

The Pathless Land

Disclosing Jiddu Krishnamurti's *via negativa* to freedom

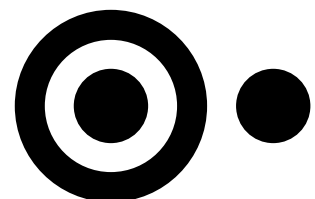
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Bachelor's thesis

Philosophy | January 2024



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Det väglösa landet

Friläggning av Jiddu Krishnamurtis *via negativa* till frihet

Abstract

This thesis describes the philosophy of freedom of Jiddu Krishnamurti, as it remained intact for practically all the period of more than fifty years as a philosopher. With an interpretation of a threefold path – *self-knowledge, amnestic stillness and unknown reality* – I picture his philosophy as a process, departing mainly from his own text *Commentaries on Living*. Apart from interpreting freedom in, simultaneously, a close and a new way, and apart from making comparison with the freedom of Isaiah Berlin and Hanna Arendt, I use two innovative methods. That is, I use the tradition of *via negativa* and negative thinking, and I involve Friedrich Nietzsche in a dialogue to understand crucial parts of Krishnamurti's philosophy. The philosophy of *the pathless land* can indeed be characterised as *via negativa*, and I find more than a few common grounds between these philosophers, and also several interesting ideas for forthcoming studies.

I den här uppsatsen beskrivs Jiddu Krishnamurtis frihetsfilosofi, så som den förblev i stort sett intakt under hans över femtio år långa insats som filosofi. Genom en tolkning av frihetsfilosofin i tre steg – självkänedom (*self-knowledge*), icke-mental stillhet (*amnestic stillness*) och den okända verkligheten (*the unknown reality*) – ger jag Krishnamurtis en processliknande beskrivning utifrån i första hand hans egen text *Commentaries on Living*. Förutom att tolka frihetsfilosofin på ett både troget och nytt sätt, och förutom att kort kontrastera Krishnamurtis frihet mot Isaiah Berlins och Hanna Arendts, använder jag två andra innovativa grepp. Dels knyter jag an till traditionen som försöker förstå verkligheten utifrån *via negativa*, negativt tänkande, dels tar jag hjälp av Friedrich Nietzsche för att belysa centrala delar av Krishnamurtis tänkande. Jag finner god grund för att beskriva hans väg till *the pathless land* som just en *via negativa*, och jag finner flera beröringspunkter med Nietzsche i såväl deras leverne som i deras filosofier. Där finns flera intressanta uppslag att jobba vidare med för kommande jämförande studier.

Keywords: Jiddu Krishnamurti, freedom, via negativa, self-knowledge, amnestic stillness, unknown reality, Friedrich Nietzsche.

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I have always wanted to be free. I don't know why.

Nor do I know what it means to be free.

Samuel Beckett, "Eleutheria"

There is a crack in everything, that's how the light gets in.

Leonard Cohen, "Anthem"

The fact is that truth is life and life has no permanency.

Life has to be discovered from moment to moment, from day to day.

Jiddu Krishnamurti, "Truth is a pathless land"

1. Introduction

Jiddu Krishnamurti dedicated much of his life to dialogues on topics that seem to be philosophically relevant. During more than a half century, again and again he emphasised how we are affected negatively by depending on other authorities. At the core of his philosophy lies freedom. Its importance was already manifested in 1929 when he dissolved the organization Order of the Star, for which he had been the leader for several years:

No man from outside can make you free; nor can organized worship, nor the immolation of yourselves for a cause, make you free ... I have now decided to disband the Order ... You can form other organizations and expect someone else. With that I am not concerned, nor with creating new cages, new decorations for those cages. My only concern is to set man absolutely, unconditionally free.¹

There is a great number of documented notes from his public talks, and yet the philosophical literature is scarce.² It is interesting to continue the analysis of Krishnamurti's philosophy of freedom, and to decipher his enigmatic use of concepts, including freedom. And as for the title of this thesis, "the pathless land" was his own expression for truth. The search for the "unknown" is here taken to be synonymous with "freedom" and "reality".

Thought cannot penetrate into the unknown, and so it can never discover or experience reality ... For this reason the mind must be entirely and deeply silent ... This silence comes when the mind is no longer seeking, no longer caught in the process of becoming.³

In this thesis, I intend to describe Krishnamurti's concept of freedom. To unveil the philosophical relevance of his philosophy, I have identified three research questions. First, how can we be free from suffering? Second, in what way can rational thinking help us? Third, is freedom something more than what we already think we know? These questions are fundamental to understand Krishnamurti's concept of freedom and they will guide us into a philosophy of existence and a somewhat paradoxical epistemology of freedom.

The methodology that I have chosen offers two innovative paths to help us to disclose the concepts of freedom. First, *via negativa* analytically reveals what freedom is not, and it turns out to be a corner stone in the philosophy of Krishnamurti. With this method I refer to the religious and philosophical traditions that claim that we cannot have direct – "positive" – knowledge about any divine entity, and that human thought and reasoning come short of accessing this. Second, since Krishnamurti has been a rather isolated philosopher, I wish to put him in dialogue with his contemporaneity. I have chosen Friedrich Nietzsche, since it is

¹ Lutyens (1975) p 196f.

² According to David Skitt, Buddhist authorities have recognised his philosophy whereas "the Western reaction has been more mixed...it is clear that personal identity is the area where classical and contemporary Western philosophy overlaps most of all with Krishnamurti's work." (Krishnamurti, 2000, p xxii). Also, Krishnamurti "in the culturally Western paradigm, would be deemed an Eastern mystic" Dhillon (2021). To Sabzevary, "The fields of academic religion and philosophy have not actively engaged in the study of Krishnamurti, perhaps because he is not user friendly" (p 52). Krishnamurti himself acknowledged that Eastern traditions to a higher extent encouraged doubt and questioning, which was foundational in his own philosophy (Krishnamurti 2000 p 9).

³ Krishnamurti (1956) p 44.

one of very few philosophers that we know that he read.⁴ Both can be considered as existential philosophers and Krishnamurti was “well versed” in the thought of Nietzsche; “Krishnamurti, after Nietzsche, was eager to demonstrate the limits of thought.”⁵ Now, since Krishnamurti is probably not familiar to the reader, I will start with a brief intellectual biography and summary of his life.

1.1 The life of Krishnamurti

Born in 1895 within a Brahmin family and a strict caste system in the south of India, Jiddu Krishnamurti was child number eight out of eleven, of whom six survived childhood. His mother insisted giving birth in the *puja* (a room kept for ceremonial worship only) since she had a premonition of this child being remarkable. For long, there seemed to be little evidence for this, Krishnamurti being a rather insignificant student and troubled for years by malaria. He is described as a dreamy boy, sometimes appearing even mentally retarded, being of a generous nature, with no interest in books and who could be stuck for a long time observing the clouds or the trees. He had, like his mother, the capacity of clairvoyance already as a child.⁶

After his wife had died, the father of Krishnamurti started to work for the Theosophical Society as one of their secretaries. Krishnamurti was thirteen when he and his three brothers arrived at Adyar in 1909, in “shocking physical conditions ... / ... he was so extremely weak physically that his father declared more than once that he was bound to die.”⁷ The Theosophical Society, under the leadership of Annie Besant and Charles Leadbeater, was a rather occult movement at this time, much because of the clairvoyance of the latter. Founded in 1875 in America, its headquarter was moved in 1882 to India, where the spiritual movement grew and assumed more esoteric forms. Besant was a British free thinker and rebel who developed a great interest for India. She arrived in 1893, inspiring many intellectuals to follow her in the study of Sanskrit and the sacred books.⁸

Within the Theosophical Society, it was thought that a glorious being would be incarnated as the new Messiah. Krishnamurti was “discovered” directly upon the family’s arrival to Adyar, and it is probable that Krishnamurti himself believed, at least for some time, that he was the chosen one. He remained the leader – and the “World Teacher” – during 18 years. From the age of fourteen he was trained not only in meditation and English, but also in communication with the “Masters”, the spiritual entities whose directions and messages it was crucial to decipher. This upbringing might have had a direct effect on Krishnamurti’s future philosophy:

Perhaps his admonition to question such experiences came from his involvement with the Theosophical Society. He himself had many visions and experiences; by visualizing a

⁴ Lutyens mentions that Nietzsche was among the authors that Krishnamurti liked to read, while almost no other philosopher is mentioned in the biography (p 70).

