



THE  
RECOVERY  
OF *love*

PART ONE: TO BEGIN

PAPER ONE

*Language*

A Series of Discussion Papers by

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We start with the matter of Language.

When I first wrote about this, some twenty-five years ago, it was in a Temenos Academy paper titled *Lost for Words*,<sup>1</sup> and its premise was that although we are blessed with language, we are also constrained by it. As I said then, whilst the blessings of language are self evident – it is useful, it gives access to the mundane and the practical, it reveals the marvellous and the poetic – the constraints are less obvious, but every bit as real... and much more dangerous.

From our earliest childhood, we are encouraged to put a name to all that we see. As we grow, more names follow, and names not just for those things that we see or touch but, in time, for all that we feel, until, at last, at our peak, if we try, we can even give a name to abstract ideas. Hurrah! Thus, our minds are taught to grasp at our experience and clothe it in words... in language.

However, our language is never entirely our own. It is given to us. It is, and always has been, governed by the base assumptions of those in power, of what they take to be real. In the Middle Ages it would have been popes, bishops and archbishops, perhaps emperors and kings; at the end of the nineteenth century it was industrialists and millowners; and now, of course, it is global corporations, bankers and investment brokers who tell us how we should speak, what we should say. 'Get real', they say. And so our present language, our reality, is set in the framework of competition, markets and prices.

But there is the dilemma. At times, we need to speak of these things, clearly we do, but this 'language of accounting' has outgrown itself and now extends beyond the market place, to define and limit all of our experience. The language of accounting now rules in the hospital ward, the schoolroom and the farm; it rules in local and national government; it governs sports, the theatre and the arts. It is everywhere and governs all.

If you recall the story of The Emperor's New Clothes, you will remember that despite parading himself in what he said were his 'splendid and beautiful new clothes', the emperor was actually naked. But no-one liked to mention it, since they had been told that to do so would make them seem foolish. Just so, there are now things we are not meant to speak of or challenge, and so we

don't because to do so would make us seem foolish. But just as what the the emperor claimed to be true was false, so our present language may be less than it appears. For even its masters, those thought to have things firmly in their grasp – bankers and finance directors, treasury officials and, dare it be said, accountants – in truth, oftentimes get it wrong. Anyone who can remember the tales of 'soft landings' and 'the green shoots of recovery', let alone the financial collapse of 2008/9, will know that economies and markets do not always behave as we are told they will; and failures, when they occur, can be spectacular. Despite their image as bastions of financial probity, banks speculate or lend with astonishing imprudence, some even collapse; and more money than most of us can imagine is lost in stock markets that 'unexpectedly' nose-dive; newly-built office buildings, carefully appraised with financial rigour and expertise, remain empty long after they should; and even the priests of this new religion, those most fêted by their peers, are sometimes found to have feet of clay, their proclaimed capacity to turn all to gold proving to be illusory – although you are not supposed to mention it lest you seem foolish.

As a result, we are left with an economy that is so weak that it has to be rescued by subsidy, and an economy requiring that savers earn all but nothing on their savings. I gasp when I recall that in 1996, when I gave that Temenos paper, interest rates on savings accounts were something like 7.5%, and now they are little more than zero; and since 2009, markets have had to be sustained by 'quantitative easing', which is in effect, massive injections of money from the Bank of England (so far something like a trillion pounds). So much for the 'invisible hand' of free markets; so much for the reality that the bankers and accountants speak of.

And yet, of course, we cannot ignore their language, because language has consequences, and whether or not we are aware of it, the domination of their language has come to determine our actions and shape our lives.

This is not news. This is not some radical departure: we have known that this has been so for more than two millennia, for the Buddhist *Dhammapada* opens with this verse:

We are what we think.  
All that we are arises with our thoughts.  
With our thoughts we make the world.<sup>2</sup>

And again, in another translation:

What we are today comes from our thoughts of yesterday, and our present thoughts build a life of tomorrow: our life is the creation of our mind.<sup>3</sup>

There it is. We have known it all along. But we haven't paid attention. We haven't insisted it was so. Carelessly perhaps, we have allowed an evidently damaging language to take over our lives, afraid to question it and blinded, it would seem, to its inevitable consequences.

