eternal consciousness

JOHN S. DUNNE

University of Notre Dame Press
Notre Dame, Indiana

© 2012 University of Notre Dame
“How quiet, peaceful, and solemn, not at all as I ran,” says Prince Andre lying on the battlefield at Austerlitz in the title scene of Tolstoy’s War and Peace, “not as we ran, shouting and fighting . . . how differently do those clouds glide across that lofty infinite sky! How was it I did not see that lofty sky before? And how happy I am to have found it at last! Yes! All is vanity, all falsehood except that infinite sky. There is nothing, nothing, but that. But even it does not exist, there is nothing but quiet and peace. Thank God! . . .”1

Experiencing peace in the midst of war, eternity in the midst of time, Prince Andre in War and Peace is an example of eternal consciousness. The actual phrase “eternal consciousness” is from Kierkegaard in the epigraph of this book, “If there were no eternal consciousness in a man . . . what then would life be but despair?”2 I was originally going to call this book A Tension of Essences, a tension of war and peace, a tension of time and eternity. That phrase is from Albert Lord’s two books on the singer of tales, the tension of essences in oral storytelling that allows the story to come out in different ways, happy ending and sad ending.3 Calling the book Eternal Consciousness then resolves the tension in favor of peace and eternity. Yet the tension of essences is still there.
There is the tension, first of all, between war and peace. “We can know more than we can tell,” as Michael Polanyi says. In telling the story of war we can know more than war, we can know peace. I think of Dag Hammarskjöld’s brochure for the Meditation Room at the UN, beginning “We all have within us a center of stillness surrounded by silence.” I spent several days in New York visiting the Meditation Room a few years ago. It is as though you can reenact there the experience of peace in the midst of war that is described in War and Peace, Prince Andre lying on the battlefield looking up into the sky. You can do it by dwelling in your “center of stillness surrounded by silence.” Of course you don’t need the Meditation Room to do it, you can do it just sitting quietly in a room. All our troubles, as Pascal says, stem from our inability to sit quietly in a room.

Then there is the tension between time and eternity. There is at once a contrast and a connection. The contrast appears in Wittgenstein’s saying, “If by eternity is understood not endless temporal duration but timelessness, then he lives eternally who lives in the present.” The connection appears in Plato’s saying that time is “a changing image of eternity.” If we rub the two thoughts together, we get something more comprehensive than just living in the present. We get the idea of living in time as a whole, relating to the past and the future as well as the present, like Dag Hammarskjöld saying “For all that has been—Thanks! To all that shall be—Yes!” If the “Thanks!” and “Yes!” can be taken as prayer, this means living in the Presence, not just in the present. So Prince Andre, lying on the battlefield and looking up into the sky, is not just in the present but in the Presence.

If we see time as a dimension, an inference drawn by Minkowski from Einstein’s Special Theory of Relativity, we can also see matter as a dimension, an inference I believe we can draw from Einstein’s General Theory of Relativity. That would have far-reaching implications for our image of ourselves as human beings. For it would mean that matter situates as well as being situated. It would mean the human brain
situates the human mind. It would mean the human body situates the human soul. This view of the mind-body problem would contrast with the view that the mind = the brain and also with the view that brain processes cause thought processes. Spirit is not reducible to matter, I want to say, nor does matter cause spirit, but matter situates spirit, situates the events of the spirit, “the phenomenology of spirit” as Hegel calls it. *Matter situates events.*

If matter situates events, even events of the spirit, there is a mystery about those events. “We listen to our inmost selves,” Martin Buber says, “and do not know which sea we hear murmuring.” What are those events? Presences, I will say, “real presences” as George Steiner calls them, the presence of others, our presence to ourselves, and the presence of God. Hegel goes from the presence of others to our presence to ourselves in his “phenomenology of spirit,” but there is a further move, to come into the presence of God, as Saint Augustine does, going from his *Soliloquies* to his *Confessions*. This then for me is the integral phenomenology of spirit, to go from the presence of others to the presence of God by way of presence to self.

An inner landscape opening onto infinity—that is what comes to light, I believe, in our presence to ourselves. This inner landscape is what Gerard Manley Hopkins calls *inscape*, but the inscape of a human being opens onto infinity, as in Saint Augustine’s words at the beginning of his *Confessions*, “our heart is restless until it rests in You.” If the human brain situates the human mind, it appears that one hemisphere of the brain situates words and the other situates music. Just as a right-hand glove fits on the left hand if you turn it inside out, so there is a musical inside of words and a verbal inside of music. The theme, the musical theme, is the verbal inside of music, and the inscape is the musical inside of words.

It is the nature of love, as Meister Eckhart says, to change us into the things we love. The love of music changes us; the love of words changes us; the love of God changes us. It is the love of God that causes us to be “oned with God”
as in the phrase “the cloud of unknowing in the which a soul is oned with God” and in the phrase “into the darkness with love.”13 And the great circle of love, “The love is from God and of God and towards God,”14 answers the basic questions of a life, “Where do you come from?” and “Where are you going?” There is a far point on this circle in our lives and in our times, it seems, where love passes through loneliness. That seems to be the point where we are now in the circle dance of time.

To pass on from this far point, to close the circle, we have to become aware of the eternal. “The mass of men live lives of quiet desperation,” Thoreau’s saying,15 seems to hold true where there is no awareness of the eternal in us. When we do become aware of the eternal, that awareness is eternal consciousness. I think again of the words of a Chinese grandmother to one of my students who had become frustrated trying to learn a difficult Chopin nocturne on the piano. “You must love the music, not master it,” her Chinese grandmother told her. “Music must be treated as all things that are eternal, such as love and understanding, because it is these things that will carry us through the darkness of our lives and the death of our bodies to the moon of everlasting peace.”

So music and love and understanding, these are “things that are eternal,” “things that will carry us through the darkness of our lives and the death of our bodies to the moon of everlasting peace.” Eternal life thus is the deeper life, the life of relatedness, a life of music and love and understanding, a life on this side of death that can carry us through to the other side. “The moon of everlasting peace” I take to be a metaphor, though in the village the Chinese grandmother came from the afterlife was thought to be on the moon. At any rate, if there is an eternal consciousness in us, there is hope rather than despair or quiet desperation. Faith is a combination of willingness and hope, willingness to die and yet hope to live, willingness to walk alone and yet hope to walk unalone.

