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‘Selving’ and Union

Abstract: *The idea that the self is an illusion is problematic and possibly incoherent. Moreover, that the self is multiform and changeable does not argue against its existence. However some of the target papers suggest that there are ‘self’ states that are sufficiently divergent for them to have incompatible properties — one refers to the analogy of light as both wave and particle. Many of these dualities have parallels with some of the main distinctions between the ways in which the left hemisphere and right hemisphere present, or represent, the world, and in which they contribute to the self.*

I am conscious that many, perhaps all, great truths cannot be expressed in language; and that, as one who cannot claim any expertise in spiritual practices (except in the most makeshift sense), I may blunder in what I say when approaching profundities of experience not my own. In writing this, I have continually reflected that ‘whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent’. But that would produce a thin volume indeed, and is perhaps unnecessarily defeatist.

At the heights of experience, the wisdom shared with us by spiritual masters indeed leads to apophasis, where language breaks down. There is a cloud of unknowing that shrouds any encounter with reality beyond that for which language prepares us. Adyashanti alludes to this when he says: ‘The more true the identity is, the less confined, the less solid, the less defined it is — until identity finally just drops away entirely. And in that case one can’t say anything, because all statements would be kind of identity statements’ (this issue, p. 38).

What follows is my attempt to approach these unsayable truths with the only tool available to me: the dialogue between philosophy and neurology. What can this tell us about such paradoxical states of

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affairs? And I start from the view that paradox is itself a sign that we are approaching deep truths, where language inevitably falters.

In considering the self, we encounter paradox at the outset. When people speak of the non-existence of the self, they are usually suggesting either that it is discontinuous over time, or continuous over boundaries. On the face of it, the claim that 'All is One' is fraught with difficulty. If true, it cannot be affirmed, since not only language but everything that exists does so only by virtue of some degree of non-unity, even if these distinctions are also seen as, ultimately, artificially segregated parts of some greater unity. Equally, if all things were radically distinct — a state of affairs as inconceivable as it is unaffirmable — there could be no language, no knowledge, and no consciousness to do the knowing. In other words, everything that exists does so because of a 'between' state. It lies in the tension *between* the forces for union and the forces for division.

This is expressed in Heraclitus's idea of *harmonie*. 'They do not understand', he says, 'how a thing agrees, at variance with itself: it is a *harmonie* like that of the bow or the lyre.'¹ The bow and the lyre consist in nothing other than strings that are, and must be, under tension, where the stable complex whole is balanced and efficient not despite, but precisely *because of*, a pulling in opposite directions. And in similar spirit, Hegel wrote that 'every actual thing involves a coexistence of opposed elements. Consequently to know, or, in other words, to comprehend an object is equivalent to being conscious of it as a concrete unity of opposed determinations' (Hegel, 1830/1975, §48).

Almaas may be referring to this in his fascinating paper. Although he says 'We are all and everything, which is a non-numerical oneness', he insists that 'first-personal givenness persists even in non-dual experience'. And he continues:

Rather than individuality, there is a sense of being the whole, or, more exactly, the sense of *indeterminate boundaries* [my italics]... For regardless of how vast or boundless, how inclusive and formless the experience is, perception is always located in a particular time and space... Individual consciousness as an organ of perception is not an illusion, and it is not a fiction, for pure consciousness simply grows an organ for its experiencing. It is an extension of pure consciousness and embodies its sensitivity for experiencing. At the same time, it has more

¹ Kahn (1979, fr. LXXVIII, Diels 51).

organization since it is an individual stream, instead of a non-differentiated continuum. (Almaas, this issue, p. 27)

Some spiritual traditions refer to The One and The Many. Though I am not suggesting that this is what any of the contributors here explicitly suggests, to state that All is One, without the counterbalancing assertion that All is Many, would be to negate the terms on which, as far as we can tell, all that is has its existence.

