THE INFINITE AND THE FINITE
By: Alan Watts
September 10, 2010

Outline

1- Knowledge of the infinite Reality is immediate, and cannot be approached through deduction and logic. Metaphysical knowledge and doctrine, as we find it in the Vedanta and other oriental teachings, is quite distinct from religious knowledge, but not at all in conflict with it. As religion begins with revelation, metaphysical knowledge begins with actual realization, which is the basis of all that follows.

2- The meaning of infinite. The sizeless and spaceless rather than the indefinitely vast. The eternal is timeless rather than everlasting. The infinite corresponds to the ground of man's consciousness, which, though not an object, though sizeless and formless, embraces all forms and objects. The religious idea of God is an analogy of the infinite in finite terms, i.e. in positive, concrete and objective ideas. But these terms cannot be used in the same framework of thought as the negative terms of metaphysic without hopeless confusion.

3- Because the infinite is not opposed to the finite, being all inclusive, there is no real problem of creation, i.e. of how it is possible for the infinite to produce the finite. The infinite includes the possibility of the finite world in principle and by definition. It produces things by becoming finite, without ceasing to be its infinite Self. Yet it is not the One as opposed to the Many, but includes both unity and multiplicity.

The religious idea of God cannot do full duty for the metaphysical infinity. For God is One, and to say that the universe is a self-limitation of God is to say that all things are one. This is a monism or pantheism which excludes the reality and significance of finite things. But the infinite includes the finite in a unity (or non-duality) which does not obliterate distinctions.