Regarding Matthew Arnold

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1 OPENING THE WINDOW

In the Introduction to his book *The Sea of Faith*[1] Don Cupitt refers to *Dover Beach*, the poem from which he draws his title, and remarks:

> The sea of faith in Matthew Arnold's great metaphor, flows as well as ebbs; but the tide that returns is not quite the same as the tide that went out. It will rise equally high; and there is continuity.

But in Arnold's 'great metaphor' the sea of faith does *not* flow as well as ebb: it simply ebbs, and it is in the space between the high tide and the low that Arnold focuses his thinking. When he refers in *Dover Beach*[2] to the 'Sea of Faith', it is to declare that he only hears its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar. Although the movement of the *tides* is regular and predictable, we cannot be as confident as Cupitt about the possible future forms of 'faith'. Nor is it clear that Arnold himself would *welcome* the Sea of Faith's being once again at the full, for the ebbing tide has uncovered what the full sea concealed.

The sense of hearing provides more veridical perceptions than that of sight in this poem. The visual is comforting and deceptive, whereas what is heard disturbs us with the truth. It is the grating roar of pebbles under the [218] action of the waves which we hear bring in 'the eternal note of sadness'. Why is it *grating*? and how is it heard to bring the note of sadness in?

The physical sound brings in *thoughts* whether we like it or not, as do other physical features of the landscape. These 'natural correspondences'[3] force themselves upon us and are not, at least initially, a matter of convention or artifice.

The sound of the pebbles grates because it disturbs an enchantment. The opening lines of the poem enchant us and provide the image for the enchantment of Faith:

> The sea is calm tonight.
> The tide is full, the moon lies fair
> Upon the straits; – on the French coast the light
> Gleams and is gone; the cliffs of England stand,
> Glimmering and vast, out in the tranquil bay.

The *calm* sea and the full tide, *moonlight* on the straits, the *gleam of lights*, the cliffs *reflected glimmering* out in the *tranquil* bay, these are images of enchantment and illusion.

But these lines have another role, as an objective correlative for the joy, love, light, etc., that Arnold is about to realise cannot be sustained by Faith. There is a grating interplay between the enchantment they draw us in to and the image they provide of positive human states.

The next lines decisively alter the so-far merely visual experience:

> Come to the window, sweet is the night-air!

The window is presumably already open or is opened now, and then, with the brilliant 'Only', something *disturbing* is acknowledged, a qualm or hesitancy is voiced, whose cause is not perceptible till one comes to the window and opens it:

> Only, from the long line of spray…

… Listen! you hear the grating roar…

It is not difficult here to *look*, so there is no achievement in *seeing*, where seeing is connected with illusion and deception, but *listening* forces us to hear [219] sounds that prompt and focus thoughts, not of our choosing, truths that one does not want to hear but which have to be acknowledged. The sound also shifts the sense and security of the visual experience: the land becomes 'moon-blanched'. What we hear causes us to think in a certain way; it is not that something we have already thought is secured by a convenient image.

The grating roar of the pebbles is heard to bring in the eternal note of sadness. Sophocles had heard the sound on the Aegean 'and it brought / Into his mind the turbid ebb and flow / Of human misery'. So the turbid movements of human misery stand in grating interplay with the gleaming images of enchantment and illusion, sustained while the window remains closed. Arnold hears the same sound. The thought that he says we find therein is actually at one remove from the sound, because it is prompted by that of Sophocles. It is that the Sea of Faith was once too at the full, as at Dover:

… and round earth's shore
Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled.

When this girdle is removed, the shore round which it lay is left exposed and naked. As Kenneth Allott remarks, the context is one for feelings of loss, exposure and dismay. When the Sea of Faith recedes it leaves exposed the vast edges drear and naked shingles of the world, that had lain concealed from view, as had the realities of human misery, by the calm, full tide, with the moon lying fair upon the strait. The Sea of Faith conceals the truth, and generates illusion.

An impulsive and passionate response or counter-thought to this dismaying recognition of false appearance, is caught in the next line, which offers the hope of a saving contrast to falsity, if we dwell in the pause of the caesura: 'Ah, love, let us be true…'. Perhaps the emphasis might fall on the *us*, as it does, I suggest, in the thought: 'let *us* be true', since truth is not where we had relied on it to be. Then, splendidly turning the sense of 'true…', the 'to one another' opens us to the moral possibilities of relationship in the scene of human misery. The turn is an instinctive one, not a matter of a considered selection. It is where he finds himself turning in thought in the crisis of his loss of faith. [220]

Moreover, we are offered a reason, or rather the beloved is, for *our* being true to one another. As we look out to the tranquil bay towards the French coast in the moonlight, we see the world as it appears at the high tide of the Sea of Faith, a land of dreams. But despite this appearance the world:

hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain.

Anthony Kenny remarks that Arnold at this point 'offers human love as the only consolation', and comments that it is an inconsistent consolation:[4] 'if there is no love and no certitude in the real world, how can one rely on the truth of the beloved?'.

It is true that one cannot *rely* 'on the truth of the beloved'. Arnold was clear enough about the limitations of 'human love', in *The Buried Life*, for instance:

Are even lovers powerless to reveal
To one another what indeed they feel?

