Chapter 2  Is / Ought

“Only when communities recapture the positive aspects of their culture will people relearn how to love themselves and what is theirs. Only then will they really appreciate their country and the need to protect it’s natural beauty and wealth. And only then will they have an understanding of the future and of generations to come.” (Nobel Lecture, 2004, Wangari Maathai, founder of Kenya’s Green Belt Movement)

Objectivity in relationships

By definition it is obviously impossible to be 'objective' about oneself; this is the essence of what objectivity has come to mean in the spatial sense, that I look outwards at the world and attempt to define it as something other than myself. Even if I conclude that I must also be like that, the eye cannot see itself. On this basis I realised suddenly that if I allow myself actually to be totally subjective about what I think is wrong with the world from my perspective, I noticed that I am actually very angry – or at least, I feel a surge of resentment towards others which seems to galvanise into a way of understanding them as essentially 'wrong', not conforming to my pattern of how the world should be. But then when I grasped that this emotion was not only in contradiction with my own deeper feelings of hope and faith, but also caused a knock-on effect in my feelings of despair and failure, it occurred to me that what was going wrong was that I was somehow echoing the moral framework of the elements of society which I find stressful.

In other words, if my view of life is conditioned by a sense of a regular moral framework 'out there' and its logical opposite, my subjective and selective view of things from my side of the fence, then this is a view which fails to successfully co-ordinate the two. This led me to ask the question: if this viewpoint is a reflection of my projection of my frustrations onto others, and derives primarily from an adherence to the sense that there is somehow a golden moral code to which all things and ideas must conform; then how does this kind of binary juxtaposition of roles within an authoritarian structure reflect my own sense of disempowerment and resistance to being a lesser part of a whole 'objective' system?

This seems like a fair assessment so far, and due to the fact that I have gone round this merry-go-round hundreds of times before, I am familiar with what the alternative must be, and I use the idea of subjectivity in contrast to objectivity merely as a device without wanting to frame my response as something dependent on the structure of what I am given. Anyway, I will elaborate on this later, but for the moment the answer is to suggest that not only is it extremely improbable that there is a one-size-fits-all formula to govern all behavioural situations, but the alternative of suggesting that a pluralistic moral universe is possible, seems to lead to a sustainable and coherent outcome. This is to suggest that if I attribute to my 'enemy' the subjective agency which says that he sees the world from his own perspective,
and add to that, that he is also trying to see things from a multiple perspective, then we have the basis of negotiations. Basically this amounts to the idea that not only are we fundamentally equal, but that the necessity of formulating a view from a subjective perspective entails that we will favour our own conclusions on an emotional basis if they are conducive to our own sense of fulfilment. And it would therefore be another step in the direction of reconciliation to realise that if all parties can agree in principle that a common ground might be acceptable to all viewpoints, given the need for a solution, then an inclusive structure of multiple subjectivities can emerge.

Anyway, that is the grand picture from above, but to return to the reality of my own reaction, it occurred to me immediately on reversing the sense of my judgement of the world that perhaps conflict essentially arises out of struggle and the fear that entails. But to round the whole picture in the context of this book what I want to raise is the idea that somehow modern culture slides imperceptibly between the self-induced polarities of the material and moral senses of reality. On the one hand we paint a picture of the world and its competitive encounters as essentially conditioned by the material need for survival and the just distribution of resources. This perspective bolsters the well worn tradition dating back to the philosopher John Locke of how reasonableness bestows dominion on the colonisation of our collective spaces. In this way we have based our categorisation of the rights of the other on our presumption that we have a standing in a hierarchy of ownership derived from the collective tradition of reinforcement. On the other hand, this sense of righteousness slides easily into the assumption of a moral superiority over those who threaten our well-being, even if the grievance is not entirely acknowledged. The chicken and egg question is whether the tradition of ordering life according to a materialist hierarchy of valuation provides the basis of a moral or social order, or whether it is somehow an institution of the correctness of behaviour towards each other, which confers on the material world an order conducive to this kind of right ordering between people.