Going up a level, however, the field looks different, since the forces for union and division are not symmetrical. They need, themselves, to be unified — not divided. Ultimately there is a *union* of division and union. Hegel again: ‘Everything depends on the unity of differentiatedness and non-differentiatedness, or the identity of identity and non-identity’ (Hegel, 1812/1969, §112). Heraclitus said that ‘war is the father of all and king of all’,² but I would add that peace must be their mother and queen; and for all to come about, war and peace need to be at peace to the degree that permits some form of union — not simply at war. Perhaps that more complex reality must be understood to lie compressed in the shorthand ‘All is One’.

Is the self a necessary evil? To the degree that we can discern any governing principle to the cosmos it is not going to be *lex parsimoniae*. The One is simpler than The Many, but the world as we know it is on the side of individuation and multiplicity, not singleness and simplicity. It is an entirely superfluous, superabundant, and exuberant outpouring of riches, which, in the happy moments when we see beyond our concerns with self, calls forth not an ascetic impulse to deny or resist, but feelings of gratitude and tenderness. All that actually is, is unique — only abstractions can ever be identical; and we delight in their ‘selving’, that sense each unique thing expresses, of *haecceitas*, quiddity, ‘thisness’ — the sense of something as this-and-no-other-thing — to which Duns Scotus and Gerard Manley Hopkins so gloriously responded at the level of intellect, and every artist responds at the level of his creative soul.

Of course, controversies about the self depend on what is meant by the self. Clearly if I open and eat a can of beans without offering them to you, you go hungry in the absence of other food, not I. If you then shoot me, it is I who die, not you. That much is trivial and obvious. We are separate physical entities in different locations in space and time, and even spiritual masters have bodies, must eat, and will one

² Kahn (1979, fr. LXXXIII, Diels 53).

day die. When people say that the self is an illusion it is not that that they mean. But what exactly do they mean? There are many senses in which we share our identity with others: we co-create one another and the world. But however we become aware of and cultivate intersubjectivity, however empathic we become, there must always be differences in our bodily experiences and feelings, formed of a personal history, and we cannot dismiss those experiences and feelings as illusory because they are at the very ground of who we are — even of our path to enlightenment. One soon finds that the tendency to deny reality to the realm of experience is contagious and one ends with the unfortunate conclusion that everything has to be an illusion — leading to the question who or what is illuded, if we don't exist, and about what? And why should we concern ourselves with that, or anything at all?

Often what seems to be being claimed is not so radical. It is that the self in the sense in which many people in the West now unreflectively conceive it is a misleading concept. The self, it is being claimed, is neither as separate from other selves nor as static and unchanging as it is often thought to be. These claims, in line with what some of the spiritual masters here suggest, seem to me to be far more interesting than the more absolute, less finely articulated, claims, and have the considerable additional merit that they don't undermine the reality and urgency of what they help us see.

Self has paradoxical qualities. The self is not an element in experience but the ground of experience — and that ground is both private and shared. On the one hand its boundaries are important and yet these boundaries are indefinite and flexible. In this it is like consciousness, Copenhagen, and cabbage soup, the definitions of which (in as much as they exist at all) have to be fuzzy. It is distinct, and yet inseparable, from other selves. It is a public event and a private experience. It fails to cohere and yet is coherent.

Not for the first time it seems to me that an understanding of hemisphere difference can illuminate a philosophical conundrum. Many 'paradoxes' depend on whether one adopts the left hemisphere (LH) or right hemisphere (RH) way of thinking about, or, more accurately, being in, the world. And it is worth looking at what the two hemispheres make of the self, because, as with everything else, without exception, they have differing takes on it.

Two Phenomenological Worlds

In a book called *The Master and his Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World (TMAHE)* (McGilchrist, 2009), I put forward a thesis about the controversial question of the origins and survival value of a divided and asymmetrical brain. Here I can give only the briefest possible outline of the thesis. Evidence and argument in favour of the thesis itself are presented at length in *TMAHE* and explicitly lie outside the scope of this paper.

Many of the findings of neuroscience offer us no more than a description of the brain correlates of human experience. As such they offer a description of experience at a reduced level, but do not directly illuminate the nature of that experience. Indeed it is argued by some philosophers that the brain cannot tell us anything about experience that we could not have discovered by introspection, since by definition the 'inwardness' of mental life has to be the authority on experience.