I have included a song cycle at the end of the book where I go from “A Tension of Essences” to “Eternal Consciousness.”
I have written music for it in the form of a theme with variations for voice and piano, the theme taken from a birdsong I once heard. At the very end I have “A Note on Mind and Matter,” where I put forward again a mathematical interpretation of matter as a dimension.
We can know more than we can tell

We all have within us a center of stillness surrounded by silence
—Dag Hammarskjöld

“I’m outside my heart, looking for the way back in.” These words from a story can describe a spiritual problem of our times. We are outside our heart, looking for the way back in. I believe it is because among the traditional three lives, action and contemplation and enjoyment, we have a life of action and a life of enjoyment but for the most part we are lacking a life of contemplation. And the dire consequence of this is that our city is a violent city. “We can know more than we can tell,” Polanyi’s principle, points the way back into our heart, I believe, and into the life of contemplation.

“Story is our only boat for sailing on the river of time,” Ursula LeGuin says, “but in the great rapids and the winding shallows no boat is safe.” What we can tell is the story, but what we can know more than we can tell, I believe, is the relationship, the *I and it* of our lifework, the *I and thou* of our human relations, but over and above these our relationship
with the transcendent, for instance, the "I in them and thou in me" of the Gospel (John 17:23). Contemplative life is in the relationship, and in that life "the great rapids and the winding shallows" are the ordeals of what has been called "the dark night of the soul." Speaking of these in his *Grammar of Assent*, Newman says "Such are the dealings of Wisdom with the elect soul," and indeed "the great rapids and the winding shallows" seem to belong to what we can know more than we can tell.

Sailing on the river of time and yet knowing "no boat is safe," we can know our own unknowing, even "the cloud of unknowing in which a soul is oned with God," and we can understand our relationships in this way, realizing we are calling the unknown "thou," recognizing the mystery in others and in ourselves. We can know more than we can tell in telling the story, therefore, but it is not a knowing of knowing, like Aristotle’s God or Hegel’s absolute knowledge, but a knowing of unknowing, like the wisdom of Socrates or the "learned ignorance" of Nicolas of Cusa. And this knowing of unknowing is the knowing of the contemplative life.

“We all have within us a center of stillness surrounded by silence,” Dag Hammarskjöld writes at the beginning of his brochure for the Meditation Room at the UN. It is when we are in our center of stillness that we can know more than we can tell. Our center of stillness is like the quiet eye of a storm, or again it is like a quiet eye with which we can see, "the quiet eye" as Sylvia Shaw Judson says of seeing art, "the harvest of a quiet eye" as Wordsworth says of poetry. Let us consider what we can know and what we can tell in our "center of stillness surrounded by silence."

**Telling the Story**

“What then is time?” Saint Augustine asks in his *Confessions*. “Provided that no one asks me, I know. If I want to explain it to an inquirer, I do not know.” That is an illustration of Polanyi’s point, “we can know more than we can tell.” The
riddle of time, moreover, is the key to storytelling. For every notion of time there is a story or a way of storytelling. In his novel *Einstein’s Dreams* Alan Lightman illustrates each notion of time that Einstein considers with a dream, a story, for instance time as a circle, Nietzsche’s idea of “the eternal recurrence of the same events.” If we stay with Saint Augustine’s thinking on time, we can end up like Heidegger asking “Am I my time?” Although I want to answer “No, I am in my time,” still the basic story, I think, is the life story, and the larger story of the world usually reflects the life story in a given era.

As the life story is told in our era, the problem is “being toward death,” as Heidegger calls it, and the solution is “freedom toward death.” That is what a student of mine was discovering when he came to me and said “I’ve found it! I’ve found it!” and I said “What have you found?” and he replied “You accept death! And then you’re free!” The freedom is freedom to live and to love. I believe that is the solution in Heidegger’s *Being and Time* where he says “Our provisional aim is the Interpretation of *time* as the possible horizon of any understanding whatsoever of Being.” It is a viewpoint that means to contain all other possible views, as *Einstein’s Dreams* contains many possible views of time. In fact, though, Heidegger is assuming “I am my time” and that is a point of view that excludes eternal life. If I am my time, then if I accept my death I become free toward death and free to live and to love, but eternal life is out of the question. If I am in my time, on the other hand, then the door is open to eternal life.

“So it is in you, my mind, that I measure periods of time,” Saint Augustine says, and Heidegger concludes from that “I am my time.” If we say instead “I am in my time,” it is still true, “it is in you, my mind, that I measure periods of time.” If I am in my time, however, and I measure time in my mind, then if I come to an insight into time it will be an insight also into my mind, and vice-versa an insight into my mind will also be an insight into time. Insight into image, as the turning point of a life, I imagine to be something like “For all that has been—Thanks! To all that shall be—Yes!” at the turning point.
in Dag Hammarskjöld’s diary. This is like “You accept death! And then you’re free!” And yet it is different. It is rather like “Thinking is thanking,” the mystic saying Heidegger is always quoting in his later work. “Thanks!” and “Yes!” is a way of accepting life and death, but it is acceptance in the form of prayer. There is hope in it that does not appear in simply accepting death and becoming free.

“Thanks!” and “Yes!” can describe a life story like that of “paradigmatic individuals,” as Karl Jaspers describes them, Buddha and Socrates and Jesus, a life of contemplation and action, a going into solitude to gain insight (contemplation) and a coming back into the human circle to share the insight with others (action). Let us consider that form of the life story to see if and how it transcends other historic forms of the story.

“Once upon a time,” the time of storytelling, is transformed by “Thanks!” and “Yes!”—the past by “Thanks!” and the future by “Yes!” The transformed time of storytelling appears in the parables of Buddha and in the parables of Jesus. The transformation itself appears in the pattern of withdrawal and return that can be seen in the story of Buddha going into the forest to achieve enlightenment and then coming back to spend the rest of his life teaching, and also in the story of Jesus going into the desert after being baptized by John the Baptist and then coming back to teach and announce the kingdom of God. The withdrawal into solitude is a transcending of the times that allows Gotama to return as the Buddha and Jesus to return as the Christ. The withdrawal is into contemplation, the return into action. The withdrawal is a transcending of the times, the return a redeeming of the times.