⁵ Dhillon (2021).

⁶ Lutyens p 7-9.

⁷ Ibid p 11, 21.

⁸ Jayakar (1986) chapter 2.

particular "Master," for example, he dreamt of that particular "Master." He later realized that these experiences were the result of his own psychological and emotional conditioning while working within the Theosophical Society.⁹

Due to the esoteric and non-transparent form of the Society, it is difficult to understand in what their alternative training and studies consisted. However, in this extraordinary environment, Krishnamurti was gradually initiated as The World Teacher, with many spiritual experiences during the years to come. He became the head of the Order of the Star, a new organization that was founded in 1911. The same year Krishnamurti initiated an almost ten-year long stay in Europe, mainly in England and France. He studied Mathematics, Sanskrit, English, History, Latin and French.

In 1922, Krishnamurti went through a remarkable and a lifechanging experience in California. He entered a semi-conscious state of mind that marked the beginning of a series of spiritual experiences referred to as "the process", which endured for years.¹⁰ They combined spiritual experiences and physical illnesses. This is part of the experience, in his own words:

There was a man mending the road; that man was myself; the pickaxe he held was myself; the very stone which he was breaking up was a part of me; the tender blade of grass was my very being, and the tree beside the man was myself. I almost could feel and think like the roadmender, and I could feel the wind passing through the tree, and the little ant on the blade of grass I could feel ... I was in everything, or rather everything was in me, inanimate and animate, the mountain, the worm, and all breathing things.¹¹

Around this time, Krishnamurti also developed his own voice as a religious philosopher and started to give public talks. At the end of his period as the head of the organization, Krishnamurti proclaimed that there is a more direct way to freedom than following the occult ways of the Theosophical Society. This led to his decision to dissolve the Order of the Star, in his speech in 1929.

During the years to come, Krishnamurti travelled regularly over the world, and mainly held public speeches in India, the UK and the USA, which today are hosting Foundation Trusts, study and retreat centres and public schools. Noteworthy are also the public talks given in the Swiss mountain village of Saanen, offering yearly gatherings between the years 1961 and 1985.

It appears one always seeks freedom on the surface, the right to go from here to there, to think what one likes, to do what one likes, to choose, and to seek wider experiences. Surely this is a rather limited freedom, involving a great deal of conflict, wars and violence. Inner freedom is something entirely different...Without this freedom, life will always be an activity within the limited circle of time and conflict.¹²

The main source for this thesis is his book *Commentaries on Living* from 1956, to which his friend Aldous Huxley is said to have encouraged Krishnamurti to write, and consisting "of a

⁹ Sabzevary (2008) p 170.

¹⁰ Ibid p 64.

¹¹ Lutyens p 116.

¹² Krishnamurti (2023a) p 23, From *The Whole Movement of Life is Learning* – Chapter 57. According to the website of Krishnamurti Foundation Trust, that was published in the 1980s.

series of dialogues with ordinary human beings whom Krishnamurti met. Set in India, Europe and America, against a variety of landscapes, the encounters recorded here are intense and illuminating.”¹³

There is a continuity in the philosophy and in the public talks from 1933, when the first talk was held, and until his death in 1986. The importance of freedom, the impossibility of following someone else’s advice, the need for self-knowledge and the idea of the “observer and the observed” all remained intact during the years.

1.2 Aim and research questions

The primary aim of this thesis is to understand and describe Jiddu Krishnamurti’s philosophy of freedom. Through my research questions, I will reconstruct the *via negativa* that I believe lies at the core of this philosophy, representing a path to freedom.

Krishnamurti uses the concept “freedom” in a strictly inner, psychological sense. For him, suffering and anxiety are mayor obstacles to obtain freedom and the emphasis is always put on one’s own responsibility for dealing with these problems, starting with his fundamental perspective on “self-knowledge”. This does not mean that he lacked ideas about societal or political changes, but for Krishnamurti they were secondary and fall, therefore, outside the scope of this thesis.

The following questions of research are chosen from my understanding of Krishnamurti’s written texts and spoken talks. I argue that these questions are integral in the philosophy of Krishnamurti and that we should approach them as successive steps of the path to freedom. In constructing my interpretation, I will follow Krishnamurti’s vocabulary closely, even when it diverges from a commonsense way of discussing psychological issues. Indeed, he frequently used profound concepts interchangeably, which can be confusing. For example, the “I”, the “ego” and the “self” are used as synonymous concepts, as are also the concepts “truth”, “reality” and “freedom”.

First, how can we be free from suffering? The reason that suffering is important for Krishnamurti is that it bothers all human beings, at the deepest psychological level. In dealing with inner conflicts, we tend, according to him, to handle them superficially. Therefore, he says, we sustain life under the influence of different authorities, and cannot be free. After learning how to perceive suffering, which is caused by conflicts, freedom as self-knowledge is possible. This notion of freedom is analysed in section 2.3.1.

Second, to which extent can rational thinking help us in this precarious situation?

According to Krishnamurti, the main obstacles for freedom are thought and time. Although there is a role for rational thinking, he claims this to be limited. The self should be downplayed in order to obtain a stillness of the mind. This somewhat paradoxical position is analysed in section 2.3.2.

¹³ Description from Krishnamurti Foundation Trust: <https://kfoundation.org/krishnamurti-books/>

Third, is there a freedom in the unknown reality? Krishnamurti joins most of us in asking if there is something more than what we already know – a God, a higher truth, something immeasurable. He views such questions from a psychological rather than metaphysical or ontological perspective.¹⁴ In this thesis, understanding the unknown will be analysed as another facet of freedom, concerning the questioning of our beliefs, and seeking new answers. I will turn to this last aspect of freedom in section 2.3.3.

My secondary aim is to put Krishnamurti in dialogue with selected writings of Friedrich Nietzsche, to clarify both the meaning and the relevance of Krishnamurti's philosophy of freedom. As mentioned in the introduction, Krishnamurti did read Nietzsche. There is an affinity between the two, that entail points of connections as well as differences that will be helpful for my interpretation. Sabzevary notes that "while it is the case that the literary field is noticeably void of commentary on the philosophy of Krishnamurti ... his thoughts are very similar to other existential thinkers, such as Nietzsche or Kierkegaard."¹⁵ Furthermore, the ancient Greek idea to "know thyself" is at the core of the philosophies of both. Regarding their methods, they used non-traditional forms of expression like aphorisms and public talks, refraining themselves from academic tradition and structure. It is, to a large extent, the spoken voice that comes through, alive and undisturbed. They negated any standardization and authority and chose not to present their thinking in any systematic way. Among the common features is, also, the rejection of traditional religious belief as escapism and a product of fear and cognitive thinking.