But now we must stop doing this. The crisis is too close. We must open our eyes, see things as they are and then speak of them. For if we wish to understand 'reality', understand who we are and how it is we have come to be as we are, we have to look at *that which we hold to be true*. When all else is stripped away, what is it that defines who we are; and most importantly, what is it that governs our way of being? For with our thoughts we make the world... our life is the creation of our mind.

I suppose it would not be too much of an exaggeration to say that we entered the twenty-first century in the guise of *homo economicus* – that is to say that the characteristics most commonly used to define (perhaps I should say quantify) the nature of our present reality are the characteristics of measurement and in particular the characteristics of costs and revenues. What we have become is a function of this most particular 'language'.<sup>4</sup>

This language, the language that has come to shape our world, has two main characteristics. Firstly, it is reductionistic, which is to say that it is a language of parts and not of wholes. It is a language that encourages us to see ourselves as 'separate from' rather than 'a part of'. And, secondly, as I have said, it is overwhelmingly a language of accounting. It supposes that the things that are real, and of value, are only those that can be measured by price. By contrast, it implies that things that are not readily priced – like

Love, for example – are in some sense unreal and therefore of no real value, as though our whole lives could be set within the columns of profit and loss, and all that we are can be captured in the values of a balance sheet.

This language is based upon the proposition that what is expressed as the real world is confined to that which is tangible, concrete and fixed. Furthermore, it is confined to those things that can be sold and consumed. Nothing else exists, nothing else is of value. And as I have said, the real dilemma is that this language, useful and productive in its own way but nevertheless limited in its relevance, has come to be taken as having universal application. It is applied not simply to some kinds of market transaction, or to our groceries, but to all that we do. It has come to define and limit our experience. It is everywhere and governs all. It has brought us to where we are, which, in truth, is a world of delusion, and if there are benefits in this world, there are certainly costs – a degraded Nature, a broken climate, divisiveness and prejudice in political life, a widening gap between not only the rich and the poor, but between the very rich and everyone else, and above all else an insidious and pervasive violence. Violence and separation are embedded in the language of accounting.

If we would rather be somewhere else – by which I mean a fairer, more just and equitable world, or even, dare I say, a world governed by Love, or at least by compassion and a caring for others and the Earth – then we had best find another language to describe it. But where might we find it?



You will not be surprised to discover that I do not have an answer to this question, but I have long known that one possibility of ‘another language’ can be found in the *philosophia perennis*, the ancient and eternal wisdom that lies at the root of all of the great spiritual traditions. It is a philosophy that proposes that all arises from a universal metaphysical truth and order.<sup>5</sup> In this realm we

cannot define ourselves entirely by reference to the material world since that would be to define us in terms of a part and not a whole. To be whole, we have to be at one with that which is both within and yet beyond the material world, with what we could call the Ultimate Reality, that which, as we shall see, I call Love.

At the same time, since all is one, we cannot separate ourselves entirely from all that is. Rather, we have to practice *being* at one with one another – and this means not only all of humankind but of all beings, all fauna and flora, the mountains and the oceans, the clouds and the winds and the rains. If this all sounds rather familiar, it is because it is – for now, in many ways, the *philosophia perennis* is being spoken of anew by ‘a great multitude’, because an increasing number of us are beginning to turn away from what we have always been told is ‘just the way things are’, to find, most especially in the rising threats of climate change and pandemics, that *we are part of all that is* and, what is more, that we are the source of much of the harm that is caused by the ways in which live.

As we begin to explore the *philosophia perennis* we enter this new realm, moving away from the prosaic to the poetic, from the mundane to the divine, from separation to wholeness, from selfish competition to a more caring collaboration. And it is familiar since this realm already dwells within each one of us and, as if by instinct, some part of us recognises it as being true.