There is courage in this withdrawal and return. “That is at bottom the only courage that is demanded of us: to have courage for the most strange, the most singular and the most inexplicable that we may encounter,” Rilke says. “That mankind has in this sense been cowardly has done life endless harm; the experiences that are called ‘visions,’ the whole so-called ‘spiritual world,’ death, all those things that are so closely akin to
us, have by daily parrying been so crowded out of life that the senses with which we could have grasped them are atrophied. To say nothing of God.”17 We have to have courage also to pass over and enter into the withdrawal and the return.

There are problems, though, in passing over, those that appear in “the quest of the historical Jesus.”18 We could speak likewise of “the quest of the historical Buddha” and “the quest of the historical Socrates.” A quest of certainty inevitably defeats itself, I think, for as we try to make sure we become ever more unsure. A quest of understanding is the way, I believe, for as we seek insight we go from one insight to another. Certainty is knowing we know; understanding is simply knowing. A Socratic knowing of our unknowing is an analogue of certainty on the way of understanding. A quest of understanding, I believe, enables us to pass over and to enter into the enlightenment that occurs in the solitude of the forest or to enter into the revelation that occurs in the solitude of the desert.

Indeed it may be that going over from the quest of certainty to the quest of understanding is the very turn that yields enlightenment and revelation. Let us try this as a way of passing over to enlightenment and then as a way of passing over to revelation, keeping in mind “we can know more than we can tell.” It is true, this may be like Peter Matthiessen’s quest in The Snow Leopard. He finds the tracks of the Snow Leopard, but he never sees the Snow Leopard itself. We may find the tracks to enlightenment without coming to enlightenment, and we may find the tracks to revelation without coming to revelation. For the tracks are what we can tell, but the enlightenment and the revelation are what we can know more than we can tell.

Years ago I was moved by the simplicity of Henry Clarke Warren’s summary of the life of Gotama the Buddha, how in the forest “he became illumined and saw the Great Truths” and how his “first aim had been merely his own salvation; but moved by pity for mankind he resolved to bestow on others the Four Great Truths and the eight-fold path.”19 I saw Gotama’s life story simply as one of gaining and sharing insight, and I
thought of the parallel with the life of Jesus, Gotama going into the forest and Jesus going into the desert, Gotama coming back into the human circle to share his insight with others and Jesus likewise coming back to spend his life teaching others. To be sure, Gotama’s life is much longer than the life of Jesus, and yet both show the pattern of withdrawal and return. Now the question is whether we can understand the illuminating that occurs in solitude and is shared in the human circle as essentially a going from certainty to understanding.

“No self” (anatta) seems to be the heart of the Four Great Truths: “all egocentric life is suffering; this suffering is caused by misknowing and its consequences; there is a real freedom from this suffering; the path to that freedom is eightfold” (Robert Thurman’s formulation). To pass over to this from a Western standpoint seems to mean passing over from a quest of certainty where “I think therefore I am” to a quest of understanding. There is a connection between self and certainty, as in “I think therefore I am,” and likewise a connection between “no self” (anatta) and understanding as enlightenment. I want to say, however, that it is not certainty that is being abandoned here but the quest of certainty, and so too it is not selfhood that is being abandoned but self in quest of certainty. For there is another quest that is being affirmed here, the quest of understanding, and so we could even say the self in quest of understanding is being affirmed here.

Here now I may have found the tracks of the Snow Leopard but not yet seen the Snow Leopard itself. I may be on the path to enlightenment, that is, having abandoned the quest of certainty and the self in quest of certainty, but have not yet abandoned the quest of understanding and the self in quest of understanding. “I would like to see a snow leopard, but if I do not, that is all right, too,” Peter Matthiessen says in The Snow Leopard, and “When you are ready, Buddhists say, the teacher will appear. In the way he (Tukten) watched me, in the way he smiled, he was awaiting me; had I been ready, he might have led me far enough along the path ‘to see the snow leopard.’” I think of the last word of Gotama to his disciples, “Walk on!”
Writing about “the Sense of ‘I’ in Christianity,” I made a distinction between self as will and self as our “center of stillness surrounded by silence.” I took the “no self” doctrine of Buddhism and the loss of self in Alzheimer’s disease to be no self as will and the loss of self as will, leaving the deep self intact as “center of stillness surrounded by silence.” I still want to maintain that, passing over to Buddhism and coming back again to my roots in Christianity. It may mean that my passing over to Buddhism is necessarily incomplete, as I follow Christ rather than Buddha. All the same, I gain some insight into Buddhism by going over from the quest of certainty to the quest of understanding.

Passing over to Christ also requires a going over from a quest of certainty to a quest of understanding insofar as doubt is the heart of a quest of certainty and faith is the heart of a quest of understanding. What I mean is when I try to make sure and become ever more unsure, I am following a path of doubt. When I seek insight and go with whatever little light I have, I am following a path of faith. Albert Schweitzer in his Quest of the Historical Jesus seems to take both paths—in the body of the work the path of doubt ending in what he calls “thoroughgoing skepticism and eschatology,” but in the last paragraph the path of faith, saying “And to those who obey Him, whether they be wise or simple, He will reveal Himself in the toils, the conflicts, the sufferings which they shall pass through in His fellowship, and, as an ineffable mystery, they shall learn in their own experience Who He is.”

Now “Thanks!” and “Yes!” means going over from self as will to self as willingness, and thus opening up to the deeper self “we all have within us,” “a center of stillness surrounded by silence.” This is not exactly “no self” (anatta) as in Buddhism but it is what has been called “self-transcendence.” The turning points in the life of Jesus, going into solitude, coming back into the human circle, and facing death, seem to reflect the self-transcendence of “Thanks!” and “Yes!” There is the “You are” of his baptism by John the Baptist (“You are my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” Mark 1:11) and the
“Are you?” of his temptations in the loneliness of the desert (“If you are the Son of God . . .”). This is the first great turning point of his life, a point where he himself seems to learn, “as an ineffable mystery,” in his own experience in solitude “Who He is.”

