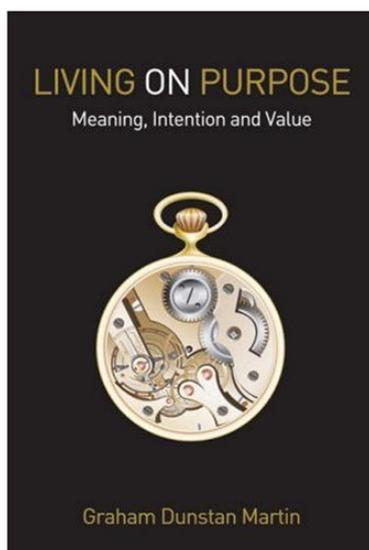


BOOK REVIEW



Graham Dunstan Martin

*Living on Purpose:
Meaning, Intention, and Value* ↗

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Reviewed by U. Mohrhoff

Living on Purpose is the sequel to *Does it Matter*, which was reviewed in *AntiMatters 2* (2) 2008 ↗. The discussion here assumes the findings presented there:

- (1) It is inexplicable how consciousness could emerge from dumb, numb unconscious matter. (“There are countless ‘explanations of how this happens’ in the literature of philosophical materialism; none of these ‘explanations’ makes sense.”)
- (2) Though it is impossible to see how mind could emerge from matter, it is easy to see how matter — at any rate, a phenomenal world — could emerge from mind (which is how Indian religions have viewed the question for about three thousand years).
- (3) Qualia — the experienced qualities of the various senses in all their great variety — are not open to materialist explanations.
- (4) Though short-term memory has been located, we do not know where long-term memory is to be found. It has not (so far) been found in the brain.
- (5) Nor has consciousness been found in the brain. “Locating these faculties elsewhere than in the physical world ... remains therefore perfectly rational.”
- (6) The special nature of mental space: “Mental events occur in a space that is quite different ... from the physical space described by physicists.”
- (7) Free Will lies outside the physicalist causal system. It is real because that’s how we experience it.
- (8) The *tacit / explicit* distinction. Martin writes:

The scientist and philosopher Michael Polanyi argued that there are at least two kinds of knowledge: knowledge that can be put into words (or other symbolic systems) and knowledge that cannot. We cannot for instance put into words our ability to recognize someone's face (not even our own), or to ride a bicycle, or to play the piano. We cannot give more than a very summary "description" of any phenomenal object — a rose, a burning fire, a fir-tree, or even our own hand. Any such "description" leaves always more, indeed an infinite amount, to say. Reducing concrete experience to language (or to any other explicit medium such as mathematics) is abstractizing from it, that is falsifying it... I must insist on the fundamental importance of the tacit/explicit distinction. People will never start thinking straight until they have properly digested it. The intellectual community is grievously ignorant of it. (13–14)

(9) Intelligent Creation. According to Martin,

[t]he odds against the Universe being created in such a form as to sustain intelligent life (even on one single tiny planet) make a Creator necessary. Moreover, the odds against the evolution of life on Earth having occurred within the time available even from the birth of the Universe, let alone from the cooling of the Earth, put this also quite out of court. Some intelligent mechanism appears necessary, and the Darwinian one (although it certainly operates) is by itself quite insufficient. (14)

(10) The evidence of mystical experience, which according to Martin allows us to assert "the reality of the soul and the likelihood of the divine."

Martin admits that some of these findings are not final, and that total certainty cannot be attached to them. The argument for the freedom of our will begs the question. And while probability-based arguments may work against evolution by random mutations and natural selection, they certainly do not work against evolution in the proper sense of "descent with modification."

As in *Does it Matter*, Martin shares some of his precious collection of scientific snobbery. There is E. O. Wilson proclaiming that there is "intrinsically only one class of explanation... All tangible phenomena, from the birth of the stars to the workings of social institutions, are based on material processes that are ultimately reducible, however long and tortuous the sequences, to the laws of physics." There is Francis Crick telling us that we're "nothing but a pack of neurons." There is Daniel Dennett pontificating that we "are made of robots — or what comes to the same thing, a collection of trillions of macromolecular machines." There is Michael Ruse with his cant that "morality is a collective illusion foisted upon us by our memes" and Peter Atkins with his inane triumphalism: "Reductionist science is omniscient... Complete knowledge is just within our grasp. Comprehension is moving across the face of the earth like the sun." And so on *ad nauseam*.