The thesis of *TMAHE* is, I believe, different in this regard. It suggests that knowledge about reliable differences between the cerebral hemispheres can tell us something of considerable importance about our mental world which would not easily be discoverable by introspection, since, for reasons of survival, nature has taken care to hide it from us. Awareness of it would bring life to a standstill.

The argument can be very briefly stated. In Darwinian terms, there is a need to be able to feed and to keep a look out for predators at one and the same time. This requires the bringing to bear of diametrically opposed types of attention to the world simultaneously: one, narrow-beam, sharply focused, fragmentary, already committed to its object; the other, broad, open, sustained, vigilant, and uncommitted as to what it might find. This is a difficult feat. The solution adopted by all mammals, reptiles, amphibians, birds, and even fish so far studied is a divided brain, in which the two halves remain sufficiently distinct to function independently, but sufficiently connected to function in concert. This is also, unsurprisingly, the case in humans, where the evidence is that the LH tends to yield the first type of attention, and the RH the second (e.g. van Zomeren and Brouwer, 1994).

Since the nature of attention, the way in which we attend, governs the nature of the world that *comes to attention*, and since each hemisphere on its own is capable of yielding a coherent experiential world, two radically different types of attention should lead to two radically different experiential worlds, with different qualities, goals, and values. Evidence from a wealth of sources, including brain insults

(traumatic injury, stroke, tumour, etc.), neuropsychological experiments in normal and post-commissurotomy subjects, and brain imaging in a range of modalities suggests that this is indeed the case.³

In one (the LH version), as in a map, things are simplified. Here there are familiar, reliable, clear, certain, static, isolated, fragmentary elements that can be manipulated easily, are decontextualized, abstracted, detached, disembodied, mechanical, relatively uncomplicated by issues of beauty and morality (except in a consequentialist sense), and relatively untroubled by the complexity of empathy, emotion, and human significance. They are put together, as brick on brick to build a wall, so as to reach conclusions that are taken to be unimpeachable. There is an excess of confidence and a lack of insight. This world is useful for purposes of manipulation, but is not a helpful guide to understanding the nature of the underlying reality. Its use is local and for the short-term.

In the other (the RH version), which is truer to the world revealed to us by physics, by poetry, and simply by the business of living, things are almost infinitely more complex. Nothing is clearly the same as anything else. All is tentative, uncertain, provisional, and complexly interconnected with everything else. Nothing is ever static, detached from our awareness of it, or disembodied, and everything needs to be understood in context, where, if it is not to be denatured, it must remain implicit. Here, wholes are more than the sum of the parts, and beauty and morality, along with empathy and emotional depth, help us to intuit meaning that lies beyond the banality of the familiar and everyday. The overall timbre is sober and tentative. This world is truer to what is, but is harder to comprehend and to express in language, and less useful for practical issues that are local and short-term. On the other hand for a broader or longer-term understanding it is essential.

Clearly under normal circumstances we are not aware that the world we experience is a synthesis of these two phenomenological versions or 'takes'. However, it is not just under artificial, experimental conditions, or in illness or injury, that their existence becomes apparent. Every attempt to reflect on life, understand the world, or convey its

³ I should say, at this point, that I am aware that a hemisphere on its own cannot be said to do what only a person can do: 'believe', 'intend', 'decide', 'like', and so on. These and similar formulations should be understood as avoiding the repetition of such cumbersome locutions as 'a subject relying on the cognitive faculties of the left [or right] hemisphere believes', etc.

true nature in language — in other words, every project of philosophy or theology — is an attempt to reconcile fundamentally incompatible models of the world, each of which can claim to reveal aspects of underlying reality. These attempts can, I suggest, be illuminated by an awareness of the conflicting models of the world yielded by the two hemispheres of our brains.

In reality we are a composite of the two hemispheres, and despite the interesting results of experiments designed artificially to separate their functioning, they work together most of the time at the everyday level. But that does not at all exclude that they may have radically different agendas, and over long time periods and large numbers of individuals it becomes apparent that they each instantiate a way of being in the world that is at conflict with the other.