On a biographical note, "[j]ust like Nietzsche, we can find numerous instances in Krishnamurti's life where he had to abandon personal friends, relatives, wealth, security and power for the sake of what he believed to be true."¹⁶ Both suffered from physical illnesses, and they shared the passion for walking. As Krishnamurti explains, "[w]hen I walk, I don't think, there is no thought. I just look...I think my solitary walks must have done something."¹⁷ The appreciation for beautiful sceneries accompany their writings and they clearly had insights while being in nature. I believe it is reasonable to say that both were sensitive beings who found nature both relieving and inspiring. Here are two short examples describing, respectively, Nietzsche's insight for *Zarathustra* and Krishnamurti's reflection on the distinction between aloneness and loneliness:

The basic conception of *Zarathustra*, the *thought of eternal recurrence*, the highest formula of affirmation that can ever be attained...it was sketched on a piece of paper with the inscription '6000 feet beyond human beings and time'. That day I was walking through the woods by Lake Silvaplana; I stopped at a powerful pyramidal block of stone not far from Surlei. The thought came to me there.¹⁸

Nature was not communicative that evening. The trees were aloof; they had withdrawn into their silence and darkness. A few chattering villagers passed by in their bicycles, and

¹⁴ Sabzevary notes that "Krishnamurti was not concerned with whether or not man is divine or if there is a soul. To him, such topics were irrelevant simply because such issues have not helped man" (p 72).

¹⁵ Ibid p 53.

¹⁶ Kalsi (2007) p 60.

¹⁷ Jayakar p 100.

¹⁸ Nietzsche (1885) p xiv, quotation from the book *Ecce Homo*.

once again there was deep silence and that peace which comes when all things are alone. This aloneness is not aching, fearsome loneliness. It is aloneness of being; it is uncorrupted, rich, complete.¹⁹

1.3 Methodology, material and disposition

As announced in the title of this thesis, we shall approach Krishnamurti's philosophy of freedom through the concept of *via negativa*. This concept originated with the "philosopher-theologians" Philo, Plotinos, Origen, and Gregory, who according to Ramelli belonged to the same Platonic tradition. Referring to the Greek Platonist philosopher Plotinos, Ramelli writes:

In Plotinus's view, the One can be known and expressed only in the negative: "We say what is not, but what is, we cannot say." This is the essence of what is called "negative theology" or "apophaticism" ... it is necessary for the soul to go far from science and all of its objects, because every knowledge and every science implies a multiplicity and therefore detaches the soul from unity and the One itself. In fact, whenever the intellect knows, this immediately produces a duality of knower and known.²⁰

Not only does this give us a background to the tradition of thinking in the way of *via negativa*, but it also establishes a rather explicit connection between the views of Plotinos and Krishnamurti. Apart from stating what we cannot know, we find here the method of negating thinking as such, in order to search for silence, and the nondualism of "the knower" and "the known". That is, by negating all that we cannot know, or that we know to be false, a special sort of knowledge or understanding can be reached. In the next quotation, the dualistic concepts are instead "the subject" and "the object":

Indeed, for Plotinus the One is present in silence. Since the One has no existence...one must stop any rational investigation into it and be silent. The One is the silence that remains after the removal of the Difference that necessarily exists between the subject and the object of thinking.²¹

In short, according to Plotinos, this "removal" can only be indicated by the philosopher, whereas "Krishnamurti often said that he could only 'point to the door'".²² And the rest of us must open that door by ourselves. And as we will see later, Krishnamurti also used the concepts of "the knower" and "the known", often in terms of "the observer" and "the observed". In sum, the supposition is that *via negativa* is relevant to the concepts of freedom studied here. In the following analysis, we shall reconstruct Krishnamurti's method of negative thinking in the context of freedom.

Considering the great number of public talks from Krishnamurti, it is not easy to make a selection. I have chosen his own book *Commentaries on Living* (1956) as the main source. In re-print, it consists of selected parts from originally three different volumes, all published in 1956. These are personal notebooks, edited by his companion and friend D Rajagopal, with relevant thinking for this thesis, and the selected version is one of few books that is both

¹⁹ Krishnamurti (1956) p 17.

²⁰ Ramelli (2014) p 174-175.

²¹ Ibid p 178-179.

²² Krishnamurti (2000) p xix, introduction by David Skitt.

relatively accessible, and written by himself. At this time, Krishnamurti was about half-way in his philosophical journey, and since there is consistency in his thinking, I find this book to be representative of his philosophy as a whole. Apart from that, I will mainly use selected talks published in the book *To Be Human*, which includes talks on freedom, knowledge and thought; when possible, the dates of those talk are indicated.

The selection on Nietzsche consists of a) the essay *On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense* (1873), b) the second untimely meditation *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life* (1874), and c) the profound book of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1885). First, the essay's scepticism on truth is fearless, and also clearly presented in a few pages and holds, I believe, throughout Nietzsche's later writings. Second, this analysis of the past stands out as one of Nietzsche's most vivid contributions on this topic, and on the immanent dangers of a historical consciousness.²³ Third, to include a later writing that Krishnamurti might have read at the time, *Zarathustra* presents a richness from which this thesis can benefit, including the idea of the eternal recurrence.

In the following, a short review of previous research is presented. Then, the notion of *via negativa* is discussed in conjunction with the concepts of freedom of Isaiah Berlin and Hannah Arendt, in order to clarify what Krishnamurti's philosophy of freedom is not. Then, my constructive interpretation will be guided by the three research questions in the order presented above.

1.4 Previous research

Jiddu Krishnamurti dedicated his life to the question of freedom, while in the academic literature there are few clues to what other philosophers have thought about this. Still, if the meaning of the word philosopher encompasses understanding of reality and grasping the limits of our knowledge, then Krishnamurti was indeed one.

Regarding the enormous material accessible, and the number of professionals and spiritual leaders that came to see him, one wonders why the academic interest has been so narrow. Is it because of the lack of systematization, of written texts, or is it because of the spiritual life of his, or maybe because of the vocabulary that he used? This thesis will not answer this question but rather offer to the readers the possibility to make a judgment on the relevance of his philosophy.

However, the mentioned lack of academic interest is not total. One part of Krishnamurti's philosophy that has rendered attention is his perspective on education. Questioning any form of authority, his view is radical and based on values.²⁴ Another perspective from which his teachings have received consideration is the religious one. Readings place Krishnamurti's

²³ Nietzsche's contribution to our understanding of the past's significance is for Hans Ruin "in a sense unsurpassed", and reading the essay can, according to Ruin, "give us an important key to the nature of his subsequent work on the whole." (Ruin, 2005, p 136, 131)

²⁴ See for example Arweck and Nesbitt (2004), Lindebaum (2009) and Rathnam (2013).

philosophy close to Buddhism.²⁵ A third example are peace studies, including topics like the nature of violence.²⁶

Sabzevary (2008) is dedicated to Krishnamurti's concepts of psychological freedom and choiceless awareness.²⁷ Sabzevary's dissertation is strictly descriptive and somewhat fragmentary, but contains several important aspects of Krishnamurti's philosophy of freedom. With a broad spectrum of references from different philosophical and religious traditions, Sabzevary notes that, similar to Nietzsche's revaluing of all values, "the path that Krishnamurti proposes is one that forces us to question and possibly re-evaluate all that was previously considered to be knowledge, fact, and truth."²⁸ Another dissertation that explicitly compares Krishnamurti and Nietzsche is Kalsi (2007), where both their responses to nihilism are analysed. Acknowledging – in my vocabulary – Krishnamurti's "amnestic stillness", Kalsi writes: "Nietzsche and Krishnamurti both pinpoint the importance of awareness but Nietzsche gets involved in philosophical criticism of abstract concepts and tends to forget about exploring the choiceless perception itself, making it a way out of the abstractions."²⁹

In a Master thesis, Rodrigues (1988) suggests that "'total insight' is the event that distinguishes" the religious mind from the conditioned mind.³⁰ The aim is to demonstrate "the vital focus of Krishnamurti's approach, which elicits the activation of 'insight' rather than further discursive thought", and readers are recommended to examine Krishnamurti's philosophy "without succumbing to the error of believing that the content alone constitutes the teaching."³¹ With a thorough discussion about both the philosophy and several scholars' criticism against Krishnamurti, Rodrigues' work is useful for this thesis. To my knowledge, it offers a proper understanding of Krishnamurti's philosophy of freedom, beautifully summarized as follows:

Liberation can occur at anytime, to anyone, anywhere, without the aid of scripture, teachers, beliefs, rituals, or organization. It is induced by Truth as the spark of discontent, and grows into a flame of passion, culminating in "insight" into an Emptiness that is the summation of all energy.³²

2. Analysis

2.1 Krishnamurti's *via negativa*

Broadening the discussion on the tradition of the Greek Platonists, in this section we will try to reconstruct the *via negativa* in the context of Krishnamurti's philosophy. In my reading, negative thinking is a method that characterizes virtually every talk and every text,

²⁵ See for example Maxwell (1994) p 62, and Dhillon (2021).

