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**STRIVING FOR KNOWLEDGE
OR
THE IRREPRESSIBLE JOY OF BEING**

Buddhist Guidelines



Chapter Overview

Introduction	7
Part A – Basics	
<i>I. In Search of Reality</i>	15
Locations and placings in Western search for knowledge	
What do we – in the West – understand by mind?	
Mind (and matter) in philosophical discourse	
Reality from a Western perspective	
<i>II. Striving for Knowledge</i>	33
A Buddhist teaching of wisdom	
A verifiable model	
The result of millennia of experience	
<i>III. Mind from a Buddhist Perspective</i>	41
Mind, consciousness and observation	
Self-observation and concrete exercise	
Mind and clarity – first steps and insights	
<i>IV. Phenomena – the World of Appearances</i>	51
What do we understand by phenomena?	
Basic nature of phenomena and complementary description	
The meaning of findings and summary	
<i>V. The Precious Jewel, the Mind of Enlightenment</i>	61
Basic nature or essence	
The Buddha and the mind of enlightenment	
Potential and the mind of enlightenment as a path	
Compassion and wisdom	
Emptiness and the wish-fulfilling jewel	
Prayer: The Four Immeasurables	
<i>VI. The Ego and Overcoming Dualistic Concepts</i>	78
Who or what is the “I”?	
The I and ordinary consciousness	
We and other sentient beings	
<i>VII. Causes from a Western Perspective</i>	92
Different questions and possible answers: Fate?	
Science and the study of causes	
Practice: Consensus without agreement	

VIII. <i>The All-encompassing Law of Cause and Effect</i>	102
The underlying principle	
Spheres of influence and mandalas – a comparison with western models	
Practical aspects and social impact	
IX. <i>Death and Rebirth</i>	116
Impermanence (and death) from a Buddhist point of view	
Bardos and intermediate states	
Rebirth and new beginning	
X. <i>Samsara and Nirwana</i>	129
Cycle of rebirths: the 6 realms of samsara	
Samsara and nirwana – consciousness as the determining element	
XI. <i>Dharma and Striving for the Precious Jewel</i>	137
Knowledge and enlightenment, faith and reality	
Many paths to enlightenment	
Tantric diamond path and highest goal	
Striving – to where?	
Text: Heart Sutra	

Part B – Deepening Insights: the Path of Seeing

I. <i>The Art of Making the Hidden Visible</i>	151
Symbols und metaphors	
Relative reality	
Making the invisible visible	
Art and magic	
II. <i>Ordinary Mind and Mind of Enlightenment</i>	157
Ordinary mind	
Mind of enlightenment	
III. <i>Mind of Enlightenment: the five Buddha-Wisdoms</i>	169
The wisdom of the Dhyani-Buddhas	
The mandala of the Dhyani-Buddhas	
IV. <i>The four Buddha-Bodies</i>	188
Enlightened mind and the ordinary body	
The three bodies of the Buddha	
The fourth Buddha-body	
Subtle energy body	

V. <i>Baśis</i>	200
The dharma: karma and impermanence	
Emptiness and wisdom of the enlightened mind	
The wisdom mandala and the subjective sphere of influence	
Basis and starting point of practice	
VI. <i>The Path of Knowledge</i>	212
Ignorance	
The path of seeing	
The gradual path and experiences in meditation practice	
The 4 stages of yoga	
VII. <i>The Magic of the Mirror</i>	226
The miraculous mirror	
The potential of the mirror	
Magic and emptiness	
VIII. <i>Mirror Clear Vision</i>	240
Mirror of knowledge	
The body as a mirror	
Mirror and reflection	
IX. <i>Wisdom and Happiness</i>	253
The precious Jewel and its realization	
Answers for the (Western) questioning of meaning	
Basic errors	
Precious striving and aspiration	
Prayer: Precious striving	
 Thanks and Dedication	 267
 Notes: general and endnotes	 269
Notes on pronunciation	278
Glossary: general and Buddhist terms	279
Sources: authors and literature	285
Illustrations – photo credits	287
Table	289
List: special texts	289

A Short Personal Introduction

This book is intended to offer readers from a Western cultural background a comparatively simple insight into Buddhist worldview and philosophy, without forgoing the profound insights resulting from it. I am a logical thinker, an intellectual, and I orientate myself on science and reasoning. At the same time I am a practicing Buddhist. Somebody, who has found answers to all the important questions.

Both self-descriptions and views are perceived by most people as opposites. The scientific model of reality is seen by them as proven reality, the Buddhist approach as pure faith, which is unprovable from the beginning. For me, on the other hand, there is no serious contradiction between my scientific approach to the world and the Buddhist view of reality. I do not have to choose between the two, since Buddhist teaching is also based on the same analytical approach as science, and the result of analysis always stands up to the scrutiny of reality.

I may have a more narrow view than most people. But to me, statements about reality are only meaningful if they are universal and always valid. This does not mean that everyone must perceive them in the same way. But the reality I mean, is something fixed in the sense that the underlying laws are not arbitrarily interchangeable. If scientists, philosophers, religious followers, etc. provide completely different views, on what should and can we orientate ourselves?