Two Selves

When it comes to understanding the self, one can already see how these two phenomenological worlds could be expected to result in two different versions. One, that of the LH, would be an entity that is relatively static, fixed, yet fragmentary, just a succession of moments, atomistic, goal-orientated, with its needs at any moment perceived as essentially competitive (since others may similarly target the same resources), determinate, consciously wilful, circumscribed in the breadth and depth of what it sees, at ease with the familiar, certain and explicit, but less so with all that is fluid, ambiguous, and implicit, and unaware of the limitations of its own knowledge. The other, that of the RH, should be more akin to a process than a thing, essentially fluid and indeterminate, yet forming a unique whole over time, aware that it is fundamentally inseparable from all else that exists, open to others and to experience, more concerned with cooperation than competition, less consciously wilful, more engaged in what one might call 'active passivity' (an open attendant disposition, in which one is ready to respond to what emerges), seeing the greater picture in space and time, and aware of the extent of its ignorance. This may be something like what Adyashanti describes when he says: 'You can be in a complete state of flow which is what it feels like not to be trapped in ego; it feels like a flow that feels very easy and open and free and vital' (this issue, p. 35). And Almaas confirms: 'It will not be a static medium, but a flowing medium' (p. 27).

Where the LH tends to see linear chains of cause and effect, the RH sees reverberative, responsive relations in which all exists in

'betweenness' — not the space between two entities, but the new whole that is made by their coming together, in which each party and the 'space' between is taken up into something radically new. Might this alone suggest a way of thinking that frees up the terms on which we debate the nature of the self?

The Curate's Ego: 'Parts of it are Excellent'

The neurological literature is largely in accord with this expectation. It suggests that the self as intrinsically inseparable from the world in which it stands in relation to others, the social and empathic self, and the continuous sense of self, with 'depth' of existence over time, is more dependent on the RH, whereas the objectified self, the external self, and the self as an expression of will, is generally more dependent on the LH. This might reflect the distinction made by Jung between the self and the ego, fulfilling different, but necessary, functions. For him, the self is the product of psychic integration over time and unites conscious and unconscious processes, while the ego is that part of self identified with the conscious will, and which, though necessary in the earlier stages of development in order to anchor the growing individual in the world, comes to be transcended in the process of spiritual growth.

The affinity of the LH for what is explicit and present in the focus of awareness leads to identification of the self with the conscious mind alone. Since there is constant intercourse between the conscious and unconscious mind, and they have no fully distinct existence, this is untenable (what counts as 'the conscious mind' may be no more than that part of consciousness that happens to be at any one time in the focus of attention — that of which the LH is aware). The neglect of this can derail discussions of free will and responsibility, and plays a part in the misunderstanding caused by Libet's (1985; 1989) famous experiments (though there are other factors involved there that lie outside the scope of this paper).

It is no contradiction that, while the idea of the self as distinct from others does have meaning, the dichotomy between self and others is fundamentally misleading. From the outset they are intertwined, proceed from and return to one another. They could be said to 'co-create' each other: 'The sense of self emerges from the activity of the brain in interaction with other selves' (Decety and Chaminade, 2003). The right orbitofrontal cortex, the part of the right frontal lobe most crucial for social and empathic understanding, is larger in primates than the

left; and this part of the brain expands during the period of playful interaction between infant and mother in the second half of the first year, and the second year, of life, during which the sense of the self emerges. It is essential to the secure sense of the growing individual as distinct from — no longer fused with — the mother, yet still deeply bonded to her, rather than isolated by the process of individuation. Allan Schore, a leading figure in the area of the neurodevelopment of the self, sees the right orbitofrontal cortex as the crucible of the growing self (Schore, 1994). The RH is more involved than the LH in almost every aspect of the development of mental functioning in early childhood, and especially of the self as a social, empathic being (Trevarthen, 1996).

