Modern, Postmodern, And
The Future Of The Humanity
Nostalgia for the Unattainable
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Introduction

Post-modernity defies definition, precisely because it is not a given thing, an entity locatable in
time or space. Besides, it belongs to the very essence of Post-modernity to stay away from
definitions and objectifications and to abjure all attempts to capture the truth in propositions.
Also because Post-modernity is not the same in art or literature, in architecture or the dance, in
philosophy or other language games, it cannot be precisely pinpointed.

Post-modernity, to me, seems more like a predicament of western humanity than a School or a
goal-directed or rule-governed movement. It does not deal with goals and rules and straight lines
and simple ideas. It is a condition of the avant garde consciousness of modern Western
humanity, a distressed state of mind, a sad plight of the spirit, a temper of the time as it comes
apart at the seams-- a perplexing modality springing from the very quintessence of modernity.

Its basic mood is nostalgia-- nostalgia for the unattainable, nostalgia for a secure foundation for
one’s own being, without having to surrender oneself to Being as Heidegger suggested. It is a
persisting pressure to present the Unpresentable, the Adrshta or Avyakta, the Avyakrta or the
Unseen, the Unmanifest, the Unformed, to use our own Samkhya categories. Knowing that it is
not possible to stand apart from it and present it in some objective way; it is a stubborn reaching
out to capture it in symbols in some objective about the truth, with reluctance to let go of the
great projects of the European Enlightenment -- a reason that takes over from religion as the
unifying principle, reason expressing itself in art, language and philosophy, reason as the ground
of human autonomy, freedom and unity. It is a sick craving on the part of western humanity to
conquer the truth and to make oneself master of it.
1. Post and Modern

What do they mean when they put the prefix post- to modern or modernity or modernism? Does it mean that just as the Ancient, Classical, and Medieval periods of European History have now receded into the past, we are now in a fourth age -- The post-modern Age?

There are some who think so. Arnold Toynbee was one of them. His characterisation applies mainly to the discipline of History. Toynbee first suggested, in a footnote to his *A study of History* (vol. I. P. I, 1924), that the Modern period of History came to an end somewhere between 1850 and 1875, that is, more than 120 years ago. By the time he came to his fifth volume of the series (published in 1939), he was using the term to refer to the time between the two European wars of 1939. For him the prophet of post-modernism was, above all, Friedrich Nietzsche (1844 - 1900), though his ideas spread widely in Europe only during the inter-war period, two decades after his untimely and tragic death.

In his discussion of Greek drama, Nietzsche had suggested the distinction, not so much the usual one between tragedy and comedy, but between two types:

- the Apollonian, stressing order, form, control, regularity, harmony and beauty-- in short the more rational gaining control over the irrational and animal drives,
- and the Dionysian, implying a joyful abandon to the emotions and feelings, a letting go, rather than a reining in-- Bacchanalian and irrational.

Oswals Spengler (1880-1936), the famous author of *The Decline of the West* shared with Toynbee theHistoricist view, which was criticised by Karl Popper as providing intellectual foundations for totalitarian future history which cannot be predicted by extrapolating from past history. The growth of knowledge was an unpredictable factor bound to bring about unexpected changes.

The Historicist view, eg. in Hegel, Marx, Toynbee and Comte, holds that human history reveals large scale or over-all laws of historical development. Spengler picked up the Nietzschean distinction between the Apollonian and the Dionysian and applied it to cultures as whole, and saw in the Dionysian-Irrational one of the main causes for the decline and fall of civilizations. This distinction, as applied to “Patterns of Culture” (1934), was formalised by the American Cultural Anthropologist Ruth Benedict (1987-1948).

According to Toynbee, the shift from modern to post-modern occurs when people abandon, in various measures, the Apollonian-Rationalist-Harmonious, and opt for more Dionysian-Irrationalist-Incongruous ways of living, thinking, and feeling. For him the spirit of post-modernism was revealed in a sort of enthusiastic and active forgetting of the past and its outmoded norms -- an intentional and self-generated amnesia of the norms of an ordered society and rational-academic institutions.

