all like

¹⁹⁵ Rinpoche, op. cit.

her, ‘part of everything’, and we would realise this if we were to follow Lennon’s instruction to

Look around.

It is the repetition of this instruction, delivered like an incantation, which gives it its power. Lennon’s use of injunctions is interesting, and it is a device he uses in his most obviously spiritual ‘message’ songs, as we have seen, e.g.

Say the Word and you’ll be free... (‘The Word’), and

Turn off your mind, relax and float downstream...(‘The Void’).

It is also expressed in the present tense, as we would now expect from a spiritually-motivated Lennon song.

‘Dear Prudence’ is a song of child-like pantheistic simplicity. Nature is portrayed in it as all-bountiful and all-beautiful, and we are portrayed as very much being part of that beauty, part of the natural order. It is a song that could have come straight out of Blake’s *Songs Of Innocence*.

Donovan, who was also with the Beatles in Rishikesh in this period, is often credited with having opened up the acoustic playing style of the Beatles to ornate finger-picking rather than simple strumming, but I feel his lyrical influence might be at work here too. He, after all, brought out the lovely *Gift From A Flower To A Garden* in 1968, a double album set which included a whole album of songs specifically for children. Lennon’s own revelation in ‘Child Of Nature’ is that even as adults we’re all ‘nature’s children’.

The point hardly needs to be laboured that an experience of Nature puts us in touch with the divine, and this is the very essence of the literary Romantic tradition epitomised by Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Shelley. Contact with nature at its most breathtaking and beautiful, i.e. sensory impressions of that which was not made by man, inevitably confront us with questions and/or insights into the nature of that creator or creative force that lies behind the manifested world. As the Sufi mystic poet Rumi puts it in ‘What A Blessing’,

*The leaf of every tree brings a message from the unseen world.*¹⁹⁶

Contemplation of nature is itself a *form* of meditation, one that does not need a formal procedure or technique, and this is pointed out by all the commentators on, and exponents of, the Perennial Philosophy that we

¹⁹⁶ Quoted in *Natural Grace*.

have so far encountered, as well as being another principle of the Perennial Philosophy itself. Dr. Brunton states plainly

*Art, its appreciation or creation, Nature, its love or companionship, likewise constitute ways of approach to the mystical state.*¹⁹⁷

We note here that both Art and Nature are mentioned. One of the reasons for the absolute failure of most so-called modern so-called ‘art’ is the fact that it is neither the result of an expanded or heightened state of awareness, nor does its contemplation lead to such a state.

Perhaps the best encapsulation of contemplation of Nature leading to an expanded awareness is Blake’s famous and oft-quoted lines from ‘Auguries Of Innocence’:

*To see a World in a grain of sand,
And a heaven in a wild flower,
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand,
And Eternity in an hour.*

Brunton argues that artistic creation is on a level of insight slightly lower than that of the sage, but we wonder. Matthew Fox says that

Mystics are the poets of the soul and they write in images.

Can we make a hard-and-fast distinction between the *true* poet and the mystic. Are not the teachings of the Christ and the Buddha in themselves poetic? Sogyal Rinpoche quotes Lewis Thompson, a writer otherwise unknown to the author, thus:

*Christ, supreme poet, lived truth so passionately that every gesture of his, at once pure Act and perfect Symbol, embodies the transcendent.*¹⁹⁸

A conception of the role of ‘poet’ such as this is a long way from many of the masqueraders who, under that name, currently ply their poetic wares in a corrupt market place, in the same way that most visual ‘artists’ don’t qualify either. I mention no names, but we will undoubtedly look back on this period of artistic history as being one in which, although the galleries and sales rooms and poetry presses were as busy as ever, almost nothing of worth was produced, and our descendents will shake their heads in wonder at the gullibility of the age. But when Lennon and Harrison, and even McCartney, the McCartney of ‘Eleanor Rigby’ and ‘Fool On The Hill’, are writing from their depths and from the faculty

¹⁹⁷ Brunton, op. cit.

¹⁹⁸ Rinpoche, op. cit.

of 'Imagination' (as Blake called it) and 'Poetic genius', I think the title of poet, or poet-mystic, is not an inappropriate one to apply to them.

Musically the song has an incredibly sensitive arrangement, its opening descending guitar picking leading to the main guitar figure, and building to a climax in the final verse, which is a repeat of the first, with its second two lines played in half-time. Various other brilliant musical ideas, such as the sustained vocal chord that builds up at first unnoticed in the second verse, help embroider the song, rather in the same way that Blake's copperplate designs complement and wrap around his texts in the illuminated books. 'Dear Prudence' has become one of the band's most covered, and most plagiarised, songs. Its beauty is so innate that when Neil Innes came to write a parody of it for *The Rutles* his version was an in itself straight, sensitive and beautiful song 'Let's Be Natural'. Even a parody of something truly beautiful will be, in itself, a thing of beauty.

While My Guitar Gently Weeps.

Undoubtedly this is George's most important statement since 'Within You Without You'. Harrison's moral purpose in his songs are sometimes stated almost bluntly, and this is his most sermonistic song. However, as with 'Within You Without You', one feels the sermon is justified. Initially Harrison used an aleatory procedure to produce the phrase 'gently weeps', and this song is not unlike Lennon's 'I Am The Walrus', in which Lennon was 'crying' at the world's craziness, and the inevitability of death:

*I look at you all, see the love there that's sleeping
While my guitar gently weeps.
I look at the floor, and I see it needs sweeping
While my guitar gently weeps.*

Harrison pauses in each refrain to repeatedly tell us that he, or rather his guitar, is crying at the pain and sorrow of the world. Like 'I Am The Walrus' it is a song of compassion for a humanity at the mercy of our 'fallen state'.