The Necessary Stability of Self

There is a mystery here for the psychiatrist. Clearly having a stable sense of self is important to most of us if we are to lead fulfilling lives. While I am not in any way suggesting that spiritual experience is akin to mental illness, it remains a fact that, for most of us, not having a stable sense of self is associated, not with wisdom, but with psychopathology. Two of the most distressing and damaging psychiatric conditions, psychosis and borderline personality disorder, are often marked by loss of the boundaries of the self and indeed of any stable self-identity at all. In less dramatic circumstances that we all share, negotiating our lives — and loves — with others, getting boundaries in the right place is essential. What happens when boundaries break down is not that we enter a state of blissful selflessness, but instead attribute things we cannot accept in ourselves — what Jung calls the Shadow — to other people, interfere in their lives, and neglect responsibility for what is properly our own, all the while priding ourselves on our selflessness. Clearly this is not a description of anything remotely like the lack of self described by spiritual masters — rather the opposite — but therein lies the paradox, and it has to be negotiated.

Securing a sense of who we are and getting to know ourselves requires a properly functioning RH. At a simple, but by no means trivial, level, as Roger Sperry and his colleagues hypothesized, the RH is particularly important for the sense of the embodied self (Sperry, Zaidel and Zaidel, 1979). Asomatognosia, the condition in which subjects fail to recognize their embodied self or parts of their own body, is found in nearly 90 per cent of subjects following any RH

stroke; and, conversely, the condition appears to be associated only with RH deficits — Feinberg, who has made a study of the condition, notes that of the 100 cases known to him, not once has it followed LH damage (Feinberg, 2000; Feinberg, Haber and Leeds, 1990).

The right frontal region appears to be essential for the determination of self in other modalities, too, such as voice recognition. Damage to the right parietal and medial regions may result in confusions of self with other; and damage to the right frontal lobe creates a disturbance of ego boundaries, suggesting 'that the right hemisphere, particularly the right frontal region, under normal circumstances plays a crucial role in establishing the appropriate relationship between the self and the world' (Feinberg and Keenan, 2005, p. 675). This region is clearly dysfunctional in schizophrenia, where subjects not only lack empathy, humour, metaphorical understanding, pragmatics (understanding of an utterance in context), social skills, and theory of mind, but crucially mistake the boundaries of self and other, even at times feeling themselves to melt into other individuals or that other beings are invading or occupying their own body space.

At an equally foundational level, it is largely the RH, and especially the right prefrontal cortex, that enables us to see ourselves as the coherent subject of experience at all, with a history, and a personal and emotional coherence over time. Right frontal damage impairs the sense of a self with a narrative, and a continuous flow-like existence; and when subjects read a first-person narrative, compared with reading a third-person narrative, the right temporo-parietal junction becomes active. The RH is responsible for 'maintaining a coherent, continuous and unified sense of self' (Devinsky, 2000); and is more engaged by memories that are autobiographical and have personal meaning. Evidence from patients with dementia is highly suggestive that it is the RH that 'connects the individual to emotionally salient experiences and memories', and which therefore forms 'the glue holding together the sense of self' (Miller *et al.*, 2001, p. 821). Douglas Watt once remarked that 'emotion binds together virtually every type of information the brain can encode... [it is] part of the glue that holds the whole system together' (Watt, 1998); and indeed, to the degree that that is so, it is the RH that stabilizes the world (there are other, deeper, senses in which this is true).

Note that an enduring coherent self does not imply a fixed or static self, any more than a tree that has survived centuries, or a river that has flowed for aeons, is fixed or static. The RH, with its understanding of possibility, change, and flow, is far better than the LH at incorpora-

ting new information into a schema, without having necessarily to abandon it, while the LH, with its attachment to the fixed and certain, sticks stubbornly to what it ‘knows’ at all costs, in the teeth of evidence to the contrary.

A sense of self is not an impediment to empathy, but its source. The process of securing a self emerges from the intercourse between child and, usually, mother. But in turn the process binds the emerging self to others once more. The sense of others as beings like oneself, and therefore as evoking empathy and understanding, is not achieved by *denying* the sense of self, but precisely in tandem with the evolution of a sense of self. This complex process is largely dependent on intact right frontal lobe functioning. The neural correlates of self-awareness and so-called ‘theory of mind’ depend heavily on the right frontal and right cingulate cortex. When I feel my pain both hemispheres are involved — when I feel yours, it is RH-dependent (Jackson *et al.*, 2006). This seems crucial to the sense of oneness with others described by spiritual masters.