Thankfully, level-headed thinkers such Mary Midgley, C. S. Lewis, Richard Swinburne, Richard Taylor, Charles Taylor, and William McDougall help restore sanity. Martin, however, ventures further than they do:

how dare I attribute to consciousness this fundamental characteristic of the divine [to be *causa sui* or not caused by anything else]? The answer is plain. Not only do I argue that consciousness is fundamental to the Universe; I further argue (as most Indian philosophy, both Buddhist and Hindu, does) for its ultimate unity with and origin in the All-Mind. (44)

One item that can be cited in support of this view is that the forward movement of time is outside physics. Since our consciousness is inseparably bound to this forward movement, many have speculated that it is caused by consciousness, and have taken this for another indication of the importance of consciousness at a cosmic level.

A good deal of *Living on Purpose* is devoted to the discussion of morality. Martin's outright rejection of its relativity seems unwarranted. Issues of this order aren't that simple and clear-cut. Most of what falls under morality is relative. As Sri Aurobindo observed in one of his aphorisms,¹ "He who will not slay when God bids him, works in the world an incalculable havoc." (This does not absolve the lunatics who imagine that they are doing His bidding.) Elsewhere Sri Aurobindo insisted that²

There is only one safe rule for the ethical man, to stick to his principle of good, his instinct for good, his vision of good, his intuition of good and to govern by that his conduct. He may err, but he will be on his right road in spite of all stumblings, because he will be faithful to the law of his nature. The saying of the [Bhagavad] Gita is always true; better is the law of one's own nature though ill-performed, dangerous is an alien law however speciously superior it may seem to our reason.

In claiming that morality must derive from universal principles, Martin appears to ignore his own emphasis on the tacit / explicit distinction. There is more to the ideal of Good than can be cast into explicit principles or translated into a "rational course of action."

A common philosophical claim is that values cannot be derived from facts. The reason this is so, Martin says in effect, is that *facts are themselves values*. This notion certainly has merit. Look up the *Collins Essential English Dictionary* (2nd Edition 2006): a *fact* is (i) an event or thing known to have happened or existed, (ii) a truth that can be proved from experience or observation, (iii) a piece of information. In other words, what causes something to be *valued* as a fact is that it is known to have happened or existed, that it is a *truth* of some kind — a value par excellence — or that it is information rather than disinformation (that is, *true* rather than false):

no "objective facts" can be arrived at unless certain values are studiously observed. Whether the issue be philosophical, scientific, or merely a question of Mr Smith catching the bus this morning, truth can be arrived at only if certain conditions are obeyed. As Socrates showed over two thousand years ago, these are (1) respect for reason and truth, (2) the possession of knowledge, (3) good will between the discussants and respect for each other's freedom, (4) "willingness to speak frankly (even when this involves admitting one's own mistakes, self-contradictions and self-refutation), and not to feign agreement."... We see plainly that the establishment of "objective facts" is entirely dependent on the observation of certain moral principles.... Knowledge and morality are interdependent.... [They] are mutually foundational. (59-60)

While this is certainly an important factor, I wouldn't go so far as to claim that the process of arriving at moral truth is "exactly the same as that of arriving at the

¹ *Essays Divine and Human*, p. 455. Puducherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1997.

² *The Human Cycle — The Ideal of Human Unity — War and Self-Determination*, p. 150. Puducherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1997.

allegedly superior ‘scientific fact.’” While objectivity is indeed “simply an agreement between subjectivities,” the different ways in which, and the different degrees to which, such agreement is reached does not warrant the claim that “[t]he status of an objective value is ... no less ‘objective’ than that of a scientific fact.” Some things are more objective than others.