Every description of reality that we accept as correct for us and that we take seriously also has consequences for our own reality of life. Every model and every assumed reality has an impact on people's attitude to life and on their actions and thus also on everything else around – on people, animals, plants and, in the final analysis, on the entire planet earth. It is not completely irrelevant what one believes. We can see that in the many models that exist so far. People act according to their point of view. They argue and fight each other especially because of different ideas about how reality is or should be according to their opinion. About who gets to determine what and how reality “really” is.

But reality as an underlying law cannot be taken “possession of” by people. If something is the way it is and not different, then it is inevitably like that for everybody. We can, of course, pretend that this is not so. One can think reality to be different and try to persuade other people of this. But reality will always bring us back to itself, even though we may not like it. Just as gravity makes sure that we always stay on the ground or arrive back there again in the end. Everything we do and think moves within the same reality. We have no other option.

I have seen it this way from the beginning, even though not always so consciously. In my search for explanations of reality, I have dealt with different points of view. I grew up here in Austria in a society shaped by Christianity. The church and my catechist at school seemed less and less credible to me as I grew up. They seemed to preach one thing to us and do something else themselves. One philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche*, in his text “Thus Spoke Zarathustra” opened up the possibility for me to decide for myself what to believe. His proclamation “God is dead” put the statements of the church into perspective. To be allowed to say and think this fascinated me. So I let God die. For me he was “dead” from now on, he no longer existed for me. However, after a few weeks it turned out that a world without such a thing as God did not feel good, – empty and somehow meaningless.

I chose the pragmatic way in order to reconcile feeling and understanding. If I could let God die, I could just as easily bring him back into my life, especially if it felt better to me that way. However, my concept of God became less personal as a result, more a term for something fundamentally positive without a concrete form. In contrast to Nietzsche’s Zarathustra, other philosophical models did not help me to advance. They were complicated, contradicted each other, and always appeared to me to represent the point of view of the respective philosopher in an arbitrary way. They did not offer me a conclusive explanation for the whole of reality in the way I was actually looking for. I gave up the search for knowledge with the help of philosophical models a few years later.

Science gave me good answers to simple questions, especially physics offered interesting models in the material context. But many questions remained unanswered. The image of man in science moved

between the “naked ape” as a result of a random evolution and the western man and his culture as the highest level of development. The theory of evolution¹⁾ said, that all humans and organisms want to survive above all and are in competition with each other – but to what purpose? So my contradictory ideas remained side by side and I ignored them because I did not have a better explanation.

Only many years later I went again on the search for answers. At that time I actually had only one new idea where to look. I had been meditating on and off since my student days. A good female friend had embarked on the Buddhist path, and from the little I knew of Buddhism at the time, it seemed at least worth a try. I gathered information of different Buddhist groups and after about a year I knew which one of the paths of the many on offer could be the right one for me. I found in Buddhism a wonderful model in which I could unite everything under one common reality. There were no logical contradictions, intellect and feeling were not perceived as opposites. Tibetan Buddhism also offered me a fantastic view into a reality full of unimagined possibilities.

In the beginning, theory and practice still stood somewhat side by side. What effect Buddhist practice can have on the personal life, I at first began to guess gradually and soon also experienced in its first rudiments. It was a bit like being in psychotherapy. One trusts a certain therapist and enters into a dialogue with her. The effect only sets in over time, and being on the way, one never knows exactly how far one will get. The Buddhist path is also a healing path, one that can free us from various unnecessary suffering. It is not a “promise of salvation”, as it is often said of religions. It does, however, offer precise instructions and explanations on how one might achieve the goal oneself. The Buddhist path is a path of insight that can lead practitioners to the highest wisdom. And it is a compassionate and wholesome path that leads to liberation from suffering at the same time as seeking insight. The goal is not sought in the unknown “beyond”, but always in the here and now. And it is above all a path of practice. Buddhists never refer to themselves as “believers” but as practitioners.

I have decided to write this introductory book because until now, as far as I know, there has been no presentation of the Buddhist view that incorporates our Western background and acquired knowledge.

The description of reality in Tibetan Buddhism understandably follows the ancient Asian traditions and its argumentation mainly refers to them. In this context, the texts use an extensive long-tested vocabulary, which, however, makes it difficult for Western readers to understand correctly. The unintentional equation of individual terms with those of familiar models leads to blurring and misunderstanding. Also my book is not entirely without “new” terms. We do not have appropriate words for certain contents. Therefore, it makes sense to adopt the traditional terms. They have not yet arrived in our cultural circle, and because they are relatively new, there is less likelihood of inadequate additional assumptions that falsify the original statement.