Coming back into the human circle, the second great turning point, Jesus begins to teach, saying “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand” (Mark 1:15). From the viewpoint of “thoroughgoing skepticism and eschatology” this means the end of the world, something that has not happened. If we take the path of faith, though, instead of the path of doubt, then the message of Jesus to us is the same as to the original disciples, “Follow me!” Thus Schweitzer, taking the path of faith after walking the path of doubt to the end, concludes “He comes to us as One unknown, without a name, as of old, by the lake-side, He came to those men who knew Him not. He speaks to us the same word: Follow thou me! and sets us to the tasks which He has to fulfil for our time. He commands . . .”

Facing death then, the third great turning point, Jesus goes through death to life, according to the Gospels. Telling the story from the viewpoint of “thoroughgoing skepticism and eschatology,” Schweitzer writes,

There is silence all around. The Baptist appears, and cries: “Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.” Soon after that comes Jesus, and in the knowledge that He is the coming Son of Man lays hold of the wheel of the world to set it moving on that last revolution which is to bring all ordinary history to a close. It refuses to turn, and He throws Himself upon it. Then it does turn; and crushes Him. Instead of bringing in the eschatological conditions, He has destroyed them. The wheel rolls onward, and the mangled body of the one immeasurably great Man who was strong enough to think of Himself as the spiritual ruler of mankind and to bend history to His purpose, is hanging upon it still. That is His victory and His reign.
Telling the story from the standpoint of faith, on the other hand, he writes, as we have been quoting him,

He comes to us as One unknown, without a name, as of old, by the lake-side, He came to those men who knew Him not. He speaks to us the same word: “Follow thou me!” and sets us to the tasks which He has to fulfil for our time. He commands. And to those who obey Him, whether they be wise or simple, He will reveal Himself in the toils, the conflicts, the sufferings which they shall pass through in His fellowship, and, as an ineffable mystery, they shall learn in their own experience Who He is.28

Observe how the story becomes present rather than simply past, from the standpoint of faith, and how the New Testament word for presence is parousia, meaning “presence” and “coming,” as if to say “I am with you always, even unto the end of time” (Matthew 28:20). He is present among us now, but in the end his presence will become manifest.

Withdrawal and return, therefore, as in the life of Gotama and in the life of Jesus, constitute a story of transcending and transforming time. Presence, the parousia of Jesus present and coming, is the answer to death in his story, the presence of God-with-us. “You are a councillor: if you can command these elements to silence and work the peace of the present, we will not hand a rope more; use your authority,” the Boatswain says to Gonzalo in Shakespeare’s Tempest. “If you cannot, give thanks you have lived so long, and make yourself ready in your cabin for the mischance of the hour, if it so hap—Cheerly, good hearts!—Out of our way, I say.”29 Peace of the present, or better, peace of the presence is the answer to death, peace of the present in Buddhism, peace of the presence in Christianity.

“Calming the storm,” as my sister describes “exercises leading to contemplation,”30 is working the peace of the present or working the peace of the presence. “If by eternity is understood not endless temporal duration but timelessness, then he
lives eternally who lives in the present,” Wittgenstein says, or in another translation, “eternal life belongs to those who live in the present.”31 I want to say instead eternal life belongs to those who live in the presence. In Buddhist meditation eternal life is found in living in the present; in Christian prayer eternal life is found in living in the presence. The story of Jesus calming the storm (Matthew 8:24–27, Mark 4:37–41, Luke 8:23–25), if we compare it with the story of him walking on the water (Matthew 14:24–33, Mark 6:47–51, John 6:16–21), is a story of the Shekinah, the presence (“It is I,” that is “I am”). As an exercise leading to contemplation, calming the storm means entering into our “center of stillness surrounded by silence.”

I want to take the surrounding silence as the surrounding presence of God. “Where the storyteller is loyal, eternally and unswervingly loyal to the story, there, in the end, silence will speak,” Isak Dinesen says in one of her stories. “Where the story has been betrayed, silence is but emptiness.”32 Telling the story of Jesus, his withdrawal and return, his going through death to life, from the standpoint of faith, allows the silence to speak of the divine presence. Telling the story from the standpoint of “thoroughgoing skepticism and eschatology,” on the other hand, leaves the silence empty. It is true, the silence is simply silence also in Buddhist meditation, and yet the silence speaks. “Who then tells a finer tale than any of us?” Isak Dinesen continues. “Silence does. And where does one read a deeper tale than upon the more perfectly printed page of the most precious book? Upon the blank page.” And that is the name of this story of hers, “The Blank Page.” “Whereof one cannot speak,” Wittgenstein ends in his Tractatus, “thereof one must be silent.”33

Telling my own story then from the standpoint of faith seeking understanding, I can tell it too as a story of gaining and sharing insight. Aging and loneliness, the main issues of my life, become occasions of insight, but is insight enough? Aging raises the problem of death, and insight here for me is coming to a sense of eternal life. And loneliness raises the problem of love, and insight here for me is coming to a vision.
of the great circle, “The love is from God, and of God, and towards God.”

Love and death then lead me to a vision of the great circle of life and light and love, as in the Gospel of John, and to a faith in God-with-us. If “we can know more than we can tell” and if we can tell of the great circle, what then can we know of life and light and love?

**Knowing the Relationship**

“Only connect!” E.M. Forster says in *Howard’s End*, and the connection, the relationship, is what we can know more than we can tell. “Only connect the prose and the passion,” Forster says, “and both will be exalted, and human love will be seen at its height. Live in fragments no longer. Only connect, and the beast and the monk, robbed of the isolation that is life to either, will die.”

Withdrawal and return, nevertheless, the pattern we found in the life of Gotama and in the life of Jesus, is not the same as living in fragments or in isolation, but is a connecting with transcendence as well as with human existence. “It may be that a clear sense of the self can only crystallize round something transcendental,” Robert Bolt says, thinking of Saint Thomas More. It may be too that a clear sense of “no self” (*anatta*) can only crystallize round something transcendental, as we go beyond self as will to willingness and the deep center of stillness we have within us.