But maybe it is a mistake to suppose that Arnold is offering consolation.[5] His thought turns to, and then he offers, a beckoning *standard* by which human love might be measured, and appeals to the beloved, to share the attempt to realise it.[6]

There would be no inconsistency if we stressed the biblical resonance of the word 'world'. Joy, love, light, etc., are not to be found 'in the world'. They are only to be found if we are not *of* the world, even though we are *in* it, *here* as on a darkling plain, where ignorant armies clash by night.[7] Arnold implies that in the real world, as opposed to 'the land of dreams', the only *possible* place in which to find joy, love, light, etc., is within and between human beings. There is some complexity in the lines, because they appear to express two propositions at once. The first denies that the desired states are to be found in the world which '*seems* to lie before us like a land of dreams'. In other words it is an illusion to suppose that joy, love light, etc., come to us through faith and a relationship with God. The second denies that they are to be found in the world in which ignorant armies clash by night.[8] [221]

The direction in which the poet turns for 'consolation' (let *us* be true / To one another) might appear more revelatory than consolatory if we think of it as a prompted, prompting thought which shows *him* something true. It is a thought that starts to show him the unrealised object of his melancholy. The pressure of the dismay or melancholy when it is dwelt upon can force its object into consciousness. The poet is impelled towards a perception or intimation of the real site of joy, love, light, etc., in the *possibilities* of human relationship, in a world where the *realities* of human relationship show us to be 'here':

> … as on a darkling plain
> Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
> Where ignorant armies clash by night.

Roger Scruton has written that Arnold 'foresaw' on that 'darkling plain' the threat posed to the 'impulse of piety, upon which community and morality are founded' by naturalistic explanations of religion.[9] But Arnold is not *foreseeing* a threat to 'the impulse of piety' on the darkling plain, but telling us that the full tide of the Sea of Faith has concealed from us, and its going out reveals, that we already are and have been, '*here* as on a darkling plain'. (*Here* is where we are, whether or not we are believers). The forces of positivism against religion are merely the latest version of an old story.

2 THE MELANCHOLY

The movement of Arnold's thought is between the dismay and nihilism of the loss of faith and the possibility of a waking up from the land of dreams. It is a confused waking up to an inner propulsion towards the possibilities of what he is later to call 'conduct' and 'righteousness'. Their distance from clear consciousness determines the melancholy, which is the voice of their insistence. As he says in *The Buried Life*:

> Yet still, from time to time, vague and forlorn,
> From the soul's subterranean depth upborne [222]
> As from an infinitely distant land,
> Come airs, and floating echoes, and convey
> A melancholy into all our day

In *Dover Beach*, 'The eternal note of sadness' is not a *consequence* of the loss of faith: its sound is present even when the tide is full. It may indeed represent an *intimation* of the loss of faith, but it is

worth considering that the grating roar of the pebbles is a part of the *total* experience of the tranquil bay, something disturbing us *within* the enchantment and we *hear* it bring the eternal note of sadness in, and precipitate the associations which lead to the insight, not just that Faith is illusion, but that it is *irrelevant* to the thing most needful. The bleakness, the dismay, the melancholy have to be imaginatively felt so that we can understand at least the *strength* of the impulse to respond, if not the direction it will take us in. On the other hand, the strength of the recoil is a palpable experience which forces the attention inwards. If the sadness forces itself on our attention then maybe we shall be forced also to attend to its object.

The world of faith is 'dead' in *Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse*, also composed in the early eighteen fifties. The poet talks of wandering between 'two worlds, one dead, the other powerless to be born'. He stands in the Carthusians' 'world-famed home' of penitential cries, white uplifted faces, the knee-worn floor, the inner strife of souls, their death in life.[10] We might connect this poem with *Dover Beach* and say that the poet sadly rejects the Carthusian enterprise as a misdirected search for joy, love, light, etc.

As the poet stands there, the whispers of his rigorous teachers pierce the gloom, teachers who had purged the faith and trimmed, or maybe quenched,[11] the fire of his youth, and showed him the high, white, or maybe the pale, cold,[12] star of truth: 'What dost *thou* in this living tomb?'[13]. But, he assures us, he has not rejected those at whose behest he long ago so much unlearnt, so much resigned:

> Not as their friend, or child, I speak
> But as, on some far northern strand,
> Thinking of his own Gods, a Greek
> In pity and mournful awe might stand [223]
> Before some fallen Runic stone –
> For both were faiths, and both are gone.

Thus the Anglican Arnold regards a Roman Catholic monastery, and waits 'forlorn', with 'nowhere yet to rest his head', in a mood less spirited perhaps than Nietzsche's, but voicing a moment of historic doubt, as Eliot thought,[14] a perplexity in the face of the new positivism:

> For the world cries your faith is now
> But a dead time's exploded dream;
> My melancholy, sciolists say,
> Is a pass'd mode, an outworn theme –
> As if the world had ever had
> A faith, or sciolists been sad.

This sounds a bit petulant, but Arnold holds on to his famous melancholy, holds on to a sense of loss, allows himself to experience it despite the scoffing of the 'sciolists'. Here a Buddhist would recognise, I think, an authentic experience of *dukkha*, a sense of suffering, pain, or unsatisfactoriness which, as an emotion, must, if it is to be understood, be traced to its intentional object, so that the melancholy becomes a *clue*, not to Arnold's individual psychology, but to something submerged and unacknowledged or unrealised. The melancholy refers us to something missed or missing, is the insistent voice of our own unrealised possibilities, seeking expression.