Martin appears to be taken in by Kant’s ethics. Arguing along Kantian lines, he writes:

If we live morally, this produces a duty in the lord of the world to reward us for doing so. But we must not know that there is such a lord of the world, nor what He would deem moral, otherwise we should act for selfish reasons and not in the light of our own thought-out beliefs as to good and evil. These however we may reasonably assume to merit divine approval if we have thought them out honestly and rationally.

It is therefore better for even the very *existence* of a spiritual order to be uncertain to us. For then, if we have an interest in acting well, it will not be distorted by undue credulity. And this suggests that, if God exists, there are good reasons for His hiding. Namely, for the sake of our moral maturity. Thus we can see that there is at least one good reason for the mysterious silence and apparent absence of God: if He appeared plainly, proclaiming commandments and promising rewards, this would falsify our search for moral truth. For the world to be a proper moral testing ground, His silence and absence are necessary.

Right and wrong are so, regardless of God’s existence. For they must not be arbitrary, but rational. They are not a question of what God commands, but of what (regardless of there being or not being a God) is good or bad. However, God’s existence is required if right and wrong are to be justly rewarded. So God becomes, not a logical certainty, but a moral need. (64)

I am convinced that there are good reasons for God’s hiding, and that moral development and the development of reason mark a crucial stage in human evolution and in the evolution of consciousness in general. But the rest strikes me as pure nonsense — the kind of nonsense typically engendered by the theistic notion that God creates the world out of nothing, rather than out of Himself. If God is hiding, it is to make possible a great adventure. It is He who evolves. By taking on the appearance of inert, unfeeling matter, he has set the stage for the adventure of evolution. The evolution of life, mind, and beyond is the evolution of His powers. The world is a playground, not a moral testing ground. God isn’t interested in our moral maturity. He’s interested in our becoming aware not merely of Him but of *being* Him. He is no bookkeeper. The universe is too vast to be framed in terms of duties and rewards. Right and wrong, good and bad, if they are not purely relative, are so according to their capacity to bring us closer to, or take us farther away from, our conscious identity with Him, individually as well as collectively. As Sri Aurobindo wrote,

[E]thics is a stage in evolution. That which is common to all stages is the urge of Sachchidananda³ towards self-expression. This urge is at first non-ethical, then infra-ethical in the animal, then in the intelligent animal even anti-ethical for it permits us to approve hurt done to others which we disapprove when done to ourselves. In this respect

³ The Vedantic conception of ultimate reality in the triple terms of being or substance (*sat*), consciousness (*chit*), and delight of existence (*ānanda*).

man even now is only half-ethical. And just as all below us is infra-ethical, so there may be that above us whither we shall eventually arrive, which is supra-ethical, has no need of ethics. The ethical impulse and attitude, so all-important to humanity, is a means by which it struggles out of the lower harmony and universality based upon inconscience and broken up by Life into individual discords towards a higher harmony and universality based upon conscient oneness with all existences. Arriving at that goal, this means will no longer be necessary or even possible, since the qualities and oppositions on which it depends will naturally dissolve and disappear in the final reconciliation.⁴

A central issue for Martin is the problem of suffering and evil: how to reconcile an all-powerful, all-knowing, all-good God with a world full of suffering and evil? This problem, too, is largely spurious, for it overlooks that those who bear suffering and evil are not different from God; we are God presenting Himself to Himself under a myriad aspects.

Martin examines the problem from a variety of religious perspectives, each of which appears to get something right. Thus it may indeed be said, as Irenaeus did, that the world makes men's souls, for both the body and the soul evolve, interdependently. This would be impossible without reincarnation. Martin rightly criticizes the *folk version* of the Eastern theory of *karma* and reincarnation, for reasons not very different from my foregoing critique of his Kantian theory of morality — they seem equally silly. This of course does not affect the truth or reality of reincarnation.

Another attempt to solve the problem of evil is to deny the omnipotence of God. Process theologian Charles Hartshorne argued that if action or creation were fully predictable, there would be no point in it. As a matter of fact, it would be impossible even to have the *sense* of being an actor or creator. Without imposing constraints on His omnipotence, God could never have embarked on His adventure of evolution. But this in no wise abrogates His omnipotence.