“As God is one,” Newman says, “so the impression which He gives us of Himself is one.” I gather that it is an impression of presence, of “I am with you,” of companionship on the journey of life. In Christianity it is the impression of “God-with-us.” If “we all have within us a center of stillness surrounded by silence,” I want to take the surrounding silence, as I have said, to be the surrounding presence of God. We can know more than we can tell, Polanyi explains, by dwelling in the particulars of what we know. Our dwelling in the particulars of our life, a phrase in Shakespeare, “the particulars of my life,” is the other side, it seems to me, of God dwelling in us.
“Do thou stand for my father,” Prince Hal says to Falstaff, “and examine me on the particulars of my life.” Saint Augustine’s prayer in his *Soliloquies*, “May I know me! May I know thee!” suggests the connection between my indwelling in the particulars of my life and God’s indwelling in me.

“I in them, and thou in me,” the formula in the Gospel of John (John 17:23), makes a similar connection between Christ dwelling in those who follow him and God dwelling in Christ. God’s presence to us, I gather, is the other side of our presence to ourselves. We cannot jump over our own shadow. We are a mystery to ourselves, that is, and that is the other side of the mystery God is to us. “May I know me! May I know thee!” is the prayer, therefore, and the question of our presence to ourselves and God’s presence to us. Deconstruction, the work of Paul DeMan and Jacques Derrida, is an attempt to undo “the metaphysics of presence.” *Real Presences* by George Steiner is an answer. Our presence to ourselves and God’s presence to us, I believe, are the principal instances. We can know more than we can tell of our presence to ourselves and God’s presence to us by dwelling in the particulars of our life.

“Our relation to our fellow men is that of prayer,” Kafka says, “our relation to ourselves, that of effort, from prayer we draw the strength for effort.” Another translation for “effort” here is “striving.” It is also possible to go from effort or striving to prayer in relation to ourselves. Let us consider what it means to go from effort or striving to prayer in relation to others, and to ourselves, and to God.

“Even if Kafka did not pray—and this we do not know,” Walter Benjamin says, “he still possessed in the highest degree what Malebranche called ‘the natural prayer of the soul’: attentiveness.” Our relation to our fellow humans is one of prayer, I take it, because we are unable to control one another, to make one another feel or think or do what we want. Thus we are a mystery to one another, and to recognize the mystery, the unknown and uncontrollable, is like prayer, or at least like attentiveness, “the natural prayer of the soul.” We do think we are able to control ourselves, on the other hand, “to conquer
myself rather than fortune,” as Descartes said, but we may come to realize we are a mystery also to ourselves, that we cannot leap over our own shadow. Then our relation to ourselves too becomes one of prayer instead of striving. “Attention is the natural prayer of the soul,” as Malebranche says, and attention means recognizing the mystery in others and in ourselves. When we go from striving to prayer we come to a kind of peace with others and with ourselves.

*I and thou,* as Martin Buber describes it, seems to mean this attention, this peace, this recognition of mystery in the other and in myself. Goethe and Socrates and Jesus are the figures Buber singles out to illustrate the *I and thou* relationship, Goethe for his relationship with nature, Socrates for dialogue, and Jesus for his relationship with God. “And to anticipate by taking an illustration from the realm of unconditional relation: how powerful, even to being overpowering, and how legitimate, even to being self-evident, is the saying of *I* by Jesus!” he says. “For it is the *I* of unconditional relation in which the man calls his *Thou* Father in such a way that he himself is simply Son, and nothing else but Son.” Buber concludes, nevertheless, that the relationship can be universal, “every man can say *Thou* and is then *I,* every man can say Father and is then Son.”

I want to say it can be universal but by way of indwelling, as in the formula in John 17:23, *I in them and thou in me.* Indwelling is the thing Buber is rejecting in this same passage where he says “It is useless to limit this *I* to a power in itself or this *Thou* to something dwelling in ourselves, and once again to empty the real, the present relation, of reality.” Yet dwelling in the particulars of our life is how we can know more than we can tell. And our dwelling in the particulars of our life is the other side of God dwelling in us. That seems to be the secret of what is called “the practice of the presence of God.” Brother Lawrence, picking up straws for God, dwelling thus in the particulars of his life, was practising the presence of God, living in the presence of God dwelling in us.

There is an intentionality, a purposiveness, in picking up straws for God, to be sure, and that intentionality does amount...
to living in the presence of God. It is like the intentionality in “abandonment to divine providence,” l’abandon that is described by Jean-Pierre de Caussade.\textsuperscript{46} It is a dwelling in the particulars of one’s life with the thought of giving oneself over to the will of God. Dwelling is thinking, as Heidegger says, and thinking is thanking. It is a dwelling that is thinking and a thinking that is thanking by which we can know more than we can tell. “The practice of the presence of God” and “abandonment to divine providence” comes out of a “Thanks!” and a “Yes!” to the particulars of a life, a “Thanks!” for the past, a “Yes!” to the future.

Waiting on God, Simone Weil’s concept of attente de Dieu, is like Malebranche’s “attention is the natural prayer of the soul.” “The key to a Christian conception of studies is the realization that prayer consists of attention,” she says. “It is the orientation of all the attention of which the soul is capable toward God. The quality of the attention counts for much in the quality of prayer. Warmth of heart cannot make up for it.”\textsuperscript{47} Actually this seems close to a Rabbinic concept of studies as learning to love God with all your mind. I think also of Saint Thomas Aquinas saying prayer is an act of the intellect.\textsuperscript{48} Dwelling in the particulars of your life can become prayer, as it is for Saint Augustine in his Confessions. As Goethe thinks of his life in terms of truth and poetry, turning the truth of his life into poetry, Saint Augustine thinks of his life in terms of truth and prayer, turning the truth of his life into prayer.

“From prayer we draw the strength for effort,” Kafka says, and that seems to hold true even where the relationship is essentially one of prayer. “Walk on!” But we draw the strength to walk on from prayer. A journey with God in time is essentially a relationship where from prayer we draw the strength to walk on. I am thinking of times of depression when we are dispirited or dejected. It is then that “Walk on!” becomes the guiding imperative of a life. I think of Newman’s prayer,

Lead, kindly light,
Amid the encircling gloom
Lead Thou me on!
The night is dark,  
And I am far from home— 
Lead Thou me on!  
Keep Thou my feet; 
I do not ask to see  
The distant scene— 
One step enough for me.  