Inevitably the answer is that both appear in the same semi-conscious wave of gradual evolution, and that consciousness of the difference between the material and moral spheres evolves according to the necessity to assert one aspect or the other. So to review my own dilemma then, if my mistake was to use a dualist standpoint as a weapon to carve out a moral space of personal legitimacy, then the response as an alternative way of thinking about it, naturally leads me to realise that what is missing from the materialist equation of need with greed, or possession with aggression, is the personal connection in relationship. Obvious as it may appear when it is written down, this suggests that a new inter-subjective reality emerges as a feeling that the rationalised objective worldview of resources and people is attempting to squeeze out any sense of organic communication. By phrasing everything as an abstract formula to be equated logically with either side of the same coin of dualist absolutism, relationships can be ordered statistically and hierarchically without the need for any messy personal contact. On this front, my realisation that my personal relationships actually form the sense of subjectivity I have in relation to life as a whole, and also my tendency to create distance between me and
others I don't like by attributing negative 'objective' qualities to them, I can now realise that the basis I have of close relationship with others actually forms the entire map of my consciousness of how the world out there works.

Taking from this, then, a belief that life is a process of coming to terms with the conditions imposed by having to share the planet with 7 billion others, not to mention the infinite variety of the natural world, brings me eventually to the phrase derived from my acquaintance with academic philosophy in the title of this piece, namely Is / Ought. This is shorthand for a way of talking about the contradictions created by asserting that, on the one hand, morality and material observation are unrelated because observation is 'value-neutral', and, on the other hand, the sense that it is often difficult to discern the difference in value judgements between an appeal to morality in itself, or as something derived from the equation with a belief in the presumed objectivity of material observations. As I have already suggested, my opinion of this paradox is that the dilemma derives from the assertion that there is in fact an absolute material substratum to the phenomenon we know as consciousness; and that these 2 supposedly separate categories of experience have co-evolved in the context of cultures attempting to assert themselves morally and materially over the conditions of their existence. The fact that in this culture in general, which seems to be pervasive in this part of the world, there is still no way to actually reconcile this dilemma of the incompatibility of the 2 supposedly 'different-but-sometimes-interconnected' types of value judgement, attests to the inter-cultural impasse that we now face. Equally, it seems that the myths which are generated to justify this stand-off are constructed by the conditioned habit of imparting supposedly moral value to equally spurious statements about the so-called 'objective' situation represented by the conflict of interests.

**The environment is personal**

To recap then, we have the idea that western culture has evolved according to a classification of perception and experience into the categories of a) value-neutral observation of a so-called material world; and b) a sense of the moral codes entailed in the just ordering of society, implied by these rules of otherwise judgement-free observation. As such the difficulty of papering over the cracks which constantly emerge in the shifting sands of competing interests, turns into a legislative order which decrees not only a moral hierarchy and social caste system, but equally arbitrarily, a conventional system of objectivity in relation to the 'natural' world. Therefore, the lack of any sound basis on which to judge either the morality of our material structures or the sustainability of moral codes, compounds the confusion in an opportunistic and increasingly competitive culture; a culture which capitalises on the lack of boundaries between one or the other to assert its right to unimpeachable righteousness and scientific genius.

My belief is that it is the fundamental relativity of the natural world and the mystical nature of our existence as spiritual beings in evolution, which gives rise to this potential for confusion and corruption. Basically, if the world in which we see ourselves as material individuals in fact demands of us a moral
response and a need to take responsibility over the conditions of the ecosystem; this throws up the problematic of, not only how a moral code must be devised to include the variety of different habitats, but more puzzlingly, how to define the material or physical universe in a way that we can form partnerships in trade and exchange ideas about the basis of life over cultural borders.

This is really the basis of what Fritz Schumacher termed 'economics as if people mattered' in his famous work 'Small is Beautiful' [1973]; the sense that nature is actually configured on a human scale and that to understand how we can inhabit it sustainably, we have to sense that the environment, as Wangari Maathai believed, "defines who we are and how we see ourselves". This leads us to see the natural world in the same frame as our personal relationships. On the same count, this subjectivity of regard helps us to understand how the material universe is framed by the need to fundamentally conform to this overall picture of sustainable and harmonious habitation. It is not just that it is a good idea to work out how the world works because it helps us to share it and keep it whole for the future; but that this knowledge that the material universe is somehow composed of the exact same energy of consciousness as ourselves, lends itself to the phrasing of how material interactions develop in a mutually symbiotic way. Whether you start from the perspective of the self or the harmony of the Life Force; the holistic nature of the relationship, which is dialogical rather than monocultural, informs us how to be, as compassionate humans no less than custodians of the environment.