In this book you actually can expect an introduction to the view of reality from a Buddhist point of view based on philosophical analysis and symbolic representation and using concrete practical examples. It guides the reader on the search for the underlying reality of everything – from the foundations of understanding reality to the secrets of highest realizations. What is special about the approach I have chosen is, on the one hand, the starting point. The readers are met where they actually are in their concepts and ideas: under the cultural influence of a western view, which is shaped by Christian tradition, philosophical-humanistic ideas of the ancient Greeks and a modern scientific materialistic world view. Unusual is also the combination of exact analysis with symbolic representations. I use both traditional European as well as Buddhist symbols. Both parts – analysis and creative approach – complement each other and facilitate the understanding of contexts.

The book is, in my opinion, a novel and long overdue work. It offers insight into the Buddhist search for knowledge in an understandable language and conveys, I hope, how exciting this search can be. Let the ancient tradition of Buddhist wisdom teaching and my way of presenting it seduce you a bit. It shows us how closely wisdom, compassion and supreme joy are connected.

Hannelore Röggl

Preface of the English translator

I have agreed to translate this book because I believe in its importance and benefit for the western reader – building bridges between Buddhist philosophical principles and Western philosophy.

There are passages in the text, I don't fully agree with (or would have chosen to express differently).

Many fruitful discussions ensued from it, but in the end I went along with the preferred version of the authoress. However, all mistakes in the English translation are mine.

There are many ways to express the dharma and I sincerely wish, that this book will provide a useful contribution to understand Buddhist thought and wisdom – and to learn from it.

I dedicate this to my root guru H.H. Drikung Kyabgon Thinley Lhundrup, who ceaselessly strives for the benefit of beings. I can never repay his kindness.

Tsunma Konchok Jinpa Chodron

– a Western nun in the Drikung Kagyu Tradition of Tibetan Buddhism

Part A

Basics

I. In Search of Reality

Locations and placings in Western search for knowledge

In all times and all cultures, people tried to improve their understanding of the world and what happens in it. Their immediate goal was to ensure survival and to have a more pleasant life. But they were also motivated by curiosity about the mysteries of the world around them. We all have a thirst for knowledge. It is already present in small children and this makes it easier for us to orientate ourselves in the world. The European tradition of thinkers can be traced back to the Greek philosophers in ancient times. Even Aristotle and Plato asked the question of what reality is and whether people are capable of understanding reality as a whole. They asked themselves whether we can perceive the real world directly at all, or only a “semblance” of it, a shadow. As we know their answers were contradictory.

Characteristic of Western traditions¹⁾ is the attempt to approach fundamental questions through classification, definition and differentiation. This approach is not only “typical” but also the pride of many Western philosophers and scholars. In many texts there is a special reference to it. The “transition from myth to philosophy” is praised as a “step from pictorial-imaginative to conceptual abstract thinking” and the “endeavour to derive everything that is real from principles” is celebrated as the liberation of thinking²⁾. One’s ego becomes the “human principle” and the thinking person of the respective thinker is equated with the “human being as such”. The thinking me does not meet an equal other, a “you”, but elevates itself in its own imagination to something higher. The category “human” and “I”, are in opposition to all others – the “not-I”, the “not-human”, nature – and considers itself as having more value. From the principle of categories, a hierarchic relationship is constructed. The demarcation serves to confirm one’s own superiority.

Strictly speaking, this “trick” is nothing more than proof of how powerful one’s own (and other’s) mental constructs can be³⁾ and how easy it is to convince oneself of ostensible truths. The perceived superiority of the thinker (and the thinking) is presented as a seemingly objective fact of “nature itself” (which is defined in parallel). The categories used, mutually justify each other. What can be clearly seen from

today's (feminist) perspective is that this type of search for knowledge is about power, and that boundaries can also have the purpose of evaluating. The moment there are categories, there are also assignments of properties and value judgments of all kinds. And a decision always has to be made – and is made – whether good or bad, better or worse, right or wrong – there is always an “either one way or the other.”

The question of Greek philosophers whether mind or matter determines reality, is still open in western cultures⁴. The contrast between the two approaches seems to be unbridgeable. Each party is sure, that (only) they are in the right. Between both sides are many who are undecided, who assume sometimes this, or that or both at the same time, even when the respective explanations seem to contradict each other. The question of who is “right”, is always reflected in the mind and decided within a mental process – in arguments, in ideological debates, in moral disputes in human societies. Matter doesn't think only “minds” – smart or not so smart – ask such questions. As one can also see from the historical answers to the questions asked is, that “mind” can be very clever. Thinkers can design such convincing models, that many other people are impressed by them and follow in their opinions. And the models can seem to be conclusive, yet not always describe outer reality in a reliable way. Sometimes it is difficult to recognize what is fallacy and fake-news as such.

Since we've freed ourselves from the absolute supremacy of church traditions, everybody has the freedom to form their own picture of something and to decide, what he or she considers more convincing. However, if one goes on a serious search for answers, it is good to be aware, what one considers probable and about what one seems to be sure of and why. An important part of the path to knowledge in the West is the question of the “position” of the search – symbolic and practical. Where and how does insight arise and what makes me sure, that it corresponds with reality? Since all our thoughts and models are developed on a mental level, we must definitely also start on our search for knowledge with our concept of the mind. The mind is the means, with which we strive for wisdom. It therefore is the first object of our joint analysis.