Newman wrote these lines as a young man, recovering from a fever while he was in Sicily. “My servant thought that I was dying, and begged for my last directions,” he writes. “I gave them as he wished; but I said, ‘I shall not die’. I repeated ‘I shall not die, for I have not sinned against the light. I have not sinned against the light’. I never have been able quite to make out what I meant.” Whatever he meant, he had the image of light in mind, and so when he wrote the lines “Lead, kindly light” he was thinking of God as light, as “kindly light.” He was drawing from prayer the strength to walk on, “Lead Thou me on!” There may even be a deeper connection here, as in Tolstoy’s story of Ivan Ilych facing death, “In place of death there was light.”  

What Newman says of the “kindly light” is very close to what Saint Augustine says of the inner teacher and the doctrine of illumination. This idea that Christ is the inner teacher does appeal to me in my experience of teaching, for I find myself praying that God will work in the minds and hearts of my students, and thinking that even when a lecture is a failure or a partial failure, the inner teacher working in minds and hearts can turn the failure into success. The idea is close also to the Quaker doctrine of the inner light that gives enlightenment and guidance and assurance. It speaks also to the problem of death, as in Newman’s words “I shall not die. I have not sinned against the light,” or more clearly in Tolstoy’s words, “In place of death there was light.”  

“May it be a light to you in dark places, when all other lights go out,” Tolkien has Galadriel say to Frodo, giving him a phial
of light.\textsuperscript{52} That phrase, \textit{a light when all other lights go out}, seems to be a description also of the inner light, the kindly light that enables you to walk on. It is indeed “a light to you in dark places.” It could be said also of a guiding image, like the image of your life as a journey in time, or even more, like that of a journey with God in time. Here the image is very close to the inner reality of a guiding light. I think of something a friend of mine told me, how the image of her life as a journey in time was a guiding light in her recovery from cancer. The image and the inner light seem related as insight into image. We can know more than we can tell in telling our story as a journey in time, knowing the relationship with God that makes it a journey with God in time.

When we tell our story from a rhetorical standpoint before others, like Newman in his \textit{Apologia}, we can know more than we can tell insofar as we can know our story also from a meditative standpoint before self and a contemplative standpoint before God. Newman speaks of his relation with God there in his \textit{Apologia} and describes it as \textit{solus cum Solo}, “alone with the Alone,”\textsuperscript{53} showing that he was aware of the meditative standpoint before self and the contemplative standpoint before God, and yet he is speaking there always from the rhetorical standpoint before others.

When we tell our story from a meditative standpoint before self, like Marcus Aurelius in his \textit{Meditations} or Saint Augustine in his \textit{Soliloquies}, we can know more than we can tell insofar as we can know our story also from a contemplative standpoint before God. At any rate, Saint Augustine seems to have a glimpse of that standpoint before God in his short prayer in the \textit{Soliloquies}, “May I know me! May I know thee!” That short prayer leads into the sustained prayer of his \textit{Confessions}. Marcus Aurelius, on the other hand, with his “inner citadel,” as Pierre Hadot calls it,\textsuperscript{54} may not be open to anything further.

When we tell our story then from a contemplative standpoint before God, like Saint Augustine in his \textit{Confessions}, is it still true to say “we can know more than we can tell” or are we telling all? If our relationship to others is one of prayer, as
Kafka says, and our relationship to ourselves is one of effort but from prayer we draw the strength for effort, our relationship also to ourselves is one of prayer, as we have seen, and so we recognize the mystery in others and in ourselves. So telling our story from a contemplative standpoint before God involves a recognition of mystery in others and in ourselves. “May I know you, who know me,” Saint Augustine prays in his Confessions, as if the prayer of his Soliloquies still holds good, “May I know me! May I know thee!” There is more than we can tell, therefore, and we can know there is more.

“Short prayer penetrates heaven,” it is said in The Cloud of Unknowing. And these short prayers, “May I know me! May I know thee!” and “May I know you, who know me,” are for me a more accessible model of contemplative prayer than the sustained prayer of the Confessions. Also Kafka’s remark, “Our relation to our fellow men is that of prayer, our relation to ourselves that of effort; from prayer we draw the strength for effort,” is for me a guiding insight along with the imperative “Walk on!” If I envision my life as a journey in time and, taking into account the deep loneliness of the human condition, a journey with God in time, and seeing “time as the possible horizon for any understanding whatsoever of Being,” I may see walking with God as an answer to death, “And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him” (Genesis 5:24).

Telling the story like this, he “walked with God, and he was not, for God took him,” is telling it in terms of the relationship with God. If we make a distinction between what we can tell and what we can know, the story is what we can tell and the relationship is what we can know. So if we tell the story in terms of the relationship, the story can appear to be a legend. All the same, we can know the relationship, but that knowing is a knowing of our unknowing, as in “the cloud of unknowing in the which a soul is oned with God.” Thus in telling the story of the Gospels, Albert Schweitzer comes to “thoroughgoing skepticism and eschatology,” and yet ends in faith with “He comes to us as One unknown . . . .” Perhaps the solution is distinguer pour unir, to distinguish in order to unite.
“A kind of mysticism emerges as champion in a field abandoned by learning and critical reasoning,” it has been said of Schweitzer’s conclusion. If the mysticism is that of “the cloud of unknowing in which a soul is oned with God,” however, it is not uncritical. We can know more than we can tell, but that knowing is in virtue of a relationship, an I and thou, really an I in them and thou in me. So one who would accept only “learning and critical reasoning,” but would stand outside the relationship, could not accept the conclusion, “He comes to us as One unknown . . . He speaks to us the same word: Follow thou me! . . . And to those who obey Him, whether they be wise or simple, He will reveal Himself . . . and, as an ineffable mystery, they shall learn in their own experience Who He is.”

A union or communion with ultimate reality, that is the usual definition of mysticism, and that union or communion is where the higher religions seem to agree or converge. I think of Rudolf Otto’s essay, Mysticism East and West, comparing Sankara from the East and Meister Eckhart from the West. The formula of union or communion with ultimate reality that I have been using here is that of the Gospel of John 17:23, I in them and thou in me. We can know more than we can tell in telling the Christian story if we know the indwelling of Christ in us, I in them, and the indwelling of God in Christ, and thou in me. So also in telling our own story, we can tell of our journey in time but we can know of God-with-us on the journey.
Is Matter a Dimension?

