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# The Spiritual Impulse to Turn Within and the Engagement in a World of Action

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The Spiritual Impulse to Turn Within and the Engagement  
in a World of Action

Jared Rodriguez  
Religion Department Senior Thesis  
Trinity College, May 2012

*I dedicate the following essay to my Grandpa, William Rodriguez, for showing me the beauty of meditation, contemplation and nature from an early age. I'd also like to dedicate this to my Mom, Dad and brother for their faithful support and unconditional love.*

## Acknowledgements:

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## Introduction

In this essay, I will compare three modern, contemporary thinkers, Thomas Merton, Mahatma Gandhi and Jiddu Krishnamurti. These three come from relatively different theological backgrounds. Thomas Merton is a Catholic monk, Mahatma Gandhi is a traditional Hindu with sentiments that come from Buddhism, and Krishnamurti, from birth was predetermined to belong to the Theosophists as their new World Leader. The underlying themes that connects these three profound figures together is, first, their transcendentalist approach in understanding the self, the cosmos, and the profane world by methods of contemplation, meditation and silence. Second, they are connected by a familiar personal spiritual development. In each case, there is a turn inward and then a turn outward, in which they send forth what they learn from their self-transformation, in order to benefit the lives of others. Thomas Merton is the baseline for comparison in this essay. From a depth of understanding of his personal life, I was able to make analytical comparisons with the outcome of his thinking after undergoing a spiritual transformation to Mahatma Gandhi and Jiddu Krishnamurti. Whether it was in literature, political activism or public speaking, each one of these thinkers has a degree of importance for theologians, scholars, and spiritually seeking individuals.

There is a method to the chronological order in which the following chapters proceed. Because of his biographical expose, Thomas Merton is first. In reading this chapter, the reader will see an incremental evolution in his transformation. The *Seven Story Mountain* is Merton's magnum opus and comes in the form of an

autobiography, often compared to St. Augustine's *Confessions*. Confession literally means: an act of confession; especially: a disclosure of one's sins in the sacrament of reconciliation.<sup>i</sup> This definition is applicable to both Augustine and Thomas Merton as each assumes an apologetic stance beneath God. Although many of the events in his life are highlighted through the lens of someone who has already undergone spiritual transformation, as Merton wrote the narrative while having become a monk, elements of tragedy, confusion, conformism, loneliness and desire are issues with which every human being can identify. In juxtaposition to this foundational background of Thomas Merton, I use *No Man Is an Island*, *The Ascent to Truth*, *Thoughts in Solitude* and *The Monastic Journey*, all books that deal with Merton's philosophical understanding of God's oneness in all that exists. Merton's impetus to turn within begins with his feelings of desperation that come from a hunger for truth and fulfillment. There is prescience in his early childhood that ultimately leads him to divert his attention away from the material world and enter a life full of spirituality by living according to the monastic structure. It is important to understand that even though Merton is categorically viewed as a Cistercian monk, the principles by which he lives and understands everything go beyond the Catholic doctrine. The process of his transformation is important because it brings into view a peculiar model that reoccurs in the lives of Krishnamurti and Gandhi. Once Merton attains self-realization by seeing that there is oneness in all sentient things, he is able to turn outwardly by acting in the world with wisdom through writing and charity:

“No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bush bask, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.”<sup>ii</sup>

Mahatma Gandhi, who is the inspiration for the second chapter, becomes internationally recognized for his social and political efforts to ameliorate the injustice that predominated in areas of South Africa and India. In his efforts, he uses an understanding found in simplicity and self-sufficiency. Different from the other two figures, Gandhi devotes his entire life to deconstruct the political, social and industrial systems that he saw as the fundamental reasons for human suffering. His relation to the world comes from a contemplative background with a self-proclaimed discovery for ‘relative truth’. Gandhi never admits to understanding the ‘ultimate truth’, as he believes man is inherently insufficient by his imprisoned carnal state, being confined to the ontological world in which only reason can be discovered. The world, as we live in it, is bound by time, gravity, and empirical truths that can be revealed through science and mathematics. It is these findings that Gandhi considers to be ‘relative truths’. We can never fully understand the ‘ultimate truths’ since all we can know is that which is causal. Therefore, the ‘ultimate truths’ comprise all that is outside the physical relationship between entities, which we know through our senses. Thus, the carnal state in which we embody prevents us from knowing anything outside of that which can be sensually experienced by the laws of causality. Gandhian philosophy metaphorically compares all religions to a tree in which various roots come from different angles to ultimately converge on the same upward plane. Gandhi believes that there are universal

principles that everyone lives by. The pursuit of happiness, love, and unity are desirable and available to all. In accordance with Gandhian belief, man is a social being and therefore is intrinsically dependent on others. Because of this, Gandhi sees it unfit that society is shaped by hierarchical plateaus that brings people in superior and inferior relation to each other. Non-violence is the main goal Gandhi wishes to attain in his political and social activism. The first step in actualizing a world without violence is to understand that all existence derives from the same infinite, abundant source. Gandhi, as a traditional Hindu, wrote about this in a fashion similar to the Upanishadic belief in Brahman, which essentially explains that there is an impersonal, universal, pervading support throughout all of existence. Gandhi, too, follows a transformational model that starts with a period of spiritual discovery in which life is rearranged, intentionally, to produce solemnity that would be conducive for self-discovery and truth. The move outward to better humanity with spiritual wisdom is paradigmatic and comparable to a similar model that echoes in Merton's life.

Krishnamurti, the third and final figure in this essay, is one who stands apart, while simultaneously reflecting the overarching spiritual journeys of Gandhi and Merton. From an early age, Krishnamurti displays radical tendencies in thought. Chosen at birth, Krishnamurti is assumed by many Theosophists to be their next World Leader. However, Krishnamurti's ideologies are in stark contrast to the inherited position he is given. Repudiating all tenets of belief, Krishnamurti's philosophy argues that man cannot find true stillness in the mind, or happiness, until he completely detaches himself by disengaging from all organized systems of

belief. Systems of belief, Krishnamurti argues, lead one to think in patterns and therefore strip man from his individuality. He advocates that all of humanity be aware of the susceptibility to which they are predisposed to latching onto belief systems as a way to seek security. This type of security is in itself a fallacy since it doesn't grapple with the unknown: the individual self. To find this sense of self, one must reside in complete stillness with no distractions.

I have chosen Krishnamurti to represent what happens when one detaches themselves entirely from his or her preconditioned identity. Thomas Merton identifies himself as a Christian by faith. Gandhi, to a certain degree, identifies with being a traditional Hindi with beliefs that come from Buddhism. Gandhi's sense of nationality is indicated in his desire to uplift his country and fight for the betterment of people, namely those who are oppressed by a system of dictators, he related to and stood behind. Krishnamurti however comes at the end, since his views, he believes are independent of all feelings, prejudices, and motives. He does not believe in nationalism, religion, politics or any other categorically structured order. Nonetheless, there is a distinct model by which Krishnamurti comes to his conclusions regarding the nature of man and his existence in the world that is resonant with the philosophies of Thomas Merton and Gandhi.

In reading the following chapters, one will recognize a coterminous model of linear transformation in which there is a turn inward to find truth. Once there is self-discovery, each figure has the impulse to turn outwards by sharing the wisdom gleaned from their transcendental states. In the beginning, there is a categorization that dictates the way in which the spiritual journey takes place. Thomas Merton has

an iconic God that became the focal point for all of his prayer, meditation and contemplation. Gandhi, in the same vein, sees Brahman as the underlying force of existence, which allows him to see a universal essence in all things. Krishnamurti dissolves ties to any systems of beliefs and in freeing himself completely, he achieves stillness in the mind. By this very nature, these three thinkers begin with diametrically opposed frameworks that are incompatible in their specificity. However, the process that advances each thinker's spiritual luminosity follows a similar trajectory that meets at a homogenous realization.

### *Chapter 1: Thomas Merton*

Thomas Merton's life was marked by events that altered his perspectives on the world in such a way that propelled him to transcend the material world and undergo a spiritual transformation by entering a monastery. These personal events are important to investigate, as the impact they made on Merton's life is momentous. It is a unique decision that one makes when deciding to leave the profane world and live a monastic life, such as Merton. Acting on such an impulse produces a radical change that readjusts every facet of one's perspective and, for this reason, is an uncommon direction for one to take. Thomas Merton had a fiercely introspective mind and his way of coping with the world is full of depth and profundity and is therefore worth attempting to understand.

Patterns of behavior, mostly his reaction to the material world, correlate to axiomatic principles found in Catholic theology. It is hard to overlook the tacit

dedication *Seven Story Mountain* pays to St. Augustine. The loathing and scrupulous analysis of the self that occurs when reflecting on past sins is strikingly Augustinian. Throughout his life, Merton examined himself with painstaking meticulousness. In turn, this resulted in his feelings of inferiority and unworthiness in the eyes of God. Consequently, Merton matriculates into an ascetic life in order to achieve self-purification by living in accordance with God's will.

Merton's transcendental philosophy derives from fundamental values in Catholic theology. Because they derive from the core of Catholicism and closely relate to those theological principles, many of his beliefs can appear dogmatic. Sanctifying grace, which is a belief that presupposes an intervening God who instills an aptitude in an individual to receive enlightenment, is a concept that Merton admittedly felt predestined for. In this way, one can preemptively devalue Merton's journey by refuting the existence of God. Doing this, however, would be missing the point. This chapter is not aimed to prove or disprove God, nor is it made to argue for theological superiority. Instead, it will look at the reasons for Merton's spiritual impulse to turn inward while analyzing the significance of such a transformation that can occur when one takes on discipline in silence, contemplation and meditation.

Thomas Merton purifies himself in the monastery by finding love in God. In his loving relationship with God, Merton finds truth. When truth is discovered, Merton is able to act in right relation to others by mirroring God's love by means of charity. The developments and lessons Merton learns when living in the monastery are universal and can therefore be applicable to any environment. In this way, the

theological context in which Merton's transformation occurred is irrelevant from the transformation itself. The purification of the self and the ability to be in right relation to others is desirable for everyone. As Merton repetitiously argues, all humans societal beings and therefore are dependent on each other. Because 'no man is an island', everyone needs to learn the importance of community. Merton believes, that detaching oneself from the temptations and distractions that are omnipresent in the material world, one is able to attain clarity. In this clarity, the human being loses himself to God and projects his absence of self unto others by echoing God's love.

### *The Turn from the Material World to the Monastic Life*

Thomas Merton's autobiographical account in *Seven Story Mountains* is written to reveal the reasons for his decision to live an ascetic life. Because he has the monastic perspective when writing his biography, the adolescent and early adulthood stories fall inside the monastic penumbra. The events that appear in *Seven Story Mountain* are deemed important by an author who is a monk. By this, these take on a theological and spiritually attributive meaning. The life events that are discussed prior to Merton becoming a monk give the impression that they are moments of significance and are incremental in his decision to radically transform his life. When reading the book, one is struck by the utter serendipity of a character that exemplifies correlating attitudes in the material world to the spiritual

convictions of a monk. The *Seven Story Mountain*, by this very nature, isn't a total objectification of Thomas Merton's life, but a tale recounted from the perspective of a monk who felt spiritually chosen to live a life for God.

Thomas Merton's mother died at an early age leaving him, his brother, John Paul, and his father as a three-part family. As an artist by profession, Merton's father spent a great deal of time working on his art; interestingly, but understandably, his time spent working on his pieces resolutely increased after the death of his wife. Even though he was too young to understand, Merton explains that his acquaintanceship with art gave him a 'connatural' understanding of contemplation – that is, when one meditates on a piece over time, the more the aesthetic beauty reveals itself. Merton explains how he understood his father's shift in work habits as a method of coping. As a way of revitalizing his inspiration, Merton's father travelled throughout Europe and, consequently, Thomas and his brother John Paul spent their childhood as nomads, ceaselessly moving around. Because of the constant shifting from place to place, these two impressionable youngsters were exposed to various environments, each place being vastly distinct from the other. One thing that persisted in each newly settled area was the need to quickly acclimate. Despite the variety of their new homes, Merton writes that there was a distinct hallmark that illuminated each environment:

Here, in this amazing, ancient town, the very pattern of the place, of the houses and streets and of nature itself, the circling hills, the cliffs and trees, all focused my attention upon the one, important central fact of the church and what it contained. Here, everywhere I went, I was forced by the disposition of everything around me, to be always at least virtually conscious of the church. <sup>iii</sup>

Even before his future experiences with God, the concept of “church” invited Merton’s young, but curious mind. Although this subject will be developed later on, Merton makes repeated claims that God sanctifies certain people. Theologically, Merton believes he is one of those chosen by God and thus has a special aptitude for receiving His grace. Inevitably, this theory, or belief, affects his interpretations of his life experiences.

There are nuances in the *Seven Story Mountain* that lead one to characterize Merton’s underlying nature as simple, but genuine. When reading the *Seven Story Mountain*, the reader is informed about a particular phase in Merton’s life in which he became intrigued by the nature of solemnity and obscurity found in the Churches of Rome, “And it was without pretentiousness, without fakery, and had nothing theatrical about it. Its solemnity was made all the more astounding by its simplicity – and by the obscurity of the places where it lay hidden...” (SSM 108). During his time in Rome he developed a great love for sincere ornamentation in churches. Coincidentally, this is the time and place in his life in which he found his desire and love for Christ. As his devotion to learn more about the churches and their mosaics matured, a sense of interior peace filled his soul. This was the first taste of what would become the impetus for Merton’s spiritual journey, “I had a kind of deep and strong conviction that I belonged there: that my traditional nature was filled with profound desires and needs that could only find satisfaction in churches of God,” (SSM 110).