What do we – in the West – understand by the mind?

The German term “Geist” or “geistig” covers a variety of faculties. They “happen” in the mind, relatively independently of what our body is doing at the moment. Whether the body is lying, sitting, standing or walking, we are almost always thinking something. So we call the mind first of all the place where certain processes take place. It is a “place” in the sense that we “locate” certain activities there. For the time being, let us not get into any assumptions and speculations about where these processes might really take place (in this or that region of the brain), but first look only at the phenomena of the mind.

The mind is first of all equated with one’s own mind. Here we can identify different areas in which it is active.

Perception and consciousness

Perception and consciousness are the basis for all other functions. We perceive things and people through our sense organs. They are the direct line to the outside. Becoming aware, however, is beyond that and is still a process of its own. Whether our eyes only see something or we actually “perceive” it is not the same. How often do we walk down the same street and suddenly we discover something “new”. Not because it was not there before, but because we have just noticed it for the first time. Our actual perception depends on the degree of our attention. But also on the condition of our sensory organs – how well we see or hear. What we cannot see or hear, we do not (logically) take note of.

We perceive something and “recognize” it. As a sign, for example, on which something is written. Or as a person who is walking towards us. We store it in our memory and remember it later. We also recognize the person based on previous experience and memories. Every single perception is a complicated mental process, which usually happens in next to no time.

Consciousness is the second fundamental quality of our mind. Apart from the simple fact that we are “conscious”, that is not “unconscious”, we are more or less “conscious” of many things. We are aware of where we are – in a room, outdoors, – with other people or alone. We are aware that it is hot or cold, that we still have to do this or that. A tremendous amount of facts are present in our consciousness at

the same time. Just to count all the facts I am aware of would occupy each of us for a long time.

We are also aware of “ourselves”. We perceive ourselves in a certain form, not only the body, but also our being, our “being here” with all the qualities that we attribute to ourselves.

How precisely we are aware of ourselves and our surroundings is related to our mindfulness, our attention. Concentration plays an important role here. Even if we are not really aware of some things at this moment, they still belong to the area of consciousness in so far, as we can make ourselves “aware” of them at any time. Even if our attention is not directed at the surrounding temperature, we can easily bring this fact to the surface of our consciousness and consciously recognize it.

Thinking and cognitive abilities

Actual thinking also takes place in the mind. Cognitive⁵⁾ processes – our thoughts and ideas – we usually imagine in the West “to happen in our head”. If we “brood” a lot or make a lot of mental effort, our head “smokes” or we get a headache. Strictly speaking it is because we tense our neck muscles, which gives us headaches.

We usually assign ideas and conceptions that are generally accessible and commonly held, to the field of the mind – the humanities, for example. In this context we use the term “in the spirit” of someone or something – in the “spirit of Enlightenment”, for example – to describe a phenomenon of agreement.

Thinking includes, among other things:

- Categorization and value judgements: We judge and evaluate what is perceived. Persons appear friendly or unfriendly to us, we like them or not. We categorise in countless ways, sometimes consciously, sometimes unconsciously. What we perceive is classified into these internal categories and value judgements and stored in our memory.
- Memory – retrospect: We remember yesterday and ask ourselves if we did everything right. But we also remember times long past – our childhood, youth, this or that journey, friends from the past,

etc. There is an infinite amount stored in our memory, so it seems, even if we can't remember them all.

- Planning and looking ahead: The future also occupies our mind. How will it be? What if this or that happens, or if it won't happen? We plan, make provisions, worry about the near and distant future.
- Ideas and concepts: We think and reflect. We have certain ideas from which we build theories about how something is made up or how something works. From these concepts, structured conceptions of certain facts are developed. All our science is based on such models. Mathematics, or physics, all humanities and the models of the psyche mentioned below, all ideologies and "isms" (such as capitalism, socialism, etc.) are based on models and concepts that people have developed to describe reality and which they implement or have the wish to do so.

Psyche and psychic system

Psyche is a Greek word for the mind and all functions of the psyche are descriptions of processes that take place in the mind, just like with thinking. The "I" as a psychic entity corresponds to the conscious perception of oneself, the feeling of individual identity, with which we describe ourselves as acting or suffering etc. and to separate ourselves from the outside world. Since Sigmund Freud* we know that there are also other areas within us such as the unconscious or the superego and various psychological functions such as repression, displacement and projection, etc.

Acting and creating

Our actions proceed along mental guidelines. We control our movements. We send the command and already the foot moves without having to "think" in a complicated way. We plan ahead, design a strategy or at least think about how we want to act in certain situations. The mind is also the place where all creative processes originate. In the personal area it is the arrangement of our personal environment. In the public sphere all kinds of artists, architects and planners shape the populated outside world according to their ideas.