Getting back to my example in the previous chapter of how conventional rules about the physical construction of reality can be misleading, we can see that this sense of rigid determinism becomes the basis of an equally absolutist type of morality. In the absence of an equivalent to the supposed certainty of maths, patriarchal systems of authoritarian control have had to create a legislative framework which pretends to the same authenticity as its material counterpart. So when we say there is somehow a problematic in the area of crossover between what can be justified by appeal to either the laws of physics or the moral codes enshrined in jurisdictional laws, we can perhaps conclude that the difficulty in making this transition, lies not in their basic incompatibility on procedural terms, but in the wholesale categorisation of life as constituted by the separate and objectively-framed spheres of material and moral reality.

Anyway, without dwelling on the way in which mainstream culture often draws the justification for its authoritarian pronouncements from its so-called monopoly of technical expertise, we can point both to the disastrous effect of industrial pollution, no less than the complacency of those same authorities to take moral action on behalf of the planet. In this way what tends to happen is that minority or dissenting views are classified as 'conspiracy theories' based on the monopolisation of truth, whether that be claimed as moral or technical. This is compounded in a circular way when one attempts to challenge the laws of material functioning, because the moral codes have become so entrenched that it even becomes an offense to make statements which differ from the orthodox. This is a far cry from the noble ideal of inventive discovery and
attests to the kind of digitalisation of culture in which everything is shoehorned into the category of what benefits the dominant class.

**A Culture of Fear**

Apart from the sense that people are cowed by the entrenched elitism of academia, an institution which relies on the compounded obscurity of enormously complex abstract theories, the actual products of this industrial culture tend to become sacred cows too and acquire a mythology and status far in excess of the sincerity which has given birth to them. In the case of the recent meltdowns at the Fukushima nuclear power station, I was initially at a loss as to why this disaster somehow enhanced the sense of technical dependency which goes with such awesome statements of human destructivity. In other words, it appeared initially, as the disaster was unfolding, that rather than becoming completely turned off the whole notion of the wonders of modern technology, there was a kind of backlash as people's fear of the ensuing radioactive fallout meant that they were again in thrall of the public authorities. Equally pervasive I feel is the sense that the despair that arises when one considers the irreversible effects of this known deadly poison, tends to attribute to this awesome power a kind of demonic infallibility; i.e. because we are helpless in the face of such enormous folly and out-of-control ecological despoliation, this somehow bestows on the theories which underpin the production of nuclear power a belief that they are unassailable and proof of the essentially meaningless and chaotic nature of life.

This is in fact a similar process to that which occurs in many cases where the complacency towards industrial overspill and side-effects are compounded by a belief that, as they somehow prove the ultimate fallen nature of humanity and the environment, the only possible solution is more of the same techno-fix which inevitably leads to more negligence and denial of the intrinsic value of the natural world. Therefore there remains deeply embedded in the rationalised culture of both academic study and the processes in the far-from-perfect industrial context, a belief in the objectivity of the materialist worldview no less than a continuing disdain for anything supposedly woolly or pertaining to a closer and more intuitive relationship with nature.

What we really need then is a culture which is able to rise above the imperfections of our own inventions. An ability to write off the past as a bad mistake and start again with a new approach and a great big apology to the natural world celebrated by hugging lots of trees and taking time out to enjoy the remaining splendours of the great outdoors and its fascinating array of wilderness and animals. This is obviously a great leap of faith for those whose reality is a 9-5 staring at a computer screen or packing synthetic food products on a production line on the minimum wage. But perhaps it can start with a realisation that actually what the industrial world is doing in its endless ravaging of the last remaining resources of a vanishing natural world, is chasing its own tail. In other words, what it is attempting to achieve in its Nirvana of consumption is in fact an endless circle of addiction in which the skewed logic of the all-pervasive science of everything, merely compounds
their own misery and deteriorating health. Fundamentally the proof that this modern supposedly developed world is floundering in the quicksands of its own making can be witnessed by the majority stuck on the treadmill of daily drudge and the Soma pills of mindless pap which drivels endlessly from the flashing screen. Aldous Huxley and George Orwell certainly knew what was coming in some ways, although I can’t help thinking that somehow their own penchant for the social meritocracy actually advances the cause which they were supposedly debunking.