The interests conveyed in *Seven Story Mountain*, such as the beauty he found in simplistic aesthetics and the peace he finds being in solitude, illustrate Merton as a person who had practical and clear intentions. This character that Merton self-portrayed is prescient as it intimates Merton is portraying himself as having a particular destiny for monkhood. With a keen eye, the reader can foresee and thus hypothesize the future monastic life Merton will take on. As might be expected, Thomas Merton found a style in monkhood that closely identifies with his desire for simplicity.

The Cistercian monastic life is practical and limits its attention to overcomplicating issues by philosophical pontification. Excessive philosophy and abstract thinking is believed by the Cistercians to result in questioning the nature of existence. For them, one's existence is a gift of God and should not be challenged. Along with the very nature of being, the Cistercians admittedly understand that there is suffering. For them, suffering is unavoidable and should therefore be accepted. Instead of wishing for suffering to cease, the Cistercians cope with suffering by vesting faith in God. In this way, the suffering we experience is believed to have a supernatural purpose. The supernatural motive that puts forth action into the world is dictated by God and is therefore incomprehensible. Cistercians believe that man's faculties for understanding the supernatural order are inherently insufficient. For man to have his perceptions or interpretations anchored by the material world is enough reason for the Cistercians to avoid philosophical abstraction and turn towards a contemplative life that dwells in God.

As the Cistercian template is aimed to achieve simplicity, the monastic life is structured around basic and practical behavior. The Cistercians achieve a practicality in life by a balance in prayer, meditation, contemplation, and other activities that equilibrate the mind and body. The Cistercians exegete the Gospel with an understanding that encourages a balance between labor and prayer as the most efficient means to achieve holistic spirituality, "Man has a body and a soul, and both need to play their proper parts in daily life."<sup>iv</sup> Merton explains that manual labor serves two fundamental purposes: a.) expressing obedience in God by seeing every task as an assignment that comes from His will, and b.) helping co-operate with God by administering to the world that He created. *Acting with depth, by acting from a contemplative mind, found in transcendence, is a way in which one can experience the nature of the world.* To understand the nature of the world by conditioning the self to using a mind rectified in prayer and laboriously acting as God's custodian of the world, one is better able to see the omnipotence of God's spiritual affection. Merton coins this method of paying homage to God as 'active contemplation'.

Retrospectively, the worldly experiences Merton endured in his early adult life became the impetus for him to enter a monastery. As the reader learns when reading *Seven Story Mountain*, Merton was not raised in a religious household. Consequently, certain childhood experiences that Merton reflects back on as spiritual were, at the time at which they happened, misunderstood to be mundane. At one moment in the *Seven Story Mountain*, Merton recounts his difficulty in adapting to environments and to the people living in the places of his temporary

residency. Even though Merton faced difficult adjustments, his experiences preconditioned him to act for God by ultimately becoming a monk. At one moment in the *Seven Story Mountain*, Merton gratefully looks back on the transience in his early domestic life. He explains that despite the difference in geographic location, everybody he came to thoroughly know and understand had connecting axiomatic principles and desires. Even before Merton intellectualized the lessons found in the Catholic doctrine and underwent sacrifice for God, he was able to notice an essential interconnectedness among every human. This insight will later resurface when Merton recognizes the degree to which *spiritual universality* is present in all things.

One must remember that the *Seven Story Mountain* is written in such a way as to highlight certain experiences in Merton's life so that they harmoniously correlate to the final transformation in an ultimate devotion to God. From the spiritual impulse to turn within and find God, Merton is able to cope with suffering and understand the world through the eyes of God. Suffering is the key element in Merton's experience in the 'outside world' that motivates him to seek a deeper meaning and understanding for the world.

In his early adulthood, Merton finds himself lonely, aggravated, and confused. The untimely loss of his father, which happened during these times of great instability, augmented his suffering:

I sat there in the dark, unhappy room, unable to think unable to move, with all the innumerable elements of my isolation crowding in upon me from every side: without a home, without a family, without a country, without a father, apparently without friends, without any interior peace or confidence or light or understanding of my own – without God, too, without God, without heaven, without grace, without anything. <sup>v</sup>

Analogous to the Cistercian belief that all suffering is willed and intended by God to create an effective higher meaning in the life one lives in the material world, Merton became engulfed in an abyss-like isolation with the loss of his father. At the same time, however, he experienced transcendental reflection through which he arrived at a deeper, spiritual meaning to life. In this way, he discovered that he cannot survive as solely independent, which drove him to seek support in something outside of himself. Although these feelings he gleaned from this particular experience do not immediately propel him to enter the ascetic life, it seems to have engendered spiritual curiosity and thereby implanted the seed for faith.

In the late 1930's to the early 1940's, Merton became part of the Communist movement. The sociopolitical era during this time was a hotbed for young, intelligent men to actively assuage the corruption they believed was occurring in the United States. Although Merton admittedly supports some of the beliefs that he expressed as a youthful advocate for Communistic ideals, he confesses that the main reason for his participation was to rebel against a domineering, capitalistic society with support from an ideologically homogenous group, "I was in the thick of a conversion. It was not the right conversion, but it was a conversion. Perhaps it was a lesser evil. I do not doubt much that it was. But it was not, for all that, much of a good. I was becoming a Communist."<sup>vi</sup>

This shift in Merton to outwardly express his interests in a systemic group with the same beliefs is significant for a couple of reasons. For one, up until this

moment, Merton did not have the experiential background to develop his understanding of the significance of dependency. After the tragic experience of losing his father, Merton was alone and needed not to be isolated from others. In his suffering, in which he felt total desperation and isolation in foreign worlds, Merton came to understand the significance and importance of relying on things outside of the self. Secondly, in Merton's encounter with the Communism of this time, he saw the movement as against corrosive capitalism and therefore an advocate of equality, namely through bettering the impoverished. In this way, Merton inadvertently aligns himself with some of the paradigmatic beliefs that will later appear during his time in the monastery concerning equality in community.

After a sufficient amount of time was invested in political activism, Merton eventually scorned Communism as hypocritical and insensitive in relation to its strident pronouncements against societal injustice on which it was founded upon: This made him discontent. The aversion Merton felt transcended Communism's inability to function in accordance with its initial principles and transformed into feelings of self-disgust. Merton's unanticipated distaste for Communism, a belief system he originally felt strongly for and a community in which he sought refuge, caused him to give scrupulous attention to the self:

I, myself, into the bargain, had turned out to be an extremely unpleasant sort of person – vain, self-centered, dissolute, weak, irresolute, undisciplined, sensual, obscene and proud. I was a mess. Even the sight of my own face in a mirror was enough to disgust me.<sup>vii</sup>

These feelings of self-loathing become the basis from which Merton understood that it was difficult to reconcile one's inherent sinful self with God while living in a

society saturated by material and sensual pleasures. Being the product of this type of society was not necessarily a lifestyle that promoted spiritual content, "In other words, the conclusion I came to was that it was not so much I myself that was to blame for my unhappiness, but the society in which I lived."<sup>viii</sup> With clearer vision, Merton saw that Communism is full of people who bathe in the same murky waters of concupiscence, pride and sin that the rest of the evildoers do. The chief weakness of Communism, he felt, was that it is, itself, just another breed of the same materialism condemned by God as the source and root of all evils. Upon this understanding, Merton recognizes that Communism is a reactionary construct to the social injustice it was devised to fight against and, thus, it transitively redeems elements of man's folly. Therefore his initial decision to join was not an independently creative action, but a reaction to the overarching society under which he was living.

Clearly, the modern environment, inhabited by most, is unfavorable for attaining a spiritual intimacy with the self and God:

The whole mechanism of modern life is geared for a flight from God and from the spirit into the wilderness of neurosis. Even our monasteries are not free from the smell and clatter of our world. Bodily agitation, then, is an enemy to the spirit.<sup>ix</sup>

The circumstances of the world and condition of the self become too miserable and motivated Merton to begin monastic life.

My hatred of war and my own personal misery in my particular situation and the general crisis of the world made me accept with my whole heart this revelation of the need for a spiritual life, an interior life, including some kind of mortification.<sup>x</sup>

This is the moment in the 'Seven Story Mountain' in which Merton directs all of his energy towards developing the inward self by entering a monastery.

*A Shift from Communism to Monasticism*

*Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common.<sup>xi</sup> (Acts 4:32)*

Merton's experience with Communism primed him for a life inside of a monastic community. The socialist ideals of Communism that speak to equality and community echoed the structural framework that constituted a monastery. In the monastery, monks orient themselves to creating a strong communal core. Monks are thus assigned tasks designed to boost the connective functionality within their community. In this way, private ownership is negated and communal efficacy is enhanced. The dependency on others that Merton learned through the operational paradigm of Communism is instrumental in understanding the basic infrastructure of the monastic community. As Merton developed a distaste for the fallacy he found in Communism, a belief system he presupposed to be utopian, he developed an inclination to turn away from society and enter a life of solitude in a monastic community.

Although Merton wishes to transform himself with spiritual wholesomeness, he has a hard time committing himself entirely at first. In a way, Thomas Merton undergoes a liminal period in which he bounces back and forth between living a life in the material world and a living a life in a monastery. The first time he was introduced to the idea of acquiring wisdom by means of silence and contemplation, he felt a sense of repugnancy and withdrew completely, "What did I care about monks and monasteries? The world was going to be open before me, with all its entertainments, and everything would be mine and with my intelligence and my five sharp senses I would rob all its treasures and rifle its cofferers and empty them all."<sup>xii</sup> However, as mentioned before, the worldly life with all its tantalizing liberties and material pleasures proved itself to be a life full of discontent, "So there I was, with all the liberty that I had been promising myself for so long. The world was mine. How did I like it? I was doing just what I pleased, and instead of being filled with happiness and well-being, I was miserable."<sup>xiii</sup> The infatuation with pleasure is destined, by its very essence to defeat itself and end in frustration. The amalgamation of myriad revelations caused by societal turmoil caused Merton to break away from the inner battles between him and his impulsive carnal appetite and ultimately lead him towards his interests in the monastic life.

In order for Merton to develop himself from within, he needed structure. The impulse for structure is a key element in Merton's life journey. Often Merton's desire for structure is a product of his own confusion. As evidenced *Seven Story Mountain*, whenever Merton felt lost and in despair, he instinctually reached out for something that would induce a sense of order. In the movie, *Inception*, there was an object used

by those plagued with the addiction for the fantastical world of imagination in which physics and the laws of nature ceased to exist. When used, this crutch, or object of reference, similar in form to a dradle, indicated the presence of gravity, thereby informing one that he or she was living in the ontological world and not a dream state. In this comparison, Merton's spiritual depravity was his loss of gravity. His spiritual depravity was the effect of living in the material world, by which temptation prevailed and where impurity flourished. The material world is analogous to the fantastical world in *Inception* mainly for the reason that both give rise to a loss of self. Deep at the inner essence of his being, Merton desires to be pure and close with God. It takes serious moments of helplessness and humility for Merton to diagnose his inner turmoil. Essentially, by feeling confused, Merton developed a stronger desire for an intimacy with God. When Merton understood that his connection with God was imperative, he yearned for a systematic transformation from the worldly life to a spiritual one, namely a "systematic mortification of my [his] passions and of my [his] crazy nature."<sup>xiv</sup> In this way, the monastery, as an institution, became the crutch, inasmuch as the implement in 'Inception' gave one reassurance of existing outside of the dream-state.

### *The Gateway to Monasticism*

*"Hope is the wedding of two freedoms, human and divine, in the acceptance of a love that is at once a promise and a beginning of a fulfillment".*

The prerequisite in finding God is to have hope in God. Having hope in God makes God a real entity for the individual and thus legitimizes God's existence. Both God's existence and love are infinite. Reciprocally, if we love God, God loves us, infinitely. Therefore, if we are conditioned with hope in God, we naturally love God while simultaneously becoming loved by God. In having this relationship founded solely upon hope, we are able to live an intimate life with God, and fully able to act in accordance with His will. This perpetual fulfillment gives meaning to life. Thus, hope (which can be interchanged with 'faith') is the pioneer impulse that forges our spiritual journey.

Without hope in God, we are damned to an immediate death of the soul, "We sometimes think of the damned as men who think of only themselves as good, since all sin flows from pride that refuses to love."<sup>xv</sup> Logically, if man does not have hope in God, he does not believe in God. If he does not believe in God, his acts, which author his existence, are in dissonance with the ultimate good and distant him from his *true* center of existence. This pride, therefore, refuses to recognize the true good that lies in the depths of man's soul. The God, which is situated in the innermost core of each man, is the ultimate good. Failure to believe in this goodness results in ignorance. Manifestly, the man who ignores ultimate goodness, acts out of disdain and thus is ignorant and blind. By opposing the belief of an ultimate goodness, man acts independently. Acting independently and forging one's own path without divine guidance tends to make man overtly prideful. This pride will ultimately result in confusion and total isolation from others since one is acting as an individual with total independence in choice, belief, and capacity to do good. This method of acting

in the world is in complete tension with communal unification under the presupposition that the only way in which man can reconcile himself with others is by understanding that God is at the center of every being. The blind man, who believes he is on his own, will always be prideful as he is unable to see the root from which all goodness emanates: "I cannot be humble unless I first know that I am good, and know that what is good in me is not my own, and know how easy it is for me to substitute an evil of my own choice for the good that is God's gift to me."<sup>xvi</sup> In short, hope in God offers the substance of all theology to the individual soul, "to re-establish all things in Christ, that are in heaven and on earth, in Him."<sup>xvii</sup>

Upon realizing that Merton's feelings of emptiness were a result of his disconnection with God, Merton concurrently invests *hope* in God, which ultimately procures faith in God's existence. This is a pivotal moment in Merton's journey and prevents him from living in the material world without being independent and alone. By understanding the action of turning within amongst a group of others with the same belief, Merton chooses to enter the monastery. At this moment, Merton begins his transformation by committing to a lifestyle aimed at understanding oneself through God. This self-cultivated action of understanding through God liberated him from himself and resulted in a pure self.