The Modern Period was characterised by a desire to abjure the Past and to discard Tradition and all external authority. Behind that drive was an absolute confidence in the capacity of unaided and autonomous human reason to solve all puzzles and to remove the veil of mystery from reality. Reason alone can make the objective world no longer a threat to one’s existence, but fully subject to human control through science and technology, ignoring the Past and concentrating on the Present in a calculated and methodical manner.
The Post-modern, on the other hand, wants to ignore even the present, in order to make a creative leap into the future untrammeled by laws, norms and institutions now dominating society. It is post-Liberal, Post-Marxist, taking for granted the collapse not only of Late Capitalism, but also of late Marxism. Nothing of what exists, including science and technology, or the dogmas of the social sciences and the norms of literature can provide the needed guidance for that leap or jump or saute into the future.

In this sense, Post-modern does not mean Anti-modern. As Jean-Francois Lyotard, one of the most provocative of the prophets of Post modernity put it: “The whole idea of postmodernism is perhaps better rethought under the rubric of rewriting modernity. (See his “Reecrire la modernite” in L Inhumain, Galilee, Paris, 1998, pp 33-44). Post-modernism retains many aspects of modernity, yet rejects the norms of strict logic and rationality, which seemed to characterise the latter. It is certainly not anti-modern in the sense of being backward-looking. It does not want to reinstate the norms of religion and tradition which modernism repudiated. Nor does it want to abide by the norms of modernity -- especially the emphasis on written language and logical rationality.

II. What is Modernity?

Of course there is no way of coming to terms with Post-modernity (most post-modern writers are allergic to the term ‘postmodernism’ since they do not regard it as one of those ‘ism’s of the modern lingo; they prefer post-modernity) without having some grasp of Modernity, and the movement away from Modernity in post-Nietzschain thought. We shall later have a look at these movements, mainly the post-Marxist or New Left, the post-Structuralist or Deconstructionist, post-Linguist or post-positivist.


I prefer Max Weber’s definition for a start, but would amend that slightly. For behind that separation of ‘substantive reason’ from the religious consciousness, and also from its basic unity, is the fundamental act of the Modern -- the repudiation of the Transcendent as the Unifying Principle and its replacement by Human Rationality as Sovereign and as the New Unifying Principle of all experience and all understanding. The central and fundamental thrust of the Modern, it seems to me, is the bold and unhesitating affirmation of the autonomy of the human individual and society, as not dependent on, or answerable to, any other reality. It is this affirmation that repudiates all external authority, outside of human reason, whether of religion or of tradition. From that repudiation of external authority and the affirmation of human autonomy and sovereignty have come the other trappings of the Modern-- e. g. Modern Science-Technology, Modern Urban-industrial civilisation, Modern Philosophy and Literature, and so on.

The beginnings of the Modern can be traced to that intellectual fever that spread in Europe from the middle of the 18th century. The French Revolution of 1789 was a high point in the spread of this intellectual-spiritual as well as political-economic-social ferment in western society. The process lasted from mid-18th to mid-19th century, and is still spreading geographically, encompassing all cultures which adopt the urban-technological industrial system, with its Capitalist mode of production, Calvinist-individualist “value-system”, culture, medicine, communications system, educational system and political-economic institutions, all based on
human sovereignty and autonomy. We “modern educated people” are all today, in large measure, products of that ferment and process. In India the process is pervasive, but has not yet conquered all the people, since all the people have not yet been educated!

What is the European Enlightenment? It was Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), one of its earliest prophets, who asked that question and answered it in his article in the Berlinscher Monatsschrift, (December 1783), entitled: Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklaerung? or “Answer to the Question: What is the Enlightenment?”