I have already suggested that in *Dover Beach* the turning to one another is not so much a consolation as a revealing of that whose absence makes us sad. The sadness is not assuaged by faith, we hear its note even where faith is present, but it becomes clear that what is absent are the

conditions upon which joy, love, light, certitude, peace, and help for pain, depend. But since these had *seemed* to be secured by traditional religious faith, and had, presumably, at least been tasted in a way that depended upon that faith, Arnold's self-conscious melancholy is not mere self-indulgence. It is a withdrawal from a mislocation and he needs to linger on it, to develop the tension in which it is apparent that he has 'nowhere to rest his head'. This New Testament reference to the 'son of man', shows that Arnold makes a *spiritual* experience of [224] the loss of faith. Faith was a kind of home, as foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests. But as a home faith is no longer available to him, and he has glimpsed its irrelevance to his needs. The tension of dwelling on (and in) its loss is a condition of change and insight.

Arnold did not 'offer the consolation of human love' in *Dover Beach*, but saw a standard by which it might be measured. In *The Buried Life* he explores and diagnoses the failures of human communication, and discovers the name of our 'nameless sadness'. It is that we hardly read in each other the inmost soul, concealing our thoughts, alien to the rest of men and alien to ourselves. What we are out of contact with is 'our hidden self'. Arnold gives a source of our melancholy in our mutual and self-alienation. But often, even in the world's most crowded streets(!) and in the din of strife, 'there rises an unspeakable desire / After the knowledge of our buried life':

> A thirst to spend our fire[15] and restless force
> In tracking out our true, original course;
> A longing to inquire
> Into the mystery of this heart which beats
> So wild, so deep in us – to know
> Whence our lives come and where they go

The melancholy was the key to a revelation, about the nature and demands of the ethical relation. The experience of *dukkha* led to a tension in which he glimpsed the inner necessity of our being 'true to one another'. He attends or waits on the insistence of the thought that has pressed upon him, and that attending has opened out to him what the thought refers to. We do not know either ourselves or each other, and the possibility of overcoming this ignorance and the melancholy that attends it depends upon the ethical life. The ethical life is a source of knowledge.

3 'THE ENERGY OF LIFE'

Now we begin to see him showing an astonishing percipience about the realities that the ethical relation can itself reveal. This becomes evident in his writing about *energy* or *virya* ('our fire and restless force') and its relation to [225] the spiritual quest and the ethical life. Some may be tempted to think that Arnold, having lost his religious faith, now 'reveres the moral teachings of the Bible' (or at least some of them). But the crux lies in what we take these moral teachings to amount to. It becomes clear that Arnold conceives the ethical life as capable of revealing something that we might call 'trans-human' or trans-natural, as forcing upon us a revision of what we take to be 'human' or 'natural'.

In the late sonnet 'Immortality', Arnold reflects, in Allott's words, on the idea of 'conditional immortality', an idea he had found in Goethe, that we must already be a 'great soul' (*eine grosse Entelechie*) if we are to be such in the future. Arnold imagines first a version of the consolatory and resentful desire for life after death that has often been cited as a motivation for belief:

> Foiled by our fellow-men, depressed, outworn,
> We leave the brutal world to take its way,

And, *Patience, in another life*, we say,
The world shall be thrust down, and we up-borne

But this weary and depressive desire for a vindicated life beyond the brutal world is dealt with swiftly:

No, no, the energy of life may be
Kept on after the grave, but not begun;
– only he,
His soul well-knit, and all his battles won,
Mounts, and that hardly, to eternal life.

This idea of a 'soul well-knit', of concentrated vital force, is crucial to his religious thinking. He presents it also as the condition of virtuous action, properly understood, and also of spiritual discovery. 'His soul well-knit, and all his battles won' recalls the (post-mortem) picture he offers of his father in *Rugby Chapel*:

O strong soul, by what shore
Tarriest thou now? For that force,
Surely, has not been left vain! [226]
…
Yes, in some far-shining sphere,
Conscious or not of the past,
Still thou performest the word
Of the Spirit in whom thou dost live –

The same achieved strength of soul is the condition of the possibility of the quest of the Scholar Gypsy. He is the type of the seeker after secret knowledge, which is secret because it depends upon conditions that seekers must establish within themselves. The disclosure of reality depends upon the state of the knower. And what Arnold is moving towards is the idea that *ethics* is the condition of disclosure. The idea of a secret knowledge is not that of an inaccessible privacy, but of a form of knowledge or understanding access which requires the password of a reconstituted self.

Arnold's sense in his poetry of the importance of concentrated action, of the gathering of a person's powers, *in the direction of* the ethical relation, of 'righteousness', stands always though in what seems an unhappy personal contrast with the theme of distraction and the dissipation of energy: at least, his authorial voice is often on the wrong side of the contrast, and this gives an edge to a continuing melancholy which has begun to see what is needful, has clear pictures of it, and exemplars, but is unable yet to achieve it. On the other hand, it is a contrast which gives point to the idea of concentration (or *samadhi*) itself, it sets out the topography which gives sense to his talk of 'whence our lives come and where they go'.[16] This contrast is there in *The Scholar Gypsy*, for instance, where the theme of conditional immortality is continued. Whereas *we* tire our wits upon a thousand schemes and are… what we have been, the Scholar Gypsy had *one* aim, *one* business, *one* desire:

Else wert thou long since number'd with the dead!
Else had thou spent, like other men, thy fire!
The generations of thy peers are fled,
And we ourselves shall go;

This purity of heart seems to be a condition of transformation or development: the Scholar Gypsy has the virtue of *sati-sampajañña*, a mindfulness [227] which maintains a clear and undistracted comprehension of purpose. Arnold seems highly alert to the value of this virtue through a weary familiarity with its absence. We are what we have been, do not change positively, because we, by contrast, tire our wits upon a thousand schemes, we 'spend our fire'[17] and die. What the immortal Scholar Gypsy has that we do not have, and it is what makes *him* immortal and not us, is 'powers fresh, undiverted to the world without'; we, by contrast, 'fluctuate idly without term or scope':

> Thou waitest for the spark from heaven! and we
> Light half-believers of our casual creeds,
> Who never deeply felt, nor clearly will'd
> Whose insight never has borne fruit in deeds,
> Whose vague resolves never have been fulfill'd;
> For whom each year we see
> Breeds new beginnings, disappointments new;
> Who hesitate and falter life away,
> And lose tomorrow the ground won today –
> Ah, do not we, wanderer, await it too?