Freedom can often be misinterpreted. If man acts in accordance with his own will and refuses subservience to God, he will adopt a superficial concept of freedom. Some believe in freedom as total independence and freedom of choice. This notion of freedom irrefutably acts on the impulsive wills of the self. Mistakenly, one views this notion of freedom as a way to attain happiness. But, if one does what is pleasing

only to the self, one will always be miserable. Merton identifies an intrinsic dependent state at which man finds himself and claims that one's freedom is far from self-sufficiency. Instead, one's freedom is understood in the context of his relation to others. If we negate the contextualized state of being dependent in a functional society, the free choices we believe will result in happiness become choices that are dictated by our false inclinations. Merton concludes, "this would never be so if my will had not been created to use its own freedom in the love of others."<sup>xviii</sup> In other words, one can never be entirely independent since it is in tension with our intended origin. Therefore, freedom is not fully free when left to itself, but becomes truly free when it is brought into the right, loving relation with the freedom of another. One must use and develop one's freedom by choosing the 'good'. Merton claims that, "the good is what is admired or accepted by the people it lives with."<sup>xix</sup>

Freedom is an important element when discussing hope. If we have hope in God, we make ourselves capable of finding God. When we find God at the center of our being we understand the universality of God in all of man. From this, we can safely conclude that God is at the center of each being that we engage in. To show God our love, we act lovingly to the creatures in which He takes refuge. This becomes an incentive to serve God through charity. Freedom, for another reason, is important when discussing hope in the sense that it advocates humbleness. If we are not humble, we will be vain and lose our capacity to transcend our ego. If we are humbled and understand that we cannot be the owners of our goodness, we give ourselves to God. In giving ourselves to God we transform the idea of freedom in

that we suspend our immediate impulses (which usually result in selfish gratification) and use freedom as a developmental implement: the more we use it in the right way, the more fulfilled we become. Merton analogizes freedom with money, "As for freedom, according to this analogy, it grows no greater by being wasted, or spent, but it is given to us as a talent to be traded with until the coming of Christ."<sup>xx</sup> Hereby, one becomes "rich" by one's own virtue of choice. Merton's choice to develop himself in the monastery is principally a rich, fruitful decision.

In the initiative to make the most of one's freedom, it is imperative to develop a mature conscience, both psychologically and morally. In developing the psychological conscience, which govern feelings, thoughts, judgments and desires, we learn the ability to manipulate it and in doing so, understand the time in which it should be used and when it should cease its activity. If one focuses heavily on the psychological conscience, one becomes impaired, "we get so much in our own way that we soon paralyze ourselves completely and become unable to act like normal human beings."<sup>xxi</sup> Thus, during times of prayer, it is best to leave the psychological conscience alone. The psychological conscience is best when acted upon instinctively and without consultation. Hence, it is best to leave the psychological conscience at rest when meditating. In light of this, meditation should therefore be the act of developing the moral conscience, "When the consciousness acts properly it is very valuable in prayer because it lends tone and quality to the action of the moral conscience, which is actually central in prayer."<sup>xxii</sup> When we eliminate the static produced by the psychological conscience, the perception of beauty becomes clearer.

The compartmentalization of the psychological conscience from the moral conscience is the first step the ascetic takes in order to respond to the beauty that surrounds the self. Once the differentiation between the two realms of thought is achieved, one gains control of the self and limits the unwanted confusion that occurs from an overactive and compulsive psychological conscience. The moral conscience is inherently weak due to the external impositions from the world which we inhabit and should therefore be in a state of continual development.

The first step in the interior life, nowadays, is not, as some might imagine, learning *not* to see and taste and hear and feel things. On the contrary what we must do is begin by unlearning our wrong ways of seeing, tasting, feeling, and so forth, and acquire a few of the right ones. <sup>xxiii</sup>

Hope is the identification of our inability to be self-sufficient and thus accepting our dependence on God. When we bring hope into our belief system, we can detach ourselves from our ego and reside in the hands of God. Although this seems rudimentary and quickly efficient, the self-incubation in God is a complicated matter and requires steadfast attention in our actions. Although Merton does not discuss literalistic interpretations of the Bible, which he believes frequently mishandle the message of the Word, he implies that one must go beyond, or transcend what we find in doctrine and find empirical solutions in our relation to others by employing a contemplative, transcendental self into the world of action: "He [God] does not need our sacrifices, He asks for our *selves*."<sup>xxiv</sup> This ideology beckons for a period of time in which one enriches the self through silence, contemplation, meditation and prayer. For Thomas Merton, this could only be attained in a monastery.

### *Development in the Monastery*

Merton's initial attempts to enter a monastery failed and challenged his will to persist. Although this bit of information is somewhat irrelevant to Merton's development within the monastery, it demonstrates the sustained effort Merton put forth hoping to achieve spiritual oneness with God. As mentioned before, Merton did not find complete sanctity in the material world. In his actions, living in the material world, Merton demonstrated an underlying impulse and aptitude for the monastic lifestyle.

By adjusting to various social climates as a child, he was able to see a peculiar universality in everyone he met. During this time in his early life, he was able to meet different types of schoolchildren, some of which he highly disliked upon first impression. Nonetheless, he was instilled with a sense of patience and because of that, he was able to acclimate to his social surroundings with peaceful ease. With this patience, he was able to reconcile his differences with those he didn't immediately get along with. His skill for patience and commitment play a pivotal role during Merton's attempts to enter the monastic life.

At first, when he enrolled in a Fransiscan monastery he was rejected by the magistrate for reasons concerning his illegitimacy. Merton admits that the reason he considered the Fransiscan monastery over other monasteries was because its systemic lifestyle was less disciplined and looser in structure, "Yes, I liked the

Franciscans. Their life was very simple and informal and the atmosphere of St. Bonaventure's was pleasant and happy and peaceful."<sup>xxv</sup> The transformative step in crossing over from the material life to the monastic life was intimidating for Merton. At this stage in his maturity, Merton was still ruffled by the illusory outlets found in society that deceitfully implicated an advantageous prospective life. Because his vision was veiled by this duplicity, he was unable to give himself entirely to God and therefore unable to dutifully enter a monastery with absolute certitude. His imbalance in devoting himself to the spiritual over the societal happened for a few years until it occurred to him that his fractional experience in the monastery was more meaningful than his vast experience in the material world.

Even with this solidified understanding and genuine desire to move forward into the ascetic life, authorities of the monastery were still challenging Merton. Interestingly, Merton reacts to rejection differently from the time in which he has illegitimate motives for entering the ascetic life (namely superficial reasons which spring from him liking the 'idea' of being a monk) to the time when he legitimately wishes to enter to the monastery for reasons of self-purification and intimacy with God. When he was rejected under illegitimate motives, Merton copes by seeking refuge in the societal world. In doing so, he maintains faith in God, but distances himself from a spiritual foundation by desiring recognition for his individuality, "...my ancient selfishness was now matured and concentrated in this desire to see myself externalized in a public and printed and official self which I could admire at my ease."<sup>xxvi</sup> Thus, he is rejected, even with legitimate intentions, Merton abstains

from indulging in the temptations of the material world and chooses to teach the Word of God by becoming a teacher in a Catholic institution.

During his time teaching, Merton was able to maintain his spiritual identity while having the opportunity to reestablish the importance of solitude in order to develop within, “In an instant the desire of those solitudes was wide open within me like a wound.”<sup>xxvii</sup> In teaching, Merton acted as God’s agent by pedagogically spreading the will of God. In serendipitous fashion, this well-intended, genuine act “for God” closely preceded his acceptance into the Cistercian monastery. In the monastery, Merton found total silence. In this silence, Merton reached new levels of contemplation that lead to an awakening.

*Contemplation is the highest expression of man’s intellectual and spiritual life. It is that life itself, fully awake, fully active, fully aware that it is alive. It is spiritual wonder. It is spontaneous awe at the sacredness of life, of being. It is gratitude for life, for awareness and for being. It is a vivid realization of the fact that life and being in us proceed from an invisible, transcendent and infinitely abundant Source...Yet contemplation is not vision because it sees ‘without seeing’ and knows ‘without knowing’. It is a more profound depth of faith, a knowledge too deep to be grasped in images, in words or even clear concepts.*

#### *Fundamental Values Upon Entering Monkhoo*

“For the essence of the monastic vocation is precisely this leaving of the world and all its desires and ambitions and concerns in order to live not only for God, but by Him and in Him, not for a few years, but forever.”<sup>xxviii</sup> For Merton, the monk justifies his existence by teaching, writing, studying the Scripture and performing Gregorian chant, while farming and tending the world God created.

Although the environment for which monasteries are located offer the appropriate atmosphere for prayer, if the monk does not genuinely turn towards God, or undergo *metanoia*, there is no purpose for his entering the monastery. Merton comments on how monasteries too can be imperfect. The outcome of these seams and cracks which become apparent to a monk who endures the monastic life long enough, is the reestablished appreciation for peace and equanimity. In this way, it is reaffirmed that one is meant to turn inwards towards the deepest recess of the soul to find God and thus peace, “Their function is to remind us that the peace of the monks depends, ultimately, on something deep hidden in their souls.”<sup>xxix</sup>

Thus interior purification trumps pristine externality. Merton explains that entering an environment such as a monastery can act as a crutch, however it doesn't guarantee perfection of the spirit. On the contrary, sometimes monks cannot ground themselves in the monastic world because their relatively disproportionate lifestyle before entering the monastic community leaves them in an inverse state and makes acclimating to the environment more difficult. In an almost empirical understanding of the social imbalance a new monk may have, Merton explains how monks grasp onto anything they can, most commonly prayer, so that there is structure in their lives. When this becomes the raft on which they keep themselves afloat, all actions that are aimed towards God become formalities that are driven by desperation and are thus insincere. Henceforth, they don't understand how to be legitimate monks with earnest practice. Why does this happen? Well, “Because the monks who have never learned how to be real monks are driving themselves crazy trying to live the monastic life with the spirit and the methods appropriate to some other kind of life.

Only a true sense of monastic tradition can preserve sanity and peace in monasteries.”<sup>xxx</sup>

### *The Sacrifice in Asceticism*

The spiritual man lives at a distance from his sensual desires and therefore lives above corporeal temptation by transcending the fleshly body that he is imprisoned in. God communicates His life and His spirit to the devotee by creating a coexistent body and the soul. Merton explains that, “It is not His plan to lure the soul out of the body, but to sanctify the two together, divinizing the whole man...”<sup>xxxii</sup>

Thus, when sacrificing the impulses that stem from the body, we must do so with the intention to clearly understand and unify with God. The pervading motif is thus:

“None of us liveth to himself and no man dieth to himself. For whether we die, we die unto the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are in the Lord. For to this end Christ died and rose again; that He might be the Lord of the dead and of the living.”<sup>xxxiii</sup>

In this way, the soul is most directly correlated to God and the body is the temporal shell in which we experience his power. The shell, therefore, should not distract us from finding this center of existence. And in order to absolve ourselves from distraction, we must repudiate our innate concupiscence.

Because we are living for God, and God is the creator of all things, we neither love ourselves more than God, nor love one higher than another. If one achieves this level of understanding, he or she loves persons and things for the good that they

possess in God. In reiterating the importance for eliminating pride, Thomas Merton explains that: “As far as his own temporal advantage and satisfaction go, he is detached and unconcerned.”<sup>xxxiii</sup> When we love and perceive everything as being a part of an infinite divine, undifferentiated oneness, we lose selfish desire and at the same time, lose opinion regarding likes or dislikes. In this sense, Merton aims to explain that indifference is a result of no desire. A lack of desire results from the loss of self in God. When this happens, things and people don’t appear as advantageous mechanisms for our selfish interests. Instead, they are reflected as microcosmic entities that come from a greater, far more transcendent source. We find this universal essence in ourselves by turning within while simultaneously concluding that this very essence of beauty, perfection, love and other forms of ineffable divine attributes are at rest and within everyone else. Upon this discovery, we formulate a total indifference within a perspective that is so strong, it has no desire and no opinion. It remains calm and at total peace. But, before we reach this peace, we must lose sacrifice ourselves to God, first by having hope in him.

The ascetic life, however, is not an end in itself, “The proximate end is to bring peace and calm to a detached spirit, to liberate the spirit from its passions, so that we can respond more readily to reason and to divine grace.”<sup>xxxiv</sup> The ultimate end in Merton’s epistemology is to establish the self with a love that emanates God’s love. To procure this idea of self, one needs discipline. However, compulsive discipline, the kind that transforms useful methodologies into rote mechanics, deprives the ascetic of meaningful prayer and contemplation. Compulsive behavior, Merton propounds, is a reaction to difference between the serenity in a monastery

and the chaotic lifestyle found in the material world that the spiritual seeker is habituated to before entering the monastery. Merton notes that this type of behavior occurs most often in newcomers. In order to feel a sense of ownership in their lives, new monks engrain themselves with a strictly regimented schedule. As a means to cope in the new world they enter, they orient their schedule based around markers in time. By resonating the confusion found in the material world, actions such as prayer become mechanical and lose the intended effect. Contrary to this notion, Merton emphasizes the importance of losing time as a sense of reference. The goal is to reach a level of prayer that transcends time. Time creates points of reference and with milestones such as these; there is a quantifiable beginning and end. Genuine asceticism is without time and, at the moment of its beginning, it sees no end. God is omniscient and thereby infinite. To reconcile the transient life with the embodied self, one's soul must attune with God.