His answer: “Aufklaerung ist der Ausgang des Menschen aus Seiner Selbst-verschuldeten Unmuendigkeit”:

Let me give his full answer in English; I confess my inability to give you a totally word-to-word Translation:

Enlightenment is the coming out of Man from his self-imposed immaturity. Immaturity is the incapacity to serve one’s own understanding without direction (Leitung) from another. This immaturity is self-imposed; Reason itself languishes, not because it lacks understanding; what it lacks is resolution and courage; it is unwilling to serve itself without an external authority. Wise up! Wake up! Be hold! (Sapere Aude! Habe Mut) Take courage to serve your own understanding! This is therefore the Motto (Walspruch) of the Enlightenment”.

Jean- Francois Lyotard’s “Answering the question: What is Post- Modernism?” (See Hassan I and Hassan S, (eds), Innovation/Renovation, Univ. of Wisconsin Press Madison, Wis, 1983, pp 71-82) seems to be a takeoff from the title of Kant’s above mentioned article on the Enlightenment.

The Modern, if not identical with that process, is certainly a consequence of that intellectual ferment, which is sometimes referred to as the European Enlightenment, to distinguish it from other enlightenments like the Buddhist, to which perhaps the term originally belongs. Enlightenment Liberalism with its twin children of modern Science-Technology and the Urban-industrial society, and its two outcomes, namely the Marxist attempt to construct the ideal society, and the Positivist-Linguistic-Discourse endeavor to capture the truth in words, are all based on the affirmation of the autonomy of the human individual and his/her capacity to know, shape, and order the world. If these four constitute the hallmarks of the Modern, Postmodern is post-Enlightenment, Post-Marxist/Freudian and Post-Discourse. We should give some attention to all three aspects in order to come to terms with the inchoate and imprecise term “postmodern”.

III Post-Enlightenment -- Frankfurt School

The first major post-Nietzschean systematic criticism of the European Enlightenment came in this century from the School of Social Research at Frankfort University in Germany. Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno published their Dialectics of the Enlightenment in 1944, but the ideas were already brewing at the Frankfort School during the Hitler years. “Enlightenment is totalitarian”, declared both Adorno and Horkheimer; the implication was that Nazi totalitarianism was a product of Enlightenment Liberalism, whose central thrust is to establish human domination over everything and to eliminate that which resists such domination.

“From now on, matter would at last be mastered without any illusion of ruling or inherent powers (in it), of hidden qualities. For the Enlightenment, whatever does not conform to the rule of computation and utility is suspect.” (Dialectics, op. cit. p. 6).
Elsewhere in the same book they said: “The fully enlightened earth radiates disaster triumphant.” The Enlightenment’s attempt was to captivate Nature and keep it in the straitjacket of abstract Reason, which it misinterpreted as Scientific Reason.

Adorno’s Against Epistemology was an even more violent attack on the claim of Scientific Rationality to be resting on secure epistemic foundations. Adorno raised the question about the basic flaw in all Epistemology, namely that no epistemology can itself be established by that Epistemology. Hegel had earlier raised that question apropos of Kant’s epistemology of established? That was Hegel’s question which had been formulated in India by our great genius Nagarjuna in his vigrahavyavarthini, already 18 centuries before Hegel. “If your shastra is based on certain pramanas, then may I ask by what Pramana were those pramanas themselves established?”

Post-modernism recognises the difficulty in establishing any system of knowledge on an indubitable basis of certainty. Goedel’s theorem had already in 1932 mathematically demonstrated that in any given system, there will be one or more elements not provable within the system, but are brought in from the outside by assumption. The Modern was the quest for that indubitable certainty of knowledge as “proven and objective”, yielded by experience and logic. For a while science thought that it could state truth objectively, and prove it. Now we know that all proof is inductive, and therefore tentative, and can be questioned by subsequent experience. We know also that there is no such thing as a non-subjective objectivity, that all perception involves subjectivity, that the perceiver is always part of the reality; perceived. No Scientific theory is handed down by the objective reality; it is the human subjectivity that formulates scientific hypotheses, and then tests their validity by experimentation. Science is neither non-subjectively objective, nor finally proven.