Well, I am almost convincing myself that life is really a pointless task of hitting one’s head against a brick wall, so I will get back to the idea of how it is that we should approach the problems of the modern age both as an ultimate ideal to fire our imaginations, but equally, in a pragmatic sense, of how we can reach that place from the predicament we are in. As the heading of this chapter implies, the 2 basic planks of how the western world has become so counter-productive and socially disintegrated are represented by the ideas of what the world is and how we should behave towards each other. This is what is meant by Is / Ought, what is and what we ought. By implication the concept that the material world is value-free of the requirements of behaviour is nominally at least not true in reverse; there is at least some acknowledgment that we are not yet complete automatons, void of personal opinions in step with a supreme dictator.

If we can grasp the fundamental structure of this statement of affairs it will help us considerably to advance both towards a re-evaluation of what is deemed the 'accidental' natural sphere; and perhaps also allow us to reconsider the ambivalence of social moral norms in a re-defined context of ecological, i.e. dialogical, relationship with nature. Once we have accepted that this is a possibility, it will then advance us towards the deeper intuitive understanding of how nature actually works and the liberating re-connection with the sensual stimulation of a holistic way of being. The sense that this is the way we were designed to be allows us a physical, or as Susan Griffin suggests in her book 'The Eros of Everyday' [1996], almost erotic awakening of our bodies which become alive to the messages of natural symbiosis. But then maybe that was exactly what the misogynistic ancient greeks were trying to avoid when they decreed that all things natural should be subordinated to the superior role of the intellect.

So how does Nature work then?

In my introduction I said that my years of attempting to discern the crux of what was then called 'the crisis of the environment', led me to the feeling that the problem lay in my own perception of the natural world, i.e. that it was essentially me who was emotionally blocked and unable to see that my perceptions of crisis were at root really a reflection of my lack of engagement with a deeper process of relationship. In the next chapter I will elaborate the finer details of how the concept of identity is one of the cornerstones in the cultural encyclopedia of our place in life. And after I have answered the question of how nature works, I want to propose a way of reaching a more
balanced relationship with nature from the current state of undervaluing what is also a spiritual resource.

Basically then, the idea is that what we have got wrong in conventional scientific or materialist ways of looking is that we fail to grasp the significance of a sense of how the individual observation is not value-free but in fact should derive from our overall, or holistic, feeling of belonging in the universe. This is to suggest that there is a way of viewing subjectively which is imbued with the capacity for spiritual connection with nature; and that once we learn to recognise the 'supernatural' dimension behind the appearance of things, we can start to define them in terms which enhance their particular propensities as part of a unified and aspiring whole. This can be understood as a process, not so much of defining things as fixed and separate mechanical entities, but as events which involve the dynamics of relationship, and lend their individual character to a description of life as constituted by the outcomes of relationships, in a way which draws on our imaginative inspiration as whole and questing personalities. Ultimately there is in fact no 'stuff' out there which just 'is' – because it is the process of entering into a fecund and mutually agreeable relationship which determines the particular attributes of our perceptions and organises them according to the potential for mutual and harmonious evolution.

In this way what might have appeared to be an 'Is' actually should really be seen as an 'Ought', and in that sense there is no such thing as value-free science, or any other discipline for that matter. Basically all of life is a moral process, although this obviously poses the question of what use the word has if everything has this attribute. But basically it does help us to recognise that the process of attributing value to things is the fundamental energy behind how we construct the metaphors of what we believe life to be. That the codes of Morality which take a separate and rarefied place in our culture are really an excuse for the construction of an un-natural order, as Gandhi remarked, perhaps hides the necessity to reinvigorate our sense of respect for each other in the context of a recognition of the fundamental equality of all of nature and the subtle shift in perceptions which that will entail. However, we must not fall into the trap of attempting to categorise the different levels of life into autonomous parts; the basic drive of holism is that we have to rely on our experience of 'best-fit' to indicate how things go together and this includes an understanding of the inter-related and pluralistic nature of how we organise the various aspects of life from the mundane to the sacred.

This leads me on to sketch an outline for a possible method of how to get from a worldview which is deeply entrenched, not to say mired, in the trappings of an ecological crisis as a reflection of our disregard for the environment, and the life-source which it represents for the future. Again, as I previously mentioned, this is actually a more difficult task than working out how nature should really be seen. This is because we need to be able to step out of the clothes of our materialist conditioning and be re-born in a cloak of sensual embrace of the vital source of our regeneration in nature. The conventional view tells us that such a step is not possible because nature is dirty and
unforgiving and anyway, even if you did create a kind of ideal in this life it
would have to be constituted by complete trust and respect for each other,
which is blatantly unachievable. Therefore the problem of how dwindling
resources are consumed at an ever-increasing rate to fuel the fires of self-
destruction, draws on the insane mentality of the addict who believes that
greater doses of the same will solve the addiction.