Feelings and sensations

We are used to assign our feelings to the body, especially when their unpredictability is in conflict with our concept of the rational self. But

even “purely” physical sensations such as pain are strongly influenced by personal factors. Not everyone feels the same way, even with the same kind of injury. Strong feelings like love or hate are quite clearly not only anchored in the physical. Sympathy, compassion, aversion... many of these different feelings cannot so easily be assigned directly to our own body. Sometimes we feel them physically – in the heart, in the belly, in the throat – but we know that neither the belly nor the heart is the cause of these feelings or the place where they occur.

The list of functions that can be assigned to the mind could be continued for a long time. Even in a dream without conscious awareness, the mind remains active and produces the dream as a reproduction of external reality according to internal instructions. All functions of the mind listed here are active possibilities, potentials, which we use and which partly run “automatically”. By this I mean, for example, that the fact of “I think” takes place even without a special decision to think. The “I” which is so important to us, sometimes feels downright overwhelmed in view of all the many thoughts that arise. So some of these mental activities are simply there, others we use more purposefully. Feelings also appear without being asked and can be just as annoying as idiosyncratic thoughts.

Many of these terms are difficult to define, consciousness and perception for example, or imagination, idea. These are possibilities that cannot be put into a nutshell. They can be described or paraphrased very well. But if one doesn’t experience them personally, they remain unclear. If we try to imagine a place where all these processes happen, it would probably make sense not to limit this mental space to the only “obvious” one. To squeeze this openness of the mind and all spirituality into a small space, into individual cells or groups of cells, does not necessarily seem so “obvious”. In view of the abundance of functions, this “place” of the mind, that is, where we could “locate” it, should fittingly be assumed to be rather larger and more expansive. A large space? How big?

If we look at our feelings, they might easily be located somewhere in the body. On the other hand, the person vis-à-vis can perceive them as well, our joy, for example, or displeasure. Laughter can be contagious. Unfortunately, hatred and agitation can be contagious too, as well as mass hysteria and panic. There are feelings that in

certain situations can affect many people at the same time. How is that possible?

Also thoughts and ideas are clearly not only within us, in an inner space for example, which could be clearly assigned to our own “I”. I am thinking of something and it turns out that others have also thought of it already. Or several people have the same new ideas simultaneously. We call this “Zeitgeist”. At certain times certain ways of looking at the world prevail. Similar ideas arise in several people seemingly independently of each other. How can that be since they live apart? For this, we use the strange expression: the time is ripe. We mean something like: general mind, that is, the collective mind, is so far developed that this new idea is commonly accepted. What is that supposed to be, the “general” mind?

Who first thought of something specific? Who could claim the right of authorship? This is a very difficult thing to determine and “prove”. Activities that have been recorded somewhere, are best to verify. But not even that guarantees authorship. The person who writes it does not necessarily have to be the first one who thought about it or really acted on it. News, ideas, spread both orally and in writing in a way that is difficult to control, and this dissemination follows its own laws. It follows personal interests and value judgements of people. Social power structures also determine whether ideas are carried through. If they are lost, the origin of the idea is also lost.

Anyway, every idea or concept is not something clearly defined. It can be presented in a shorter and more concise way or in a broader and more detailed way. The space in which we could experientially “locate” our mind has no clear boundary to the outer world. No demarcation line that would easily match our physical appearance. We can neither “hold on” to “our” own ideas by not giving them away, nor can we prevent ideas from outside “penetrating” our inner world of thought. That “the mind” and all spiritual things are exactly at this or that place cannot be proven. Although we can indeed observe how the destruction of matter, of individual cells of the brain for example, confuses or blocks thoughts and other functions. But where the “Zeitgeist”, which is so often spoken of, is located and how tiny cells should plan our future, remains probably unexplained. All ideas

of “that” or “another” place of the mind are assumptions and theories, – also “spiritual” and “fleeting”.

A summary of our previous observations of the mind from a Western point of view is not very easy to make. There is a wealth of abilities and functions – memory, thinking, feelings, etc. – that are traditionally attributed to the brain and other organs. On closer examination however, we get an impression of something indeterminable and traversing boundaries. Just as we imagine mind anyway – airy, intangible and not fixed in place.

Mind (and matter) in philosophical discourse

The striving for knowledge in Europe is based largely on the tradition of philosophy. The history of philosophy is closely linked with the history of the Christian church. The exchange between them was partly harmonious, but often also in mutual contradiction. Philosophy – literally: the love of wisdom – sees itself as an open exchange of ideas, in which different approaches to imagination also have their place. The Christian church on the other hand, starts out from a fixed and only one correct set of ideas. Contradictions in content are hardly accepted even today.



Platons parable of the cave

At the beginning of the philosophical discourse we find a number of Greek philosophers. One of the most important was Plato. At the centre of his reflections was the “theory of ideas”, which describes the essence of perceived reality as an idea⁶. Plato backed up his theses with the famous parable of the cave. People are tied up in a cave without a direct view of the outer world. They see the events (which happen in front of the cave) only as shadows cast by a strong

light (from outside) on the cave wall⁷⁾. This is how Plato imagined that humans have access to true reality. It is beyond the visible things and humans can only perceive a part, a shadow of reality.