Everything that exists is situated. Everything that’s above matter is situated; matter itself is situated.
—Max Jacob

Space is three-dimensional, and time is a fourth dimension, and matter is thought to be situated in space and time. If we say matter itself is a dimension, though, then what is situated in space and time and matter? Events? Let us say matter is a dimension along with space and time, and let us say events are what are situated in space and time and matter, and let us see where this leads us. Telling a story then, as we have been doing, is telling of events in space and time and matter. “A story that is to be told,” Padraic Colum says, “has to be about happenings.”

“Everything that exists is situated,” Max Jacob says. “Everything that’s above matter is situated; matter itself is situated.” If we say matter is a dimension, though, then matter situates as well as being situated. That would mean the brain situates the mind, the body situates the soul, and generally matter situates
events or happenings of all kinds. I think of Einstein’s theory of relativity. His original theory, the special theory of relativity (1905), led to Minkowski’s inference that time is a dimension. His later theory, the general theory of relativity (1915), I believe, could lead to a similar inference that matter is a dimension. There has been a renaissance of general relativity in our time, and so perhaps it is time to draw this inference from the curvature of space and time that arises from matter in general relativity.

If matter is a dimension along with space and time, then storytelling is about spirit. I think of Heinrich von Kleist’s marvelous essay “On the Marionette Theatre” where he speaks of “the path taken by the soul of the dancer.” The marionette, as he describes it, is a doll suspended by a string attached to its center of gravity. It is an image of the dancer. But “the path taken by the soul of the dancer” is the path of the spirit. The story of the spirit then goes from unconscious unity with the body and on through partial consciousness to full consciousness. Grace as gracefulness is there in the beginning and in the end, but it is missing in the partial consciousness of the middle. In the beginning and in the end we are as graceful as dancers, but we lack that grace now in the middle time.

“Grace appears most purely in the human form which either has no consciousness or an infinite consciousness,” the dancer says in Kleist’s essay. “Does that mean,” Kleist answers, “we must eat again of the tree of knowledge in order to return to the state of innocence?” “Of course,” the dancer replies, “but that’s the final chapter in the history of the world.” If we say matter situates the spirit, then the brain situates the consciousness, and the body situates the soul of the dancer.

**Does the Brain Situate the Mind?**

“This is the point where the two ends of the circular world meet,” the dancer says to Kleist, speaking of conscious and unconscious grace. The relation of body and mind, according
to this, is a circle, going from unconscious to conscious unity by way of partial consciousness with its separation of body and mind. If we speak then of the brain and the mind, we come upon this circle and this same “point where the two ends of the circular world meet.” I think of the two hemispheres of the brain, and how words are associated with the left hemisphere and music with the right hemisphere, and how there seems to have been an original unity of words and music, as in Vico’s idea that “the world’s first languages were in song,” and thus perhaps an ultimate unity or harmony to come which I want to call “the music of words.”

Now the right hemisphere seems to be connected to the left hand and the left hemisphere to the right hand. So if a person suffers a stroke in the right hemisphere, as happened to a friend of mine, the paralysis occurs in the left hand and the left leg. I noticed that my friend, who was fifty years old or so, was still able to speak, but her speech at first was in a high monotone. Her speech lacked what is called “the speech melody,” the rise and fall in pitch that occurs in normal speech. As she recovered from the stroke, the speech melody came back and her voice began to sound normal again. The connection with the left hand and the left leg has remained a problem, though, as if the recovery has never been quite complete.

Speaking to “the Kantian problem of the right and left hand which cannot be made to cover one another,” Wittgenstein says “A right hand glove could be put on a left hand if it could be turned round in four-dimensional space.” Actually it seems to me there is a simpler solution: a right hand glove could be put on a left hand if it could be turned inside out. Thus too, if words are associated with the left hemisphere and the right hand, and music is associated with the right hemisphere and the left hand, then words are music inside out, as it were, and music words inside out. I am right handed myself, and I have thought of words as my right hand, my stronger side, and music as my left hand, my weaker side. All the same, the real relation between words and music seems congruent to the relation between the two hemispheres of the brain.
To be sure, I know much more about words and music than I do about the two hemispheres of the brain. If we can assume, nevertheless, that one hemisphere situates words and the other hemisphere situates music, then we can indeed say the brain does situate the mind.

“Paradise is locked and bolted,” the dancer says to Kleist, “now that we’ve eaten of the tree of knowledge, and the cherubim stand behind us. We have to go on now and make the journey round the world to see if it is perhaps open somewhere at the back.”

This is the circular journey to the point where the two ends of the circular world meet. We have to grow into full consciousness, that is, to overcome the effects of our partial consciousness. How? Hegel thought to accomplish this in his Phenomenology of Spirit by going from our usual standpoint before others to the inner standpoint before self. I am thinking it is accomplished by going on from the standpoint before self, like that of Saint Augustine in his Soliloquies, to the standpoint before God, like that in his Confessions. The key, I imagine, is in his prayer in the Soliloquies, “May I know me! May I know thee!” that leads on into the sustained prayer of his Confessions. I think this may be the back entrance into paradise that Kleist’s dancer was seeking.

“While I was speaking to him I did not know what was going on in his head,” Wittgenstein quotes from ordinary conversation. “In saying this,” he comments, “one is not thinking of brain processes, but of thought processes.” So he makes a distinction between “brain processes” and “thought processes.” If we can make a similar distinction between the things of life and our relation to the things of life, we can suppose that brain processes have to do with the things of life and thought processes have to do with our relation to the things of life. The “phenomenology of spirit” then, as Hegel calls it, is the story of our relation to the things of life. Hegel’s concept of spirit, nevertheless, as “pure self-identity within otherness,” takes the story only from the standpoint before others to the standpoint before self. We have to make a further move to the standpoint before God to find the back door to paradise.
If we suppose brain processes have to do with the things of life and thought processes have to do with our relation to the things of life, then it is our thought processes that interpret the words and music of our brain processes. Our story and our song have a structure in our brain processes, but they get an interpretation in our thought processes. Newman tells his story in his *Apologia*, but he tells it from a rhetorical standpoint before others, answering criticisms and attacks on his integrity. The standpoint before others is a relationship to the story and it is an interpretation. So too is the meditative standpoint before self in the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius and the *Soliloquies* of Saint Augustine, and so too is the contemplative standpoint before God in the *Confessions* of Saint Augustine.