Every ascetic goes through a transformative stage from the Relative to the Ultimate. Under this transformative stage, the ascetic uses discipline as an agent. Discipline is thereby the requisite, or preliminary conscious force that further catalyses one towards his closeness with God, "To desire a spiritual life is, thus, to desire discipline."<sup>xxxv</sup> To reaffirm the affirmed, discipline should not be rigid, but should jointly maintain an essence of liberty while balancing itself with an element of severity,

If we do not command ourselves severely to pray and do penance at certain definite times, and make up our mind to keep our resolutions in spite of notable inconveniences and difficulty, we will quickly be deluded by our own excuses and let ourselves be led away by weakness and caprice."<sup>xxxvi</sup>

Merton emphasizes the need for a 'spiritual director', a guide on the spiritual journey that he considers to be helpful. Although it isn't entirely necessary, a spiritual director can create an element of order in the devotee's life. The spiritual journey can be complicated in the sense that upon entering and acting within the spiritual paradigm, one can easily lose touch with the true motives behind the efforts. In this way, the spiritual director is beneficial to directing one's discipline towards a more efficient spiritual freedom: "It is much easier to persevere in our penance, meditation and prayer if we have someone to remind us of the resolution we have begun to forget. Spiritual direction will protect us, in some measure, against our own instability."<sup>xxxvii</sup>

### *Pure Intention*

Pure intention is an important concept one must learn when undergoing transformation in a monastery. Essentially, having pure intention maintains truth in action. Pure intention is a product of simplicity. One will find it difficult to find Christ when living a life perturbed by complexity. Simplicity in thoughts and actions will give rise to Christ's presence in one's life. Thus, actions embedded in intentions illuminating from the inner presence of Christ, will be meaningful.

Merton further explores this concept by distinguishing action in two separate categories: *right intention* and *simple intention*. Right intention, in accordance with

its intended efficacy is immediate, and therefore seemingly effective. But, Merton notes that right intention is originally conceived as an action aimed to do good for the sake of doing good. When one acts under these precepts, one's actions are essentially premeditated and anticipate a reciprocal event or gesture to mirror the seemingly good projected by him or her. In other words, if one sacrifices time or money to better a cause, under this notion, one will expect a reward as return. In this way, it is an action bound by a temporal beginning and end in which one committing the right action muddles himself with the product of his act, the moral value to their act, and other milestones in between.

These complications are disharmonious to the desired simplicity and cause one to be lost in the complexity of the content in their action. In this way, the one putting forth the 'right action' will consequently lose the holistic perspective gleaned from charitable acts. A 'simple intention', as Merton coined it in 'No Man is an Island', takes form in the opposite way. One who is simple in their act is fully immersed by what they are doing to the point where they lose their ego, or identity while acting. In losing themselves while acting 'good' in the world, they reenact the concept of losing oneself in God when acting on hope, and are proverbially speaking, transubstantiated by their actions in Christ when acting under a 'simple intention'.

### *Finding Truth is to find God's Love*

To follow God's love is to be Truthful. Charitable acts are pragmatically compatible with the will of God. A happiness that is sought for ourselves alone,

naturally falls short of a holistic state of inner peace. True happiness is found in unselfish love, “a love which increases in proportion as it is shared.”<sup>xxxviii</sup>

Love that wills the best for another individual is love that derives from truth. Selfish love is not interested in the truth, but only in itself, “It proclaims itself content with an apparent good: which is the exercise of love for its own sake, without any consideration of the good or bad effects of loving.”<sup>xxxix</sup> It is clear then, for one to love others, one must love the truth. The truth, in other words, is the correct moral conduct one assumes and projects in a world of action. Therefore, if I am to love another, I must transcend the material world, which by its very nature, hides the meaning of love, and in doing so, enter the deeper mystery of God’s love for man. By experiencing this, I have the capacity to discover truth. Upon discovering truth, I can discern the correct and incorrect path. Simultaneously, I fall in love with truth and will naturally wish to share it with others, as I see myself in them by looking through the eyes of God, “I must seek the life of the Spirit of God breathing in him. And I can only discern and follow that mysterious life by the action of the same Holy Spirit living and acting in the depths of my own heart.”<sup>xl</sup>

Truth positions one in a good relationship with God. Once this happens, one is able to act out of Truth and love by means of charity, “In order to love others with perfect charity I must be true to them, to myself and to God.”<sup>xli</sup> This is contingent upon the idea that the true interests of a person are perfectly in common to the whole Kingdom of God. Therefore, everyone’s true interests are in common with the will of God as God is the ultimate designer of all souls.

## *Vocation*

For every human, there is a divinely designed and intended purpose or vocation for life. Additionally, for every human there is an impulse to spiritually reconcile the self with an ultimate being. For Merton, this was to know Christ. In knowing Christ, Merton found truth and love. In terms of choosing the appropriate vocation, Merton explains that there must be an evaluation that builds from the foundations of truthful intentionality, "...but he must understand clearly that in order to fulfill this vocation he can only be one person: himself."<sup>xlii</sup> A man only lives when he can love the self and thereby love others. In order to achieve this level of appreciation for people and everything else in the world, one must act in accordance with their truth. For Merton, this becoming of the self is to, "become Christ by knowledge and by love."<sup>xliii</sup> By this, one must become Christ in order to attain divine knowledge of the self and thus truth. In knowing the truth, one can act according to his vocation. If one pursues his vocation founded on truth, one can love the self without having pride, hence loving the self in the correct way. If one is able to love the self in this way, he will be able to love other people and everything in else in the world as he has a new vision that unveils the essence of God in all that He has created. With this epistemology, it is impossible to achieve wholesomeness in life without finding Christ. As Merton finds it nearly impossible to find Christ in the material world, it is presumed that turning to towards the monastic life is imperative.

Merton's implications describe a life that lives in complete unity with Christ. In this unification one creates an embodiment of Christ. In embodying Christ, one manifests all of his or her actions out of his will. This becomes ambiguous when brought in relation to one's position in society; such as a profession. There is no moment in time when Merton discusses practical vocational employment, such as being a carpenter, accountant, or lawyer, but in his ambiguous explanation of everyone's God given vocation, Merton describes what one should live by and what one shouldn't. In this way, we can sketch a tentative projection for the meaning of 'vocation':

He is bound by his vocation to fight his enemy. He cannot avoid the battle. And is a battle that he alone can never win. He is forced to let Christ Himself fight the enemy in him. He must do battle on the ground chosen not by himself, but by Christ.<sup>xliv</sup>

This advice to give oneself over to Christ is restated in all of Merton's epistemology. But, as a means to avoid confusion regarding one's destined will, Merton advises that all mankind must vest faith in Christ. For in Christ, there is truth. And truth is fulfillment in love.

### *Charity*

Charity is the vehicle that brings us closer to God in that it mirrors Christ's methods of love and sacrifice. Once we have discovered the true mystery of Christ we desire to share it with others. Charity is action from knowledge and understanding found in God. Without charity, knowledge is fruitless. So, if we have a

true understanding and genuinely know God, “our identification of ourselves with those we love will be patterned on our union with God.”<sup>xlv</sup> Charity is pragmatic love.

In addition to knowing God by acting charitably, we are graced with the level of understanding that God has of others. This follows the principle that God loves all of his creatures. In coinciding with his intent to all, we are able to mirror him and thus reflectively be in relation with Him on an intimate level while finding the essence of all he loves and thereby extracting a clearer idea of *who* they are. In brief, such love that is at the heart of charity leads to God because it comes from Him. Let us not confuse this act of love with love for ourselves. For if we love others as we love ourselves, are we being truly charitable? Merton would say ‘no’, “He alone holds the secret of a charity by which we can love others not only as we love ourselves, but as He loves them. The beginning of his love is the will to let those we love be perfectly themselves, the resolution not to twist them to fit our own image.”<sup>xlvi</sup>

As we have already established that man cannot be independently alone, he therefore must be dependent on others. Therefore, everyone is inherently assigned to better the ‘common good’ by the grace of God. For this reason, one cannot act for the sake of himself, and thus must coexist with other men, “As long as we regard other men as obstacles to our own happiness we are the enemies of society and we have only a very small capacity for sharing the common good,” (NMIAI 169). Essentially, giving good to others is to reveal the good in them, “Charity, in order to be perfect, needs an equal. It cannot be content to love others as inferiors, but raises them to its own level.”<sup>xlvii</sup>

Merton strays away from philosophical abstraction and lends his offerings of wisdom from a theological background deeply rooted in God. One reason for his opposition to philosophy other than the abstractness and ambiguity it often produces is that it tends to be overly personalized and therefore loses its 'common good' periphery. If we extend our actions from a theologically rooted belief in God we are then able to connect with society in a selfless way. A way in which one can gauge his measure of love for God is by his own self-denial, "The one who has the most in the realm of the spirit is the one who loves least in the order of the flesh."<sup>xlviii</sup> Detachment of the self is the will and the desire to renounce oneself completely in order to obey God.

## Chapter 2: Gandhi

*God is that indefinable something which we all feel but which we do not know...To me God is Truth and Love; God is ethics and morality; God is fearlessness. God is the source of Light and Life and yet he is above and beyond all these. God is conscience. He is even atheism of the atheist...He is personal God to those who need his personal presence He is embodied to those who need His touch. He is the purest essence. He simply is to those who have faith. He is all things to all men. He is in us and yet above and beyond us. One may banish the word 'God' but one has no power to banish the Thing Itself.<sup>xlix</sup>*

On October 2, 1869, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was born into an oppressed India that was suffering due to Great Britain's financial tyranny. At an early age, it appears that Gandhi was very average, timid, inarticulate, and painfully shy. By 1883 he was married and soon thereafter, in 1888, Gandhi was studying law in England in hopes to be a 'proper Englishman'. But, with much disappointment and failure in this endeavor, Gandhi moved to South Africa to work with a community of

a hundred thousand indentured Indian laborers working in mines and fields. At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Gandhi was politically active in South Africa and India, non-violently pushing for Indian equality. It was during this time in which he was given the title, “mahatma”, literally meaning ‘great soul’.<sup>1</sup> Gandhi believed that the only way in which one could act rightly was to act from a source of truth. Thus, at the root of all of Gandhi’s political and social actions is an underlying desire for Truth. This sense of Truth was derived from his spiritual understanding of the world. For Gandhi, Truth is God and God is love. Gandhi, impelled by an inner voice, expressed his conviction that the world could not continue for long the way it was and as so, it needed reformation to become other and better. Man cannot find truthful answers in the preconditioned state of civilization that propagates conformism or totalitarianism. In accordance with basic Gandhian principles, if every individual gained self-knowledge through self-transformation, various Truths, embedded in the individual, would be discovered.

If the cosmic and personal Truth resonated with each individual, non-violence would be achieved and love would flourish. The people of the civilization would be able to express their interests in a welcoming atmosphere that could nurture their pursuits for happiness. Politics and spirituality would coexist harmoniously. Divisions in religion wouldn’t separate theological groups from each other; rather universal principles, like non-violence, would bridge the gap between the different flavors of belief systems. Life would be simple and the industrial mode of production would be tempered in its tendency to dominate and exploit. Citizens would look

after their neighbors before satisfying their self-interest. The political climate would be peaceful and economic stability would eliminate the impoverished demographic.

These ideals, which composed much of Gandhi's vision for civic nationalism, were conceived in a state of total self-realization that came out of disciplined contemplation, meditation and silence. The starting point for Gandhi's proposal for the construction of a social order is the person who, through the revolutionary transformation of the self, moves towards a process of social reordering and helps create institutions that install and sustain a civilization. In Gandhi's history of political activism, there were times in which he felt distanced from his purified self. As a means to regain total clarity, Gandhi would spiritually rehabilitate himself by means of fasting, meditation and silence. These became the instruments through which he could reach an ultimate end of self-purification and self-realization and thus embody Truth.

For Gandhi, the utopian ideal for community is heavily oriented toward the individual as a communal element. An organized system of beliefs represents the interests of individuals as much as it does for other alternative factions of interest. The overarching expression of society is a product of various interests, which use a common outlet, the governmental order, that house and organize interests into an expressive object. For instance, certain lobbying groups may use the Democratic Party as an engine to launch their respective interests in a system much grander than their own. In order for civilization to be coherent and functional, the individuals that compose the unified body are expected to project their interests from a selfless, morally sound, base. Only those who have a clear understanding and

solid grasp of their moral identity can freely work in the context of society. Gandhi's conception of society is that it is a governing order imposed on the people to uphold what is moral and what is universal. In this way, moral precepts are expected to be binding *a priori*. If executed correctly, the governing order establishes grounds for freedom and liberty. Upon being free, one has the allocated space and time in which he or she, can undergo a process of self-realization. After this method of conditioning, one has a premise for his or her individualism. This identity is expressed in society in relation to others and creates a systemic functional community. By this notion, *the transcendental self is essential in acting in the world*. Finding this self, according to Gandhi, must be the primary concern of every man. The transcendental center is, in the theological words of Gandhi, God, "that indefinable thing we all feel but we do not know."<sup>li</sup>

One must find the transcendental self within before making sense of the environment in which one lives in. Gandhi's primary objective in life was to self-purify in order to find Truth, or ultimate self-realization. By living in relation to the external nature of the world without discovering the inner self, one is inherently disabled with shortsightedness. For Gandhi, this would be "losing the vision for God." In other words, those who only minister to the exterior, profane reality of the world distance themselves from the inner, transcendent universe and thus become alien to the soul in which God resides. "Realization of the self or the soul consists in the mind directing its attention from the external to the internal universe. If the mind changes its direction and begins to think of the inner world it travels from the material to the non-material stuff of which man is composed," (Mehta 26). When the

mind drifts away from the distractions of the material world and meditates on the stillness he finds in contemplation, he confronts the consciousness itself. In doing so, he realizes that *he is soul*. The soul is God. Finding this trivializes the material body as it is temporal and constantly changing. The soul, by contrast, by its very nature is stable and unchanging. When one realizes this concept and transcends the intellectual comprehension that can come out of reading up on abstract principles such as this, he or she can attain a state of perfect absolute bliss. This is the basis from which Gandhian thought manifests.