What is easily overlooked in discussions of this kind is (i) that reality is not something that exists “in itself,” out of relation to consciousness, and (ii) that if there is a consciousness that sees things as they *really* are, then this is likely to be far beyond our *present* capacities of comprehension or imagination. Among the different humanly accessible poises of relation between self and world, some are indeed “truer” than others, but none of them can claim to present *the* truth. Hence the exclusive either/or — the logical *tertium non datur* — does not apply. According to Hartshorne, God does not intervene because he cannot; he has handed over his powers to us. More likely, God has adopted different poises of consciousness, one in which he could but would not, one in which he would but could not, one in which he neither would nor could, and one in which, in fact, he does.

Martin answers some of the sillier theodicies effectively, but ultimately he remains too attached to reason's irrational demand for clear-cut answers. Thus he challenges proposals by Samuel Alexander, Teilhard de Chardin and others, according to whom God is as yet incompletely realized in the Universe or not yet fully “born”:

⁴ *The Life Divine*, p. 104. Puducherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 2005.

For Alexander, the originating entity is Space-Time, which engenders first matter, then life, and finally mind. The next and final step is “deity,” which is as much superior to mind as mind is to mindless life. The Universe is “pregnant” with deity, and is straining to bring it into being — this being the Cosmic purpose. In the system of Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955), life rises out of unconsciousness through successive evolutionary phases; the goal of humankind is to achieve a coherent planet-wide civilization, which will ultimately coalesce into a super-wise being, namely the Omega Point. At this point, God and Omega will unite, and the purpose of the Cosmos will have been achieved. (84)

Martin’s question, “What mechanism may be supposed to lie behind this inevitable evolution of the higher from the lower?” is disingenuous. Physics knows of no mechanism by which the outcome of a measurement influences the probabilities of the possible outcomes of a subsequent measurement — yet it does. (All that the fundamental theoretical framework of contemporary physics places at our disposal is correlation laws, which allow us to predict the probabilities of possible measurement outcomes on the basis of actual outcomes.) If physical explanations boil down to statistical correlations between measurement outcomes, how could we possibly understand the “mechanism” that lies behind the evolution of life and consciousness?

In Teilhard’s system this may be answered by God’s sitting behind the Universe waiting (perhaps actively) for the Omega Point to arrive.... [T]he problem of God’s non-intervention in evil then reemerges. Similarly, if He sits ahead of us, causing the present from the future [as Fred Hoyle suggests], His moral and causal responsibility is no less than if He sat in the past.... We have a simple dilemma. If God doesn’t intervene, this casts doubt on his moral nature. If he does intervene, then this casts no less doubt on it, since his intervention in some cases and not in others (equally deserving) is clearly unfair. (84-85)

It appears to me as the height of hubris, for a cognitive tool as limited as the human mind, to judge which cases are “deserving” and which are not. Here is Sri Aurobindo’s humorous and poetic response⁵ to such reasoning:

Against human reason this is his offence,
Being known to be for ever unknowable,
To be all and yet transcend the mystic whole,
Absolute, to lodge in a relative world of Time,
Eternal and all-knowing, to suffer birth,
Omnipotent, to sport with Chance and Fate,
Spirit, yet to be Matter and the Void,
Illimitable, beyond form or name,
To dwell within a body, one and supreme
To be animal and human and divine....

To man’s righteousness this is his cosmic crime,
Almighty beyond good and evil to dwell
Leaving the good to their fate in a wicked world
And evil to reign in this enormous scene.
All opposition seems and strife and chance,
An aimless labour with but scanty sense,
To eyes that see a part and miss the whole.

⁵ *Savitri*, p. 657, emphasis added. Puducherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1997.

Having previously claimed that “we appear to know that the Universe was created ... by a huge and very precise intelligence,” Martin finds the relationship “between this Creator and any much later emerging, evolved Divinity ... hard to imagine.” Isn’t it enough that this “huge and very precise intelligence” can imagine it?