In opposition to these representatives of a higher principle and a reality beyond visible things, Platonism, stood Aristotle* and his followers in ancient Greece. Aristotle did not see actual existence lying beyond in a world of ideas like Plato, but in the concrete objects of this world. He saw general matter only as the common ground of things and not as something substantial. Aristotle also used the term substance or matter. Idea is the unborn, the unchangeable. It forms substance or matter. According to Aristotle, substance without form is the first matter, but without real existence. This is also how he explains human beings. The soul, which is immortal, is the moving, shaping element, the body is that which is moved. The body is not, as with Plato, the prison of the soul, but is there for the sake of the soul, it is its goal. These two views of Plato and Aristotle on the world marked the beginning of an unsolvable dispute between the positions of idealism and realism (see⁴⁾).

The representatives of the “mental principle” (idealists) further developed Plato’s ideas. From this separation of the people in the cave from the events outside, the idea of a hierarchy between those different areas arose. A higher mental principle was postulated, the divine, which stands above everything and beyond all visible phenomena⁸⁾. In contrast to it stands man, who in the form of the soul has a share in the mental principle and represents a kind of intermediate link. Among them is the animate nature, which has neither mind nor soul and is therefore considered to be lower. The idea (the mental) was assigned to clearly defined places which were assumed to be clearly distinguishable. Fluid perceptions – ideas – became definable units, individual principles, the principle man, the principle God, etc.

Christianity adopted this division and strengthened the hierarchical structure. The higher mental principle was imagined as a kind of friendly but relentless ruler. God is male. He gives and takes life and rules over man and nature. Man like a subservient, is subjected to God’s law. Life on earth is temporary and full of suffering, a kind of test of his moral competence. God appears as judge in the Last Judgment and rewards the “upright”, obedient man in the hereafter with a

happy and eternal life in heaven. Man considers himself superior as a representative of God – above the material world and nature. The church as an institution appointed itself as the only representation of the one God on earth. People who wanted to reflect and philosophize about existence themselves were increasingly unwelcome.

In the 17th and 18th century a counter-movement began to form, the Age of Enlightenment. The absolute dominance of the church was slowly pushed back. Instead of relying only on truths, so-called dogmas, established by the church, people now wanted to explore and explain the world themselves. But God remained in the role of the Creator for a long time. Man acted, so to speak, on his behalf by means of his God-given reason. The human mind of research got into a superior position. One no longer argued exclusively with the divine will, but with human reason.

The first philosophical approaches of rationalism⁹⁾ and later a mechanistic picture of reality developed. Substance was now accepted as the primordial basis of all existence and the omnipotence of natural law slowly began to displace the idea of the divine. Nevertheless, many philosophical directions proceeded unchanged from a Creator God and a soul, which was now seen as substance in keeping with the spirit of the times.

In the philosophical treatises of Immanuel Kant* and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel*, both sides seemed to meet in their reference to reason. The successful consciousness recognizes reason as the basis of all reality, writes Kant, for example. With reasoning, “God”, as a higher mental principle, can be found, but apparently also refuted. So-called right and left Hegelians, who both referred to the philosophical premises of Hegel, surprisingly came to completely opposite results in this regard¹⁰⁾. In materialism, whose main representatives are considered to be Karl Marx* and Friedrich Engels*, it is no longer about a theoretical otherworldly higher mind, but about reality as it is lived. Philosophy, so the credo, should be realized. Religion is regarded as the keeper of prevailing conditions. One of Marx’s most famous statements describes religion as opium for the people. His aim was to strive for another utopia, a society of equality.

So, two opposite main directions can be found in the older European history of philosophy: one, in which mind is seen as the determining force of reality and as the origin of all existence and one, in which everything mental is considered to be only a by-product of matter. Apart from philosophers who thought about the world and argued about it with each other and the representatives of religions who underpinned their beliefs with extensive mental constructions, there have also been numerous forerunners of modern natural science, since antiquity. One can assume that experiments have always been part of human life. A combination of preliminary thought processes – theory – and verification – of theory – is the basis of all further development. The forerunners of research of natural sciences were above all physicists – from the calculation of the speed of free fall to models about the earth, sun and planets¹¹). It is through their theses that many dogmas of the Church were put to the test. The increasing importance of natural sciences in recent centuries shifted the focus away from philosophically and religiously motivated debates towards empirical research¹²).

Natural science assumes that there are “true” statements about things and facts (or false ones) that can be investigated experimentally. The assumed “true reality” is the criterion for statements being true or false. “Scientific realism” assumes that the applied theories create a world view that corresponds to the “real structures” of the world. In practice, this means that science generally aims to represent reality correctly (truthfully) in its theories. One could say, it follows on from traditional “realism” and accordingly takes a counter-position to traditional “idealism”. The level of debate has shifted, yet the dialogue between the various representatives has presently come to a standstill. One side (realists and science) only accepts “solid” – data-based – arguments. Since mind cannot be “measured”, it does not exist for them. The other side (idealists) although not deterred by this, is nevertheless not taken seriously anymore. And although all the activities mentioned – both of philosophy and science – are predominantly mental, the existence of mind can obviously not be “proved” scientifically.