In a Temenos lecture that he gave in London in 2002 to launch his book, *The Wisdom of the Arabs*,<sup>6</sup> my dear friend, the late Professor Suheil Bushrui, talked about the work of Aldous Huxley, who, in 1946, published his own collection of sacred texts under the title of *The Perennial Philosophy*.<sup>7</sup> Aldous Huxley, he said, described the realm of the perennial philosophy as a ‘divine Reality’ of which we are inextricably a part.<sup>8</sup> In this, there was nothing unusual for Aldous Huxley was, after all, restating the teachings of many others before him. But then, with an insight that caused him to be criticised by those who valued the head above the heart, he went on to say something that spoke of how we have to be in order to be able to see these teachings as true; how we need to be in order to hear them. He said:

But the nature of this one Reality is such that it cannot be directly or immediately apprehended except by those who have chosen to fulfil certain conditions, *making themselves loving, pure in heart, and poor in spirit*. Why should this be so? We do not know. It is just one of those facts which we have to accept, whether we like them or not and however implausible and unlikely they may seem.<sup>9</sup> (my emphasis)

This apparent heresy of a necessary acceptance should be of interest to us. In a world such as ours that is marked, at least in its public realm, so much by arrogance, control, hatred and violence, this emphasis upon humility and compassion may be of a special importance. And so, given my presumption that we live in an age of delusion, I wonder whether in seeking another language we might attend to Huxley's notion of a "Divine Reality." And I also wonder whether, in response to his condition of making ourselves "loving, pure in heart, and poor in spirit," in seeking and following a new path, we may need to discover qualities and practices that are now quite rare, or rather are not taken seriously; the qualities and practise of Love. This aspect, the qualities and practise of Love, will be explored in Paper 2. But, first, what might this other language of reality be?

As an illustration of a way of being in which we are 'at one', here is a quotation from Huxley's *Perennial Philosophy*.<sup>10</sup> It is from the mediaeval monk Meister Eckhart:

There is a spirit in the soul, untouched by time and flesh, flowing from the Spirit, remaining in the Spirit, itself wholly spiritual. In this principle is God, ever verdant, ever flowering, in all the joy and glory of His actual Self. Sometimes I have called this principle the Tabernacle of the soul, sometimes a spiritual Light, anon I say it is a Spark. But now I say that it is more exalted above the earth. So I name it in a nobler fashion ... It is free of all names and void of all forms. It is one and simple, as God is one and simple, and no man can in any wise behold it.<sup>11</sup>

Something that is "ever verdant, ever flowering" and "free of all

names,” seems to relate to this problem of naming and holding on to, to which I have already referred.

And then there are two more quotations, this time taken from Professor Bushrui’s *The Wisdom of the Arabs*.<sup>12</sup> Again they speak of a oneness with the divine. Both are from one of the earliest Sufi masters, Al-Hallaj:

Thou art my life and the innermost secret of my heart;  
Wherever I am, there also art thou...<sup>13</sup>

I am He whom I love and He whom I love is I;  
We are two souls dwelling in one body.  
When you look at me you can see Him,  
And you can see us both when you look at Him.<sup>14</sup>

Two souls dwelling in one body, and “when you look at me you can see Him.” Utter unity. Is this a guide? Is there something in the notion of oneness rather than separation that gives us a direction?

Even if we do not use the language of a personal God, a Him to whom we can turn – and not everyone does – these quotations provide us with a very different idea of who we are. For if we really do take ourselves to be defined only as, and limited by, *homo economics*, then the rules of the marketplace and the balance of accounts set the parameters of our reason and of our being. We must be subservient to the algebra and algorithms of pricing. In the end, quite literally, it is markets and the economy that matter. However, if, perhaps in some mysterious way that we cannot explain, we see ourselves as unified with, and as an expression of, that which we might call ‘divine’, that which is within and beyond us, then reverence for others now present or yet to come must cause us to temper our own desires and actions with those qualities that are the teaching of all the great spiritual traditions – generosity, patience, simplicity, humility, harmlessness, compassion and so on, the very qualities that Aldous Huxley thought were necessary for those who would be able to understand and to practice the perennial philosophy, those that he referred to as being loving, pure in heart, and poor in spirit.