My own path out of this impasse, as I described earlier, was somehow ramified
by an extreme experience of the natural world in which I sincerely felt a surge
of trust and excitement emanating from a perfectly ordinary natural scene.
Admittedly, I had been prepared for this by my openness to all things organic
and wholesome through my love of the great outdoors and my intellectual
inquiry into eastern mysticism. But the depth of this experience could only lead
to the conclusion that the energy of nature was somehow penetrating my
innermost being to advise me that this is a source of wisdom far deeper than I
could ever conjure through my individual efforts. It has remained ever since a
basic tenet of my belief system that the natural world reflects the character of
divine love and that all I have to do is to turn myself with an open heart to this
source to be filled with gratitude and hope for the future.

And just to round this picture, it has since crystalised into a feeling for life in
which everything is imbued with that same spirit, and that the best way to
enhance my receptiveness to that wisdom is to believe in myself, with my
whole being, as a conduit for that energy in which my every sensation contains
the potential for personal development. As such I went on to immerse myself
in the study of nature through the contemplation of beauty and the meditative
practices of Zen Buddhism. These compounded in me the understanding of
how we are naturally configured to be harmonious parts of a whole system of
integrated evolution; that all we have to do to receive the wisdom conveyed
through the practices of spiritual training, is to subdue the yearnings of the
fearing mind and allow the spontaneous gestures of our deeper spirit to impart
a sense of rightness and emotional balance.

Essentially what we need to effect a transition away from the habits of self-
obsession and neglect, is an experience of life which snaps us out of our
complacency and delivers a new message of hope. From the shining precipice
of my advanced years I can suggest that this is a steep learning curve, but
that the principle is easy to grasp. That if we can gain a real-life physical
sensation of how it feels to be picked up and seriously loved by our
environment; to gain a vital recognition of the fact that this is our home, and
that this sense extends beyond the appearance of this world to an infinite
depth of mystery; that is the road to deconstruction of the gnawing
dependency that the industrial rat-race grinds into us from an early age.

All the facts are known?

Having taken you on a meandering trek through the forest of ambiguity which
constitutes the modern myth of Reasonableness, I want to now attempt to
summarise my findings to counter the oft-pronounced assertion that 'all the facts are known'! In the first chapter I attempted to cast doubt on the structures of materialism and sketch a more inclusive concept of the indivisible wholeness of natural processes. Now, apart from the rather obvious counter to this claim which is to wonder in whose service these so-called facts are framed, it is possible to deconstruct the apparatus of the modern military-industrial complex in terms of its claim to be the benevolent provider of prosperity and technical wizardry.

First of all we have to ask, what actually is a fact, and how does it function in the context of life? As I said before, it seems to be universally accredited in mainstream institutions of knowledge that measurable facts about the material universe represent a purely mechanical and value-free foundation for the forms of life which acquire greater right to value-status the more complex or closer to human form they get. The question then, in reply to this, must therefore hinge on the concept of how such facts are conceived and, most significantly, how it is possible to describe something without reference to its ultimate purpose. In other words, what something is must also contain what it is for; its definition exists in relation to how it functions as part of a wider theory of explanation, and the more general theory must have a raison d'être. The crunch comes when we ask, well what is this ultimate purpose then; and we find that if it is not to become part of a coherent and integrated whole in service of compassion for all beings and a sense of the mystical depth of an infinite creation, then it must somehow be a process of denial of the purpose of being. On this basis the claim to be value-free equates to the idea that life itself is pointless; or at least, the attempt to divest the material sphere of any part in the moral one, denotes a potential shift of meaning from the idea of a material fact onto ways of framing human purpose as somehow unrelated to the natural world.