The Enlightenment is a project that has failed -- the attempt to unify all experience through the single dialectical logic of unaided human reason. Nietzsche in the last century had decried the Enlightenment as well as its emaciating and freedom--something rationality scientism and historism. Postmodernism is post-Enlightenment, in a very Niezschian sense, in fact in Dionysian-Bachanalian style of repudiation of all rules and conventions, a creativity that springs from excess of energy, an excess that is sexual and orgiastic, which Nietzsche commended as the antidote to this insipid rule-bound rationality of the Enlightenment. Hence Lyotard’s intriguing title: Economie Libidinale.

Juergen Habermas, the last of the Frankfort Scholers, has sought to put some legitimacy to modernity by integrating it with a universal pragmatism. Habermas in his philosophical Discourse of Modernity (MIT Press, 1987) Recognizes the fact that the whole western project of replacing Religion with Reason as the comprehensive uniting factor has simply exploded. Nietzsche doubted whether modernity can be redeemed at all; it cannot fashion out of itself the criteria for itself. “ For from ourselves we moderns have nothing at all” (On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life, Cambridge 1980, p. 24, original Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie fuer das leben, 1874). But Habermas has made an attempt, rather uncharacteristic of the Frankfort School, to say that while proof is not possible, validation of propositions is possible, though the validation criteria appropriate for the physical discipline. The Validation Criteria appropriate for the sciences cannot be used for the social sciences for example; as you go higher into art criticism or literary criticism, even the criteria of the social sciences will not fit; ideology formation requires another set of validation or legitimating criteria.

This attempt of Habermas fixes him in the Modernist rather than the Postmodernist camp. He is still talking about propositional truths and their legitimation; thus he is still in the positivist line.
The other prominent product of the Frankfort School was Herbert Marcuse, to whom shall revert in a later section.

**IV. Postmodernism as Post-Discourse**

The recent oscillations of French Philosophy constitute an important aspect in the emergence of the post-modern consciousness in Europe. In the immediate post-war years, Nazi occupied France fostered Existentialism as a philosophical tool -- truth grounded in the subjective in a world where the external or objective world was so unstable and uncertain. In the French resistance, any particular French citizen in Nazi prisons woke up every day with an awareness of the possibility that he/she may have to face the firing squad that day, or perhaps escape it today to face the possibility to the enemy even when faced with death -- that was a context in which Existentialism really worked.

As France became independent, and as French affluence grew, the focus returned to the objective -- the whole structuralist approach, with its programme of charting external reality precisely, in terms of an exhaustive statement of all the relations within which any entry became significant. The structuralists, especially Ferdinand de Saussure and Claude Levi Strauss, emphasized the spoken word or discourse rather than the written word as the object-constituting entry. “The linguistic object is not defined by the combination of the written word and the spoken word, the latter alone constituting this object.” (De Saussure in La Dissemination, Paris, 1972, p. 45).

“Language and writing are two distinct sign systems; the unique raison d’etre of the second is to represent the first” (ibd). Plato had already said of writing that it was an orphan or a bastard. Speech or Discourse alone is the legitimate and high born Son of the “Father of Logos”.

Structuralism did not reign long before Deconstructionism set in, toppling it. If for Saussure, the phoneme, or the basic unit of sound is real, and the grapheme or basic unit of writing is only a representation, Jacques Derrida wanted to go even further back behind the phoneme to “meaning”.

> All experience is the experience of meaning (sinn). Everything that appears to consciousness, everything that is for consciousness in general, is meaning. Meaning is the phenomenality of the Phenomenon.”