That the world isn't perfect and needs changing is obvious from the third line. This isn't a matter of sweeping away any one ideology, capitalism, or communism. Harrison is talking of the same sort of moral and spiritual hygiene that Goethe was alluding to in his statement

*If each of us sweeps in front of our own steps, the whole world will be clean.*¹⁹⁹

We all have the answer to all our problems within us, 'the love there that's sleeping'. Consistently 'Love' is promoted as the answer, as 'all you need', in Beatles songs, even ones with such a doomy feel as this one, which focuses more on the problems we all face, rather than being delivered from some visionary height where 'It's easy'. It's 'the love we all could share' of 'Within You Without You', and this song is a more sustained plea for us all to 'try our best to hold it there'—a message even more pertinent now than it was then. And we must not forget also that if we are dealing with capital-L Love that is within, as opposed to the mere human emotion, then we could also be substituting its synonyms, 'God' and 'Mind'.

In the song's refrain, Harrison seems specifically to be thinking, again, of those who in 'Within You Without You' 'gain the world and lose their soul'—those in power:

I don't know why nobody told you

¹⁹⁹ Quoted in Dan Millman's *No Ordinary Moments*, HJ Kramer, 1992.

*How to unfold your love.
I don't know how someone controlled you,
They bought and sold you.*

Harrison is functioning artistically once again in this song from his Witness Self, looking on like Paul's 'Fool On The Hill', or the John of 'I'm Only Sleeping' and 'Rain' at all our activity and folly. He sees both our potential, 'the love there that's sleeping' ('the world is at your command' John admonishes the 'Nowhere Man'), and that which deflects us from realising that potential. This is especially apparent in the second refrain:

*I don't know why you were diverted,
You were perverted too,
I don't know why you were inverted,
No-one alerted you.*

'Living is easy with eyes closed/Misunderstanding all you see', John says in 'Strawberry Fields Forever'. But to live in such a purblind way produces a humanity completely at the mercy of time, change, death and decay, a humanity comprising only of those who, as Paul Brunton says, have *failed* in life due to living only by the ego, however much they have apparently succeeded, a humanity that is 'diverted' from its ultimate purpose and from any ultimate source of happiness, peace and contentment; a distorted, 'perverted' humanity, whose values are entirely the wrong way round ('you were inverted'), and who were never 'alerted' by any spiritual teacher to their state.

Writing from this point of view enables Harrison to say what needs to be said, even if he then starts sounding holier than thou. That Harrison realises that he too, as a limited ego-bound human, is also 'perverted' etc. becomes clear, however, in the second verse:

*I look at the world and I notice it's turning
While my guitar gently weeps,
With every mistake we must surely be learning, [my emphases]
Still my guitar gently weeps.*

We notice the 'we' here. Also notice the similarity, once again, to Paul's 'Fool'.

The Beatles adopted a 'heavy' approach to the song which works well, but the song works equally well as a solo acoustic piece, as released in the haunting version on *Anthology III*. If anything, its understated delivery gives it even more impact. Also interesting is the cancelled verse

I look from the wings at the play you are staging...

*While I'm sitting here doing nothing but ageing
While my guitar gently weeps.*

This image is similar to Lennon's

Keeping an eye on the world going by my window.

Harrison's own summing up of 'God-consciousness' came many years later in the *Anthology* interviews, and it's interesting to see him using the analogy of life being a play once again, almost inevitably quoting Shakespeare:

All we wanted to do was be in a rock band, but as Shakespeare said, all the world's a stage and the people are only players. We were just playing a part. Being The Beatles was like a suit that we wore for that period of time, but that isn't us really. None of us are. Our true nature is looking to re-establish that which is within, all knowing.

In the originally released version, the verse about life being a 'play' is dropped, in favour of what begins as a repeat of the first verse:

*I look at you all, see the love there that's sleeping
While my guitar gently weeps.*

Rather than a simple repeat of the lyrics of the whole verse, Harrison then uses the dramatic device of simply saying (in the third line):

Look at you all....

leaving a gap in the lyrics in which we are implicitly invited to do just that, take a good look at ourselves, after which comes

Still my guitar gently weeps.

Moments like that in which normal songwriting procedures are broken, moments when the audience is directly addressed and involvement is invited, occur frequently in the Beatles' work, (we've seen how often Lennon directly addresses the listener in the present tense), and it is one of the reasons that the Beatles were so special. When it came to their music, they were, at their best, intuitively brilliant communicators—even at a time when they were communicating very badly among themselves.

Blackbird.

An astonishing little gem from Paul, showing how he was still capable of excellent work. This is a brief, concise sketch of spiritual yearning:

*Blackbird singing in the dead of night
Take these broken wings and learn to fly,
All your life, you were only waiting for this moment to arise.
Blackbird singing in the dead of night
Take these sunken eyes and learn to see,
All your life, you were only waiting for this moment to be free.
Blackbird fly, blackbird fly
Into the light of a dark black night.*

We note that the blackbird is singing in the (symbolic) night, unbowed or unaffected by darkness, rather like the thrush in Hardy's poem 'The Darkling Thrush'. When all hope seems lost in the human world with its follies, Nature just goes on about its business, and, by being in its presence, we can restore a sense of balance. McCartney is echoing the Romantics here—especially the Wordsworth of 'The Tables Turned', and the Coleridge of 'The Dungeon'.