Martin is attracted to a modern Manichaeism or Zoroastrianism. He considers it a major advantage of this theory that “it is a matter of simple observation that good and evil are perfectly distinguishable. Any fool can tell them apart.” I have no doubt that any fool can tell them apart. The question is, can a wise person? Sri Aurobindo again:

The materialist is not wrong when he holds good and evil to be merely operations of Nature which she uses impartially and without making a distinction, and that the distinction is an evolution in the human mind. Evil is good disintegrating to prepare for a higher good. That which is now tyranny, was once necessary to consolidate human society. What was once an ideal state of society, would now be barbarous and evil. Morality progresses, religion widens with the growing manifestation of that which is divine in the human race. As with the individual, so with the race and the world, evil tends to good, it comes into existence in order that men may reject the lesser good and rise to the higher.⁶

Martin’s faith in a clear-cut distinction between good and bad is strangely at odds with his assessment of religious institutions and beliefs.

The truth is not in the doctrines, for these are merely words, and words are not experience, but merely point to it. But if you have not had the experience, this is like pointing to an object that is, quite simply, invisible.... True spirituality resembles the wild beauty of a beach somewhere on the Highland West Coast. Institutional religion is that same beach encumbered by deckchairs, parasols, sea walls, ice-cream vans and multi-storey hotels. (93-94)

I have argued that it is our duty in this world and the next to work out right and wrong for ourselves. The Universe is hostile to those deadly certainties which have always been proclaimed by bigoted priests, ayatollahs, zealots, inquisitors and apostles of scientism. God is the friend of doubt, of mystery, of the search for truth rather than its capture. Narrow-mindedness, intransigence, fanaticism and absolutist dogma are contrary to divine law. (190)

Living on Purpose comes alive when it speaks of experience. Case in point: Flora Courtois desperately searched for God but could not find Him. One day she consulted the parish priest, who went over various doctrines of the church but never seemed to touch the core of the matter. About three days later, she was alone in her room, sitting quietly on the edge of her bed and gazing at a small desk, not thinking of anything at all. Then,

in a moment too short to measure, the Universe changed on its axis and my search was over. The small, pale green desk at which I’d been so thoughtlessly gazing, had totally and radically changed. It appeared now with a clarity, a depth of three-dimensionality, a freshness I had never imagined possible. At the same time, in a way that is utterly indescribable, all my questions and doubts were gone as effortlessly as chaff on the wind. I knew everything and all at once, yet not in the sense that I had ever known anything before.... Over a period of many months there took place a ripening, a deepening and unfolding of this experience which filled me with wonder and gratitude at every mo-

⁶ *Essays in Philosophy and Yoga*, p. 62. Puducherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1998.

ment. . . . I had plunged into a numinous openness which had obliterated all fixed distinctions including that of within and without. A Presence had absorbed the Universe including myself, and to this I surrendered in absolute confidence. . . . In some indefinable way I knew with absolute certainty the changeless unity and harmony in charge of the Universe and the inseparable identity of all seeming opposites. . . . Freed from separateness, feeling one with the Universe, everything including myself had become at once unique and equal. . . . All was meaningful, complete as it was, each bird, bud, midge, mole, atom, crystal, of total importance in itself. (94–95)

English psychotherapist Margot Grey provides another case in point. Her own near-death experience (NDE) led her to study the phenomenon. This is how she describes it:

In February 1976, while travelling through India, I was struck down by a strange illness which was never conclusively diagnosed. During the three week period that it lasted I hovered on the brink of death, while my temperature soared to 105 degrees. At some point during the process of passing in and out of consciousness I became aware that if I somehow urged myself I could rise up out of my body and remain in a state of levitation up against the ceiling in a corner of the room. At the time this seemed entirely natural and felt very pleasant and extremely freeing. I remember looking down on my body lying on the bed and feeling completely unperturbed by the fact that it seemed likely that I was going to die in a strange country half a world away from home. . . .