Derrida suggests that this pure meaning as formed in consciousness is not only independent of any sign, uttered or written, that represents it; it also differs from that latter. This difference cannot be wished away; it persists. The sign is one thing; that which it signifies, the signified, is another. The latter is true meaning in its pure sense. The sign is the exteriorisation (Husserl’s *Aeusserung*) or expression (*Ausdruck*) of meaning. So Derrida in his Grammatology sets out “to deconstruct everything that ties up the concept and norms of scientificity, to onto-theology, logocentrism and phonologism.” (ibd p. 35).

With Deconstructionism, the pendulum of French thought swings again to the subjective as the truth. With that Discourse, Language, Logic and Words take a back seat. Michel Foucault, Roland Barthes, Jacques Lacan and others join the parade of the Nouvelle Critique. The problem now is the old Aristotelian-Thomist one of the relation between propositions and facts. Foucault’s *Les Mots et les Choses* (1966 - Eng Tr The Order of Things, Tavistock, 1970), The Archaeology of Knowledge, (Tavistock 1974, L Archeologie du Savior, 1972), *Histoire de la*
folie a 1 Age Classique, Gallimard, E. T. Madness and civilisation, Tavistock, 1967) and many others sang the same refrain: away from language and logic and discourse:

I can even accept that one should dispense, as one can, with a discussion of the speaking subjects; but I dispute that these successes give one the right to turn the analysis back on to the forms of discourse that made them possible, and to question the very locus in which we are speaking today. Foucault, Archaeology of Knowledge, p. 202.

Structuralism was a false pursuit of objectivity and an attempt to ignore or eliminate subjectivity in the discourse. Foucault abandons Structuralist language and Categories, eg. languages, myths, works of literature, dreams, films, etc., and uses new one; formations positivities, knowledge, discursive practices. The last sentence of the Archeology, which all along is a debate with the structuralist, is particularly poignant:

Discourse is not life; its time is your time; in it you will not be reconciled to death; you may have killed God beneath the weight of all that you have said; but don’t imagine that, with all that you are saying, you will make a man that will longer than He” (p.211).

There is the predicament of post-modernity. Once you throw away discourse, what do you have? If language and proposition are not truth, then what Sign do you use to signify meaning? It seems easier to answer that question in art and architecture. Listen to Protoghesi on Architecture:

The rupture of post-modernism consists in an abrogation of the hegemony of Euclidean Geometry... The difference between modernism and post-modernism would be better characterised by the following feature: the disappearance of the close bond that once linked the project of modern architecture to an ideal of the progressive realisation of social and individual emancipation encompassing all humanity. Postmodern architecture finds itself condemned to undertake a series of minor modification in the space inherited from modernity, condemned to abandon a global reconstruction of the space of human habitation....

The disappearance of the idea that rationality and freedom are progressing and that rationality is normative, would explain a true style, or mode specific to post-modern architecture, according to Portoghesi. All that is possible is a sort of bricolage -- a random putting together of odd elements from earlier styles. Does that apply to poetry and literature as well?

Foucault breaks with all the pre-occupation of western thought with language and rationality, with discourse and commentary. Modernism assumed that language is the root of all thought. Language itself thus became pre-occupied with the nature of language, not with the nature of truth. If the European Enlightenment put all its stress on Science and Rationality, the postmodern culture must satisfy itself with a little art and a little literature -- not that either of them can present the unpresentable, but simply because we have little else. Or you can choose George Bataille’s Nietzchian path of surrealist will to Power, like one possessed, willingly embracing horror and shame, fighting the windmills of Power entrenched in society. (See his Der Heilige Eros, Frankfort. 1982).

There is no nature of Man given; morality is no longer possible; literature can only show the limits of experience; it does not give knowledge; in fact it too is a non-savior, a note to know. As Lyotard Put it:
Finally it must be clear that it is our business not to supply reality, but to make allusions to the conceivable, which cannot be presented. (“Answering the Question: What is Post Modernism? Op. cit.