As life progresses, we all feel that our 'wings' get 'broken', and we long to be able to 'see' in the spiritual sense, and long also to be 'free'. McCartney's blackbird stands both as a symbol of our suffering, of our yearning, and of the healing power of Nature—it can fly 'into the light of a dark black night', that is, it can render even the darkness full of light. Lennon had often used the symbol of flight as one of freedom, now his partner successfully does the same thing. We note also the allusion to 'this moment'. It is in this very moment, and in being in this very moment, that we *can* achieve liberation, can 'see' and 'be free'—the here and now that the Perennial Philosophy and its communicators such as Ram Dass and, more recently, Eckhart Tolle, refer to time and time again.

The open DBDGBD tuning used in this song (again, probably, a suggestion from Donovan) gives its composer a sense of melodic freedom, as well as a sense of the 'home' chord never being far away (in this case, G major—2nd inversion). In an open tuning one can invent chord shapes that seem pleasing, and if one plays a discordant note, it is immediately remedied by quickly playing the open strings (i.e. the key chord) again. Using open tunings is rather like being given a musical safety-net, over which it is then safe to take flight. This is a good example of how the use of specific instrumentation and/or tunings gives rise to the nature of the music composed on it. 'Blackbird' has a sense about it of having emerged almost as naturally as a blackbird's song—the sound of which is, of course, featured charmingly and appropriately in the recording. The simplicity of the lyric and its brevity also make me think

of this piece would sit comfortably among Blake's *Songs of Innocence*. The same could be said of Lennon's 'Child of Nature' (had it been fully 'finished'), 'Dear Prudence', and our next song: 'Julia'.

Julia.

While Lennon had many failings as a writer and a person, as do we all, he never fell into the trap of producing the merely pretty. The depth which is often lacking in McCartney's work can be found in abundance in his. This is why 'Julia' is a *beautiful*, rather than a pretty, song. 'Julia' is, of course, as it plainly states, 'a song of love' for his dead mother. However, we feel that in it, 'Julia' is also conflated with his new-found love Yoko Ono. We get the feeling that Julia was the original for his 'dream girl', while in Yoko he has finally found an embodiment of this ideal.

The opening lines are arresting:

*Half of what I say is meaningless,
But I say it just to reach you Julia.*

This may be seen as a sort of key to Lennon's often obscure experimental lyrical pronouncements—but on the other hand he seems to be paraphrasing directly Kalil Gibran, not from *The Prophet* this time, but from the 1927 collection *Sand And Foam*:

Half of what I say is meaningless; but I say it so the other half may reach you.

'Julia' is described repeatedly in the song in ways which make her a part of nature, like a natural force herself:

*Julia, Julia, ocean child, calls me...
Julia, seashell eyes, windy smile...
Julia, Julia, morning moon, touch me...
Julia, sleeping sand, silent cloud, touch me...
Her hair of floating sky is shimmering, glimmering
In the sun.*

The pantheism evident in 'Dear Prudence' and celebrated and announced in 'Child Of Nature' is here given a personal bent, as if Lennon can feel his mother's spirit in all these varying manifestations of nature. Here is Gibran again, this time from *The Prophet*:

..what is it to die but to stand naked in the wind and to melt into the sun?

Shelley's 'Adonais' pursues a similar theme:

*Peace, peace! He is not dead, he doth not sleep—...
He is made one with Nature: there is heard
His voice in all her music, from the moan*

Of thunder, to the song of night's sweet bird.

So does Dylan Thomas in his 'And Death Shall Have No Dominion':

*Dead men naked they shall be one
With the man in the wind and the west moon;
When their bones are picked clean and the clean bones gone,
They shall have stars at elbow and foot.*

So, Lennon is, as so often, voicing something which is part of a philosophical/poetic tradition, and which is effectively an aspect of the Perennial Philosophy. The Horatio-minded would dismiss the idea of death as a being made 'one with nature' as a form of compensatory self-deception—yet they believe implicitly in the science which tells us that no matter can actually be destroyed. The atoms in the molecules that make up my physical body as I write these words will never (as long as the universe exists) disappear. As Deepak Chopra puts it

...the human body...is a river of awareness flowing through time. As energy you will always be here.²⁰⁰

Yoko, as a Japanese name, means 'child of the ocean', so the two women are converging here in Lennon's vision. Also, one could interpret the line 'ocean child calls me' as being addressed to Julia in such a way as to, as it were, ask permission for this new love to be granted room. We remember how in 'In My Life' the transformational love that is invoked will overcome the hold of the past, will be 'more' than all that 'went before'. It is as if Lennon is asking permission from his dead mother to let Ono in, and, therefore, for her (Julia's) influence over his imagination and psyche to be given up. By directly invoking her in song, Lennon is actually asking to move forward. He is grieving in public now, in a way that he could not do as a young man, where he had to bury his emotions due to the 'Men don't cry' dictum of society that he later disowned. In acknowledging this grief properly for the first time, he is not being held in the grip of his past, but rather liberating himself from it. 'Julia' is a song of love, but it is also a song of farewell.