This begins to hold together, and the more I think about it, and even if I struggle with the form of the words – and I do – the

more it seems to me that it is beyond doubt that the choices we make about 'language' and 'reality' will always, and inevitably, lead us in particular directions. There are always consequences.

Again, this is not a new idea. Those of you who are familiar with Buddhist texts will know the prophetic story of the wheel-turning king who failed to give to the poor. Poverty led to theft, theft to violence and so on and so on until at the lowest point, at the depth of degradation, just a few people had the insight and courage to turn away from the seemingly unstoppable tragedy and, once more, proclaim the ancient wisdom of generosity, simplicity and compassion until, as again one thing led to another, the wellbeing of all was restored.<sup>15</sup> Will there now be, I wonder, those who have the insight and courage to prick the bubble of our delusion, tell us that the emperor has no clothes on, and help us to see how we may prevent or at least live with the myriad crises that are looming? We must pray that this is so, otherwise we may discover that those who profess calamity are prophetic, for, unchecked, the language of accounting will continue to promote its own dangerous and damaging fantasy, promising ever-increasing consumption for all, and thereby reinforcing the environmental and social catastrophes that have already begun to wreak havoc.

Since giving that Temenos paper twenty-five years ago, I have come to see that language is not only a constraint, and sometimes a damaging constraint, but also that we often struggle to find truth in words or texts alone. Texts, prosaic texts – for poetry I think is another matter – seem to be riven with partiality, uncertainty and, to some extent, unreliability and misleading bias, very often marked by the particular circumstances of their time and place. It is as if there is no common or adequate vocabulary or discourse.

But there is a dilemma. Words may fail us, but what then shall we do? How do we challenge a dominant and evidently damaging and unjust language? To be heard, we seem to have to speak of it whilst using the very language we decry. Again and again, I have come across the difficulty of finding 'agreeable' words; again and again I have been told that nothing can be done unless what is proposed fits into, or is spoken of, in 'acceptable' terms – to fit into the language of business and economy – even though we now know beyond doubt that this language only brings us back to where we are. Even now, after years of discussion about

sustainability, corporate responsibility, responsible investment and the costs of environmental and social degradation, we seem to be stranded in the place that this language has led us to. And despite the very many places where this is challenged, it would seem that we cannot move beyond it.

But we can no longer remain where we are if we are to avoid significant calamity. We must find ‘another language’, and another way of being. For as we speak, so we are. Here are words of the late Philip Sherrard:

[How] we perceive things depends crucially upon the state of our consciousness, and...the state of our consciousness depends on the state of our being. This does not mean that the reality of things themselves varies according to the consciousness which perceives them, and still less that their existence is dependent upon their being perceived. It simply means that how they appear to us, *the kind of reality we attribute to them*, and whether we see them as they are or, as it were, through a distorting lens, have very little to do with the things themselves and very much to do with the quality of our own being, the purity of our soul and the level of our intelligence. And this in turn means that the way in which we see things *may not correspond in the least to the reality of the things themselves*.<sup>16</sup> (My emphases)

It is increasingly understood, not least in science and ecology, that if we are to see things as they really are we must see them not as fixed, independent and separate but as ever-changing, connected and whole; that all that is, is part of an intricate web of being, a web of causation and dependency, a web of relationships; and that we should see ourselves as ‘a part of’ and not ‘apart from’. Indeed, perhaps the most compelling idea of our time is the rediscovery of what we might call *a reality of relatedness* – to which I will turn in Paper 7. In physics, in biology, in economics, in medicine, in the arising of the entire debate about ‘sustainability’ and what might be termed the environmental or ecological crisis, the limits of reductionism and a science of parts are being exposed as false, and a new reality of connectedness and wholeness is emerging. Furthermore, it is understood that these relationships

are essentially dynamic. Far from being fixed and certain, reality is characterised by fluidity, by shift and change. Indeed, our reality of *relatedness* is, in truth, a reality of *relatingness*, that it to say that it can only be realised by being experienced. It is a reality that requires not disinterested observation but mindful participation.