V. Post-Modern as Post-Marxist, Post-Freudian

In a sense, 1968 was a watershed year for Europe and America. In that year the students led by New Left thinkers like Herbert Marcuse, hit at the vitals of society in an effort to demolish it and reconstruct something fresh and new. It was the year of Student Revolts of California and France, which mushroomed first to gigantic proportions, only to fizzle out very soon. Marcuse had convinced them that humanity was ready for a revolution, and that the students, who were unlike industrial labour, had no vested interests of their own to defend, should strike, wherever possible assisted by others. The edifice of society was so shaky that one little knock from the students would bring it down, and out of the ashes of the old the new would spontaneously spring up. In France, Daniel Cohn-Bendit and others led the revolt, and students took over the universities by force and began running them.

I remember very well the excitement of those days. The students captured the University, and in that process captured the Word, *la Parole*. It was thought as the most important event in human history, more significant than the taking of the Bastille in the French Revolution. The Word was power and that was now in the hands of the young students. Everything was going to be all right, since the students wanted the welfare of humanity.

Alas, how quickly that dream went sour, even before two years had passed!

It was, however, a major trauma for the younger generation. They would never again, for a long time, try anything revolutionary. They lost faith in the Parole they had captured. The Word did not have the power they thought it had. Here was the beginning of Derrida’s Deconstructionism beginning in the wake of the tragic discomfiture of the Student Revolt. Cohn-Bendit minced no words. Liberalism had gone sour, and Marxism had gone senile. No good was to be expected from either of these sources.

It was the quest for an Emancipatory Cultural Politics, the blending of aesthetics or art / literature with politics that launched almost all the Post-modern thinkers on the new path. Scholastic-philosophical or Foundational modes of thinking had proved to be sterile and unproductive. You cannot always have a praxis fully conforming to theory. Theory has sometimes to be thrown to the winds, if you want to get some action. The Marxist Ideology was also seen as shot through with totalitarianism and corruption. Something new had to be tried; the Apollonian or Rational-Harmonious had failed; only the Dionysian, which has no time for theoretical reflection, but operates from joyful abandon to libidinal energy, would do.

Where does Freud come in all this? I want to be very brief, and bring this sterile discourse of mine to a conclusion, so that you can rest.

Sigmund Freud saw deeply into the nether regions of the human psyche, and saw the origin of culture in the suppression or subjugation of the libido, in the taming of the Pleasure Principle by the Reality Principle. Herbert Marcuse, in asking students to sabotage and undermine existing society, was following and amended Freudian line. Freud’s idea that the conflict between the Reality Principle and the Pleasure Principle was intrinsic to human nature, and therefore any culture arising from that conflict has to be necessarily repressive, was questioned by Marcuse. His idea was that changes in the forces and relations of production had already taken us to the verge of a new civilisation. Technological and socio-economic development has advanced so
much that work need no longer be so harsh, demanding the exercise of the Reality Principle in a strict and domineering way. Work itself could soon become play, pleasant and effortless, leaving the dull part of work to machines. Once work becomes play, the reality Principle, characterised by strict rational control of the instincts and drives, need no longer be the same.

In understanding Postmodernity, this relation between psychological categories and their Socio-political implications has to be constantly kept in mind. It is a libidinal rather than cerebral political economy that the post-modernist are after. The Reality Principle, in the present civilisation identified with control of the libido and its drives and instincts by a domineering rationality, is not exercised by just the individual’s exercise of rational control over the libidinal instincts. Almost all the institutions of the socio-politico-economical structure of present society are meant to rein in the unrestricted play of the instincts. The Reality Principle, as domineering control by rationality, is at the bottom of all social and political-economic institutions.