The line

*When I cannot sing my heart
I can only speak my mind.*

is very affecting, alluding to the inauthentic mask-self that has been in place ever since childhood in order to hide his deep pain at abandonment. By 'I'm A Loser', as we have seen, Lennon had realised that an authentic

²⁰⁰ From *The Way Of The Wizard*, Rider, 1995.

self awaited him beyond the roles imposed upon him by society and by his own inability to deal with deep pain and trauma.

This ‘mask-self’ is probably familiar to all of us, although if we haven’t yet reached a stage where we are aware of its presence, we will still be going along with it believing it to be our real self. It arises as an attempt at self-protection, and is described here by healer Barbara Ann Brennan in a section from her book *Light Emerging*²⁰¹:

The mask self is our first attempt to right ourselves...We present our mask self to the world according to our beliefs of what we think the world says is right, so that we can be accepted and feel safe....We put our best into the creation of this mask, but it doesn’t work. The mask never succeeds in producing the internal feeling of safety for which we strive...We feel like fakes, and we become more afraid.

Having moved from using reporters as substitute therapists, Lennon’s work on himself is now apparent in his artistic creations. It is no coincidence, I feel, that ‘Julia’ is a song composed in Rishikesh, i.e. after intensive bouts of meditation. And this is a song influenced by Donovan, who had taught Lennon the folk-based finger-picking style, also used on the, also pantheistic, ‘Dear Prudence’. Donovan has this to say about ‘Julia’:

*...learning a new style meant composing in a new way. In his deep meditation sessions, John had opened up his feelings for his mother. He found release for these emotions in ‘Julia’, the tune he had learned with the new finger style.*²⁰²

‘Julia’, then, is the result of intensive inner work, and of widening musical horizons. A self-liberating invocation of the dead, as well as a moving song of love for both the dead and the living, it is not the first time that we have come across the idea of ‘touch’ being used in the context of the incorporeal in this study. Nor will it be the last. It makes a fitting end to side two of the *White Album*, a side which is otherwise rather patchy and lightweight. It is also, significantly, Lennon’s first fully solo performance on record.

²⁰¹ Bantam, 1993.

²⁰² Quoted in *A Hard Day’s Write*.

Revolution 9.

This sound collage succeeds brilliantly where Lennon and Ono's other excursions into the avant-garde, such as *Two Virgins*, fail so dismally. Why? Simply due to the fact that so much is going on. Actual musical-seeming highs and lows and apparent structures abound. It's gruelling, disturbing, but fascinating listening.

A McCartney fragment frames the whole thing:

*Can you take me back where I've been from,
Can you take me back?
Can you take me back where I've been from,
Brother can you take me back?*

This 'take me back' functions as a sort of equivalent of the 'Let me take you down' of 'Strawberry Fields Forever'. We are taken back into the psyche, rather as a hypnotist might take us 'back', but rather than going to a specific location in the memory, 'Revolution 9' seems to give us a fly-on-the-wall glimpse of the subconscious mind in all its disorder and randomness.

Any meditator, once they attempt to empty the mind of thought, becomes paradoxically aware of how fragmented, multifacet and multilayered the contents of the mind actually are, and how very difficult it is to still it. What we find in our own unstructured mental processes is a rag-bag of scraps of memories, fantasies and thoughts, and 'Revolution 9' presents all these in *sound*. Meditation manuals usually talk of mind-chatter, but this hardly does it justice. It is a sort of roar like the sea, and out of it float occasionally recognisable bits of flotsam and jetsam, scraps of music, a child mucking about on the piano, bits of a symphony, an Arab singer on the radio, a football crowd, scraps of conversation or broadcasts...

*Eldorado...financial imbalance...the watusi...the twist...take this brother,
may it serve you well...if they become naked...*

The exercise in dissociation that was the end of 'I Am The Walrus' is presented here without any musical backing to hold it together. We also have incoherent cries and vocal noises from Lennon. He was obviously as interested in these as he was in properly formed words themselves, and a number of his songs feature them either in their finished or in demo versions. His incoherent mutterings and murmurings, including a repeated 'Mother...mother...mother', give the piece another framework: it's as if we are watching Lennon having a dream, and at the same time *experiencing* that dream sonically.

Of course, a further layer of interest and effect is added by the use of treated experimental sounds and backward tapes: that's definitely a football crowd we're listening to, but there's something weird about it, the words can't really be made out. There's nothing wrong with your hearing, dear listener, it's just it's a backwards tape: we're definitely in the world of *Through The Looking Glass* again (there seems to be a case to make Carroll Lennon's main influence).

The End Of The Beginning?

Let It Be/Abbey Road albums.

As the Beatles disintegrated after, indeed during the recording of, the *White Album*, so Lennon's creative energies were largely focussed elsewhere. His great statement of 1969 was a solo single, 'Give Peace A Chance'. Interestingly, Paul, who was the only one of the three writing Beatles still committed to the band (unsurprisingly as he'd come to dominate it) started to write with depth again as the band fell apart. He was finally in the sort of 'impossible situation' described by Jung earlier.

*I used to lie in bed and wonder what was going on. I had a dream one night about my mother. She had died when I was fourteen, so I hadn't heard from her in quite a while and it was very good. It gave me some strength. In my darkest hour, mother Mary had come to me.*²⁰³

The result of this visitation was, of course, 'Let It Be', and I think we have to take it at face value that her message to him really was to 'let it be', to let go and accept the inevitable. He couches the visitation as a frequent, rather than a one-off, occurrence, perhaps wishing, as usual, to make the song less autobiographical, less visibly and specifically about himself and his then current situation vis-à-vis the band:

*When I find myself in times of trouble, mother Mary comes to me
Speaking words of wisdom, let it be.*

'Amen' means 'Let it be', usually in the sense of 'so let it be', expressing a particular wish, but the sense in which his mother's visitation is couched would surely be 'let it be' as in 'let go and let God'. McCartney was, characteristically, unable to take this on board, and continued to deceive himself that the Beatles would continue until Lennon's announcement that he was leaving the band—which he foolishly then kept quiet on the advice of his new manager, Alan Klein.