On a philosophical level, however, there is still contradiction and criticism. The critics of “scientific realism” point out, for example,

that many historical scientific theories prove to be time-related. Theories that were considered proven at the time of their occurrence, later turned out to be erroneous. The group of “anti-realists” also represent a counter-direction. They criticize scientific knowledge as too “theory-filled” and take the position that it is not possible to separate pure observation data from their theoretical interpretation. An “objective given nature”, as it is an assumed prerequisite for scientific research, does not exist in their view.

Reality from a Western perspective

After this brief overview of Western perspectives, it quickly becomes clear that it is difficult to conceive of a uniform idea of this large group who consider themselves part of European Western culture. On the one hand, there is a common “tradition of thinkers” in philosophy, which in itself is already very inconsistent. On the other hand, there is Christianity, whose positions have been the sole determining factor for centuries. And on an opposite pole we find the “sciences”, whose representatives today, although not generally, but nevertheless in wide circles reject the existence of mind and the spiritual as an independent active entity¹³). This “common tradition” of the “West” somehow exists and at the same time it loses itself in contradictions. It is lifted up as something special and superior to everything else and at the same time there is a complaint that “it”, the Occident, is threatened.

So how do we perceive reality “here in the West”? How do you, dear readers, see it? Do you believe that there is such a thing as “the mind” at all? And what does this belief in mind or matter as a cause of reality mean?

A viewpoint that is becoming more and more common in the West today assumes that everything that could be described as mind has its cause exclusively in pure matter. This would mean that mind as an independent phenomenon does not exist and that all causes of perceived reality would have to be sought in matter. This is quite in line with the approach of how research is undertaken in many areas. Mental activities are assigned to the brain and accordingly investigated in the interaction of brain cells. On cell level one hopes to be

[illegible]

To approach the question from a Western point of view, one must first clarify what one could understand by “mind” at all, whether one means by mind the phenomena of the mind in general. Or whether one imagines “mind” as a delimited entity, not necessarily as a “castle ghost” or a spook, but an individual identity like the “one God” with a male body or the “individual soul” which can be assigned to a concrete, living (or dead) human being. As a mind which one could consider as “my mind” or “your mind” or the “divine spirit”.

23

The ability to develop concepts and implement plans was and is the basis for all progress in human history. Physical activities have a much smaller range of influence compared to mental ones. Without a plan or concept, human power is not very effective. Only the use of tools and the construction of machines have advanced the conquest of the world by humans. To this must be added all the other mental achievements. One could enumerate an infinite number of them – language, writing, books, measuring instruments, clocks, architecture, means of communication... Our entire civilization is based on mental planning, – our laws, social order and security, old age and health care.

Intention and structure are also found in our bodies. On all levels, from animate to inanimate matter, structures are recognizable as the basis of their suchness. We have finally discovered them with our mental abilities and are still busy searching for new principals. They increase every day. So are intention, structure and information in itself sufficient to turn inanimate matter into living matter? Does matter strive to reproduce itself? I do not know of any specific substance that carries this tendency in itself from the outset, neither water nor stone nor the oxygen in the air. They are present as matter and change their form under outer influences like the weather and other climatic conditions. But do they reproduce, reflect about themselves, develop further? That they would want to do this of their own accord seems to me to be very speculative.

Does it make sense to look at living things as if they were machines, as if they were things with a simple, installed program to reproduce themselves? If we would take the time we spend in our life with reproduction as a yardstick and compare how much time we spend thinking, feeling, wanting and planning, the scales would probably quite clearly come down on the side of mental and not reproductive activity. Which purpose would it serve, to think of a living being as a programmed machine? On closer inspection, the idea of living beings as self-controlling machines seems rather far-fetched. Every machine, every computer and every robot functions and works only because some human being has controlled and programmed it. If a super-robot is put on another planet, its activity there is limited by the forethought of its creators on earth and by their ability to give further instructions.

The idea that our machines would one day become independent and continue to operate on their own and without us is only a human fantasy. Everything mechanical remains “simple” in comparison to what we can see in the animate world. Every simple insect is more capable of action and more “imaginative” than the best programmed machine. Neither is it practice-related if we look at the body as if it were just a super-programmed thing in which individual cells control movement and hormones control feeling. Without a unifying “plan”, the result would probably be mainly chaos. What constitutes “life” is certainly more than a comparatively simple, set computer program.