We await it too, but forlornly, the spark of heaven, light half-believers of our casual creeds, who never deeply felt, nor clearly will'd. But even though we are *all*, for Arnold, between two worlds, one dead, nevertheless he is already seeing here the terms of a way forward, how the other world might develop the power to be born. It is a way that depends upon the gradual and progressive accumulation and gathering of our powers: which itself, through the ethical life, is the condition of a progressive revelation of how things are. Ethics replaces metaphysics as the means of knowing. One of Arnold's poetic achievements is that he has made conscious, and given us the sense of, what it is to feel deeply and will clearly. But it is only rare exemplars who manifest this, the Jesus of the Gospels, the Scholar Gypsy, his father. Sometimes he writes as though there were no bridge across the gulf, no clear path from the one state to the other. But he does also attempt to describe an intermediate state, between dissipation and focused concentration, in his personally painful discussion of spiritual progress, also [228] in *Rugby Chapel*, which starts elegiacally near the chapel in autumn and ends in a straggling march through an Alpine snow storm

> Cheerful, with friends we set forth –
> Then, on the height, comes the storm
> …
> Friends, who set forth at our side,
> Falter, are lost in the storm

And when we arrive at nightfall at the inn the gaunt and taciturn host asks whom we have brought, whom we have left in the snow:

> Sadly we answer: we bring
> Only ourselves! we lost
> Sight of the rest in the storm.

Arnold finds in his own father the marks of an exemplar, the embodiment, in other words, of the notion of the well-knit soul he sought to understand and articulate. His father's life and demeanour have given him the sight of a *possibility*, whatever we may think about the dynamics of their actual

relationship (some of Arnold's writing suggests a kind of defeated paralysis in the face of Thomas Arnold's perceived exemplariness):

> And through thee I believe
> In the noble and great who are gone

pure souls honoured by former ages, who else…

> Seemed but a dream of the heart,
> Seemed but a cry of desire
> … souls tempered with fire,
> Fervent, heroic, and good,
> Helpers and friends of mankind.

The initial necessitated turn to the idea of an ethical standard by which human life might be measured has taken us unexpectedly far. For in conceiving ethical action Arnold has described a progress from scattered and ineffectual energies to the gathering of powers and concentration to be found in the de-[229]meanour of the *Bodhisattva* figures, if I may so call them, whose possibility is confirmed by the exemplary life of his own father. 'Hardly' is a word that Arnold uses frequently, to mean 'with difficulty', and he represents the progress from the one condition of energy to the other as one that is achieved 'hardly'.

But the keeping the possibility of such an achievement steadily in view (through the virtue of mindfulness) is itself partly secured by the presence, even if only in imagination, of at least apparent exemplars, who are *recognised* as such). And his conception of that achievement carries him towards the idea of a state of the soul that at least renders intelligible the idea of immortality. In the Buddhist tradition, the notion of *saddhā*, which is often translated as 'faith', is a matter of the development of *confidence* in a process. This virtue is really a multiple one, one of imagination, which supplies images, and one of a steady gaze, which stays upon the images thus supplied. So there is an inner unity or interdependence between the Buddhist qualities of *viriya*, *sati-sampajañña* and *saddhā*, which Arnold seems to me to have grasped. This is evident in the following comments against Newman in *Literature and Dogma*:

> Faith, instead of being a submission of the reason to what puzzles it, is rather a recognition of what is perfectly clear, if we will *attend* to it… *attention, cleaving, attaching oneself fast* to what is undeniably true, – this is what the faith of the scripture, 'in its very nature', is. (p 233)

Saddhā and mindfulness are manifested in the instinctive turn towards ethics, which grows under the steadfast way Arnold has kept his attention upon it. Under the pressure of his melancholy, of his experience of *dukkha*, Arnold glimpses a resolution, an impulse or movement of thought and imagination. The steady gaze opens out the scene of ethical life from the darkling plain of human misery to the driven march through the Alps of spiritual progress. These explorations have been achieved through the self-conscious dis-illusionment of Faith. There is no *welcome*, in these thoughts, for the turn of the tide. [230]

4 'A REAL EXPERIMENTAL BASIS'

The dim perception in *Dover Beach* of our impulsion towards the ethical life has become, twenty or so years later, the leading idea of Arnold's neglected classic, *Literature and Dogma*,[18] where he is able to say that '*God* is… really, at bottom, a deeply moved way of saying *conduct* or *righteousness*' (p 46).

This strange remark needs, of course, to be set in context. It would be premature, as I have already said, to *dismiss* Arnold's position on the grounds that he merely offers a routine reduction of religion to ethics, without first clarifying how the ethical life itself is to be conceived. John Mackie has raised a question about the possibility of a middle position between religious realism and a naturalistic expressivism of the kind associated with Richard Braithwaite.[19] It seems to me worth considering the *possibility* that Arnold has found such a pathway.[20] It is a possibility that depends upon how we construe the idea of the ethical life. It seems to me that in Arnold we have at least the beginnings of the notion that it increasingly opens us to realities that were formerly concealed. There are, on this view, realities that are concealed from the unregenerate consciousness.