### *The Religious Contributions to Gandhian Thought*

To contextualize Gandhian principles in a theological format, it is worth understanding the Hindu and Buddhist traditions, both of which have roles in shaping Gandhi's attitude towards civic nationalism and the importance of transcendentalism. Rebirth, through the system of *samsara*, a central element in these philosophies, gives rise to the concept of *moksha*. *Moksha* is the escape from rebirth. This can only be initiated once all past karma is absolved. *Moksha* is the attributing impetus for all of Gandhi's spiritual endeavors. To attain *moksha* is to realize *Brahman*. *Brahman*, another specialized term found in Indian religions that relates to the concept of God, is the supplying force that unifies everything that exists. Once *Brahman* is discovered, one is attuned with Absolute Truth. Gandhi was known to have dubbed this process of realization, the entrance into the "Kingdom of Heaven," clearly borrowing from the Christian language. It is possible that this message could have come from Tolstoy's influence on Gandhi, namely his book

entitled, *The Kingdom of God is Within You*, which supposedly gave Gandhi an interior strength when engaging in civil disobedience. Many of Gandhi's contemporaries believed that moksha could only be attained once one withdrew from the world. These same groups believed that Gandhi was a martyr since he seemingly sacrificed his spiritual development by assuming political action in the world. In response to this, Gandhi argued that:

No one can be called a liberated person while he is still alive; one may be said at the most to have become fit for moksha...We must, therefore say that the Dweller in the body cannot be free while He dwells in it...If it [moksha] is the most important thing in life, it should be clear to us that it cannot be attained while we live in this body. Till the gate of the body prison has opened, the fragrance of moksha is beyond our experience. Whether terrible or not, this is the truth.<sup>lii</sup>

*Understanding the Self in Relation to Others – Reducing Oneself to Zero*

*Man must choose either of the two courses, the upward or the downward, but as he has the brute in him he will more easily choose the downward course than the upward, especially when the downward course is presented to him in beautiful garb.<sup>liii</sup>*

Gandhi recognizes that God made humanity different from the rest of his Creations. This is the very reason that man must try to elevate himself and not give way to the brutish nature of his primordial impulses. With this understanding, Gandhi avoids isolating himself from society. In accordance with Gandhian logic, the very fact that human beings have souls indicates that each individual has an element of the divine. Thus, humanity, as a whole, is obligated to love and serve one another. *Swaraj*, a term Gandhi used to convey the 'rule over the self' is something that can be

found within: "It is an inward change...It is the transformation of the heart...and that absolute transformation can only come by inward prayer and a definite and living recognition of the presence of the mighty spirit residing within."<sup>liv</sup> Once one undergoes this transformation, the external world changes. The perspective that comes to be from inner solitude is to be shared with the world in what Gandhi refers to as transcendent-and-immanent freedom. Because the idea of complete perfection, for Gandhi, is unattainable, the idea that one can *retreat* to purify the soul as a means to understand the ultimate and thereby uplift everyone else with this superior, otherworldly, cosmic gnosis is unacceptable. The only possibility for Gandhi, therefore, "lies in remaining in the world and engaging in action not motivated by self-interest, but directed towards ameliorating the suffering of others."<sup>lv</sup>

By nature, man is created for action. As such, the ascetic who retreats to a mountain or cave for a long period of time as a way of self-purifying by withdrawing from society, is in Gandhian principle, untrue to his basic nature, "This quest, Gandhi insists, does not imply leaving the world and settling in a cave. It means the acceptance of the phenomenal world as real and participating in the dynamic aspect of the world, that is, karma, action."<sup>lvi</sup> Inaction bears no fruit that betters fellow man. As aforementioned, man is inherently dependent on others because of his limitations and aptitude for being social by sharing ideas and services. If inaction is eliminated and acting out of self-interest is deemed distant from Truth and therefore destructive, the only other alternative is then *action in relation with others without self-serving motives*. Gandhi understands selfless action as sacrifice and

upholds the idea that this performance of action is a sacred duty, “This sacred duty lies for Gandhi, in exerting oneself for the benefit of others, that is, service.”<sup>lvii</sup>

...action leads to bondage unless it is performed in a spirit of sacrifice. Sacrifice means exerting oneself for the benefit of others, in a word, service. And when service is rendered for service’s sake, there is no room for attachment, likes and dislikes.

The Bhagavad Gita is a Hindu scripture that carried a tremendous amount of weight for Gandhi. Gandhi interpreted the teachings of the Bhagavda Gita as such that if an *individual* can perform *his* duties rightly, whether this is political, economic, educational, or any other, one could attain *moksha*. Henceforth, *moksha* is not intended to be compromised without removing the husks of the corporeal body in the material world. Purifying the self through the transformation of self-realization gives one strength to exercise his individuality in the utmost correct way. By doing this, one attains a sense of wisdom. In this wisdom one understand the Truth. Acting on the Truth is the only way in which one can atone for his or her past karma. The completion of this atonement in eliminating karmic residue brings about *moksha*; or escape from rebirth. The achievement of this spiritual cleansing is what Gandhi refers to as the Ultimate Truth.

In order for one to act rightly, the individual needs to eliminate the ego. In Gandhi’s practice there are certain techniques and methods of “killing” one’s ego: the disciplines of the three *margas*, or spiritual pathway, Jnana yoga, Karma yoga and Bhakti yoga – the disciplines of knowledge, of action, of devotion. The principal purpose for these three disciplinary practices is to eliminate the ego as a way to understand that there is no separation or distinction between individuals.

In Bhakti yoga, the devotee channels all of his love towards God. With this directed energy, the devotee develops a particular wisdom that reflects the omnipresence of God that resides at the core of every man. As such, all men are inherently interconnected by their divine compositions. In genuinely believing that God is in everything that surrounds the self, one comes to the realization that there is nothing but God and thus one's attachment to the profane world and all of its material distractions and thus the ego disappears. Being attached to material things, gives rise to untruthful attitudes such as competitiveness, anger and jealousy. At the nucleus of these attitudes is the ego. The ego is the root of all evil and presupposed oneself with selfishness that naturally manifests to those who surround that individual. This disadvantageous attitude causes dissonance in relationships and further proliferates one to embark on a life without truth, and "so when we detach ourselves from such thing, we become selfless and automatically kind and helpful to others."<sup>lviii</sup>

Karma yoga is the path to action. By doing this, one would work not just to benefit others as a means of reciprocating favors, but as a way to better the self through ritual and caste duty, and to rid oneself of past bad *karma*. This was Gandhi's new work ethic, one that would benefit everyone materially as well as spiritually." Gandhi preferred work to contemplation and devotion, but did not undermine these other paths, "work alone in your proper business, never the fruits thereof; let not your motive be the fruits of works."<sup>lix</sup> Work has to be in accordance with good intentions in order to achieve communal functionality. Evil work could never be reconfigured in the form of good work. By this idea, work had to contribute

to the general welfare of the world. The desire for *moksha* had to be present in whatever work humans engaged in. As mentioned before, *moksha* is never an immediate expectation, but is the ultimate goal in the life that pursuer would keep in the mind while working. Gandhi, as a man who wanted to lift up the plight of the poor, believed that lowly work, such as labor that involved manual exertion, was the most honorable. As such, this type of physical work Gandhi believes pays homage to God in offering and sacrifice. Additionally, the work should be aimed towards promoting conductivity for non-violence. Lastly, the success of the work is largely dependent on the practice of daily contemplation and devotion to God. This new work ethic that Gandhi brought to light did more than change the behavior of those who participated in work, it brought together reconciliation between productivity and spirituality. As Gandhi wanted spirituality to be assumed by all members of society, he had to demystify it from the traditions from which his spiritual perspective sprang by contextualizing it in a framework for modern day affairs.

### *Modern Civilization*

Whereas Thomas Merton and Krishnamurti were thinkers who formulated their epistemology away from the world, and in their isolation, established a disposition in wisdom and stability, Gandhi's method for developing his ideologies was by acting in society. With the sentiment that man is inherently a social being, Gandhi didn't see a reason for isolating oneself from the rest of the world, "I value individual freedom but you must not forget that man is essentially a social being. He

has risen to present status by learning to adjust his individualism to the requirements of social progress.”<sup>lx</sup> Gandhi viewed those who withdrew themselves from the world as a way of enhancing their spiritual being *as selfish and regressive* as those who exploited and undermined others by means of industrialism and capitalism. In the philosophy of Gandhi, man must acclimate to the environing social order and reshape it from the foundation of each man’s self-realization. “Gandhi’s denunciation of modern civilization and his proposal for reordering it, no doubt stem from his concern for the destiny of man which modern society distorts.”<sup>lxi</sup> In order for one to understand Gandhi’s philosophy that denounces modern society, one must also understand his conception of man and his views about the relationship between man and society.

Violence, for Gandhi, was an inevitable result from the framework of modern civilization and its institutions which gave rise to exploitation, competition, complexity and centralization. In this, his aim was to end violence by exposing the cancerous elements growing in the womb of modern civilization. Gandhi’s response to society was not a reaction to a careful analysis of the institutional structures and motivations. Instead, his opposition to modern civilization, which he mocked as a ‘satanic civilization’ was expressed in moral condemnation. Instead of devising solutions that would be fixed upon the topography of modern civilization, Gandhi theorized that the root from which all industrialism, capitalism, and machinery was antipathy to Truth and thereby, evil. No evil could be construed for good and Gandhi beckoned for a moral transformation in all of the foundations on which civilization sat. In this, Gandhi rejected modern society in its total form, “Gandhi rejects the

central assumptions and the world view implicit in modern civilization,” (Roy 38). His commitment to reshaping the central unit of ideologies that modern civilization branches from makes his rejection final and absolute. This is why, to some, Gandhi’s condemnation of the modern civilization in India was shocking, unsettling, and ‘forthright’. “Gandhi does not wish to address minor flaws that could objectively be altered to produce a more efficacious civilization.”<sup>lxii</sup> Rather, he attacks the foundation from which civilization develops.

Gandhi was on a quest in pursuit of higher goals like morality and spirituality. He saw that the modern civilization was incompatible with these as it advocated self-interest as the prime value of life. Gandhi condemns this garb that dressed modern society as distasteful, tempting attire that ‘pampered’ the human body by inciting and proliferating wants and desires. For Gandhi, the modern civilization, meaning the societal context in which he was living, as he saw it stood for dominance, violence, and the killing off of morality, “If modern civilization stands for all this, and I have understood it to do so, I call it satanic and with it the present system of government its best exponent.”<sup>lxiii</sup>

In his approach for a total reformation of society, Gandhi strategized using moral assertion that was universal and thus palatable for all individuals. Taking a lesson from the Bhagavad Gita’s usage of reiteration so that the message would be easily transplanted in the mind of the reader, Gandhi tailored his arguments on society by pinpointing specific examples related to the overall demoralization of society. Machinery, education, politics and other systems that supposedly contributed to the functional efficacy of modern civilization were brought under the

scope of Gandhi's moral assessment. He strenuously argued against the advancement in machinery. Advancement in machinery inevitably created more administering groups, that, by holding a superior status would suppress the majority of citizens by assigning them pawn-like tasks to keep the industrial organization of which they governed afloat. Politics separated individuals by factions, categorically, and Gandhi foresaw that this political system of compartmentalization that polarized groups would lead to violence. Education, as a whole, conditioned citizens, at an early age, to one day occupy these dysfunctional positions that on the surface, appeared to be cohesive.

Gandhi is highly critical of modern education as its pedagogy aims to condition the student to assume an occupation in the corrupt, modern civilization. In this sense, the negative elements that Gandhi called upon regarding modern education were by their very nature recharging, in cyclical fashion, future generations to fill the squandering occupations in order to keep modern civilization, in all the flaws that he saw in it, ongoing. Gandhi argues that modern education does not develop the mind, body and spirit, which he, as a traditional Hindu, famously considers as the tripartite of man. Education, instead of propounding knowledge to feed the immoral system of modern civilization, should be aimed to build character. Viewed thus, Gandhi makes no distinction between education and religion:

Education, character and religion should be regarded as convertible terms. There is no true education which does not tend to produce character, and there is no true religion which does not determine character. Education should contemplate the whole life. Mere memorizing and book-learning is not education. I have no faith in the so-called system of education which produces men of learning without the backbone of character.<sup>lxiv</sup>

Building character through spirituality, which inherently touches upon self-realization, which in turn, develops an idea of Truth, is vital in a society as a society is composed of man-to-man relationships. Knowledge, without any sense of devotion towards a supernatural being, or something larger than the self is a misfire. Gandhi believes that intellectualizing material, even morals and principles, isn't enough. Once man is in touch with the something above him, he instantly has a broader vision of others and his place in nature. Thereupon, he identifies himself with God and finds that self-serving interests are of no value, and thus loses the desire to serve the self. This concept of sameness that is achieved by anchoring oneself in God is coined as *Samatvam*, which essentially means, "oneness with everything in life."