²⁶ See for example Fisk (1994).

²⁷ Sabzevary p 52.

²⁸ Ibid p 77.

²⁹ Kalsi (2007) p 69.

³⁰ Rodrigues (1988) p 43.

³¹ Ibid p 67.

³² Ibid p 218.

underlining what freedom is not. The connection between negative thinking and theology is described by Wendy Farley: “The *via negativa* is a Christian practice intended to dissolve the mind's attachment to concepts and integrate nonduality into awareness.”³³ Writing about Marguerite Porete, Farley acknowledges that one’s negation might still be structured by, or dependent on, the object of this very negation, and that one must be more radical to overcome the work of the will and the ego: “Progressively deconstructing the will, what we might call the ego or consciousness of a separate self, she [Porete] emphasizes the noncognitive sense in which duality is effaced by practice.”³⁴ This perspective is not far from Krishnamurti’s rather radical concept of nonconscious understanding, which he often called choiceless awareness:

When we make an effort to be or to become something, that something is the projection of ourselves. When we make a conscious effort to understand, we are hearing the noise of our own accumulations. It is this noise that prevents understanding.³⁵

Attributing the term originally to Thomas Aquinas, in an article on *via negativa* and Samuel Beckett’s play *Eleutheria*, Marius Buning describes both the theological *affirmation* that “God is not this” and the *undecidability* beyond affirmation and negation.³⁶ That is, there is a difference between saying that God (or freedom) *is* something else, and that God (or freedom) is undecidable or indemonstrable. This could be a useful distinction when analysing the philosophy of Krishnamurti. For Buning, the deconstructive stance is preferred:

Since it is fundamentally an open-ended form of discourse that precludes closure, negativity never leads to any kind of essentialist or positivistic idea. In other words, negativity ... is always bent on destabilising language and unsettling meaning, privileging negation over affirmation and absence over presence.³⁷

One line of criticism against Krishnamurti concerns subjectivity, meaning that he depends on private insights, and that any discussion about these things meets a dead-end of inaccessibility. According to David Skitt, one of his commentators, Krishnamurti points to commonsense views among all of us and claims that his response would have been twofold: “First, doubt, question, challenge what I am saying. Second, test what I say in practice.”³⁸ Also, instead of describing what freedom is, Krishnamurti is known for describing the nature of the mind that can potentially reach it. With Kalsi, we could relate this to the idea of “existential” truth, in contrast with “epistemological” truth:

The very knowing of truth is the denial of truth, as Krishnamurti puts it. One cannot know truth. Truth is not to be found intellectually...This is not an epistemological truth but an existential truth.³⁹

³³ Farley (2011) p 139.

³⁴ Farley p 141.

³⁵ Krishnamurti (1956) p 225, *Wisdom is not accumulation of knowledge*.

³⁶ Buning (2000) p 47.

³⁷ *Ibid* p 46.

³⁸ Krishnamurti (2000) p xxiv, introduction by David Skitt.

³⁹ Kalsi p 185.

In this way, Krishnamurti's negative path to freedom is not – epistemologically – about a) what freedom is or not, but rather – existentially – about b) how freedom is ever-changing and comes to us whenever we are ready. This is familiar to Farley's concept of "deconstructing the will", since, according to Krishnamurti, we can be free once we can negate thought's "constructs". Perhaps even more puzzling is his claim that this is negativity actually turns into positivity: "Total negation is the essence of the positive."⁴⁰ This paradoxical statement implies nondualism, which we shall come back to.

Also, Krishnamurti's *via negativa* enquires into the opposite of concepts.⁴¹ By doubting the way that we normally think, we can learn to see reality. The following two excerpts are from talks in 1934 and 1984, and demonstrate both negative thinking and the consistency of his philosophy:

Truth is not to be understood through any system, through any path. A path implies a goal, a static end, and therefore a conditioning of the mind and heart by that end, which necessarily demands discipline, control and acquisitiveness. This discipline, this control becomes a burden. It robs you of freedom and conditions your action in daily life.⁴²

Self-interest is very small, very petty, very narrow, and unless there is complete freedom from that, truth becomes impossible. And truth cannot be through any path; it is a pathless land. You can't go through any system, any method, any form of meditation to reach it. There is really no reaching it – it is.⁴³

Negative thinking resides in Krishnamurti's frequent claims about what freedom and truth are not. Also, I believe, the dialogue itself could be interpreted as a *via negativa* in negating the expected answers to one's questions. For example, being asked about what can be done to free ourselves from psychological conflicts, Krishnamurti according to Skitt advocates "undecidability":

He answers, "Nothing." He simply proposes that when these separative thoughts and images arise, one should "stay with" them. This signifies not escaping, not condemning or justifying, not seeking to change or get rid of them, but "holding them like a baby" with care, affection, and curiosity.⁴⁴

To my understanding, for Krishnamurti, both functions are important: *via negativa as undecidability* as an "existential" never-ending open dialogue for self-examination, and *via negativa as affirmation* as the "epistemologically" negating key to understand what freedom is not. Throughout the thesis, both are used.

⁴⁰ Krishnamurti (1980a).

⁴¹ It has been interpreted in terms of "negative dialectics", "non-identity thinking" and "anti-positivistic perspective". Dhillon reflects on "how both Adorno and Krishnamurti highlight contingency over necessity, and reject positive identity thinking and positive dialectics as emblematic of reified thought" (Dhillon 2021).

⁴² Krishnamurti (2000) p 7, Talk at Adyar on January 2, 1934.

⁴³ Ibid p 15, Conversation at Brockwood Park on October 14, 1984.

⁴⁴ Ibid p xxi, introduction by David Skitt.

2.2 What freedom is not: two political concepts

Now, as a first methodological step on the *via negativa*, and before proceeding to the analysis of Krishnamurti's philosophy of freedom, it will be helpful to remind ourselves of two political concepts of freedom with the inner, psychological freedom of Krishnamurti. To begin, when Isaiah Berlin that contrasts makes the distinction of negative and positive freedom, he is also clear in advocating the former. He believes that positive freedom could turn into authoritarianism and lack of recognition of the plurality of the human condition. Since the goals that we all want to achieve in our lives are not the same, conflict is inherent in being alive.