On the other hand, it’s probably obvious that without this body, which supports and “carries” us so well, we would not be here. It is a perfect “vehicle” or container for our mental activities, for our life. The “two” make a good team and both aspects are crucial for our life. Why do we actually have to “separate” them, deliberating which one is in charge? Wouldn’t the “leading principle”, if at all, not be a mental activity anyway? We ourselves, whoever exactly that is, are surely responsible for how we treat our bodies. Whether we give it the right food, provide it with enough sleep, get enough exercise, etc., etc. The body itself, if it could be in charge, would surely do it right by itself, wouldn’t it? Which animal, – except for e.g. a pet that is fattened by its owner – would probably eat more than it needs? We, with our supposedly great intellect, seem to have other things “on our mind”. Our main interest is not necessarily the well-being of the body. The guiding and caring quality of our mind leaves much to be desired for as far as the body is concerned. How can it do what we expect it to do if we do not care for it well?

Mind and matter work together. We use our body in such a way that we take its abilities and limitations into account. Through the senses, the body connects us with the outside world, supplies us with energy, takes us where we want to go and gives us feedback how it feels. Ideally, body and mind work together and not against each other. The mere fact that they can also work “against each other” speaks for the existence of an “idiosyncratic” mental force within us. We try to impose our will on the body and often do not even bother to consider its needs. The body signals its unwillingness back to us by refusing to carry out our commands and becoming ill. It hurts, individual parts no

longer function properly and at some point it abandons us completely. Obviously our body and mind can be at odds and have opposite wishes and needs.

We also know and use the fact that the body can be influenced by the mind. We can relax the body, or even tense it up through our concepts and ideas. We can consciously influence our mood by holding certain concepts and sometimes we do this without being aware of it. Our mood in turn influences the body. A good mood relaxes the body, negative moods tense it up. In autogenic training¹⁴ you can learn to relax the body with certain sentences, in order to calm down. In the same way, as you would influence a child positively, with friendly calming words. In autogenic training there is an appendix after the main sentences, something called an intent-building sentence. We decide to do or achieve something that is good for us. This ability is called autosuggestion. We tell ourselves something and it becomes reality. The body relaxes, we become mentally calmer and we feel much better.

The same system also works across people. One can influence each other in a calming or disturbing way, by spreading fear and prejudices, or by “talking the other person out of it”. A well-known form of external influence is hypnosis. Another frequent form of external and self-influencing is the so-called placebo effect. Although the drug has no specific medical ingredients, it works and causes the symptoms to disappear. We call this imagination and pretend that it is a “false” effect. But it actually only shows, that we have great self-healing powers which can already be activated by believing in external help. It is in itself marvellous that faith and the will to heal, that is purely mental powers, can have such a strong effect. It is not easy to understand why we do not use these powers more often and better.

The capacity of people to be influenced can be very different. Some people are rigid and stubborn. It is difficult to dissuade them from their opinions and attitudes. Others are easily influenced and have hardly any opinion of their own and no fixed point of view. The same applies to the body, showing a wide range of possible reactions. Chronic symptoms are more difficult to shift than acute ones. The body can “over react” or hardly at all. Different side effects of me-

dication are just one example of how differently body and mind can react to the same stimuli.

We also assume the effectiveness of mental powers in daily life. Each individual is required to adhere to the laws and guidelines set by society. In education we expect children to follow our guidelines, our “orders” and to adopt our moral standards. Every idea of morality is linked to the fact that there are decisions and that one can and should consciously choose the right one. The enforceability of laws and moral concepts is based on the assumption that people are free to decide for or against them and that, if necessary, pressure can be used to get them to do what is expected in each case. Apart from morals and ethics, we also assume that our life can be influenced through our behaviour. We make plans for the future and consider the possible right- or wrongness of something we do. We are aware of the fact that we can take fate into our own hands. We do not always know with certainty what is “right” and whether we will like the result. But we are convinced of the fundamental effect that our mental attitudes and deeds have. Nobody lives in the belief that everything is just “coincidence” anyway. We also talk about someone “deserving” something or not. We think he or she would be entitled to this or that, or also not, by the way he or she is.

There is also the prevailing opinion that knowledge is very important for our life. That learning and education create more favourable conditions in any case, no matter what the material basis might look like. Knowledge and skill help to create better living conditions. Even if someone is physically strong, in most cases he is still inferior to the more clever one. Mind counts more than physical strength. Intelligence brings more advantages than purely physical strength.

So from a Western point of view there are numerous indications of the existence of the mind and its effectiveness. Less convincing for people who do not believe in God, is the assumption of a mental power as a separate entity. Since mind per se^G) is currently not “measurable” or representable, it would also be impossible to distinguish differences, if they existed, between a lower and a higher mental power. The idea of a God remains a question of faith.

In summary, there are indeed numerous common conceptions of mind and matter and their influence on perceived reality. But the models are quite contradictory. In the Western tradition mind is always thought of as something human. Also the idea of a God draws its meaning from being in relation to people. The human mind presents itself as the sum of individual functions, the effects of which seem to be evident but not calculable. Perhaps it could also be described as an abundance of dynamic potential in an unbounded space. Dynamic because it seemingly has unlimited possibilities for change, because it is flexible, intangible and difficult to define. As a potential because it possesses power and energy, allows things to come into being and always provides new energies. Not to be limited because its activity can and wants to exceed every limit again and again.