In keeping with this, those with damage to the right fronto-temporal cortex may experience a curious cognitive detachment from self.

Gnothi Seauton

Important aspects of self-awareness, including insight into one’s strengths and weaknesses, an essential element in spiritual growth (‘know thyself’), is very much better in the RH than in the LH. For this in itself one needs ‘theory of mind’: self-awareness involves seeing how we are likely to seem or come across to others. The capacity to understand one’s self as a human being like others, which is involved in self-awareness, is an aspect of the human ability to identify with others, empathize with them and share their feelings, and is largely dependent on the RH.

The LH is associated with the will to act, and particularly to grasp. Even imagining a manipulative action activates the left motor cortex. It is the hemisphere that controls the right hand, the hand with which most of us do the grasping. Connections between speech and the right hand are numerous and run deep: it is also the hemisphere that deals with that aspect (not all) of language with which we say we ‘grasp’ things — make them precise and pin them down. The LH does not recognize what it has not initiated, and confabulates a story in order to make sense of things it doesn’t understand, often attributing the promptings of the unconscious mind — outside its control — to

control by alien forces. At the same time it knows less of why it is doing what it is doing. One of the earliest findings about hemisphere difference was that the LH is the seat of the expression of selfhood through the conscious will. It is noteworthy that Adyashanti uses this language to describe the attempt by the ego to hang onto new more enlightened experience: 'And as soon as you grasp at it, your grasping *solidifies* the experience of the ego. Every kind of grasping, no matter what level the grasping is happening at, is essentially an egoic activity' (this issue, p. 35).

RH-damaged individuals — therefore relying on their intact LH — may become more wilful and less empathic; they tend to become less sensitive, less insightful, more prone to euphoria, irritability, and anger, as well as incapable of understanding implicit meaning. They lose a sense of what one might call *depth* — in space, and time, and emotion: space becomes two-dimensional, there is a loss of *durée* (Bergson, 1889/1908) in the appreciation of time, and emotional understanding becomes shallow.

A consensus is emerging from the literature that religious experience tends to be associated with the right hemisphere. This conclusion is supported by a book-length study of spirituality and the brain (Trimble, 2007), a further book-length account of the neuroscience of religious experience (McNamara, 2009), and by a comprehensive review of the literature (Devinsky and Lai, 2008).

They agree in implicating right fronto-temporal networks, one distinguishing the 'religion of the everyday man', with its characteristic ongoing belief pattern and set of convictions, predominantly localized to the frontal region, from ecstatic religious experience, more localized to the temporal region, both in the right hemisphere.

The Problem with Reflection

It is not just that each hemisphere has a different take on the self, but that each has a different approach to knowing the self. The phenomenology of schizophrenia bears many resemblances to that of RH-deficit states. It has been characterized by Louis Sass as involving three principal phenomenological abnormalities: 'hyperconsciousness' — whereby elements of the self and of experience which normally remain, and *need* to remain, intuitive, unconscious, become the objects of a detached, alienating attention; 'loss of ipseity' — of the pre-reflective, grounding sense of the self; and 'unworlding' — a loss of the sense of the overarching context that gives coherence to the

world (Sass, 1992). These phenomena are, however, not confined to schizophrenia. They are also found in philosophical enquiry and in some religious practices. Philosophers, like schizophrenics, have a problem with the sense of the self which ordinary individuals, involved with living, lack. As Wittgenstein noted: 'it's strange that in ordinary life we are not troubled by the feeling that the phenomenon is slipping away from us, the constant flux of appearance, but only when we philosophise' (Wittgenstein, 1964/1971, p. 83). Some things need to remain out of the focus of consciousness, because the focus of consciousness changes them: and of course everything changes its nature when taken out of the context of the lived world. Trying to find the self by focusing on it causes it to disappear — not because it doesn't exist, but because it is like trying to see what something looks like when you are not looking at it.