Whatever the principle in terms of which the area of non-interference is to be drawn...liberty in this [negative] sense means liberty *from*; absence of interference beyond the shifting, but always recognisable, frontier... / ... the 'positive' conception of freedom as self-mastery, with its suggestion of a man divided against himself, has in fact, as a matter of history, of doctrine and of practice, lent itself more easily to this splitting of personality into two: the transcendent, dominant controller, and the empirical bundle of desires and passions to be disciplined and brought to heel. It is this historical fact that has been influential.⁴⁵

Berlin perceives freedom not as something fundamental in the human mind as such, but rather as a product of our beliefs and traditions. Therefore, "conceptions of freedom directly derive from views of what constitutes a self, a person, a man."⁴⁶ Also, these two concepts of freedom are described within a mainly political context. Berlin gives examples of political oppression, public authority and the possible consequences and risks of a sovereign state. Where negative freedom tries to put restriction of the authority, advocates of positive freedom rather want to place that very authority "in their own hands".⁴⁷ Given this societal perspective, he thinks, every real notion of freedom or liberty must include a minimum of the negative concept.⁴⁸

Further, Krishnamurti's understanding of inner freedom as "pure observation" is in stark contrast with Hannah Arendt's concept of freedom as essentially *action* and *beginning*. Arendt gives little attention to "'inner freedom', the inward space into which men may escape from external coercion and *feel free*".⁴⁹ For her, this concept of freedom is a withdrawal from society and is historically preceded by – and as it seems, outflanked by – liberation as action. Freedom is being in the world, that is, inner freedom is essentially not what freedom is about:

The inward space where the self is sheltered against the world must not be mistaken for the heart or the mind, both of which exist and function only in interrelationship with the world ... / ... We first become aware of freedom or its opposite in our intercourse with others, not in the intercourse with ourselves.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ Berlin (2002), p 174, 181.

⁴⁶ Ibid p 181.

⁴⁷ Ibid p 212.

⁴⁸ Ibid p 207.

⁴⁹ Arendt (2006) p 145.

⁵⁰ Arendt (2006) p 145, 147.

This position presupposes the distinction between “inner” and “outer”. Arendt describes the inner duality in a person as having “an intercourse between me and myself” which leads to “a conflict within the will itself”.⁵¹ Her argument for freedom as action and beginning is that inner freedom inevitably leads to this dualistic and solitary conflict within ourselves. From a different perspective, Krishnamurti negates the distinction between the mind and the world, embracing inner freedom without any contradiction with human relationships.

Nietzsche, in short, seems to advocate a position close to positive freedom.⁵² For him, if we seek for freedom primarily outside of ourselves, we get lost, because the thirst for freedom seems to be that fundamental need, which was denied by Berlin.

In sum, for both Nietzsche and Krishnamurti, freedom is primarily neither Berlin’s non-interference nor Arendt’s relating to the outer world. Krishnamurti would oppose Berlin’s claim that we must compromise between divergent needs: “If, as I believe, the ends of men are many, and not all of them are in principle compatible with each other, then the possibility of conflict – and of tragedy – can never wholly be eliminated from human life, either personal or social.”⁵³ However, referring to Arendt, we must be careful with the concept of “action”, since both Krishnamurti and Nietzsche speak enthusiastically about action in their own understanding. We will come back to that in section 2.3.3.

2.3 Krishnamurti’s philosophy of freedom

Below I will analyse Krishnamurti’s philosophy of freedom as a threefold path in terms of self-knowledge (2.3.1), amnesic stillness (2.3.2) and the unknown reality (2.3.3). For Krishnamurti, freedom is a basic need for every human being, to overcome suffering and conflict. I interpret this as a fundamental psychological claim, which contrasts with the more “political” freedom of both Berlin and Arendt.

2.3.1 Freedom as self-knowledge

The first step to be able to meet this fundamental need for freedom, is self-knowledge. In his presentations and talks, Krishnamurti often departed from ordinary situations where, for example, someone is suffering from contradictory desires, and the dialogue would analyse the matter. To him, observation – which he often uses as synonymous with awareness and perception – without thought is needed. To follow his own methodology, the first question of research is how we can be free from suffering all together. We must, he says, begin with the observation of the phenomenon.

Freedom is not a reaction. Freedom is not choice...Freedom is pure observation without direction, without fear of punishment and reward...In observation one begins to discover

⁵¹ Ibid p 157.

⁵² “Free from what? What is that to Zarathustra! Brightly shall your eye announce to me: free for what?” (Nietzsche, 1885, p 55, *On the Way of the Creator*.)

⁵³ Berlin p 214.

the lack of freedom. Freedom is found in the choiceless awareness of our daily existence and activity.⁵⁴

According to Krishnamurti, in order to be free from suffering, the self must be understood. Self-knowledge is obtained neither by ignoring nor judging one's suffering, but by carefully observing it. Any sort of escape from our suffering is denied. In my interpretation, the constant perception of psychological facts is the fundamental feature of this first aspect of the *via negativa* to freedom.

The self is for Krishnamurti a creation of thought, and he uses the term interchangeably with the "ego" and the "me"⁵⁵. It has always a tendency to isolate itself from others, and thereby to divide and separate. He does acknowledge an "expansive" element of the self, which helps us to actively get things done in the physical world. Although helpful in many situations, he maintains that the self "is made up of many entities with different masks, each in opposition to the others. The whole fabric of the self is the result of contradictory interests and values."⁵⁶

But, we may ask, why can we not just free ourselves *from* suffering, that is, why bother so much about observing? One possible "crack" in this reasoning, that we may find puzzling, is Krishnamurti's emphasis on observation rather than action. We could ask, with Arendt, how freedom as self-knowledge avoids the risk of solitude? And, we could ask with Berlin: if other people are causing us suffering, why can't we, so to speak, "free ourselves" from their interference? According to Krishnamurti, to understand one's own prison is a necessary first step; "self-knowledge is not an ultimate end; it is the only opening wedge to the inexhaustible."⁵⁷ And in this process, to avoid solitude is merely escape. Freedom as self-knowledge is neither a removal of suffering in an active sense, nor a denial of suffering or a displacement of suffering, but a transformative affirmation of suffering through observation:

You may escape from it in a crude way, or with refinement; but it is as near to you as your shadow ... If we are able to face that emptiness, to be with that aching loneliness, then fear altogether disappears and a fundamental transformation takes place. For this to happen, there must be the experiencing of that nothingness.⁵⁸

This is neither the negative freedom from suffering, nor the positive freedom to self-mastery, but the "nothingness" of staying with our deepest anxieties. Perhaps the best way to describe it, then, is freedom *through* our suffering. Therefore, Krishnamurti's answer to Arendt would presumably be that emphasis on perception is necessary, because everything

⁵⁴ Krishnamurti (1980a).

⁵⁵ This is only one example of Krishnamurti's characteristic vocabulary, which may impede interpretation. Another example of the meaning that he gave different concepts is the distinction he made between seeking and searching: "What is found in the state of seeking is but a projection of the mind. In the state of search, however, the mind falls into a condition of openness, sensitivity, and freedom." (Sabzevary p 91). A third example, in the view of Rodrigues, is that, according to Krishnamurti, "the word 'thought' covers a large range of mental phenomena that are not commonly labeled by the term 'thought'" (p 72).

⁵⁶ Krishnamurti (1956) p 107, *Consistency*.

⁵⁷ Krishnamurti (2000) p 47.

⁵⁸ *Ibid* p 54.

else is an escape: “What is important is not to escape, not to make an effort, just to remain with ‘what is’.”⁵⁹ Here, the concept of observing ‘what *is*’ is important. We tend to occupy ourselves with ideas about ‘what should be’, which denies us the key to freedom.

To understand what *is*, there must be freedom from all distraction. Distraction is the condemnation or justification of what *is*. Distraction is comparison; it is resistance or discipline against the actual...Only in passive yet alert awareness can that which *is* unfold. This unfolding is not of time.⁶⁰

Krishnamurti gets close to Nietzsche in his critic of the “self”, and perhaps “self-knowledge” should have been termed differently in order to be true to Krishnamurti’s own critic. Nietzsche goes rather far in discarding the value of the intellect⁶¹: “when it is all over with the human intellect, nothing will have happened.”⁶² We overestimate knowing, he says, and we are blinded by our own thinking. We need a watchful eye on all the different deceits that are produced in our brain, both thinking and sensation:

The pride connected with knowing and sensing lies like a blinding fog over the eyes and senses of men, thus deceiving them concerning the value of existence. For this pride contains within itself the most flattering estimation of the value of knowing.⁶³

Coming back to Arendt’s distinction between the inner and the outer, she focuses on action to avoid solitary conflicts in our duality. Nietzsche wants to overcome that duality by seeking the unity within oneself; “that higher unity in the nature and soul of a people must be remade, that break between the inside and the outside must disappear...”⁶⁴ That is, there is no sense in separating the understanding of ourselves from the outer world, and neither should we trust the so called truths of our intellect; “if each [of] us had a different kind of sense perception ... nature would be grasped only as a creation which is subjective in the highest degree.”⁶⁵ For both Nietzsche and Krishnamurti, having the right perception (observation) of ‘what *is*’ is primary – and it does not even exclude action – and that is why Arendt’s argument about the solitary conflict would be negated by both.’