Another song of this era by McCartney in a similar vein is 'The Long And Winding Road', and it is almost impossible not to see the 'you' that is addressed in that song as being actually 'You', the Higher Self, God. Certainly if the 'road that leads to your door' were to be ascribed to any human being, subject to time, death, change and decay, how would it fit with McCartney's assertion that it will 'never disappear'? Only a capitalised 'You' as the addressee of the song makes it work.

Some elements of the spiritual can be detected on the *Abbey Road* album. Lennon's 'Come Together' is mostly a 'gobbledegook' self-portrait, but he does have a few pronouncements, such as the unitive ideal of 'Come together' itself, of course, as well as the line

²⁰³ Quoted in *A Hard Day's Write*.

One thing I can tell you is you got to be free.

With his track record of statements in alignment with the Perennial Philosophy, I think it is spiritual freedom we are dealing with here, rather than the ‘do absolutely anything you like’ ideal of freedom. As the *Book Of Common Prayer* puts it, in almost Zen-like paradoxical terms, it is the service of the Higher being, of God,

Whose service is perfect freedom

‘Because’ is an extraordinary, ethereal love song to his ‘oceanchild’, in which, once again, the idea of Love as ‘the underlying theme to the universe’ is posited, in the lines

*Love is old, love is new,
Love is all, love is you.*

‘Sun King’, another song inspired by a dream, is actually musically an evocation of heaven, and the ‘Sun King’ himself is surely an embodiment of God, or at very least, as Robert Bly puts it in his book *Iron John*, the ‘sacred king’ that lies as an archetype within all of us. Usually the idea of the Sun as a Divine Being is tied in with the Divine *Masculine*— this is a rare appearance in Lennon’s work where it is largely the female archetype, the Divine Mother, that predominates, as we’ve seen.

Harrison’s songs also have spiritual overtones. In ‘Something’ he seems to be trying to get to that essential mystery of attraction, that ‘something’ that attracts us to *this* person, not that person. What that ‘something’ is, of course, is *karma*. ‘Here Comes The Sun’ points to the cycles of the seasons and, in the song, we are at the point of the beginning of the ‘up’ part of the cycle, Winter turning to Spring. His ‘All Things Must Pass’, and indeed many songs written during the Beatles final years, which graced the album of the same name, (‘The Art Of Dying’, for example), point to a profound grasp of the up/down, light/dark, cyclic nature of our existence in this ‘fallen’ realm.

Paul goes for broke, in a way, with the last line of *Abbey Road*

And in the end the love you take is equal to the love you make.

As Lennon was later to comment, this is appropriately

*A very cosmic, philosophical line.*²⁰⁴

²⁰⁴ Quoted in the *Anthology*.

for the Beatles to end their recording career with. It's a simple rephrasing of the idea that what you put in you get back, or as the Bible has it

*Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.*²⁰⁵

After making this 'big statement', however, being Paul he can't help but downsize it by tacking on the throwaway 'Her Majesty'. The same sort of 'bathetic' ending we have noted with 'Within You Without You' and 'Tomorrow Never Knows'.

²⁰⁵ Galatians, 6:7.

I Me Mine.

One late song we can't skip over as it's so central to the concerns and thesis of this study is George's 'I Me Mine' recorded, confusingly, after the *Abbey Road* sessions (1969), and released in 1970 on *Let It Be*, which comprises otherwise of tracks from before *Abbey Road*, including 'Across The Universe', finally rescued from B-side-obscurity and dating from as far back as early 1968. Discounting later necrophiliac concoctions such as 'Free As A Bird', it's the Beatles' last recording. Even then, Lennon was absent from the recording. It's an important Harrison song, and he has this to say about it:

*'I Me Mine' is the ego problem. There are two 'I's, the little 'i' when people say 'I am this', and the big 'I'—i.e. Om, the complete, whole, universal consciousness that is devoid of duality and ego...When the little 'i' merges into the big 'I' then you are really smiling.*²⁰⁶

As Dr. Brunton points out, the surrender of the rule of the ego-mind, the 'little 'i', is at the core of the Perennial Philosophy, because, as Wilber pointed out earlier for us, it is that 'little 'i' that is the barrier to our connectedness with Mind, with God, with Love:

*...to cease trying to cling only to the transient identity of the personality...this is the necessary prelude to opening the heavy door which bars our way to discovery of what exists behind the 'me'. For this reason every illumined religious, mystical and philosophical teacher has voiced the need of self-surrender.*²⁰⁷

The song has a wistful tone, and it is a song in which, by the very use of the phrase 'I Me Mine', Harrison is careful to include himself among a humanity that is far from spiritually perfect: it's not just people 'out there' who are at fault. Plus it goes on, day in, day out, for all of us:

*All through the day, I me mine, I me mine, I me mine,
All through the night, I me mine, I me mine, I me mine.
Now they're frightened of leaving it,
Ev'ryone's weaving it, coming on strong all the time,
All through the day, I me mine.*

*All I can hear, I me mine...
Even those tears, I me mine...
No-one's frightened of playing it,
Ev'ryone's saying it, flowing more freely than wine...*

²⁰⁶ Quoted in the *Anthology*.