Philosophers spend a good deal of time inspecting and analysing what one might call the life of the RH from the standpoint of the LH — something which spiritual masters themselves decry. If feelings are the glue that hold the world together, it is perhaps then not surprising that the glue begins to disintegrate, and there is a nasty cracking noise as the otherwise normally robust sense of the self comes apart, possibly revealing more about the merits (or otherwise) of the self-reflexive process, than the self under scrutiny. But feelings can't be dispensed with: they are even closer to the core of being than thinking. *Sentio, ergo sum.*

The LH also dislikes uncertainty. As John Welwood writes: 'our everyday experiences may often appear to be at odds with the highest truth. This creates uncertainty and ambiguity. For many people, the disparity between these two levels of truth is confusing or disturbing. They think reality has to be all one way or the other' (see full version of Welwood paper, available at www.the-self.com). So does the self definitely exist, or not? I believe the RH's approach is better able to help us here, as I hope to show.

Both ego and self (before no-self), according to Adyashanti, are grasping and clutching. This is the mode of the LH. It is the RH, not the LH, that gives the ground to our being, sees what is *not* foregrounded, while the LH focuses on whatever is salient against that ground. As he carries on to say: 'The self is the witness, and you can never see the witness or subject. You can only see what the witness witnesses' (this issue, p. 36). Equally, Christopher Curtis Sensei (this issue) suggests that enlightenment is more knowing than knowing *about*, being in the presence of than reflecting *on*. As I have

demonstrated elsewhere, these are distinctions which tend to characterize the modes of knowledge of the RH (*kennen*) and of the LH (*wissen*) (McGilchrist, 2009, pp. 94–7).

Cynthia Bourgeault (this issue, p. 50) quotes Jakob Boehme: ‘When you remain silent from the thinking and willing of the self, the eternal hearing, seeing, and speaking will be revealed in you.’ This silence is associated with the kind of open receptive attention of the RH, in which things ‘presence’; and indeed evidence suggests that mindfulness meditation is marked by activation of widely distributed networks primarily in the RH (Berkovich-Ohana, Glicksohn and Goldstein, 2012; Hölzel *et al.*, 2011; Leung *et al.*, 2013), as well as inhibition of the posterior language centres of the LH, where the constant chatter (‘monkey mind’) that tends to accompany consciousness has its home (Newberg *et al.*, 2001; 2003). She also writes, in a wonderful phrase, that ‘it is this love that calls forth the courage to face the shadow work, for it is done *in relationship with a greater wholeness already intuited*, not as a dismantling of the only selfhood we know’ (Bourgeault, this issue, p. 51). Once again this appeal to the sense of intuited wholeness, rather than analytic either/or-ness, suggests the RH’s take. The self does not need to be annihilated: it can be taken up (Hegel, *aufgehoben*), transfigured, into a new whole. (‘Nothing, no matter its state or level of attainment, can possibly fall out of God.’) And here she comes very close to my own thesis about the relationship between the hemispheres: that there is nothing wrong with the LH as long as it is aware (which, alas, it almost never is) of its own limitations. It is a good servant (or emissary), but a poor Master. ‘The egoic selfhood’, she writes, ‘does not go away; rather, it becomes a good servant. It’s still a very useful tool for many of the functions we are called on to perform in this world. But it is now “transcended and included”; we recognize that it is a modality of action and not the seat of our identity’ (*ibid.*, p. 53).

Thus it seems to me that the hemispheres can illuminate both the question whether there is a self and how to go about answering it.

On the second point first: too great an emphasis on precision of language and conceptual analysis leads us back to the left hemisphere’s take. Spiritual and religious practices are an attempt to escape the normative power of analytic thought, as poetry escapes language, and re-alerts us to the reality known to the right hemisphere. We need to balance an analytic and introspective approach with a more intuitive and synthetic approach (to this, as to all questions concerning the nature of reality) if we are not to be misled. This is not at all about the

LH as objective versus the RH as subjective, but about a world in which there is a clear divide between subject and object (LH), and one where there isn't (RH). And both approaches are necessary, without implying they are equal. As I have demonstrated elsewhere, the RH at first grounds, and ultimately interprets, what the LH unpacks at an *intermediary* stage. It is like being first attracted to a piece of music as a whole, and trying to play it; then taking it apart to practise one's fingering at bar 42, and to understand the harmonic progressions; but then forgetting all that once more in the final performance. The fragmenting was not a waste of time, by any means, not negated, but subsumed in the performance of the whole. It just must be no longer *present*. It is the RH, the one that sees the whole, that is the Master, the LH just the emissary.