So having suggested that how we describe the world is necessarily tied up in what we think it exists for, we have to gain a feel for how this concept translates into a workable method and practice. Personally, as I found my years of painting to be a great introduction into the rhythms of human creativity and the way that the mind acts as a kind of notebook for a deeper underlying process of sensation and experience, I retain a model of the coherence of natural processes as essentially ones which reflect the inclinations of my own being; and how that subtly engages with the stuff of nature to draw out a method which is harmonious and sustainable. However, being a person who is used to creating a living by manual means, for me the process remains ambivalent, and I tend to leave it to a form of intuition which is similar to the way that a musician improvises on a basic theme. When asked to define what jazz is, the famous trumpeter Wynton Marsalis replied that some people tend to see jazz as somehow a process of juggling the notes in a pastiche of interweaving dances and melodies, whereas the reality is that if you have devoted your life to the culture of expression which jazz represents, you have already internalised every strand of the repertoire to the extent that what comes out is really just an emotional expression. I could say the same about how holism starts with a fundamental immersion in the experience of nature
and evolves through the process of acquiring and accumulating sensations of beauty or disaster, which results in a feel for the workings of life. As such this echoes the sentiment of John Seymour who became known for his advocacy of self-sufficiency and emphasised the concept that we are part of nature.

For those of my readers who would prefer a more concrete explanation of how to make a transition from a conventional to a more nature-inspired version of how things go together, perhaps we can revert to the idea of all the facts being known. If we are not convinced to change course by the idea that what results from knowing all the facts is a catastrophic breakdown of the life-support system which is our ecological foundation, then perhaps we can chew over the more cerebral version which is to ask if all the answers are known, then what are the questions? On this count, I imagine the hardened materialist to be suggesting that the questions are those which are pertinent to our need for knowledge such as how to predict certain vital processes such as climate change or the onset of cancer. Presumably if all the facts are known then it should be easy to induce the correct answer. That this is very often not the case, leads to inquiry into the method by which the facts are framed in order to use them to justify the explanations which are implied by them. Obviously to suggest that facts are somehow the cause of the more general observation that a whole system is breaking down, merely leads in a circular fashion back to the original description of individual parts as the basic building blocks of the greater theory. The ultimate aim is to prove something which we have hypothetically implied by our observations.

The next step is to say that if we have implied the framing of a factual world through the recognition of our needs, and that the lack of precise results implies a probability that we have observed incorrectly, then we have to refine our knowledge through further experimentation based on the search for patterns which indicate coherence between different hypothetically-framed elements. Ultimately then, what we need is a way of verifying these experimental processes which draws, not only on a learned capacity for recognising significant patterns in abstract based on familiarity with the conventional laws of science, but also from a capacity to draw these inferences of our experiment into alignment with their satisfying of our perceived needs; e.g. curing cancer or solving the problems of climate change.

In light of my previous sketch of how ultimately all knowledge must take a moral stand if it is to have any claim to represent the fulfillment of human and natural potential, we have to realise that the search for significant metaphors also has to be framed in a way which satisfies the conditions imposed by a symbiotic environment. In other words, those hypothetically-framed concepts or visions of what we think might be the case, which we use to galvanise our thoughts around problematic observations, actually have to include the values associated with nature in order for our theories to reflect the needs of the crisis of the environment. Therefore a fact is only really a fact if it contains within it the potential to enhance natural processes, otherwise it misconstrues the ultimate purpose of life which is essential to define what it is. If this feels like
an insurmountable obstacle to a search for pure truth, then perhaps all I can say is to repeat my assertion that ultimately a value-free natural environment is equivalent to a belief in the meaninglessness of life as a whole. Alternatively if you actually try to implement a method which is not only conditional on its satisfying the proviso of ecological sustainability, but also entails a liberating re-connection with our own senses as part of our personal relationship with all of life, then you may be surprised how easy it becomes to recognise the myriad patterns of the natural world; and come to an understanding that ultimately the world is created for the spiritual growth of individual consciousness into the all-embracing interdependence of emancipated being.

Anyway, having suggested that what passes for a moral truth in our saturated media often wears the mantle of some undeclared allegiance to a 'material fact', and that these so-called facts, in their framing as hard objective absolutes about life, have as little claim to universality as their moral cousins; I then went on to hint at the idea that sometimes when the factual reality blows the lid off our sense of moral belonging and security, such as at Fukushima, what results is rather a re-entrenchment of those same wizened kernels of so-called wisdom. I feel that this is really a result of the shock of the process which heightens our fear of death and therefore leads to a greater susceptibility to the lies that supposedly guarantee our safety. That the Japanese population continue to be herded like sheep back into their radioactive pens, despite the dire pronouncements of Naoto Kan, Prime Minister in March 2011, Japanese nuclear experts and an in-depth Greenpeace study, belies the hope that the averagely educated citizen of a nuclear state will rise above a vision of impending doom and reclaim the environment as the natural birthright of future generations.