²⁰⁷ Brunton, op. cit.

All through your life, I me mine.

Even as deep an emotion as sorrow, Harrison can see, is bound up with ego—‘even those tears’. No cure such as meditation is actually offered in the song, but its insistence, its sense of the all-pervading nature of ego, leaves us with no doubt in mind that an answer needs to be found. The sadness in the song, well supported by Spector’s orchestral arrangement, gives way in the middle sections to an angry rock shuffle over the repeated insistent variation on the title, ‘I, Me Me, Mine’, expressing perhaps frustration at the predominance of the ego.

The phrase ‘I Me Mine’ is in many ways an obvious one, and could have been picked up from many sources. However, it comes as no surprise to me that it’s used extensively in Huxley’s *The Perennial Philosophy*. Here’s just one example:

By fits and starts most of us contrive to forget, if only partially, our preoccupation with ‘I’, ‘Me’, ‘Mine’ and so become capable of receiving, if only partially, the graces which, in the moment, are being offered us.

Dr. Brunton (again) makes it clear exactly why it is that all teachers of the Perennial Philosophy insist on this point in this passage:

When we understand that the World-Mind is the basis of all existence...we will know that in the universal good our personal good will necessarily be also included whereas if we selfishly seek our personal good alone the derisive irony is that we shall fail to attain it. Our duty is to consider ourself not only as a part living for its own sake but also as a part living for the Whole.²⁰⁸

The surrender of the personal ‘i’ is the key act which brings us peace, and which puts our place in the universe in its proper perspective, and that proper perspective involves the whole of which we are part. As Fritjof Capra notes, we have now moved past the stage of the ‘survival of the fittest’ aspect of Darwinian evolution, or at least cutting-edge rather than Horatio-mindset dominated biologists have, because of our increased awareness of any species’ or individual organism’s inter-relatedness to its environment. Evolution is no longer seen merely as the adaptation of organisms to their environment, but the ‘*coevolution* of organism and environment’ [my emphases]. Thus

An organism that thinks only in terms of its own survival will invariably destroy its environment, and, as we are learning from bitter experience, destroy itself.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁸ Brunton, op. cit.

²⁰⁹ Capra, op. cit.

As Dr. Brunton says, it's ironic, isn't it? Selflessness is actually what meets our true, as opposed to perceived, needs.

Coda.

To sum up, perhaps we need to look at Ken Wilber's summary of the modern malaise, 'the Horatio-mindset', as I've called it, as delineated in *A Brief History Of Everything* in a little more detail. While noting that the era known as the Enlightenment *did* produce many positive benefits for mankind, Wilber points out that

The downside of the Enlightenment paradigm was that, in its rush to be empirical, it inadvertantly collapsed...interior depths into observable surfaces, and it thought that a simple mapping of these empirical exteriors was all the knowledge that was worth knowing. This left out the mapmaker itself—the consciousness, the interiors...—and, a century or two later, it awoke in horror to find itself living in a universe with no value, no meaning, no intentions, no depth, no quality—it found itself in a disqualified universe ruled by the monological gaze, the brutal world of the lab technician.

And that, of course, began the postmodern rebellion.

Conchis, the ambiguous magus-figure of John Fowles' novel *The Magus*²¹⁰, puts it like this:

...the attempt to scientize reality, to name it and categorise it and vivisect it out of existence, was like trying to remove the air from the atmosphere. In the creating of the vacuum, it was the experimenter who died, because he was inside the vacuum.

The Beatles, as I've said, were part of that postmodern rebellion Wilber talks of. That the prevalence of this Horatio-mindset is disastrous for each individual, for mankind as a whole, and for all life on the planet is obvious to me. But I have repeatedly used the words of spiritual masters and promulgators of the Perennial Philosophy, rather than rely on my own observations only, to make this point, and to make it, hopefully, more valid for the reader.

Intellectual materialism, the Horatio-mindset, after declaring there to be no God, no spiritual dimension to life, leads humanity into a complete impasse. If, as they say, there is no Higher reality then mankind is forced to cling more than ever to a material world that is self-evidently entirely transitory: there is nothing lasting or abiding, and therefore there is, as Wilber points out, nothing of any *value*. If the basic foundation of a civilisation is one of despair, as ours has become, then is it any wonder that, as Yeats put it in 'The Second Coming'

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;

²¹⁰ Jonathan Cape 1966.

Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world.

Is it any wonder that addiction becomes rife, when the world and our existence in it is conceived as being utterly meaningless? The Horatios thought they were liberating mankind from superstitious dread, and it's true that the anthropomorphic view of God that the hollow shells of outmoded religion left us *is* ludicrous. As Dr. Brunton points out

*...the God of the vulgarised religions...is not God at all. It is unworthy of an intelligent man's best affection or highest hope.*²¹¹

However to replace it with no view of God at all, is not only insane but extremely unintelligent. To *not* be able to see the wonder of design that is a tiny fly, or the supreme intelligence behind an eco-system, and to consign all this to blind chance is just ludicrous. The so-called 'intellectual' that has promulgated this view does not deserve the title.