As to the first point: of the self, itself, there might be many versions, but there are two main senses in which we keep encountering it in the target papers. They appear to correspond to the self as viewed by the RH and the LH. Whether we agree that the self exists may depend on which version we mean. But taken together they may yield more than they do apart. This is because of the way that, according to Heraclitus and Hegel, as well as most writers in the spiritual traditions of both East and West, contraries co-arise: and all that comes about does so in the tension, the *harmonie*, that results.

Thus, it seems to me, we come to be in control of ourselves, not by a loss of all initiative, but by jettisoning the illusion of control over circumstances; similarly we become free from time, not by denying its reality, but by accepting transience. There is an innocence the other side of experience that is greater than the innocence this side of it. There is an experience of freedom from time and the embodied self that is only available the other side of immersion in both, not by their rejection — that way leads to error. There is a kind of peace the other side of torment; a kind of general understanding we reach only by going through the particular, not by turning our backs on it. There is a kind of freedom from the self that exists only the other side of self-knowledge and self-acceptance. This could be what separates psychopathology from saintliness.

Thus Welwood (this issue) warns against a spirituality that 'becomes just another way of rejecting one's experience' (p. 70) — experience which is all that we have. And the analogy may be this, from Curtis Sensei: 'During these years, I became convinced that the correct cut must lie right in the midpoint on a scale of too much strength on the one end, and too much control on the other. I had no

idea that what he was looking for was something else altogether...' (p. 62). The tone of the lyre and the strength of the bow are not improved by compromise, the string going slack. They are both emergent properties of a synthesis between opposing entities, which displays entirely new qualities. Not the midpoint, but the synthesis, not avoidance of the 'negative' pole, but embrace of the apparent duality. The dual and non-dual need to work together, as Adyashanti puts it.

The advantage of this point of view is that it not only accommodates but redeems the apparent drive in all that is towards differentiation, that delighted exuberance of being underlying the 'thisness' of every existing thing, which according to Hopkins lies at the heart of creation, and is shared by God. The most famous expression of this intuition, his poem 'As Kingfishers Catch Fire', conveys how each thing has what Hopkins called 'inscape', by which he meant its proper essence, taut with its own energy, possessing the power to 'selve': 'Crying *What I do is me: for that I came.*' But he says more than this. In the less often quoted sestet of the poem, beginning 'I say more', he writes:

....Christ plays in ten thousand places,
Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his
To the Father through the features of men's faces.

What I believe Hopkins intends is that we should understand that the divine incarnate ('Christ') manifests itself in 'ten thousand' ways that are 'lovely' — not just beautiful, but worthy of, and calling forth, love — and are so recognized by the divine creator ('the Father') in and through whatever it is his act of creation makes *new* ('not his'). Thus the Ten Thousand Things and the Oneness of Being are not only reconciled, but revealed to be part of one and the same divine order in which the coming apart and together, the 'selving' and union, are equally real, equally eternal, and equally creative.

Is light a wave, a particle, both, or neither? In Christology there is an enigma: Christ is neither simply Man, nor simply God; but neither is he just Man *and* God, nor is he *neither* Man *nor* God. When I started writing this piece, the words of Pyrrho were in my mind. For Pyrrho the Greek (as for Nāgārjuna, writing 400 years later in India) they have universal application, but they seemed particularly appropriate in relation to the self: 'neither affirm that it is, nor that it is not, nor that it both is and is not, nor that it neither is nor is not.' That didn't seem particularly helpful as a contribution, any more than Wittgenstein's injunction to remain silent. But it may come to life in a

Hegelian sense: for the emerging product may be neither just both, nor neither, of two contraries we cannot singly embrace, but something new altogether, as the lyric tone of the lyre emerges from the tension of the wire that holds its warring ends together.

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