According to Krishnamurti, first we must understand that we are not different from our worst feelings and thoughts. This “epistemological nondualism” is at the core of freedom as self-knowledge, and it contrasts with Arendt’s view of the self, which we can presume that Krishnamurti would have interpreted as an escape. About Berlin’s idea, that the

⁵⁹ Krishnamurti (2000) p 182, talk at Brockwood Park, August 29, 1985.

⁶⁰ Krishnamurti (1956) p 127, *What is and What Should be*.

⁶¹ Here, I take “intellect” to be equivalent to thinking.

⁶² Nietzsche (1873a) p 1. Since this translation of this source is not authorized, a separate reading of the original text follows where this essay is used: “...wenn es wieder mit ihm [der menschliche Intellekt] vorbei ist, wird sich nichts begeben haben.” (Nietzsche 1873b p 369).

⁶³ Ibid p 1; “Jener mit dem Erkennen und Empfinden verbundene Hochmuth, verblendende Nebel über die Augen und Sinne der Menschen legend, täuscht sie also über den Werth des Daseins, dadurch dass er über das Erkennen selbst die schmeichelhafteste Werthschätzung in sich trägt.” (Nietzsche 1873b p 370)

⁶⁴ Nietzsche (1874) p 27.

⁶⁵ Nietzsche (1873a) p 6; “hätten wir noch, jeder für sich eine verschiedenartige Sinnesempfindung...so würde niemand von einer solchen Gesetzmässigkeit der Natur reden, sondern sie nur als ein höchst subjectives Gebilde begreifen.” (1873b p 379).

understanding of freedom is derived from the view of the self, Krishnamurti would perhaps agree, even though the latter believed that self-centeredness is part of the cause of suffering: “the very activity of self-centeredness is producing loneliness.”⁶⁶ Rodrigues takes the example of the sensation of anger to show the dividing nature of the self, inevitably leading to conflict and dualism through this very division:

Thus, for example, if a particular sensation arose in consciousness, thought could produce, "This is anger," or "I am angry," or "I am anger." ... All three responses ... reveal their divisive nature since: in the first, the observer is separate from the observed phenomenon, in the second, the self is separate from the attribute it is experiencing, and in the third, the self is separate from any other phenomenon but the one it is experiencing.⁶⁷

Skitt describes how we normally experience things in two steps, first in the direct and unitary state of being “at one with the sensation”, and then “a duality, a separation, a split”.⁶⁸ Or, in the words of Kalsi: “Observing is something immediate, in the present, while knowing is something that happens afterwards. Observing is non-dualistic, while knowing is partial or fragmentary.”⁶⁹ For Krishnamurti, when we let our perceptions translate into experience, called “sensation,” this produces the split between observer (“subject”) and observed (“object”), which enhances the importance of the “image-maker”. Then, these experiences and thoughts are stored as mental images.

Instead of separating “our self” from our perception, we must see, again through observation, that both are just images. This is where Krishnamurti’s often mentioned concept of *the observer* comes in: “The phenomenon of the observer and the observed is not a dual process, but a single one; and only in experiencing the fact of this unitary process is there freedom from desire, from conflict.”⁷⁰ Freedom as self-knowledge presupposes the ability to perceive the fundamental unity *beyond* the images created by the brain. This is why perception is so important: the path to freedom is *negating* that which should not be, through discovering the ways by which our minds are conditioned by – that is, psychologically dependent upon – habits, knowledge, opinions, and beliefs.⁷¹ In this, perception or observation of ‘what *is*’, is fundamental:

[T]he whole movement of thought can be so encompassing that the mind that is thoroughly conditioned is almost completely blind to any sense of what-is and exists virtually always in the realm of images, concepts, memories, beliefs, intentions and the like. All these are referred to by Krishnamurti as "thought," and in essence constitute conditioned consciousness.⁷²

While Krishnamurti’s position is often close to Nietzsche’s – and while they both agree that self-knowledge is not primarily thinking – there appears to be a difference between

⁶⁶ Krishnamurti (2000) p 86, talk at Saanen on July 15, 1984.

⁶⁷ Rodrigues p 75.

⁶⁸ Krishnamurti (2000) p xx, introduction by David Skitt.

⁶⁹ Kalsi p 134.

⁷⁰ Krishnamurti (1956) p 61.

⁷¹ Sabzevary describes this concept of conditioning as “enculturation; that is, the mind becomes conditioned or programmed by the environment and, thereby, perceives the world through a fog of subjectivity.” (118)

⁷² Rodrigues p 72f.

Nietzsche's cage of unconsciousness and Krishnamurti's emptying of the mind. According to Nietzsche, our eyes are blinded and deceived by our senses and our thinking, and we cannot understand the relationship between the observer and the observed – between the subject and the object: "For between two absolutely different spheres, as between subject and object, there is no causality, no correctness, and no expression; there is, at most, an aesthetic relation."⁷³ It seems that Nietzsche is saying that conditioning, or psychological dependence, happens unconsciously and inevitably separates us from the world. Krishnamurti's understanding of the observer and the observed is at the core of freedom itself, ending all conflict. The emphasis on perception is motivated by precisely the possibility of being psychologically free from the content of our consciousness.

In this section, Krishnamurti's *via negativa* is both *undecidability* and *affirmation*, while Nietzsche's is more clearly *undecidability* in the sense that we cannot access the essence of perception. For Krishnamurti, perception brings freedom by understanding *what is*. The *via negativa* is at work here by denying the brain the right to translate the perception into thought. Freedom as self-knowledge is a process in which we need to understand how we are conditioned by suffering. It is a transformative and affirmative process, working psychologically at both an existential and an epistemological level. Out of self-knowledge comes a stillness which is beyond the mind.

2.3.2 Freedom as amnesic stillness

If the perception and affirmation of our suffering is the initial step on Krishnamurti's *via negativa*, to which extent can rational thinking alleviate our suffering and set us free? Is there any place at all for thought in his philosophy of freedom? First, we should note that Krishnamurti uses the concept "choiceless awareness" to denote a sort of understanding of "the whole content of the problem" and "the silent and choiceless observation of what is."⁷⁴

The observer is the holder of all memory from which all thought arises, so thought is never new. It is never free ... We are asking whether the image-maker, the machinery of this image-making, can ever come to an end. I will show you how it comes to an end. First of all, you have to inquire what is awareness, what it is to be aware ... aware outwardly and aware inwardly, to be aware choicelessly.⁷⁵

This silent observation of our psychological facts is not part of the self, of the "machinery of image-making". Still, thought and rational thinking must be understood: "There is freedom from thought only when its deep significance is fully understood; and for this, profound self-knowledge is essential, not vain and superficial assertions."⁷⁶ This understanding, therefore, must go – psychologically – deep, and rational thinking does not suffice. It is a paradoxical position, and we might still doubt whether "thought" is not still needed to reach this "understanding" or "awareness".