We have seen that this industrial-scientific-rational mindset is,

a) not really rational, because it dismisses all that it cannot explain by a rigidly adopted set of criteria (the Newtonian/Cartesian paradigm), as non-existent, and

b) not really scientific either, as it hasn't acknowledged that the Newtonian/Cartesian paradigm has actually been overturned and superseded by science itself, it hasn't taken into account the 'new' physics which has been with us for *a hundred years already*. Einstein's first major papers on relativity were published in 1905! The 'quantum revolution' has been with us since 1927! The wilfully blind are like John's Nowhere Man:

He's as blind as he can be, just sees what he wants to see.

As for the vaunted idea that it is the spiritually minded who are ignorant and foolish, the very opposite is the case. If it were true, and the materialists were right, we'd have a just, sane, happy, world society without wars, famines, unhappiness, despair. But we don't. As Dr. Brunton pointed out, if one can look at the incredibly complex, statistically impossible patterns inherent in Nature, (and by Nature I mean not only in what was previously designated the 'living' 'organic' world, but in what the new physics confirms as *all* of Nature), this entire vibrantly alive and animate and interrelated universe, as being a mere matter of blind random chance, they really have to be pitied for their stupidity. Meanwhile, why should *we* pay over and over for *their* error? The 'intellectual' (note inverted commas) 'elite' (note inverted commas) that came up with this idiocy, whether 'philosopher' (ditto) 'scientist' (ditto) or 'artist' (ditto, mentioning no names), is merely, to use a phrase

²¹¹ Brunton, op. cit.

of George Orwell's 'objectifying his own inner misery' and presenting it as an pseudo-'objective', but actually entirely *subjective*, world view.

Those who have in the sphere of the arts got as far as realising 'there is something rotten in the state of Denmark', and who then make a nice materialist packet out of endlessly regurgitating their own bleak view of the world are particularly at fault, I think. If all they can offer is observation of the problem over and over again, without doing the personal work that would involve positing a *solution*, then they are doing themselves and, more importantly, their audience a great disservice. If it's all so bleak, why not just erase yourself, instead of coming out with a new album/play/book/film year after year in which this bleakness is relentlessly posited? Why not put yourself out of our misery? What most people in the West take to be 'highbrow' culture is largely a matter of self-pitying cynicism and misery, laughable in the fact that it takes itself so seriously. The artist who regards himself in this way is trapped in ego-error. The liberating fact that the Perennial Philosophy makes plain for us is this: *there is no self to take seriously*. The true capital-s Self lies beyond the petty, sadness-and-pain-addicted ego. Here's Ken Wilber again:

*The ego...is kept in existence by a collection of emotional insults; it carries its bruises as the very fabric of its existence. It actively collects hurts and insults, even while resenting them, because without its bruises it would be, literally, nothing.*²¹²

We are all wounded by life early on, it's true, but we must wake up out of the idea that our wound is our *identity*. If we are, as so many of us are, identified with our wound, we are like the Wounded King of the Grail legends, as pointed out by John Matthews in *Healing The Wounded King*:

...a wound as presented in the story of the Fisher King has no closure. It remains open. It becomes the defining element of the person, pulling one's identity into itself. The King is not a king who has been wounded and who is recovering; he is the Wounded King. That is his identity, an identity of loss and disempowerment.

*Furthermore, a wound is meta-personal. The injury was inflicted on the king, but the wound affects all the kingdom...a wound affects our connections and relationships.*²¹³

No wonder, then, as T.S. Eliot put it in his great poem, we are all in *The Waste Land*.²¹⁴ It is the Waste Land of Ego.

²¹² From *Grace And Grit*.

²¹³ Element, 1997.

²¹⁴ I would not put Eliot in the category of those who I have attacked as merely objectifying their own inner misery. Eliot even in *The Waste Land* is evidently searching for its antidote in spiritual terms,

This demoniac Horatio-mindsetter, how free of him are we ourselves? *Isn't* he a bit like you and me? Our task is to free ourselves of our identification with our wounds, free ourselves of the Horatio-mindset, free ourselves from the illusion of separation, and realise, as George said, not that we're *alone*, but that 'we're *all-One*'.

Sogyal Rinpoche complains in his book that all the things that go to make up our 'culture' miss the point that the Perennial Philosophy teaches, or the seven points, as outlined by Wilber:

*There is no general information about the nature of mind. It is hardly ever written about by writers or intellectuals; modern philosophers do not speak of it; the majority of scientists deny it could possibly be there at all. It plays no part in popular culture: No one sings about it, no one talks about it in plays; and it's not on TV.*²¹⁵

Well, he may have a point about most of culture, but I hope that this little book has proved to you, dear reader, that this isn't entirely true, and that there was *one* band who did sing about it, *that band being the most popular and successful group in history*. Many have misinterpreted the 'Love' that the Beatles sang of in their most exalted and spiritually orientated songs as being the same as the 'love' in their early, straightforward non-spiritual boy/girl songs. Spearheaded by Lennon, the Beatles turned holding-hand-boy/girl love as the central theme of popular songwriter into capital-L spiritual LOVE, the force that through the green fuse drives the flower, the root of all things, the ground of all existence. We have discussed how the terms 'Love', 'Mind' 'God' and even 'Void' are synonymous, although both 'God' and 'love' are words that have become devalued for us through over use. Still, as Huxley pointed out for us, despite the limited value of words, for now we're stuck with them. 'All You Need Is MIND' just wouldn't work, would it?