Arnold's considered response to positivism, to the 'sciolists', is two-sided, reflecting the earlier movement of his thought from the perceived illusoriness of belief to the emergent realities of the ethical life. Although he wholly accepts the positivist critique of theology, he attempts, with striking originality, to ground what he takes to be the 'real' truths of Christianity by deploying the very same experimental method. In other words, he brings an anti-speculative and experimental method to the task of illuminating the spirituality of his tradition.

The disenchantment with religious belief is given conceptual expression in the criticism that the 'assumption' that there is a personal first cause of the universe, cannot be *verified*. The reflective turn towards the realities and conditions of the ethical life is given expression in his account of the nature of 'conduct' or 'righteousness' as it is ascertained by *experience*. [231]

Arnold wished to give to the Bible 'a real experimental basis', a basis 'in something which can be verified, instead of something which has to be assumed':

> whatever is to stand must rest upon something which is verifiable, not unverifiable. Now, the assumption with which all the churches and sects set out, that there is 'a great Personal First Cause, the moral and intelligent Governor of the universe,' and that from him the Bible derives its authority, can never be verified.

If, Arnold says, we are asked to *verify* that there rules a great Personal First Cause, 'we *cannot* answer'.

It is a very particular theology[21] that Arnold says 'can never be verified'. He presumably takes this from the critiques of philosophical theology offered by Hume and Kant, which would have reinforced the positivist conclusion (rather than premise) that genuine knowledge depends upon empirical observation. When Arnold says that the relevant theological assumption cannot be 'verified', I do not think his complaint is that it is unsatisfactory because it cannot be verified *in experience*. I think the point is that it cannot be verified through metaphysical argument. That leads us to the positivist conclusion that real knowledge depends upon empirical verification. So Arnold then looks at the Bible with a view to seeing what *can* be verified in experience, appropriating the new conceptual tools of verification and the experimental method to the task of understanding it. This seems to me to be an unusual and important move, though its importance clearly depends on what Arnold then *finds*.

He does not, however, take the Logical Positivist step, of claiming that if theological statements have no means of verification, then they are factually meaningless, do not have any meaning as statements which can be true or false. He leaves open, or does not consider, the possibility that the unverifiable assumption *could* be true (or false): all he is concerned to assert is that we are just not nor could be in a position to *know* whether it is the one or the other. That is hardly the end of the story for the theological realist, but there is a *pragmatic* side to Arnold's dismissal of belief in the personal first cause as an 'assumption'. It is an assumption that has been

rejected by the 'lapsed [232] masses', and they are not, he believes, going to return to what is true and vital in religion by being persuaded to accept it again:

> This theology is… now a hindrance to the Bible rather than a help; nay, to abandon it, to put some other construction on the Bible than this theology puts… is indispensable, if we would have the Bible reach the people.

From a conceptual point of view, Arnold is explicitly criticising the theory that access to the spiritual tradition must be by means of rational persuasion and arguments for a personal first cause.

In order to understand how Arnold arrives at the thought that 'God' is a deeply moved way of saying 'conduct' or 'righteousness' we need to place it in the context of his *alternative* 'construction on the Bible'. That construction depends upon his appropriation of 'the experimental method' and his claim is that what is true and vital in religion is its knowledge of cause and effect as it applies to consciousness and ethics. Thus he talks about the 'method' of Jesus, and his 'secret'. The connection between method and secret is claimed to be a testable discovery of moral experience. The method, briefly, is *self-renunciation*, and the discovery it yields is the emergence of an ethically higher self in which joy or happiness is found to be connected with 'conduct or 'righteousness', in a more abundant sense of 'life'.[22] In other words, Arnold shows an intuitive grasp of the principle of *paṭiccasamuppāda* or 'dependent arising' as it is instantiated in particular New (and Old) Testament teachings. This is not of course to say that the Bible *teaches paṭiccasamuppāda* as a doctrine, but the teaching Arnold mentions shows a clear recognition of the way one phenomenon arises in dependence upon another.

However, if the connection between virtue and happiness is a matter of experiment, then it needs to be put to the test. It may be objected that Arnold's confidence about 'life from righteousness' is misplaced. He announces, in his emphatic and incautious way, that happiness *undeniably* follows conduct or virtue. But the idealist philosopher F.H. Bradley denied it, with cold, dismissive precision: [233]

> If what is meant be this, that what is ordinarily called virtue does always lead to and go with what is ordinarily called happiness, then so far is this from being 'verifiable' in everyday experience, that its opposite is so; it is not a fact, either that to be virtuous is always to be happy, or that happiness must always come from virtue.[23]

Bradley's dismissal of Arnold is cold, but his counter-claim, despite his scepticism about 'verifiability', is germane and needs an answer, since Arnold's whole enterprise is grounded in a particular application of the experimental method. The question is about what can, in Keats' phrase, be tested on the pulses of experience.

How are we supposed to adjudicate between Bradley and Arnold, as surely we should be able to if we are in touch with an 'experimental method', which can, presumably, be applied by anyone? The difficulty is that Arnold has identified an experimental method in which the experiment is made upon the state of the individual subject.