⁷³ Nietzsche (1873) p 5; "...den zwischen zwei absolut verschiedenen Sphären wie zwischen Subjekt und Objekt gibt es keine Causalität, keine Richtigkeit, keinen Ausdruck, sondern höchstens ein ästhetisches Verhalten..." (Nietzsche 1873b p378)

⁷⁴ Krishnamurti (1956) p 101, *Awareness*.

⁷⁵ Krishnamurti (2000) p 111. From talk at Claremont College on November 17, 1968.

⁷⁶ Krishnamurti (1956) p 17, *Thought and Love*.

Krishnamurti would often emphasize that the human brain is not essentially different today, compared to a few thousand years ago. In a similar dishonouring way, Nietzsche claims that the intellect just happened to emerge in humans, and that there is nothing sacred or special about it. What we take to be true perceptions are actually products of the whole process of thinking and language. Resembling Krishnamurti's talk of image-making where "the mind creates reality in its own image"⁷⁷, Nietzsche says that "the weaker, less robust individuals" due to "the flame of vanity... [are] deeply immersed in illusions and in dream images."⁷⁸ Now, can we be free of that flame, free of these illusions?

If I make up the definition of a mammal, and then, after inspecting a camel, declare "look, a mammal" I have indeed brought a truth to light in this way, but it is a truth of limited value. That is to say, it is a thoroughly anthropomorphic truth which contains not a single point which would be "true in itself" or really and universally valid apart from man.⁷⁹

Since our sensations and thoughts are always entwined with metaphors, Nietzsche tells us to be fundamentally sceptical about them. In Nietzsche's view, we are caught up in a cage of "a proud and deceptive consciousness", a cage to which we were confined and locked by "nature" who "threw away the key."⁸⁰ In my reading, considering that "[t]he drive toward the formation of metaphors is the fundamental human drive", Nietzsche believes that we can never be free from the illusions of thought.⁸¹ From the perspective of image-making, Krishnamurti and Nietzsche have a common ground in doubting any sort of freedom through thinking. However, whereas Nietzsche seems to deny the possibility to reach a deeper understanding, Krishnamurti believes that we can break this chain process, where normally "the sensation that arises from perception is then identified as an experience which, through thought, is associated with an image, or labelled with a word, and stored in memory."

What Krishnamurti suggests in breaking this process, I propose, is "amnesic freedom", meaning freedom as non-thinking.⁸² For Nietzsche, anthropomorphic truth and epistemological scepticism are the *via negativa* as undecidability, implying that the lost key is

⁷⁷ Krishnamurti (1956) p 68.

⁷⁸ Nietzsche (1873a) p 1; "...weniger robusten Individuen ... eine Flamme Eitelkeit ... Sie sind tief eingetaucht in Illusionen und Traumbilder..." (Nietzsche 1873b p 370)

⁷⁹ Nietzsche (1873a) p 5; "Wenn ich die Definition des Säugethiers mache und dann erkläre, nach Besichtigung eines Kameels: Siehe, ein Säugethier, so wird damit eine Wahrheit zwar an das Licht gebracht, aber sie ist von begränztem Werthe, ich meine, sie ist durch und durch anthropomorphisch und enthält keinen einzigen Punct, der, wahr an sich, wirklich und allgemeingültig, abgesehen von dem Menschen, wäre." (Nietzsche 1873b p 377)

⁸⁰ Ibid p 2; "...ein stolzes gauklerisches Bewusstsein...die Natur...Sie warf den Schlüssel weg..." (Nietzsche 1873b p 371)

⁸¹ Ibid p 7; "Jener Trieb zur Metapherbildung, jener Fundamentaltriebe des Menschen..." (Nietzsche 1873b p 381)

⁸² Etymologically, the root meanings of *mnesi*, *mneme* and *men* have to do with remembering and thinking. As I understand Krishnamurti, although we must still use thinking to solve all sorts of problems in our lives, it has no role to play in the psychological realm of freedom. Therefore, "amnesic" is here used in the meaning of non-thinking, or simply to not (mainly) think.

also a closed door to freedom. That key, for Krishnamurti, is “what *is*”, and this is both a necessary and possible step for avoiding the conflicts that the “self” and “thought” bring.⁸³

To understand that which you are, whether pleasant or unpleasant, the myth, the ideal, the self-projected future state, must entirely cease. Then only can you tackle what *is*...Only in passive yet alert awareness can that which *is* unfold. This unfolding is not of time.⁸⁴

The expression “passive yet alert” appears here for the second time and I believe it captures something essential, namely Krishnamurti’s *via negativa* concerning thought: precisely because thought tends to function in opposites, awareness is both passive and alert. He uses both terms to point to the freedom beyond “oppositional” thinking. Kalsi expresses this notion of negative thinking in terms of action: “Inaction is forcibly trying to hold action. Inaction is seen in the backdrop of action. But non-action is not inaction, it is the ‘total’ spontaneous action. It is creative action.”⁸⁵

Furthermore, even though Krishnamurti repeatedly indicates that thought is not needed, I believe that this could be questioned. If the concept of “awareness” (in this section) is more likely to imply thought than “observation” (in the previous section), it might be an open question whether there is not still a place for rational thought on this part of the path to freedom. The following statement summarizes the understanding of amnesic stillness:

Understanding comes, not through the exertion of will, but only when the mind is still. The mind cannot be *made* still, for the maker himself is a product of the mind, of desire. There must be an awareness of this total process, a choiceless awareness; then only is there a possibility of not breeding illusion.⁸⁶

Now, to bring in psychological time to our analysis, according to Krishnamurti, there is neither past nor future. A prerequisite for freedom, he says, is to watch like a hawk “so that thought and time don’t enter into the whole process of living.”⁸⁷ “When the mind becomes quiet”, Sabzevary notes, “it breaks free of the chains of psychological time.”⁸⁸ The reason for this is, that “thought is a movement between ‘what is’ and ‘what should be’. Thought is time to cover that space.”⁸⁹ In the outer world, in society, “thought is necessary, time is necessary” since we need to “go from here to there”. But our mistake is to believe that “time and thought are necessary in the psychological world, the world of the self, of the psyche, the world inside the skin.”⁹⁰

A traditionally negative concept of freedom as resistance towards something harmful is, according to Krishnamurti, always a continuation of the conditioning of the past: “Freedom from something is only a modified continuity of what has been, and therefore it is not

⁸³ Rodrigues p 71.

⁸⁴ Krishnamurti (1956) p 127. *What is and What Should be*.

⁸⁵ Kalsi p 207.

⁸⁶ Krishnamurti (1956) p 82, *Fulfilment*.

⁸⁷ Krishnamurti (2000) p 86, talk at Saanen on July 15, 1984.

⁸⁸ Sabzevary p 89.

⁸⁹ Krishnamurti (2000) p 78, talk at Brockwood park on September 9, 1973.

⁹⁰ Ibid p 86, talk at Saanen on July 15, 1984.

freedom”.⁹¹ Any dependence or conditioning of time is harmful, and the perception of what *is*, is what can bring us the necessary stillness. In my interpretation, this is not just a notion of being present, but also an appreciation of the present moment as a constant movement, as a never-ending invitation to learn. According to Krishnamurti, “the mind may be unable to follow the movement of what-is, and departs from it by clinging to the past or escaping into the future. Thus, what-is becomes the point of departure, but also is the necessary point of return if one wishes to understand Truth.”⁹² Therefore, in the path from perception to amnesic stillness, there is according to Krishnamurti’s explicit philosophy no obvious place neither for thinking nor for psychological time. However counterintuitively this sounds, we conclude that non-thinking is necessary to perceive facts without the distortion of the self, and that “non-psychological” time is necessary to follow the constant movement of what *is*.