Marcuse proposed, to the students as well as to others who would listen, that the identification of the Reality Principle with the idea of rational domination of the instincts was perhaps a mistake. In former societies, only the upper classes were liberated from the oppression of work and toil. Now that possibility is open to all, at least in western society, according to Marcuse in his Eros and Civilisation – A Philosophical Enquiry into Freud (New York, Vintage Books, 1955). The reality principle itself can become a function of pleasurable Eros, rather than of toil and domineering rationality; if people’s consciousness can be liberated from this addiction to domineering rationality. As against Freud, Marcuse argues that a non-repressive civilisation is both possible and eminently desirable. This is what most Post-modern prophets seem to be really after.

We do not have the time here for a deeper analysis of the Freud-Marcuse debate, which is of central importance to understanding post-modernity. Let us simply recall that for Freud, the anti-reality principle, psychic forces, operates, not from the rational mind, but from the Unconscious. The pleasure principle, repressed by rationality and society, bursts out in phantasy or imagination, above everything else. Freud’s das phantasieren or phantasy-making begins to operate in children, and continues in adult daydreaming. Phantasy originates in the deepest layers of the Unconscious, and creates some of the highest products of human creativity, like art, poetry, literature, myths, as well as dreams and hallucinations. Phantasy belongs to that original pre-individual existence in without the domination of the Reality Principle of Rationality. Imagination preserves the racial memory of a happy human past, when the Id, which had not yet become the Ego, and Nature lived in unison and harmony. It is this libidinous economy of a non-repressive culture which post-modernity seeks. To that extent we should respect it.

CONCLUSION

George Bataille’s “Holy Eros” may or may not deliver the goods that post-moderns are after. If they succeed in making the Libido and its energy yield the non-repressive culture everyone wants, the present speaker would exult and rejoice. But he has to enter a note of caution. The whole Post-modern enterprise is still a child of the Enlightenment; it may question the overuse of rationality. But it retains the fundamental assertion of the Enlightenment that humanity is totally autonomous, supreme and sovereign, neither responsible to nor dependent on anyone or anything else besides his/her mind and libido, always living by one’s own resources, whether it be of rationality or libido, the rational mind or the fertile imagination. To that extent post modernity remains within the structure of modernity.
For Indian minds, puzzled about post-modernity, I will humbly recommend a change of air. Let us all get out of the Enlightenment Frame of Mind, and go for a walk. Let us expose ourselves to and drink in other ways of perceiving and experiencing reality. For a first course, I would recommend a good plate of Chinese Philosophy, particularly Taoism. Instead of Reality Principle and Pleasure Principle, let us for a while imbibe good Yin-Yang complementarity thinking. Then aware that the western way is not the only way of thinking and experience, let us immerse ourselves in our own rich Indian Heritage, especially before its breaking up into Buddhist, Jain and Hindu – the Samkhya-Yoga heritage common to all three traditions. Stay critical, but expose yourself without hesitation. Look also at the heritage of the First Veda, the noble notions of Yajna from which all creation originates (Yajno bhuvanasya nabhi) and Rta which holds all things together. Then come back to the Jainas and pick up their Anekantavada which can inoculate you against all dogmatism including that of rationality. Again pick up, again from the Jains, to whom it really belongs, a dose of real ahimsa, not the garden variety of so-called non-violence, but the spirit and attitude of benevolence towards all life and all thought (Anekantavada is but an aspect of ahimsa towards other ways of thinking, believing and living). Then you are ready to immerse yourselves in the Spirit of the Lord Buddha, and dedicate yourself to universal compassion and dedication to the removal of stress, distress, and suffering. With that commitment, you will benefit from a dose of Nagarjuna’s Prajnaparamita or Sunya-Pratityasamutpanna type of reality perception and reality-dealing. Then if you feel allergic to philosophy and logic by now, relax for a few months with a copy of the Mahabharatha. After that you will be in a more privileged position to look at the antiques of western thought with a sense of detachment, and sometimes of amusement, but always with compassion. Somewhere along the way turn your inner eye to the Transcendent; bow down before it if you can. If not at least contemplate and wonder. The Transcendent is all grace – more gracious than you think. Thank you.

(February 18, 1995)