In many ways it's a miracle that they wrote in a spiritual vein at all, but that they did is irrefutable—unless you happen to be a rock critic. The continued interest in the band reached an apogee in the nineties, but most of it missed the point, the very blatant point, that 'Love' was the Beatles' overriding message. I hope, in this study, to have gone some way to put that message in the context in which I feel it is grounded, that of the Perennial Philosophy, which is, as Huxley puts it,

...the core and spiritual heart of all the higher religions.

For a while back there pop music was, in my view, literally, on the side of the angels, promulgating a non-materialist world view, and

and antidotes are offered in the mostly Christian symbolism of later works, especially the 'Choruses From 'The Rock'', and *Four Quartets*.

²¹⁵ Sogyal Rinpoche, op. cit.

helping to shape a potentially evolved humanity. Then the backlash set in, and the forces of materialism-only took over. None of which would matter if it weren't for the fact that those forces threaten to destroy life itself. How much longer can this sort of short-sightedness continue?

Actually, probably not much longer. The rapidity with which we are destroying our own environment is quite astonishing—and finding or creating new levels of reality in which to do so. (When I first wrote this book in 2003 the idea of 'electro-magnetic-energetic' pollution barely existed, for example.) Will we wake up in time? The cultural revolution of the sixties and its swing towards spiritual values was a wake up call. We hit the snooze button throughout the seventies, the eighties, and a good part of the nineties. Perhaps recent events can be seen in the light of one last alarm call. Here's Huxley again, at some length, on so-called progress:

Modern man no longer regards Nature as being in any sense divine and feels perfectly free to behave towards her as an overweening conqueror and tyrant. The spoils of recent technological imperialism have been enormous; but meanwhile nemesis has seen to it that we get our kicks as well as halfpence...There is no known method of computing the amount of felicity or goodness in the world at large. What is obvious, however, is that the advantages accruing from recent technological advances—or, in Greek phraseology, from recent acts of hubris directed against Nature—are generally accompanied by corresponding disadvantages, that gains in one direction entail losses in other directions, and that we never get something except for something.

These words date from the publication of *The Perennial Philosophy* in 1946! And yet mankind, like a sleepwalker carrying a naked flame in a house piled high with old newspapers, has been stumbling along in the same way ever since. Meanwhile since 1946 *some* have challenged the Horatio-mindset, some have declared that 'All You Need Is Love' and have pleaded that we need to 'Give Peace A Chance', and I believe that ultimately we will redeem and heal the world, *if* we continue to pay attention to the big 'I' over the little 'i'. We can remain optimistic if we remember Peter Russel's earlier translation of the Chinese word for crisis, *wei-chi*, meaning both 'danger' and 'opportunity for change', and act upon that knowledge. Indeed, as we have seen, both Capra in *The Turning Point*, and Russel in *The Global Brain Awakes* argue that *crises are what actually bring about evolution*, in individuals, species, and in systems.

If only we were brought up to value ourselves, others, and the planet as manifestations of a divine reality, if only we saw each one of us as a 'Child Of Nature', if only our vision were sacralised from the very start as in Huxley's *Island*. Instead our lot as children of 'the nightmare of modernism' is to inherit nothing other than a spiritual vacuum. We have

been cheated and conned, like the figure in Lennon's 'Girl', breaking his back for his day of leisure—until it kills him. If this knowledge of being short-changed is spared us in life, then it is on the deathbed that it will come rushing in, a *tsuanami* of meaninglessness that will overwhelm all our materialist defences. Or it will do so unless we have begun to overthrow our inherited Horatio-mindset by cultivating a knowledge of the Perennial Philosophy and spiritual practices. As it is, for many of us our first unwitting encounter with the Perennial Philosophy came from songs by the Beatles. Essentially the Beatles brought sacred material and concepts back into the mainstream of culture that had become entirely secularised—a pretty important achievement.

I have mostly fought against, in this book, deifying John Lennon, George Harrison, Paul McCartney and Ringo Starr, (barely mentioned as he is not, generally, a songwriter, sorry Ringo!), but I was struck the other day by a passage in *The Tibetan Book Of Living And Dying* dealing with the idea of *bodhisattvas*, the great souls who, even though they have attained personal liberation, re-incarnate in order to help humanity:

Throughout history there have been figures of artistic genius, spiritual strength and humanitarian vision who have helped the human race go forward...When Tibetans hear of such people, they immediately say they are bodhissatvas.

Another thing which struck me is that

...the incarnation appears in such a way potentially best suited to the karma of the people of his time, to be able most completely to help them...

In a non-sacred age, who better to spread the word of the Perennial Philosophy to those hitherto unaware of its existence, than members of the best selling rock band of all time? For all their faults, failings and vacillations, in their own right because recognisable to us 'probably best suited to the karma of the people of [their] time', I feel I may be slipping here into a reverent posture, as did Leary in his *Politics Of Ecstasy*:

Obeisances and profound gratitude to you, inspired revealers of the great vibration. Beloved gurus of Liverpool, I'm four you.

The Four Evangelists!

We can either mark the sixties—already historically so far away—as the moment of change when a generally unenlightened humanity began to wake up from its torpor—a process accelerated by its own newly discovered capacity for total destruction—or we cue up the end of side one of *Abbey Road*, the doomy end of Lennon's song 'I Want You', where the band instrumentally paint The End in 'doom-rock' style (more

usually encapsulated by groups like King Crimson and Black Sabbath), with Kali and the Grim Reaper dancing over the flickeringly lit corpses. Either the era of the Beatles' dominance over popular Western music was the beginning of the end, or, as 'The Void' insists, it was

...the end
Of the beginning.