In respect of the connection between righteousness and happiness or the sense of 'life', Arnold rather than Bradley is the one who makes the traditional claim:[24] whether it is true or false is something to be found out. But it is not thereby to be tested on the basis simply of what any particular person's *present experience* happens to be, as though one were to settle the matter just by seeing how it stood with oneself or others, independently of the implied notion of a *developed or achieved experience*. But Bradley is right to question what we 'ordinarily' mean by virtue or by happiness. Our traditions distinguish, on the one hand, the virtue that is achieved through

continence, against the grain of contrary impulses, to use Kant's phrase, and, on the other, the achieved effortless virtue that is associated with temperance, that arises out of a transformed inwardness and interior disposition, not over against an unregenerate one. The claim that virtue and happiness are connected is not tested by immediate inner experience (of what remains to be transformed) but by fulfilling the conditions upon which the truth is claimed to depend. That is the point of Jesus' *method* and his associated *secret*.

Perhaps the most striking thing that Arnold does is to highlight the biblical notion of 'life from righteousness.[25] It is not a vague or free-floating notion, [234] but is determined by the moral regeneration that is claimed to be its ground. (Perhaps one criticism of Arnold might be that although he is concerned to talk about 'life from righteousness' he does not always make it clear that this life is essentially *shared*, constituted by particular forms of relationship, which are themselves discovered and become the means of discovery). To know what the term 'life' refers to requires one to have undergone the transformation that brings it about. The promise of 'life' is the promise of a determinate outcome of a determinate process. To put it another way, this category of 'life', which is parallel in some ways to the Buddhist notion of *brahmacarya*, is also an *epistemological* category whose progress charts our understanding of the world. The enjoyment of this 'life' is claimed to give us an expanded and expanding sense of our own lives and of the world in which we live.

If we return to the Mackie question, whether there is a middle way between theological realism and naturalism, it should be clear that the answer depends crucially upon where such a life, such a faring, leads us. Arnold's unexpected disciple, Richard Braithwaite, is generally taken to represent the 'naturalistic' position, on the grounds that he reduces religion to the 'agapeistic way of life'. But we are left uninformed by Braithwaite about what that way of life amounts to. We just do not know whether this expression opens up a fissure into something religiously profound. (On the other hand, we do know that his critics make naturalistic assumptions about *agape*!). But we know more about Arnold's intentions; we know at least that he has a strong grasp of such practically determined concepts as *viriya*, *saddhā*, *sati* and *samādhi*. The issue is where these will take us. This kind of analysis already gives us a perspective on what it is to know another person at all. It shows us what can be known or disclosed through the ethical relation. I have in fact found indications in Arnold's writing of four of the traditional five 'spiritual faculties' (*pañca indriyāni*) of Buddhism, the fifth of which is *prañña* or knowledge. What becomes crucial is the experimental tracing out of the lineaments of these categories, of what the life Arnold seeks to describe itself discloses. This is the task of a future philosophy of religion.

Most crucially the claim is that *ethics* is the epistemological condition of discovery of how things are. In order to see what this 'life', this *brah*-[235]*macarya*, leads to, we shall have to live it out. And since to live it implies change, our sense of the plausibility of any claims about how far we can travel will depend upon our relation to that change. It would be an intellectual mistake to foreclose on what is to count as living such a life and what it might reveal to us, as though one knew in advance what realities were or were not disclosed when the grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies.

It is clear that the kind of discovery Arnold has in mind is not limited to that of the connection between virtue and happiness, even though that is of the first importance to him. But his imaginative sense of the modalities of energy or *viriya* takes him to unexpected places which are, at the least, on the edge of anything that could come within the scope of the experimental method. In *Immortality* Arnold had already talked of the energy of life:

> No, no, the energy of life may be

Kept on after the grave, but not begun;
– only he,
His soul well-knit, and all his battles won,
Mounts, and that hardly, to eternal life.

He draws on and develops such thoughts near the end of *Literature and Dogma*. He has just dismissed there what he considers the 'futilities' of metaphysical defences of the immortality of the soul, and its 'fairy tale' representations that cannot, he tells us, survive the turning of a steady regard upon them.

He suggests we begin instead with *certainties*, by which I take it he means 'facts' that can be established:

> And a certainty is the sense of *life*, of being truly *alive*, which accompanies righteousness. If this experimental sense does not rise to be stronger in us, does not rise to the sense of being inextinguishable, that is probably because our experience of righteousness is really so very small… At any rate, we have in our experience this strong sense of *life from righteousness* to start with; capable of being developed, apparently, by progress in righteousness into something immeasurably stronger. Here is the true basis for all religious aspiration after immortality. And it is an experimental basis. (p 377)

The fact or 'certainty' Arnold refers to is the 'strong sense of life from righteousness' and this is the form of what he says is hoped for in immortality rather than a ground for belief in its existence. If anything is to count as the life of immortality it is the life from righteousness that we can have the experimental sense of now. This 'sense of inextinguishable life' is not even something that Arnold is claiming for himself, as is evident from that 'apparently'.

Far from offering us a 'merely naturalistic' reduction of religion to ethics Arnold has allied himself, through his highlighting of the Biblical notion of 'life', with the great experiential spiritual traditions. What we have is a spiritual category that stands, epistemologically, quite independently of the particular theology that Arnold wished to reject. It then provides him with the terms in which to 'recast religion' and offer an alternative theology.

5 THE NOT OURSELVES

We have by now almost enough contextual background to understand the claim that 'God' is a deeply moved way of saying 'righteousness'. What we are going to see, I think, is that Arnold is offering a projectivist theory of theological language. It is not one I am going to attempt to defend. It may well fail as an account of the development of theological language, though it is an intriguing and neglected one among natural histories of religion. But that is not what is interesting about it. What is interesting is what he seeks to express, not the particular means of expression.