This is sadly something which seems to be a general feature of human culture; in that the conditioned morality contained in cultural myths such as the Revelations of the Bible, and the modern idea of the inevitable implosion of the ecosystem, reveal the inherent lack of faith of the masses. That being said we can accept that this is a necessary part of the process to an acceptance, not only of our own mortality, but the wider need to belong to a collective movement which somehow reflects our own feelings of emptiness and insecurity. Importantly, we must recognise the process for what it is and not be cajoled into believing the shallow epithets of the quick-fixers or the doom-mongers. Yes it is useful to generate myths of the finitude of earthly existence, and in this we have to try to be sensitive to the mistakes we are making and the potential for renewal. But equally we have to recognise that an embrace of the fact of death is a stepping stone to a deeper connection with all of life, and a sense of belonging to a collective spirit which nurtures its faith in the eternal.

From here we can go on to a recognition that in fact that same feeling of emptiness in face of the abyss of darkness which represents death, and also the acceptance of the emotional pain and physical suffering it may cause, are necessary parts of the whole process of life. This is because emptiness is the fundamental condition of our individual souls in comparison to the opportunity for life which is reflected in the totality of nature and beyond. We have to reach
this point of un-knowing in order to rise above the conditioning of a fearing
culture of materialism and gain a mature sense of humanity as a collective
pulse of compassion. Equally, the pain and suffering of the individual person
are necessary signs of how we are related to the wisdom of the ecological
whole. This fact is not negated by the seeming lack of justice when people are
victimised or subject to natural disasters, because life could not be an
opportunity for growth into spiritual awareness if it did not contain the
potential for choice which life on the mortal plane reflects. I will return to the
theme of individual identity in the next chapter.

Finally we can perhaps develop from this point of the need for an openness to
the mystical truth of being, to see that what this leads to is an appreciation of
not only the role of individual commitment to the necessity of ecological
sustainability, but equally, the generation of a personal feeling of spiritual
development as a parallel with my attempt to align myself with the 'goodness'
of the natural environment. In the practice of Buddhist meditation it is
somehow taken as read that the process of stilling the mind and the body in a
unified effort to rid the mind of selfishness, imparts a feeling of natural
integration with the beneficial forces of nature. As such we could therefore
imply that somehow the pursuit of a pure body through things such as yoga or
the refinement of our lifestyles, can be conceived of as a moral gesture in
itself. Therefore we come full circle to the definition of 'physical' processes as
somehow aligned with the attempt to proclaim the need for unity in common
purpose. This is the basis of my further elaborations of health concepts in
chapter 5.

And as an afterthought, I have noticed through writing this that there is in fact
an interesting parallel emerging between the concepts of objectivity in the first
2 chapters. In the first I have suggested that over-adherence to a supposedly
mental process of rational abstraction has led to an obfuscation of the process
by which we sense the interconnections in natural processes. In the second
chapter the shift of objectivity emerges as one which can mutate at will to
satisfy both conditions of a value-free domain of scientific certainty and also
the covertly-implied assertions of a moralistic culture. The parallel seems to be
indicated between the lesser vehicles of knowledge in both systems; e.g. there
is a downplaying of the role of the senses both as arbiter of the organic
processes of life, and also of the need to locate the process of valuing our
judgements in an integrated ecological whole which includes the promptings of
the body. Can we suggest therefore that the process of nature is itself a moral
one? And similarly, does this imply that the sensations of our bodies are
somehow the basis of morality?

Well, I leave those questions hanging as witness to the need to create new
metaphors in a world beset by cultural collapse, but it is an interesting
comment on how past cultures have migrated from the classical mythology of
patriarchal structures, to a more secular and liberated sense of the power of
reason to determine their own fate. As a holist I would like to be able to find
hidden truths in the leanings of a culture which is suffocating for lack of vital
symbols of human flourishing. However, I will conclude by saying that it seems
to me that we can find many examples of how one culture has given way to
another by transforming or over-mapping the bonding elements of the
previous one, but however we attempt to salvage the bid for truth from the so-
called enlightenment of modern Europe, there will have to be a drastic re-
writing of some of the fundamental axioms of how we inhabit the earth as a
finite resource; and on the spiritual level, how to deconstruct and revitalise a
path of self-aggrandisement in the trappings of power which somehow harks
back to an erstwhile alienation from the natural world as a source of belonging
and wisdom.