Man is naturally dependent on others as he was created with strengths and limitations. These intrinsic limitations are balanced when a functional unit can coalesce and other individuals can compensate for others. Education thus, should be the background for development that should preserve the substance of the self while regulating man-to-man relationships as man, in Gandhi's vision, is by nature, a dependent, societal being. Education is the building block for an affluent civilization. Modern civilization exploits man's passions by employment, machinery and other media that are open to express man's primordial interest, namely those interests that are self-serving. In effect, man's inner being is ignored when man becomes the 'reflexive creature of the external', in that he is the acting product of that which has been imposed on him by external forces.

## *Adhyatmam – Adhidaivam*

Although much of Gandhi's epistemology came from the axiomatic principles of Hinduism and even Buddhism, it can be argued that Gandhi was an anti-theist in that he vehemently promulgated the idea that all religions have a common universality in morality. Although there are different divinities worshipped in different religions, the universality in morality is what ties all religious traditions, morals and beliefs together. The anti-theist argument would be thus: the parameters that categorize and compartmentalize religions are unnecessary and in distinguishing one group from another, these distinctions construct barriers that implicitly advocate opposition. *Adhyatmam –adhidaivam*, literally meaning, the superior, or supreme self (*adhyatmam*), and the spiritual substratum of the cosmos (*adhidaivam*), advocates for one to glean a perspective that sees the manifestation of the supreme spirit in all – “the self, all living beings and material objects.”<sup>lxv</sup> To be able to do this is to rise above the material world and seek that which gives rise to all sources of life. Echoing the sentiment that one must reduce oneself to zero, Gandhi eliminates his accumulated subjective perspective and shuns those who believe their views as Absolute:

It has been my experience that I am always true from my point of view, and am often wrong from the point of view of my honest critics. I know that we are both right from our respective points of view. And this knowledge saves me from attributing motives to my opponents or critics.<sup>lxvi</sup>

Gandhi advises all to stray away from exclusivism and respect the integrity of all by rooting their beliefs in *satya* (truth) and *ahimsa* (non-violence). Each individual's attitude that derives from these two important principles should be

present in every facet of governmental order in society. The pursuit of self-interest is immoral since it does not reflectively consider others perspectives. The desire to improve oneself in finding truth and to do good for others is what matters most.

The 'manyness of reality' argues for the respect of the integrity of others (*ahimsa*), calls for harmonious social relationship, enjoins the principle of trusteeship as the basis of strengthening harmonious relationships, enjoins the principle of trusteeship as the basis of strengthening harmonious relationships between various divisions of social order, and advocates the principle of decentralized, fully participatory village.<sup>lxvii</sup>

The ideology proposed by Gandhi cannot be expressed in a civilization that has a centralized order of government. Each perspective, as understood in his 'manyness of reality' has importance. Similar to the way in which each society member should share his specialties with others who are in need, the contributions regarding the overall functioning order should be shaped by all. The related interests of the majority groups will prevail and the minority interests will be carry less weight, but will have their own domain for governance. As such, Gandhi saw civilization as a tight-knit community that should have a strong agreement for commonality. The idealistic civilization Gandhi envisioned was small-scale and full of simplicity. He saw that the best way for societies to function as a cohesive unit was for them to be small. In this way, each individual is able to have his or her interest represented while being forced to contribute to the overall function of the civilization.

### *The Beauty of Simplicity*

Gandhi's theorized that machinery, in other words, technological implements that expedite the completion of a task, is on a perpetual track of advancement. This

trajectory of advancement will ultimately become so modified that efficiency in production will be infinite in its acceleration. When production is generated on a high-frequency basis such as this, complexity trumps and overshadows simplicity in a civilization. As a way of refuting arguments from his contemporaries regarding the success of the West that has thrived, and continues to thrive, on improvement in technology, Gandhi explained that the establishment itself, was too young and relatively recent to empirically understand the negative results that manifest from overdependence on machinery. Thus, the impulse to supersede others by competing in quantitative output is an illusion that is tempting because of the immediate, but temporary fulfillment it brings. Machinery is the vehicle for an industrious civilization. Principally, Gandhi rejected industrialism on the grounds that it does not allow everyone to enjoy a better standard of living. Instead it situates a minority in power over a majority of suffering, "Industrialism then stimulates a multiplication of wants but satisfies the wants of only a few."<sup>lxviii</sup> Simplicity, Gandhi iterated, was the medium in which happiness could be found.

Because Gandhi considers bodily welfare the focus of modern civilization, he is able to explicate the roots from which machinery and technology grew. His analysis of modern civilization supplements the reason for there being an infinite desire for more and explains the reason why those who already have what they need feel the impulse to gain more. Simply put, to produce more goods increases only the hunger for more. The emphasis on increasing one's worldly possessions makes every individual a competitor for scarce resources. In this competition against others, one concedes that one's interests trumps others, and the idea of

'getting ahead' means that we overpower others in order to survive. This approach to living a happy life is in complete tension with Gandhian theory that focuses on supporting one's neighbor over satisfying one's self-serving interests. The self-serving approach that comes with assimilation to machinery and all of its instant gratifications is exposed on a larger scale in the context of a modern civilization that is bound by industrialization. Essentially, this is a curse for man as it "depends entirely on your capacity to exploit, on foreign markets being open to you, and on the absence of competitors."<sup>lxix</sup> Industrialization leads to dehumanization in that when mass production is involved to satisfy the increasing demand for more, people are needed to occupy the substratum of work. Simultaneously, and much worse, it undercuts human development and transforms the interests of good individuals into greed. Gandhi approached his outlook on economics and industrialism from the approach that humans could not be absolute masters of material nature and therefore should not be treated as such. Paying homage to Occam's Razor, a principle that advocates a simpler explanation is better than a complex one, we could more easily analyze the meaning of Gandhian economics by echoing John Ruskin's famous quote, "There is no wealth but life."

I do not believe that multiplication of wants and machinery contrived to supply them is taking the world a single step nearer its goal. I wholeheartedly detest this mad desire to destroy distance and time, to increase animal appetites and go to the ends of the earth in search of their satisfaction. If modern civilization stands for all this, and I have understood it do so, I call it Satanic.<sup>lxx</sup>

One of Gandhi's reasons for opposing mass industrialization is that it leads to imperialism. With manufacturers producing objects in high demand, the increase in

generating goods is amplified. With this amplification, certain manual tasks, normally denigrating the laborer, are distributed to those viewed as less powerful in society. With global trade, the working camps tend to be located in a place in which the labor and manufacturing costs are low. Thereby, in addition to dehumanizing the morals of people, imperialistic capitalism robs other individuals of their livelihood on an international level. A current example that can put this into modern-day context is the recent controversy relating to Apple's manufacturing warehouse, Foxconn, located in China, which made its way on to the public map after an explosion occurred in late January, killing two and injuring dozens. The work conditions at this particular warehouse are notably deplorable and pay for labor is minimal. Apple has achieved a rate of production that is arguably unmatched in modern history, partly because of their mastery of global manufacturing in which the cost for production, facilities, and labor is low.<sup>lxxi</sup> Ultimately, this concludes with harsh working conditions that are hazardous for the employees.

### *The Pursuit of the Simple*

Socially and economically Gandhi opposed rapid growth in industry by means of machinery. It centralized the nation by creating a minority elite class that had an inherent power over the majority. The rich get richer and the poor, poorer, and getting rich becomes "an act of establishing the maximum inequality in our own favor."<sup>lxxii</sup> In addition to dehumanizing humanity by transforming truthful interests

into greed, major industrialism suppressed those who wanted to pursue a spiritual lifestyle. By emphasizing the improvement of the existence of man, we assume the role of the ultimate Maker and as such, push out spirituality.

Gandhi makes a point in focusing on poverty as the primary enemy for morality and spirituality. By constructing an alternate material world that disguises itself as the ultimate provider, civilization is fighting against nature. Gandhi looks to nature's resources as a way of gauging the degree to which man can consume. Similar to the Middle Way path that endorses moderation in all practices, Gandhi theorizes that nature is a system that can prioritize man's needs, "Nature is endowed with only so much resources that can satisfy not more than man's minimum needs, it does not have enough to satisfy man's greed."<sup>lxxiii</sup> As such, the level to which man is attuned with nature can further develop happiness, self-realization, and knowledge of Truth.

Although man is expected to contribute to society and help others and by this very nature, be dependent on others, Gandhi argues that being 'self sufficient' is not only another way in which *one* can contribute to *their* enviroing surroundings, but a necessary way of living. It is in view of these considerations that Gandhi puts so much emphasis on self-help and bread labor. Bread labor implies that everyone must perform sufficient bodily labor to entitle him to bread. As Gandhi says, "Intelligent bread labor is any day the highest form of social service. For what can be better than that a man should by his personal labor add to the useful wealth of the country? Being is doing."<sup>lxxiv</sup>

In its basic understanding, bread labor is manual labor by doing work that is self-sustaining while enhancing the livelihood of others. Gandhi challenged certain elements of Buddhism in this effort to encourage others to work as a means of self-development and communal sustainability. Gandhi challenged the lack of emphasis that the Buddha gave to manual labor. This harks back to his position that opposes spiritual fulfillment by withdrawing from the world and advocates self-realization by being in right relation to others.

Whenever you are in doubt or when the self becomes too much with you, apply the following test. Recall the face of the poorest and the weakest man whom you have seen, and ask yourself if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him. Will he gain anything by it? Will it restore him to a control over his own life and destiny? In other words, will it lead to swaraj for the hungry and the spiritually starving millions? Then you will find your doubts and yourself melting away.<sup>lxxv</sup>

Even upon achieving full self-sufficiency, no man can ever become completely independent, mainly of the societal orientation that disposes him of being intrinsically dependent on others. When dependence becomes necessary in order to keep society in good order and is brought in right relation to others, it loses its negative connotations and rather, is seen as cooperative. It is an interesting distinction, when Gandhi found God, he found Truth. In experiencing the key to appropriate action, by knowing Truth, Gandhi acted in the world. Through action, he developed a greater understanding for others and consequently, God. Gandhi, different from Merton, found God and Truth through experience in the material world by politically and socially engaging himself with his surroundings. Whereas,

Merton found solemnity in a monastery and through that peace, drew a better understanding for God's love and truth, Gandhi found spiritually attunement by being in right relation to others by acting truthfully. Gandhi often speaks of Truth talk in relation to God talk, hence his acts of truth are deemed as inspired by the divine. For Gandhi, this meant embarking on a long, dangerous journey, to ameliorate the injustice and oppression in India and South Africa. Both Gandhi and Merton correlate by reflecting acts that emulate their understanding for what constitutes the spiritual core in all that exists.

### *Chapter 3: Krishnamurti*

Jiddu Krishnamurti was born on May 11, 1895 in Madanapalle, a small town in India. Adopted at birth by Dr. Annie Besant, it was prophesized by Charles Webster Leadbeater that Krishnamurti was going to be the future's world teacher for the Theosophists. Due to this prophecy, a worldwide organization, the Order of the Star in the East was created in 1911. As an adolescent, Krishnamurti was situated as it's figurehead and for years was educated by the Theosophists to prepare him to become the next World Teacher, a figure that would ultimately propel spirituality and aid humanity in instilling the knowledge required to move to a higher evolutionary stage. It didn't take long until Krishnamurti dissolved his role of superiority as the messianic leader. The reasons for him resisting a leadership role as a spiritual figure are numerous, but all seem to derive from his belief that

man must be his own spiritual guide and cannot find enlightenment in the philosophy or teachings of others. The Krishnamurti proverb, “Truth is a pathless land”, is central to beliefs regarding man’s relation to the world and because of this, Krishnamurti could not assume the role of a spiritual leader for the masses. His dissolution speech, made on August 3, 1929 contained powerful messages that spoke to individualism being the only vehicle to liberate oneself.<sup>lxxvi</sup>

Jiddu Krishnamurti spent his life giving talks that promoted the importance of identifying the mind’s activity. Towards the end of his life, these kinds of talks would often take place in his area of residence, Ojai, California, a place known for its unique culture in spirituality, music, art, and ecological awareness. Krishnamurti mirrored his belief that thinking, speech, and action should be spontaneous and full of creativity. As such, his talks were never preplanned nor bound by a premeditated agenda; most of his talks were open for participants to ask questions at any time. It is hard to give finitude to what Krishnamurti gave to the world through his teachings, since ascribing meaning, or categorizing his teachings would be antithetical to the very nature of his transient, and never rigid doctrine.

From the beginning, Krishnamurti was motivated to release man from the cages that stunted creative thinking, as these cages promulgated the interests of those who were falsely, but commonly believed to be superior. His methodology was to move away from the external influences in the profane world, both material and abstract, and aimed at abolishing all preconditioned frontiers of the mind that gave understanding to one’s identity and relatedness to the world. His pedagogy of transcendence encouraged equanimity in the self by rejecting categorical

attachment to all systems of belief in religion, politics and other societal frameworks that inherently endanger and rob man of freedom in thought. Krishnamurti's teachings are revolutionary in that they highlight the mind's thinking processes. By doing this, he is able to unravel the complex systems from which thoughts are causally conceived.