The idea of a progressive transformation of individuals through the ethical relation, by means of which reality is gradually revealed or disclosed is consciously identified by Arnold in *Literature and Dogma* through a notion of the 'given' and its quasi-personified form, 'the Eternal not ourselves that [237] makes for righteousness'. Bradley has some fun at the expense of this idiosyncratic expression, but the notion it expresses is important.

Arnold is invoking the idea of a gradually revealed *given* that cannot be traced back to our choice or construction, though we do indeed construct a great deal around it when we reflect upon it theoretically in the form of what he calls *Aberglaube*. He refers to this given as 'the not ourselves', in a way which shows his firm sense of the notion of a progressive revelation that depends upon his experimental method:

> In the first place, we did not make ourselves, or our nature, or *conduct* as the object of three-fourths of that nature; we did not provide that happiness should follow conduct, as it undeniably does.

Arnold goes on:

> The *not ourselves*, which is in us and in the world round us, has almost everywhere… struck the minds of men as they woke to consciousness, and has inspired them with awe… Our very word *God* is a reminiscence of these times, when men invoked 'The Brilliant on high'… as the power representing to them that which transcended the limits of their narrow selves, and that by which they lived and moved and had their being.

And he says of the Israelites:

> They had dwelt upon the thought of conduct and right and wrong, till the *not ourselves* which is in us, became to them adorable eminently and altogether as *a power which makes for righteousness*; which makes for it unchangeably and eternally, and is therefore called *The Eternal*.

Arnold cites a remark of Goethe, 'Man never knows how anthropomorphic he is' (p 33), and says later, as we have seen, that '*God* is here really, at bottom, a deeply moved way of saying *conduct* or *righteousness*' (p 46). This is a long way from the first recognition of this 'stream of tendency' in *Dover Beach*. Scruton perceived Arnold as foreseeing 'the loss of piety, the loss of respect for what is holy and untouchable; and in place of them a presumptuous ignorance, fortified by science'. It is true that Arnold complains about [238] the mockery of the 'sciolists': 'As if the world had ever had / A faith, or sciolists been sad'. But we need to tread cautiously around Scruton's use of language here, 'piety', 'what is holy and untouchable', and the form of his question, 'whether we really are constrained, by our scientific realism, to dismiss the sacred from our view of things'.[26] The point is not so much whether Arnold would himself have used this language, as the *application* he would give it. It is that which makes him important. Scruton (p.9) talks of the possibility of 'some intimation of transcendence that we can neither explain nor describe'. But Arnold talks about the 'not ourselves', as something gradually revealed. If Arnold were to refer to 'the sacred' mentioned by Scruton it would be in similar terms: a deeply moved way of saying 'conduct'.

If Arnold's position is now coming into focus it is likely to be read as a piece of reductionism which makes the truth of theological utterances a function of the truth of moral propositions. But Arnold is offering us a projectivist reduction of theological language, it seems to me, of a distinctive and impressive kind. He claims that human beings attempted to personify a progressively disclosed *given* or 'not ourselves' of human experience by which reality is made manifest through 'conduct'. It is not any product of our choice or of our construction that things are thus and so, that they follow these laws, it is a given, a 'not ourselves'. Human beings have used theological language to represent to themselves 'that which transcended the limits of their narrow selves'. The 'not ourselves which is in us', our very impulsion towards the expression of the laws of our being referred to in *The Buried Life*, the impulsion to 'find our true, original course', becomes 'a power which makes for righteousness'. Whatever one may want to say about the accuracy or adequacy of this as an historical account of the use of God-language, it at least shows how Arnold perceives the 'not ourselves' as a graduated opening to us of reality, in a way that depends upon our satisfying in our lives the conditions for the possibility of that opening. His alternative construction on the Bible substitutes a so-called experimental notion of God for that of the personal first cause:

> the word 'God' is used in most cases… as by no means a term of science or exact knowledge, but a term of poetry and eloquence, a term [239] *thrown out*, so to speak, at a not fully grasped object of the speaker's consciousness. (p.12)

The 'not fully grasped object of the speaker's consciousness' is just this obscurely present given that opens out progressively to conduct. The use of God-language is to be understood in terms of assertions that can be verified in experience:

> Let us announce, not: 'There rules a great Personal First Cause, who thinks and loves, the moral and intelligent Governor of the universe, and *therefore* study your Bible and learn to obey this!' No; but let us announce: 'There rules an enduring Power, not ourselves, which makes for righteousness, and *therefore* study your Bible and learn to obey this. (p.323)

If, Arnold says, we are asked to *verify* that there rules a great Personal First Cause, 'we *cannot* answer'. The answer, though, in the second case, is that it can be verified by *experience*. This is Arnold's position. What he puts in the place of 'belief' or faith is the notion of a revelatory *life*. It is not a position that will satisfy the theological realists, but was never intended to. On the contrary, it is the product of a painfully developed process of thinking that arose out of the dismay that followed his loss of Faith. Arnold has contributed to a piece of cartography, to the description of a path that has opened up before us. The verification of the description is not going to be easy, and we may, if we try it, be questioned by Arnold's gaunt and taciturn host, the wind 'shaking his thin white hairs', and have to give the same answer. Or maybe we shall arrive with friends. In any event, it seems to me time for a re-assessment of Arnold's religious thinking in our own multicultural context. His claims are about what can be tested in experience, though in a way that challenges our forms of experience themselves. He develops the Biblical notion of 'life' which becomes an epistemological category as the medium of disclosure. He rejects traditional metaphysics as the route to ultimate knowledge and replaces it with ethics as the route through which otherwise unknown realities of being make themselves manifest. [240]