At one point during the early part of my illness I remember finding myself floating in total darkness in what seemed to be outer space. It was like being in or part of absolutely nothing. I recall thinking, “so this is what happens when one dies, it’s just absolute nothingness, just black limitless space,” and yet I was not afraid of it nor did I feel lonely. I was conscious of my own identity and aware of my aloneness, yet at the same time I found myself to be “one” with infinite space; I seemed to be part of it and it was part of me.

Later on, I seemed to be travelling down an endless tunnel. I could see a pinpoint of light at the end of the tunnel towards which I seemed to be moving and which was gradually drawing nearer. I remember knowing with absolute certainty that I would eventually be through the tunnel and emerge into the light, which was like the light of a very bright star but much more brilliant. A sense of exultation was accompanied by a feeling of being very close to the “source” of life and love, which seemed to be one. I felt embraced by such feelings of bliss, that there are no words to describe the feeling. (107)

Finding in the NDE the strongest evidence for post mortem survival, Martin deals in considerable detail with reductionist “accounts” of this widespread phenomenon, effectively ruling them out of court.

In a chapter concerned with further evidence for (and arguments against) survival, Martin mentions “an eminently commonsense objection to any Next World” — the question “Where is it?” This reminds me of a customer in a grocery store asking what some newly introduced fruit tastes like. The store manager’s reply: “I’ll tell you this if you tell me what an orange tastes like.” I will tell you where the next world is if you tell me where this world is.

Another telling experience was reported by Sir Auckland Campbell Geddes, a Professor of Anatomy. (Initially, when he communicated it to the Royal Medical Society of Edinburgh as part of the Bicentenary Address, he described it as the report of a patient.)

I was asleep when the nursing sister, having just noted that my pulse and respiration were normal, suddenly realized that I had stopped breathing and had no pulse. She believed me to have died. Between ten and eleven minutes later, after one long sighing inspiration, normal breathing and pulse resumed. In the morning I awoke as if after an uneventful night....

At no time did my consciousness appear to me to be in any way dimmed, but I suddenly realized that my consciousness was separating from another consciousness, which was also me. These for purposes of description we could call the A and B consciousnesses, and throughout what follows the ego attached itself to the A consciousness. The B personality I recognized as belonging to the body, and, as my physical condition grew worse and the heart was fibrillating rather than beating, I realized that the B consciousness belonging to the body was ... built up of "consciousnesses" from the head, the heart, the viscera, and so on ... The B consciousness began to disintegrate, while the A consciousness which was now me, seemed to be altogether outside my body, which it could see. Gradually I realized that I could see not only my body and the bed in which it was, but everything in the whole house and garden and then I realized that I was seeing not only "things" at home, but in London and in Scotland, in fact, wherever my attention was directed it seemed to me; and the explanation I received, from what source I do not know, but which I found myself calling to myself my Mentor, was that I was free in a time dimension of space, wherein "now" was in some way equivalent to "here" in the ordinary three-dimensional space of everyday life. I next realized that my vision included not only "things" in the ordinary three-dimensional world, but also "things" in these four or more dimensional places that I was in....

From now on the description is and must be entirely metaphorical, because there are no words which really describe what I saw, or rather, appreciated. Although I had no body I had what appeared to be perfect two-eyed vision (one of the eyes had in fact been blind for twelve years) and what I saw can only be described in this way that I was conscious of a psychic stream flowing with life through time; and this gave me the impression of being visible, and it seemed to me to have a particularly intense iridescence. I understood from my Mentor that all our brains are just end organs projecting as it were from the three-dimensional universe into the psychic stream.... I realized that I myself was a condensation, as it were, in the psychic stream....

I came back into the body really angry at being pulled back, and once I was back all the clarity of vision of anything and everything disappeared, and I was just possessed of a glimmer of consciousness which was suffused with pain. (174-176)

There is another impressive report, by Mellen-Thomas Benedict, which begins with "In 1982 I died from terminal cancer" and ends with "We are literally God exploring God's self in an infinite dance of life." On the day that Benedict had the reported experience, his hospice caretaker found him lying apparently dead, with no evident clinical signs of life. He remained in this state for at least an hour and a half. When he was tested three months later there was no sign of cancer. "Spontaneous remission," the doctor said.