It is important to remember that Krishnamurti vehemently repudiated all systems of belief and did not pledge allegiance to any collective group. He believed that confining oneself to fit into an overarching order with its own precepts intrinsically narrowed the mind's ability to exercise outside of certain pre-established patterns with finite parameters. These patterns of the mind imprison the self from freely thinking with pure, independent creativity and instead force one to think in reaction. Additionally, when one identifies with a system of belief one naturally isolates him or herself from others. By being in isolation, one disrupts human development by eliminating one's relation to others. Isolation, Krishnamurti explained, can happen by being an ascetic who leaves society entirely and live alone, but can also occur in the context of homogenized group, such as a Communist party.

### *The Need for Security*

Much of what Krishnamurti based his discipline on was the universal impulse for security found at the innermost core of every man. He argued that the human being is continually searching for an escape from feelings of loneliness, emptiness and solitude in the self. However, the state of total emptiness in the mind produced what Krishnamurti experienced to be a condition of spontaneous creativity. Creativity, in this context does not imply the external projection of a

creative idea through art, craft, poetry, movies or music. Instead, this creativity surfaces when the human is immersed in the most transcendent realm of the inward self. When this creative condition is attained, the human approaches all that he engages with a clean perspective that is completely aware and anew to situations. In order to reach this moment, one must separate oneself from past experiences - that transitively formulate his or her conception of identity and consequently dictate his or her relation to other people and the environing surroundings - "...until the mind is aware of its own process, until it sees itself functioning in a particular pattern and is able to be free from that conditioning...all search is in vain."<sup>lxxvii</sup>

This preconditioning is a very destructive thing. If we, as human beings living in a societal context are preconditioned to think and act in a certain way, we never truly act from the underlying nature of inner selves. Instead, we unknowingly reflect what has been engrained in our mind from years of imposed external influences. Surely, this way of being and acting is untruthful and distant from the core of the individual. In being untruthful to the self, one is in a constant state of conflict. Since conflict corrupts man's equanimity, it is easily recognizable. Man thus identifies and diagnoses what he believes to be the problems that effectively cause turmoil. In identifying the root of the problem, man acts to remedy what he believes to be the impetus for conflict by employing various methods of therapy. However, this very act of resolution is conflict in itself, as it perpetually forces a state of becoming. Thus, conflict resurfaces in the very act of resolving the initial conflict. As he wishes to become more virtuous, patient, focused and less violent, the human being is never living in the present moment, but instead living in both the past (that which he was)

and the future (that which he wants to be). If I am a hedonist who indulges in overeating during every meal, but wish to limit my gluttony by reducing what I consume, I instantly bring upon the self more conflictive forces to the original problem-at-hand. Krishnamurti explains that if all of humanity were to carefully observe the processes of the mind and have stillness without judgment or comparison, there would be happiness – and, moreover, peace. If we identify the fundamental issue that underscores the conflict, we have a greater chance of success in resolving it.

The creativity that Krishnamurti advocates everyone to seek, in a way, is gentle stillness. It is when the mind is in a constant state of awareness. It is when the mind and the self can simply *be* and when action emanates from a pure, untainted source of *being*. The need for security, on the other hand, arises when there is disorder and agitation in the mind. The more confusion that stirs the self into agitation, the more inclined man is to reach out for feelings of security in the political, social, or religious sphere.

Confusion arises only when I think or insist that the road leads somewhere else – and that is the state that most of us are in. Our opinions, our beliefs, our desires, ambitions, are so strong, we are so weighed down by them, that we are incapable of looking at the fact.<sup>lxxviii</sup>

The sect that offers the solution from suffering is merely a façade and in seeking refuge in it, we only propagate the interests of those who are superior in that particular group. By doing this, we naturally give power to those who are seen as the agents of executive order: “to give primary importance to these superficial things when the whole structure of society is crumbling, is like cleaning and

polishing your fingernails while the house is burning.”<sup>lxxxix</sup> Once a sense of power is established in a group, the inequality between the inferior and superior engenders competition. Competition provokes more conflict and creates more outlets for ‘becoming’. To indoctrinate oneself into these kinds of systems is to put the self and all other men on a lower platform.

System becomes important, the philosophy, the idea, becomes important and not the man; and for the sake of the idea, of the ideology; you are willing to sacrifice all mankind which is exactly what is happening in the world.<sup>lxxx</sup>

Thus, Krishnamurti develops his philosophy by completely rejecting the functionality of the world as it is: one that is perversely dominated by a deeply flawed essence of order.

There is a psychological process intended for security when one ardently believes in something. If we are to meet everything anew, we must abandon preconditioned dispositions that evolve from our experiences. Experiences give one a frame of reference and something to work against; in other words, these actions are our axis for movement. When a new kind of experience comes to light, something one has never been confronted with before, the experiencer aligns his or herself with a cognition based on empirical understandings that from the beginning, were never original to the individual. As such, new experience can never be holistically understood and any potential developments that would arise with a mind that is still, creative, and profound are immediately revoked. “Therefore, the more knowledge a mind is burdened with, the less capable it is of understanding.”<sup>lxxxi</sup>

The accumulation of understanding in the world gives us a frame. Once we feel the frame is jeopardized, or we feel that there is the possibility of losing that which we've accumulated, we become fearful. Thus, the fear of the unknown is the fear of losing the accumulated known. Once the mind feels fear, it resorts to patterns, which act as mechanisms that cope with fear. These mechanisms are constructed patterns that we apply during times of confusion, or during times in which the accumulated known is challenged by something that issues in an impending sense of loss of that accumulation. Krishnamurti argues that the mind, itself, is fear because of its natural inclination to use patterns as mechanisms for thinking expediently and clearly. Based on experiences, we produce patterns which construct a framework for thinking, thus we never live in the present, and "this means that whatever the mind does to get rid of fear causes fear."<sup>lxxxii</sup>

In the moment of inserting a pattern of thinking during a foreign situation as a way of making sense of the experience, the experiencer echoes ideologies that come from systems of belief that he or she belongs to. In that moment, the one is temporarily losing the self. If we were to take this concept and magnify it on a larger scale, one finds temporary relief when one identifies with a particular religion. Fear, thus must always find a substitute, such as a pattern of thought, as a way of realigning oneself when a moment of confusion arises. If I'm a Christian who is in fear of death, most likely, I will identify myself more closely with God because that God promises me an afterlife of eternal paradise. "The more you are identified with a substitute the greater the strength to hold on to that for which you are prepared to

struggle, to die, because fear is at the back."<sup>lxxxiii</sup> Therefore, fear is the non-acceptance of what the self *is*.

### *Listening*

It is difficult to listen without making judgments, comparisons or opinions. Can the mind listen without formulating an abstraction? Can it ever listen without making any interpretation based on the screened prejudices of that which we are listening to? Krishnamurti believes that seeing and listening and therefore learning are all one in the same. Hearing is doing nothing to stop seeing and thus we are constantly projecting our feelings onto that which we are listening to and thereby alter, with our preconditioned feelings, the lessons we learn from what we audibly receive. These reactive moments are microcosmic extensions of our fundamental foundation for belief and thus our relation to the world. If I hear the one speaking through the image I attribute to him or her, do I even hear?

In putting forth our past experiences at the moment of listening, the act of listening immediately becomes temporally bound. Krishnamurti argues that there is an art to listening, which abandons all the screened prejudices or pre-formulated ideas in religion, politics, science or spirituality. For Krishnamurti, truth can never be given; rather, it can only be experienced. As the world is temporal and transient in nature, when conditions and perspectives change with time, there is never a definitive exposition of what the truth is. Thus, truth cannot be given, it can only be experienced under an unconditioned state of full, direct perception, "Understanding comes through being aware of what *is*. To know exactly what *is*, the real, the actual,

without interpreting it, without condemning or justifying it, is, surely, the beginning of wisdom.”<sup>lxxxiv</sup> The attainment of what *is*, is the end at which Krishnamurti’s teachings wish to achieve. What *is*, is that which is non-judgmental and fully unaware. It is only in this state that the mind can be fully attuned to beauty, truth and perception. It is only when we transcend the conditioned self that we can attain a level of stillness and thereby see and listen to the world clearly.

### *Effort in Action*

You want to arrive, you want to succeed, you want to find an ultimate God or truth which will be your permanent satisfaction. Therefore you are not seeking truth, you are only seeking God. You are seeking lasting gratification and that gratification you clothe with an idea, a respectable-sounding word such as God, truth; but actually we are all seeking gratification and we place that gratification, that satisfaction as the highest point, calling it God, and the lowest point is drink.<sup>lxxxv</sup>

Krishnamurti contests that all action that is aimed towards an end, or is purported to attain a certain desire, is in itself, a reaction. This reaction reflects what one is striving to become or create. Many of us who live in the West are instilled with the ethic of ‘work hard go far’. Most of us, in the context of this particular society find this principle to be true. Let us not misinterpret Krishnamurti’s teachings by invalidating them as nihilistic notions that bastardize the work ethic. However, Krishnamurti finds a struggle in all action that aims to attain a premeditated end. Joy and happiness do not come through effort, thus one can never act to receive feelings of happiness or equanimity. Surely, the actions that seemingly bring such ends are only momentary in their reality.

The starting point for Krishnamurti's understanding of the phenomenal world starts with demarking that man is inherently impoverished. Truly, Krishnamurti believes, if one is aware of his or her own insufficiency and spiritual poverty, one is able to clearly reconcile and creatively act upon that which they are. This is why it is pivotal in Krishnamurti's philosophy for one to understand the self, "...when there is understanding of what is, which is emptiness, inward insufficiency, when one lives with that insufficiency and understands it fully, there comes creative reality, creative intelligence, which alone brings happiness."<sup>lxxxvi</sup>

To shed a different light on this philosophical understanding of action, if one acts to improve the self, there is implicit recognition of deficiency of the self that the actor wishes to ameliorate. This form of action is in a continual state of becoming, in which one is arriving at a higher, more desirable state than the previous one. This produces an eternal state of conflict and a self that is never fully at peace and thus the mind is never entirely still. Paradoxically, the mind that isn't still elusively appears to be a mechanism that, with enough calculated thinking, can actively seek out the fullness and stability that comes along with a transcendental stillness. Krishnamurti describes this action as one which distinguishes the 'me' or the 'I'. Therefore action that derives from a mind without clarity and therefore intends to bring about an end, is merely a reaction. It is ceaseless in becoming, which is the denial, or the avoidance of what *is*; but when there is awareness of emptiness without choice, without condemnation or justification, then in that understanding of what *is*, there is creative action. Having a basis of understanding the self and the processes of the mind will in the end, produce moments of tranquility. Thought is

the product of the past and therefore it can only think in terms of the past or the future; it cannot be completely aware of the present, “to be free of contradiction one must be aware of the present without choice.”<sup>lxxxvii</sup> Thus, self-knowledge is the beginning of understanding; without self-knowledge, contradiction and conflict will continually permeate our everyday existence.

### *How Can We Find the Self – What is the Self?*

As Krishnamurti relentlessly emphasizes in his teachings and writings, one must lose the superficial sense of the self in terms of ‘me’ and ‘I’ that carry associations, affiliations, ascriptions, nominalizations and any other form of classification that obfuscates the ability to distinguish the way in which the mind works. Mirroring Gandhi’s sentiment that one must reduce oneself to zero, Krishnamurti argues that losing the self is imperative in finding truth. One can only lose the self when there is mindful observation that monitors the types of actions one expresses in various situations. The only way we can discover the self is with a mind at ease that is still and silent. By understanding our actions and the processes that lead to these actions, our desires, which have taken form in action, become clear to the self. In short, mindful experience is what strengthens the self. In this sense, the self is the external exhibit of ‘I’ or ‘me’. Silent experience, with no interruptions, so that desires, judgments, comparisons or other interests don’t distort it, is experience that develops the self truthfully. This different understanding of truthful experience in contrast to illusive experience is related to Krishnamurti’s feelings towards those who strive for perfect intelligence. We want to be intelligent, but intelligence comes in different forms. The right intelligence is

integral intelligence, “to be integrally intelligent means to be without the self.”<sup>lxxxviii</sup>

One must therefore understand the process of experience before discovering truth about the self. Similar to Gandhian interest in maintaining a certain level of poverty in order to bring about truth, Krishnamurti encourages everyone to be poor, to a certain degree, so that understanding will come with more ease and clarity.

A virtuous man is a righteous man, and a righteous man can never understand what is truth because virtue to him is the covering of the self, the strengthening of the self because he is pursuing virtue. When he says, “I must be without greed,” the state of non-greed, which he experiences only strengthens the self. That is why it is important to be poor, not only in the things of the world, but also in belief and knowledge.”<sup>lxxxix</sup>

It must be noted, that underscoring Krishnamurti’s devised systemic plan for finding truth is the notion of losing the self. Being poor in knowledge is taming the mind from latching onto patterns of the mind, which has already been established as a coping method for one to apply when challenged with the unknown, or in other words, moments of fear. Poverty for Gandhi was a way to achieve simplicity. He often did this by outwardly altering his style of life to that which was self-sustainable and therefore, forcibly less complicated. For Gandhi, this methodology procured feelings of equanimity. Similar in principle, Krishnamurti found that with less encyclopedic knowledge, the mind was able to retract from that which it believed it knew, and in that retreat, there was stillness. Both of these philosophies interconnect on the agreement that simplicity brings to the fore self-realization.

## *Simplicity*

Krishnamurti found that simplicity in all things was necessary in order for one to understand the self. Being brought up as the predestined messianic leader of the Theosophists, the young Krishnamurti was often accompanied by devout followers. It was not in his interest when he was young nor old to attract a following, as doing such would position him on a throne of authority. The paradigmatic systems that begot hierarchy were the source for all that was complex and conflictive in the world. Having a first-hand experience instilled a disgust for organized systems of order and as a result, Krishnamurti made it an effort to live unaffiliated with emblematic groups by living simply.