This vision of a world of constantly shifting relationships, coming to be and ceasing to be, is not, of course, in the least bit new. The ancient Greek, Heraclitus, for example, saw reality as an ever-changing river where ‘everything flows’; and such a reality also lies at the heart of the Buddhist notions of impermanence and emptiness,<sup>17</sup> which are the foundation of the Four Noble Truths.<sup>18</sup> For at the very moment of his awakening, the Buddha spoke of arising and ceasing, of the knowledge of “the passing away and reappearance of things.”<sup>19</sup>

More especially, this reality of relatingness is expressed in the Buddhist teaching of *paticca samuppāda* or ‘dependent origination’ – that there are no absolutes but only a shifting pattern of interacting connections:

That is when this is; that arises with the arising of this. That is not when this is not; that ceases with the cessation of this.<sup>20</sup>

Here, the phenomenon of arising and ceasing would seem to be extended beyond mere linear causality to include a much more radical *reciprocity*, which, again, lies at the very heart of the teachings of the Buddha. For it is taught:

One who sees *paticca samuppāda* sees the Dhamma; one who sees the Dhamma sees *paticca samuppāda*.<sup>21</sup>

But what lies behind this understanding of causality and the web of being? Where does it lead us? Is there some further destination or is this all that there is – arising and ceasing?

This is a question that brings us to the next matter, the matter of Love: what is it and how can we find our way towards it?

# Endnotes

1. A version of this paper was included within a paper written for the Temenos Academy in 2021 and reproduced on their website [temenosacademy.org](http://temenosacademy.org).
2. *The Dhammapada*, a new rendering by Thomas Byrom, Vintage Books, New York, 1976, 3.
3. *The Dhammapada*, translated by Juan Mascro, Penguin Books, England, 1973, 35.
4. The following two paragraphs are largely taken from: David Cadman, 'With Our Thoughts We Make the World', *A Sacred Trust*, The Temenos Academy and The Prince's Foundation, 2002, 163-4.
5. The Temenos Academy ([temenosacademy.org](http://temenosacademy.org)) runs a two-year Foundation Course in the Perennial Philosophy, which they described as being "like an underground river, [which] has flowed through all civilizations and all ages, and wherever it sends up springs and fountains, Beauty and Wisdom have flowered."
6. Suheil Bushrui, *The Wisdom of the Arabs*, Oneworld, Oxford, 2002.
7. Aldous Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy* Chatto and Windus, London, 1946. Gottfried Leibniz is thought to have first coined the phrase *philosophia perennis* some three hundred years ago and many other writers, not least traditionalists such as René Guénon, Frithjof Schuon and K. A. Coomaraswamy, have also spoken of these eternal truth. Both Guénon and Coomaraswamy are referred to by Huxley.

8. Ibid. 1.
9. Ibid. 2-3.
10. Aldous Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy*, Chatto and Windus, 1972
11. Ibid. 22-23.
12. Op cit, Suheil Bushrui.
13. Ibid. 29.
14. Ibid. 31.
15. Dígħa Nikáya, Division 111.26
16. *A Sacred Trust: Ecology and Spiritual Vision*, edited by David Cadman and John Carey, The Temenos Academy, 2002, 2.
17. In Pali, impermanence and emptiness are known as *aniccat* and *sunyata*.
18. *Majjhima Nikaya*, (MN) Tr. by Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi Sutta 9, p.p. 132-144.
19. Ibid. Sutta 4.29, p. 105.
20. Ibid. Note 408, p.p. 1231-2
21. Ibid. Sutta 28.28, p. 283