Quoting from his earlier book *Shadows in the Cave: Mapping the Conscious Universe* (Penguin, 1990), Martin offers a shrewd *gedanken* experiment:

Let us suppose that I, the only person in my universe, inhabit a planet called Thelgo.... I eat the fruit of a tree similar to the banana. But one year I find I am tired of bananas. My solution, of course, is simple. Since mind in my universe may be exercised to alter matter, I simply will the bananas to turn into oranges, and so they do....

It is clear that Thelgo is a very unstable place. It will react in the manner of a dream to my every whim... What happens now, if a second consciousness arrives on Thelgo? Will the environment become more stable or less so? It will become more stable, that is, less responsive to my will. For the physical nature of Thelgo is held stable by the mind or minds present there, unless it or they command a change. To change all my banana-trees into orange-groves, both wills would have to be exercised in the same direction. If three further conscious beings arrive on the planet, its stability will be proportionately increased. And so on *ad infinitum*. In short, it must be a law of such an imaginary universe, that an increase in the number of consciousnesses within it leads to the ever-increasing stability of its physical matter. One might by analogy point out that the more threads support an object in space, the more immovable or "solid" it becomes. (168-169)

Martin's point is that "before God created conscious beings to inhabit His universe, He could have a completely free hand with it. But, once He has done so, His own range of freedoms is progressively reduced." I would venture a different interpretation. God doesn't *create* conscious beings. He *is* a conscious Being, and by a multiple exclusive concentration this takes on the aspect of a multitude of separate conscious beings. The more their conscious selves get separated from their supra-individual source, the less power they have. This is the process Sri Aurobindo calls "involution." When carried to its ultimate extreme, the result is a multitude of *formless* beings, for then the individual loses not only its consciousness but also the power to sustain a form. Physicists call these individual beings "particles." Conversely, the further our conscious selves evolve towards their original unity — the more we realize our identity with God, not only statically but also dynamically — the greater will be the power of our consciousness over matter. This is what Sri Aurobindo means by "evolution."

In the final chapter Martin returns once again to the problem of suffering and evil. Allen Watts wrote:

God also likes to play hide-and-seek, but because there is nothing outside God, he has no one but himself to play with. But he gets over this difficulty by pretending that he is not himself... He pretends that he is you and I and all the people in the world, all the animals, all the plants, all the rocks, and all the stars. In this way he has strange and wonderful adventures, some of which are terrible and frightening. But they are just like bad dreams, for when he wakes up they will disappear.

Now when God plays hide and pretends that he is you and I, he does it so well that it takes a long time to remember where and how he hid himself. But that's the whole fun of it — just what he wanted to do. He doesn't want to find himself too quickly, for that would spoil the game. That is why it is so difficult for you and me to find out that we are God in disguise, pretending not to be himself...

You may ask why God sometimes hides in the form of horrible people, or pretends to be people who suffer great disease and pain. Remember, first, that he isn't really doing this to anyone but himself. Remember, too, that in almost all the stories you enjoy, there have to be bad people as well as good people, for the thrill of the tale is to find out how the good people will get the better of the bad. (192-193)

"This is a glorious statement," Martin writes, "but it hardly solves the problem of evil." Of course it doesn't. No statement does, as he himself is acutely aware. By themselves, statements can only solve problems that are themselves mere statements. Real problems require real solutions.

The good news is that by now Martin himself has provided us with the keys to a real solution. The first key, after Watts' clue, is contained in the Thelgo scenario. As said, the further our conscious selves evolve towards their original unity, the greater will be their power over matter. There is bound to come a time when this power will be sufficient to transform evil out of existence. In the words of Sri Aurobindo,⁷

The fully evolved soul will be one with all beings in the status and dynamic effects of experience of a bliss-consciousness intense and illimitable. And since love is the effective power and soul-symbol of bliss-oneness he will approach and enter into this oneness by the gate of universal love, a sublimation of human love at first, a divine love afterwards, at its summits a thing of beauty, sweetness and splendour now to us inconceivable. He will be one in bliss-consciousness with all the world-play and its powers and happenings and there will be banished for ever the sorrow and fear, the hunger and pain of our poor and darkened mental and vital and physical existence.