Krishnamurti saw that external displays of simplicity led to a pseudo-pretense, almost artificial reflection of the self as humble in living. Simplicity is more than a renunciation of the material. Simplicity can only come into being inwardly, and with that internal transformation there is outward expression. In order to glean an understanding of the inner, one must observe the outer by discovering how conflict, struggle and pain exists outwardly: “the more you understand the process of sublimation, suppression, substitution, the greater the possibility of being simple.”<sup>xc</sup> This will allow the self to observe the moments that lead to conflict. Being simple is conducive for mindful observation.

## *Awareness*

As being in relation with each other catalyst an understanding of the self, it is important to remain aware of the mind-processes during thinking and action. We

develop this awareness by understanding our relationship to the whole, “there is no life without relationship; and to understand this relationship does not mean isolation. On the contrary, it demands a full recognition or awareness of the total process of relationship.”<sup>xci</sup> Proper awareness is not hyper in its judgment or discernment. It shouldn’t compare others for this only is useful in situating things in regard to the hierarchical ladder found in institutions. Thus, one must be passively aware. In behaving this way, one must not condemn anything because for the moment one does this, one admits to a lack of understanding of that which it is judging. Passivity, in this sense, is not a state of idleness in which implications are missed, rather, it is a state of extreme alertness in which, “there is no longer identification with the problem and therefore there is no judgment and hence the problem begins to reveal its content.”<sup>xcii</sup>

To be aware that we want a particular answer to a particular problem – surely that is the beginning: to know ourselves in relationship to the problem and how we deal with the problem. Then as we begin to know ourselves in relationship to the problem – how we respond, what are our various prejudices, demands, pursuits, in meeting that problem – this awareness will reveal the process of our thinking, of our own inward nature; and in that there is a release.

It is common for people to be unable to fix their problems since it is challenging to dispassionately look at a problem. Because we always desire a result from our problems we can never let the problem tell its own story without interpreting it. We always approach a problem with our own intentions and attitudes and thereby distort it from its reality. A situation that confronts the self with challenges may be new or unique in its presentation, but because we revert to mechanisms that come from a patterned mind, our ideation or mechanisms for dealing with conflict are the

same. By confining ourselves to what we already know in our relation to the world, we instantly put a cap on the infinite ways of growth. Most people are ignorant of this behavior and therefore mechanically proceed to act by rote. This is why it is so important for man to have integral awareness when confronted with problems.

For Krishnamurti, isolation does not enlighten one with self-understanding. Instead, it propels one to search for a way to achieve power. The whole process of isolation is a search for power. The very desire for power or for position is undoubtedly a form of separatism. The nationalist is cursed because in his nationalistic, patriotic spirit, he is creating a wall of isolation. Krishnamurti explains that one can live in the world without the desire for power, position and authority when one does not identify oneself with something greater and all encompassing. The desire to identify oneself with something greater is both a way of falsely coping with fear while seeking power. In this way, there is isolation in that which man finds comfort, refuge, or sovereignty. Krishnamurti is different from Merton in his journey for enlightenment in that he completely repudiates any form of organized thought. Merton, finds love, truth, fulfillment, in a God, who has a long doctrinal history. Krishnamurti, in a very Buddhist sentiment, iterates that all things are transient. The self, by this very nature, is transient, thus perspectives, beliefs and feelings within the individual come and go. In this way, one must not invest heavily on his or her 'screened perspective' and thus must detach oneself entirely in order to find truth. The main difference between these two thinkers is the axis from which Merton develops his understanding compared to Krishnamurti's lack of gravitational pull to anything pre-established, and his disassociation from

everything. This, in turn, creates a malleable, fresh, awareness of the world and the self, which is always anew, as the transient nature of the world is in a perpetual motion of change.

### Conclusion

There are two themes that connect these three thinkers. First, Thomas Merton, Mahatma Gandhi and Jiddu Krishnamurti all needed to turn within before understanding the deep nature of existence. Secondly, with what each one gleans from spiritual enlightenment, there is an impulse to turn outward, to improve the world through their developed wisdom. In doing so, each one needed silence and a level of withdrawal from the world. In their contemplation and meditation they found an underlying, but compelling force that each one described as being ultimate. But, even with experiencing the ultimate, none of them were bold enough to make the claim that they fully knew the ultimate as their own. Conjuring up what seemed to be a divine essence, all three reacted in trying to give the feeling of the *noumenon* a name.

For, Thomas Merton, it was the Catholic vision of God. This theological depiction of God has qualities of love and embraces all who find sanctity in his grace. He is assumed and understood to be at the core of all that exists. In this way, Thomas Merton saw that all of humanity belongs to an undifferentiated oneness. With this profound discovery, he believed that if we all belong to God, we are all a cohesive family that is intended to cooperate with each other. Man is a societal being

and therefore must not lose himself in asceticism. By this very nature, Thomas Merton made an effort to live dependently in a monastery. In the monastery he was able to live a content life by performing activities that embraced spirituality physically and mentally. He was able to find a specialized vocation, and through writing, he reached thousands of spiritually seeking people: some of whom entered monasteries on their own accord under the influence of Merton. There is a level of balance that proliferates throughout Merton's life. Because he takes on an order by living in the Cistercian monastery, his life is structured with steadiness in prayer and physical work. Holistically, Merton is able to attain a position in life that is beneficial to the self and others. In turning outwards, from what he gained through introspection, Merton betters his environing surroundings. God, for Merton is the axis from which his spiritual devotion emanates. Through his spiritual transformation, however, he sees that essentially, all religions are aimed at attaining the same goals of happiness, equanimity and peace. Based on evidence from the *Seven Story Mountain*, there are moments that lead Merton to decide to live a monastic life. Tragedies and moments of loss are depicted to magnify the suffering that is inherent in the very nature of life. All of humanity struggles, some more than others, but with struggle, there are methods for coping. The methods Merton uses are those which provide guidance, structure and discipline. This sharply contrasts with Krishnamurti's belief that all man must free himself from institutional frameworks; in this way, Krishnamurti espoused a posture one might call "anti-establishment."

Mahatma Gandhi responded to the issue of contemplation and action differently. Although he had his way of retreating from the chaos of the material world, Gandhi did most of his learning by experiencing relationships with other people through political and social activism. With non-violence as his guide, Gandhi was able to understand that all of human nature belonged to a unified source of existence. He was able to see the methods for which society went awry. In transcending the topical layer of societal and political order by finding the roots and sentiments from which they grew, he identified the right action and beliefs one must have to create a functional community. Condemning hierarchy, which also stemmed from his feelings that were closely related to the cosmological notion of Brahman, Gandhi saw that no man should hold superior power over another. Because the political system in which he engaged in was founded on these ideals, Gandhi put most of his effort towards unveiling the origin from which these methods of behavior developed. Gandhi attempted to dispel competition since he believed that it led to irrational rivalry, which ultimately resulted in violence. This is the flavor of methodology Gandhi employed when evaluating and diagnosing the modern civilization he deemed was satanic and corrupt.

There is a linearity to the way in which Gandhi revolutionized his life and those whom he influenced. He sought refuge in simplicity because a life without distraction was a life conducive for contemplation and clear thinking. Simplicity, for Gandhi, was achieved by self-sustaining methods of living. By sewing his own clothes and living in a community small enough so that he had an intrinsic level of responsibility to serve himself and those who lived with him, Gandhi achieved a

lifestyle that was both contemplative and active. By living this way, he felt as though he attained a certain degree of self-realization and truth. The model thus resurfaces in which a spiritual thinker believes that answers come in both solitude and a world of action. The initial step, in this paradigmatic process of learning, is that one steps away from impositions and external influences. In doing this, one is able to regain a sense of the self with total clarity. Let it be noted, as noted previously, this process, is not necessarily quick or efficient. Instead, it requires full devotion. For Thomas Merton, this meant retrying numerous times so that he could finally be accepted in a monastery. And then, in being in a monastery, it took a long period of time for him to be able to attain the enlightenment he discusses. Gandhi also had moments in his life where he felt a sense of losing the clarity that gave him a basis for understanding. In these moments, which most notoriously happened during Hindu and Muslim conflict in India, Gandhi subdued himself and found a sense of peace through fasting, meditation and prayer. Once he felt spiritually revitalized, he moved outward again, to improve society. This is the repetitious process for which the spiritual impulse to turn within and reconciling that, which one gleans form this period of introspection, in society, takes place.

Krishnamurti as discussed before is the black sheep. He has no axis around which he focuses his energy for attaining spiritual enlightenment. He repudiates all systems of belief, organizations of thought, politics, religions, education, and any other formal group that influences the way in which one thinks. For Krishnamurti, thinking as one naturally would without an encyclopedic knowledge in science, philosophy, literature, and other disciplines is the only truth we can come to know.

His whole life was aimed at freeing himself from the precepts of knowledge, belief and feelings he, much like everyone else in a society, inherited. Krishnamurti encouraged that people to immerse themselves in stillness. This stillness would bring the mind to a place in which it could identify the processes for which thought comes to be. In knowing how one thinks, and knowing the 'reactions' one has to relationships, people, objects, one is able to act in the world in harmony. Love, for Krishnamurti, is comparable to the Truth that Thomas Merton found, and the Self-realization Gandhi found in their times of meditation. Although there isn't much on the biographical life of Krishnamurti, he admits in his teachings and lectures, the medium through which most of his philosophy is communicated, that there needs to be a withdrawal from the world in order to be right relation to the world. This advocacy for solitude to promote well-being falls under the categorically conceived model which I hope, by this point has become apparent. Once again, to reiterate: there is suffering in the world. Calamities like war, poverty, injustice, prejudice, racism, amongst many others saturate every facet of life. We are confronted with these, but do not know the reasons for their existence as we live in the flurry of these being bred. In this way, they are natural to us; we truly know no other way of life. But, deep at the core of our being, we feel an inclination for all of these atrocities to cease from existence. The problem lies therein, that because we are living in a world of murkiness, it is difficult to think and rationalize problems with clarity.

Merton, Gandhi and Krishnamurti, in their lives underwent a process of turning within to find this clarity. The turning within is multifaceted and different for each thinker. For Merton, it was entering a monastery. The monastery gave

Merton order. It provided him with objectives and a lifestyle that supplemented his motivation for finding God. By living a life of simplicity in which he tended the Earth that he believed God created, and by praying, contemplating and meditating as a way of balancing the psyche with the physical, Merton was able to achieve equanimity. This was the *linear path* that Merton followed to find where his impulse directed him to go. For Gandhi the methodology of successfully turning within came from living a life of political action while residing in a community of simplistic endeavors: an engaged kind of path. His non-violent political agenda brought him in right relation with enemies and supporters alike. There was an empirical understanding of the world that came through experiencing a life in action. In this way, he was able to find a self-realization that gave him feelings of peace and equanimity. Krishnamurti, by disengaging from all that was imposed on him and the all that composed his precepts was able to see the world with a clear vision. He felt that screened prejudices created patterns in the mind. The patterns in the mind are a natural inclination for man to live by as they uphold a sense of security. The need for security surfaces when man is afraid of the unknown. Krishnamurti argued that the only way in which we can truly know ourselves and act truthfully is by plunging into the unknown abyss: a purified path. In this way, there is a coterminous pattern to all three thinkers in which there is a turn within, a development in solitude through various practices, methodologies, coping mechanisms, and the final stage when the spiritually attuned being wishes to turn outward and act in society. All three believed that man is intrinsically a societal being due to his instilled nature and as such, much specialize in the unique aptitudes given to him, while benefiting

others in the community. When this is achieved correctly, there is peace, spontaneous creativity, harmony, truth, equality, comfort and love.

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- <sup>vi</sup> Thomas Merton. *Seven Story Mountain*. p. 131
- <sup>vii</sup> Thomas Merton. *Seven Story Mountain*. p. 133
- <sup>viii</sup> Thomas Merton. *Seven Story Mountain*. p. 133
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- <sup>xxi</sup> Thomas Merton. *No Man is an Island*. p. 32.
- <sup>xxii</sup> Thomas Merton. *No Man is an Island*. p. 32.
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- <sup>xxiv</sup> Thomas Merton. *No Man is an Island*. p. 63.
- <sup>xxv</sup> Thomas Merton. *Seven Story Mountain*. p. 266.
- <sup>xxvi</sup> Thomas Merton. *Seven Story Mountain*. p. 236.
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- <sup>xxxiv</sup> Thomas Merton. *No Man is an Island*. p. 111

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lxxxiii Jiddu Krishnamurti. *First and Last Freedom*. p. 86.  
lxxxiv Jiddu Krishnamurti. *First and Last Freedom*. p. 20.  
lxxxv Jiddu Krishnamurti. *First and Last Freedom*. p. 73.  
lxxxvi Jiddu Krishnamurti. *First and Last Freedom*. p. 70.  
lxxxvii Jiddu Krishnamurti. *First and Last Freedom*. p. 75.  
lxxxviii Jiddu Krishnamurti. *First and Last Freedom*. p. 79.  
lxxxix Jiddu Krishnamurti. *First and Last Freedom*. p. 82.  
xc Jiddu Krishnamurti. *First and Last Freedom*. p. 90.  
xci Jiddu Krishnamurti. *First and Last Freedom*. p. 94.  
xcii Jiddu Krishnamurti. *First and Last Freedom*. p. 97.

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