Our relation to the things of life is manifold, to be sure, not just the overall relations we have mentioned, before others, before self, before God. All the same, these overall relations can unify our life, especially that before self and that before God, as in Kafka’s saying, “Our relation to our fellow men is that of prayer, our relation to ourselves, that of effort, from prayer we draw the strength for effort.” This unity of relationship may tell us something about the unity between the verbal and the musical sides of the brain. I think of the definition of song Saint Thomas Aquinas gives in his preface to the Psalms, “Song is the leap of mind in the eternal breaking out into sound.”

Song unifies the verbal and the musical sides of the brain, and if we think of it as “the leap of mind in the eternal breaking out into sound,” it expresses the mind’s unifying contemplative standpoint before God. I think of Stravinsky’s *Symphony of Psalms*, drawing on three of the Psalms (39, 40, and 150), or Saint Augustine’s *Confessions*, drawing also especially on three Psalms (4, 42, and 139), though not set to music. Looking at the definition of song more closely, we find three elements:

- *exultatio mentis* the leap of mind
- *de aeternis habita* in the eternal
- *prorumpens in vocem* breaking out into sound
The leap of mind is actually *exultatio mentis*, an exultation of the mind, a joyous transport, *de aeternis habita*, over eternal things, *prorumpens in vocem*, breaking out into sound or into voice. If the brain situates the mind, what does this tell us about the brain and what does it tell us about the mind?

A somewhat similar and yet somewhat different question has been posed by neuroscientists. “As far as we know, humans are the only species that synchronize to a beat, that move or tap their feet to musical rhythms,” Ani Patel says. “What does that tell us about the human brain and its structure and function?” Rhythm is the element that is common to words and music. I think of Saint Augustine writing *On Music* and of a song I wrote to him called “Unchanging Number”:

Tell me, Master
how you turn
from changing to unchanging number
and are sensible to
music of eternal life,
or tell me rather how to listen
to unchanging number in the changing
and to hear eternal music
in the song of earth.13

Here I have brought the discussion back to song as “the leap of mind in the eternal breaking out into sound.”

I think of *The Songlines* by Bruce Chatwin, about the aboriginal pathways across Australia, and I wonder if song is related to journey, to journey in time for us who are no longer aboriginal nomads. I wonder too if song is related to a journey with God in time, as I envision my own life, and if that is how song is “the leap of mind in the eternal breaking out into sound.” I found to my own surprise that the voyages and travels of my own life largely ceased when I returned to music and began to compose song cycles and song and dance cycles, as if music somehow took the place of the voyages and travels, or as if music were itself voyage and travel.
Number, changing and unchanging, as Saint Augustine speaks of it in his essay *On Music*, is the rhythm that is common to words and music. There are all the different ways of responding to music that E. M. Forster speaks of in *Howard’s End*, “Whether you are like Mrs. Munt, and tap surreptitiously when the tunes come—of course, not so as to disturb others—; or like Helen, who can see heroes and shipwrecks in the music’s flood; or like Margaret, who can only see the music; or like Tibby, who is profoundly versed in counterpoint, and holds the full score open on his knee. . . .” If we follow “the path taken by the soul of the dancer,” however, the path of the spirit, we are led, as I say in my song, “to hear eternal music in the song of earth.”

If the brain does situate the mind, then we can expect the song of earth to situate eternal music. What I mean is something like Plato saying time is “a changing image of eternity.” The music of time, thus, is a changing image of eternal music. If we make a distinction between the person and the life that the person lives, saying the person is like a vertical dimension passing through the horizontal dimension of the life, the changing image of eternity is the changing image of the person passing through the life. The song of earth then is about the life, the life story or part of the life story, while eternal music is about the person. “For within our whole universe the story only has authority to answer that cry of heart of its characters, that one cry of heart of each of them: Who am I?” as Isak Dinesen says in the first of her *Last Tales*. The song of earth is to eternal music, I am thinking, as the story is to the cry of heart, *Who am I?*

An eternal consciousness is the answer to the cry of the heart, according to Kierkegaard. “If there were no eternal consciousness in a man,” he says in *Fear and Trembling*, “if at the foundation of all there lay only a wildly seething power which writhing with obscure passions produced everything that is great and everything that is insignificant, if a bottomless void never satiated lay hidden beneath all—what then would life be but despair?” This eternal consciousness, nevertheless, is
extended in time, in a journey in time, and so the life story tells us who we are. If the brain were the mind, instead of situating the mind, then there would be no eternal consciousness in us. If the brain situates the mind, though, as we have been saying, then the human being is an incarnate spirit and there is an eternal consciousness in us, and there is or can be a journey in time where we go from unconsciousness through partial consciousness to full consciousness.

Now if “we can know more than we can tell,” then in the study of brain processes we are studying what we can tell, and in the study of thought processes we are studying what we can know. What we can tell is what we can express in words and music. What we can know overlaps with what we can tell but goes beyond it on account of our indwelling in the particulars of what we know, my indwelling in what Shakespeare calls “the particulars of my life.” Indwelling corresponds to being situated. There is the indwelling of the mind in the brain, of the soul in the body, and it is out of this indwelling that we can know more than we can tell.

Yet is dwelling in “the particulars of my life” the same as dwelling in my body or dwelling in my brain? Consider again the hemispheres of the brain, the realm of words and the realm of music, but consider now the process of composition. I think of a friend who was a band director and attended a workshop on composing led by a jazz composer who said “You have to be at peace to compose.” To be at peace is to dwell peacefully in your brain and in your body. That peaceful indwelling makes it possible to compose words and music. Or again I could say to be at peace is to dwell peacefully in “the particulars of my life,” and that peaceful indwelling makes it possible for me to compose. To compose I have to be composed.

Dwelling in the particulars seems to have been the method of the Renaissance. It is what Paul Valery called “the method of Leonardo da Vinci,” or that is how I interpret Leonardo’s motto ostinato rigore, “obstinate rigor,” as if he were never satisfied with a tacit knowing of particulars. Leaving behind him many incomplete works, Leonardo asked himself again