The second key is that nothing exists out of relation to consciousness. Existence is always existence *for* a conscious self, and different poises of relation between world and self not only distinguish different individuals but also exist in the same individual, as Sir Auckland Campbell Geddes' distinction between A consciousness and B consciousness beautifully illustrates. The discovery of the "detachable" A consciousness is, in fact, the first decisive step on the path of Indian yoga. This taken, we realize that

[w]hat we call misery, grief, pain, absence of delight is ... merely a surface wave of the delight of existence which takes on to our mental experience these apparently opposite tints because of a certain trick of false reception in our divided being — which is not our existence at all but only a fragmentary formulation or discoloured spray of consciousness tossed up by the infinite sea of our self-existence. In order to realise this we have to get away from our absorption in these surface habits, these petty tricks of our mental being,— and when we do get behind and away from them it is surprising how superficial they are, *what ridiculously weak and little-penetrating pin-pricks they prove to be.*⁸

The real solution therefore is (i) a thing of the future and (ii) a matter of going within, away from our absorption in the most superficial parts of our consciousness. This leaves us with two problems: why evil ever existed in the first place, and why there had to be a consciousness, however superficial, in which the pin-pricks assumed such formidable proportions.

Given that nothing exists out of relation to consciousness, there is nothing that cannot be changed by a sufficiently evolved — and this means unified — consciousness. The past, too, only exists in relation to consciousness and therefore it, too, can be changed. There may come a time when there never was anything painful or evil. Which is why I cannot agree with Martin's absolutization and justification of pain and evil.

Loss, that imperative of passing time, that tragic knell which rings on and on throughout our lives, is an important factor of the world we inhabit. It might be argued that the value of a thing is precisely in proportion to the risk of its loss. Here is the reason for the particular way in which the World has been created... The loss of loved ones is the absolute darkness which makes us realize their presence to be the absolute light. Love is

⁷ *The Synthesis of Yoga*, p. 509. Puducherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1999.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 387.

connected with loss, and cannot be realized in its entirety without the risk or even the reality of it. To this the love-tragedies of European literature all bear witness. (194–195)

Can God's creation be judged by the love-tragedies of European literature? I think not. The infinite and immortal being that we are cannot really lose anything. It is bound sooner or later to realize that it never lost anything except its temporary ignorance and passing lack of awareness. Value being the heart of existence, it cannot be defined in negative terms or measured by its relative absence, nor can there be such a thing as absolute darkness. "If we do not believe in the reality of evil, we shall commit it," Martin writes. I don't see much difference between this and the pernicious claim that if we do not believe in God, we shall burn in hell for all eternity.

Martin has spent the greater part of his working career as a teacher of poetry. Who would know better than him that a poem's meaning is not evident on its surface:

it is a parcel that one unwraps, or a set of Russian dolls — except that you never reach a final one. Better perhaps, it resembles something alive: it grows in one's mind like a tree. Nozick agrees: he writes, "How can there be a stopping-place for questions about meaning?" And I am suggesting here that the Divine is that place within which there is no stopping-place. For we must attribute to the Divine an ever-expanding, ever-deepening sense of life. (200)

Given an ever-expanding, ever-deepening sense of life, how can there be an absolute darkness of a permanent place for evil? Martin concludes with these words:

I shall expect to survive death. I look forward to meeting in the Next World — to their great astonishment — Dennett, Pinker, Dawkins and the rest of the materialist caucus. If they are not to be found there, I shall know *either* that they are, as Jaron Lanier suggests, zombies, *or* that their beliefs have somehow prevented them crossing the gang-plank for this most exciting of voyages.

All in all, a worthwhile and thought-provoking read.