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NOTES

[1] London, British Broadcasting Corporation, 1984, p.18.
[2] I have used the Allott edition of Arnold's poetry, London, Longman, 1979, and occasionally refer to their annotations.
[3] Cf. Richard Wollheim's classic essay on *Expression* in his *Art and the Mind*, London, Allen Lane, 1973.
[4] See Anthony Kenny, *God and Two Poets: Arthur Hugh Clough & Gerard Manley Hopkins*, London, Sidgwick and Jackson, 1988, p.160.

[5] Aelred Squire in his *Asking the Fathers* (London SPCK, 1973) makes the same mistake, commenting that many of us have gone 'far beyond Arnold's provisional answer to this terrible absence; human love often proves little more than a makeshift barrier against the blind forces of a world 'where ignorant armies clash by night' (p.3).
[6] 'Conduct', of course, becomes the lodestar of his thinking in *Literature and Dogma* (1873). In *East London* the poet encounters an 'ill and o'erworked' preacher, who is cheered by 'thoughts of Christ':

> O human soul! as long as thou canst so
> Set up a mark of everlasting light,
> Above the howling senses' ebb and flow,
> …
> Not with lost toil thou labourest through the night!

[7] Compare *Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse*:

> As if the world had ever had
> A faith, or sciolists been sad!

[8] Nor, *pace* Kenny, does Arnold say that the beauty of the world is a dream: the beauty of the world is the *image* of a dream: the dream of faith.
[9] *The Philosopher on Dover Beach*, Manchester, Carcanet Press, 1990, p.8.
[10] If we recall the later reflections of Heidegger upon Nietzsche's announcement of the Death of God, we might think of this Carthusian way of life as a paradigm of the *Bildung*, the form of self-development, that had become impossible for people in Arnold's intellectual position, since the world was dead to which it gave expression and upon which it depended. Heidegger's alternative emphasis on *Besinnung*, though, is solipsistic by contrast with Arnold's explicit attention to the ethical relation. See my 'The Turn Towards Buddhism' in *Religious Studies*, 1995.
[11] Kenneth Allott draws our attention to this 'more candid' version of 1855.
[12] See previous note.
[13] My italics.
[14] Eliot says of this moment, rather grandly, that it is a moment which has passed, 'which most of us have gone beyond in one direction or another' (quoted in Allott p.302).
[15] A fire which, in *Grande Chartreuse*, his rigorous teachers had 'trimm'd' if not 'quench'd'.
[16] This remark recalls Socrates' ironic opening words in the *Phaedrus*: 'where have you been and where are you going?' The ability to answer the question depends upon an interior change, of just the kind Arnold seeks to describe.
[17] 'spending our fire' has become something positive in *The Buried Life*, presumably because it is to the end of tracking out our true, original course.
[18] (London, 1873); Tolstoy admired *Literature and Dogma*, describing it as a 'favourite work', he read out passages to his friends, and remarked in a letter to Chertkov, that 'Half of M. Arnold's thoughts are my own. It is a joy to read him'. Tolstoy is reported to have been re-reading the book as he worked on *Resurrection* and his character Nekhlyudov's moral regeneration could be taken as an Arnoldian paradigm of moral transformation.

Wittgenstein was profoundly influenced by Tolstoy. During the Great War he was known by fellow soldiers as 'the man with the gospel'. He carried Tolstoy's *The Gospel in Brief* around with him at the Front and could reasonably be described later as a Tolstoyan renunciant. He attached great importance to Tolstoy's short stories. The strength of his admiration for Tolstoy's work has

itself had an effect upon philosophers influenced by Wittgenstein, who have in turn drawn illuminating attention to Tolstoy's writing in their moral philosophy and philosophy of religion: writing that included insights that Tolstoy at least would have thought that Arnold shared.

[19] See Mackie's *The Miracle of Theism*, chapter 11, (Oxford University Press, 1982).

[20] Arnold's response to the nihilistic atheist in *The Better Part* is:

> 'Was Christ a man like us? *Ah! let us try*
> *If we then, too, can be such men as he!'*

which is another way of talking of setting up 'a mark of everlasting light'. This becomes the more interesting if we take that mark to be one that constantly recedes before our developing understanding. This makes the difference to the way we read the lines from *The Divinity* cited with approval by Richard Braithwaite, '*Wisdom and goodness, they are God!*' – which is another way of saying that 'God' is a deeply moved etc.

[21] That of the First Cause of the philosophers and theologians.

[22] Arnold refers to Goethe's notion of *Entsagung* as an essential aspect of *Bildung*. He makes it clear that he is not advocating any extreme of asceticism for its own sake. He has in mind the moral enterprise of constraining sensual and egoistic impulses as they intrude on the well-being of others, advocating a means to an end, the removing energy from unregenerate impulses, to strengthen and secure the higher form of life he seeks to characterise.

[23] F.H. Bradley, *Ethical Studies*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1988.

[24] The beginning of the *Dhammapada*, for instance, tells us that 'if a man speaks or acts with a pure mind, joy follows him as his own shadow'.

[25] Arnold makes clear that he is not talking about the practice of virtue for the sake of its (future) rewards.

[26] Scruton, p.8.