Krishnamurti’s distinction between the temporality of thinking and what I call amnesic freedom can be considered from the horizon of Nietzsche’s reflections on the science of history and the existential necessity of forgetting. For him, there is a relationship between the historical (remembrance) and the unhistorical (forgetfulness):

All acting requires forgetting, as not only light but also darkness is required for life by all organisms...So: it is possible to live with almost no memories, even to live happily as the animal shows; but without forgetting it is quite impossible to *live* at all...*the unhistorical and the historical are equally necessary for the health of an individual, a people and a culture.*⁹³

According to Nietzsche, living a life fully means to act, and in acting there needs to be a “capacity to live *unhistorically* while it endures.”⁹⁴ We must distinguish the forgetting from the past, and – as I interpret Nietzsche here – in this act of forgetting, there is a transformative energy that, essentially, is life. This also means that one must have “a line which distinguishes” the light and the dark, which is to take responsibility for one’s capacity for growth and healing. This, Nietzsche calls the “plastic power” of “transforming and assimilating everything past and alien”.⁹⁵ In my interpretation, this bears similarity to Krishnamurti’s constant movement:

"what-is, according to Krishnamurti, is perennially new. Whatever exists at the moment, a thought, a sensation, a perception, yields to a new reality the next moment. The present moment's what-is becomes the next moment's what-was and thus ceases to be true. What-is, is true. The true leads to Truth. What-is is constantly in movement.”⁹⁶

The act of forgetting resembles Krishnamurti’s transformative affirmation of what *is*, as in Nietzsche’s words: “without that cloak of the unhistorical [the human being] would never

⁹¹ Krishnamurti (2023a) p 23. From *The Whole Movement of Life is Learning* – Chapter 57.

⁹² Rodrigues p 70.

⁹³ Nietzsche (1874) p 10.

⁹⁴ *Ibid* p 9.

⁹⁵ *Ibid* p 10.

⁹⁶ Rodrigues p 69.

have begun and dared to begin.”⁹⁷ Also, in *Zarathustra*, Nietzsche introduces the concept of “will to power” as the transformative drive behind our actions:

Like Nietzsche Krishnamurti seems to realize that power is one of the central drives in human beings. However, unlike Nietzsche, he does not see power to be the basic drive underlying the universe. He sees this lust for power as some psychological craving for gratification, an escape from psychological insufficiency.⁹⁸

In the next section, we shall see that their concepts of “action” is an interesting candidate for this analysis of power, or energy. For now, Krishnamurti and Nietzsche seem to coincide in a *via negativa* of *undecidability* that denies a clear affirmation of what freedom is, both seemingly searching for something yet unknown; “This – is just *my* way: – where is yours?’ Thus I answered those who asked of me ‘the way’. For *the* way – does not exist!”⁹⁹

Amnestic freedom is a state of the mind – or rather of the brain as we will see in the next section – beyond thinking and psychological time, opening up for the constant movement of what *is*, of reality. This resembles *via negativa* as *affirmation*. Although this involves liberation from the future, the main focus is, for Krishnamurti, on the past; “there is freedom when the entire being, the superficial as well as the hidden, is purged from the past.”¹⁰⁰ Also, in this amnestic stillness, he says, is a new form of energy, and a possibility to reach the unknown.

2.3.3 Freedom as the unknown reality

In this last section, following Krishnamurti’s terminology, we take the term “reality” to be synonymous with freedom, and truth. On the third question – whether there is a freedom as the unknown reality – we start with imagining a dialogue between Nietzsche and Krishnamurti. I wish to recreate some of their alert, vivid style, picturing them literally speaking together.

K: It is only in complete freedom that the mind can discover that which is true.
N: Truth, and action, you find in the Godless desert, and the creative will liberates the way.
K: But is not this creative will just as detrimental for our path as ambition and vanity?
N: Detrimental no, but destructive yes! But to overcome fragmentation, power is needed.
K: But all sense of power gives strength to the self, the me, which is not freedom.
N: Even your idea of ending conflict, to attain freedom, must surely involve some sort of will?
K: No, the will itself is conflict in an active brain. Transformation requires the end of all this.
N: Will is power and it is beneficial when used correctly, searching for that heavenly nothing.
*K: I can see that freedom implies action, but that action is not a power of the brain.*¹⁰¹

From this imagined dialogue, three aspects are important. First, there seems to be a paradox in that the human “brain” cannot attain truth – which is the unknown – although

⁹⁷ Nietzsche (1874) p 11.

⁹⁸ Kalsi p 85.

⁹⁹ Nietzsche (1885) p 169, *On the Spirit of Heaviness*.

¹⁰⁰ Krishnamurti (1956) p 69.

¹⁰¹ The dialogue is based on the following texts: Krishnamurti (2023b) p 5, Krishnamurti (1956) p 211f, *Stillness and Will*, Nietzsche (1885) p 28, *On Believers in a World Behind*, p 89, *On the Famous Wise Men*, p 179, *On Old and New Tablets*.

the “mind” potentially can. In a recorded conversation in 2019 at the Krishnamurti Centre in England, Skitt reflected on this topic. Krishnamurti’s usage of the term “brain” was introduced in the 1960s, and then gradually distinguished from “mind”.¹⁰² There is a lack of clarity of the two concepts, and with time Krishnamurti clarified his view:

For many years he used the terms brain and mind virtually synonymously, but in more recent talks and books he emphasizes that the Mind is quite distinct from the brain; Mind is 'outside' the brain. The Mind can 'use' the brain, but not vice versa.¹⁰³

The introduction of “the Mind” is undeniably a significant change in Krishnamurti’s philosophy, and it implies relationship between the individual “mind” and the impersonal “Mind”; “[w]hen there is no thought, there is perception which is direct insight. It is this freedom from thought that gives Mind the capability to use the brain as its instrument.”¹⁰⁴ Krishnamurti takes this further: there is fundamentally no such thing as “my” individual mind, since they are related. And the brain must be quiet or stilled before the Mind can act through it:

Our brain is constantly in conflict and therefore in disorder. Such a brain cannot understand what the mind is. The mind – not my mind, the mind, the mind that has created the universe, the mind that has created the cell, that mind which is pure energy and intelligence – can have a relationship to the brain only when the brain is free.¹⁰⁵

The scope of this thesis does not permit to describe all the implications of this, which could include Krishnamurti’s concept of human relationships, love, and the relation between the individual and society. Instead, I wish to turn to one of many conversations between him and the physicist and philosopher David Bohm, where the question of the unknown – here called “the ground” – was analysed in depth. In the fifth dialogue in 1980, Krishnamurti claims that there is fundamentally no relation between “I” and “the ground”, since the personal mind *is* the impersonal Mind. Here, we also meet his idea that the human brain is essentially the same as “a million years” ago:

I’ve fasted, I’ve meditated, I have given up, I have taken a wove of this and that, I have done all those things because I have had a million years of life. And in the end of the million years I am still where I was in the beginning. Which is a great discovery for me, do you understand?...All the works I have done...the ground says are valueless. And if I can drop all that, my mind is the ground. Then, from there I move.¹⁰⁶

Second, the unknown reality is referred to, by both Krishnamurti and Nietzsche, in terms of *action*. For Krishnamurti, I believe, the key to freedom lies in the choiceless awareness itself. Whereas Rodrigues calls the final, hidden, key to freedom “insight”, in my interpretation the more precise term would be “action”, since it covers several mental activities, among them insight:

¹⁰² Skitt 2019.

¹⁰³ Maxwell p 59.

¹⁰⁴ Rodrigues p 113.

¹⁰⁵ Krishnamurti (2000) p 102f. Talk at Saanen on July 25, 1983.

¹⁰⁶ Krishnamurti (1980b).

It is the action of Mind, as observation, awareness, attention, and finally insight, that frees the conditioned mind. Until the event of total insight there are countless forms of duality, the result of mistaking concept for reality. Upon the event of insight, there is only Truth.¹⁰⁷

According to Krishnamurti, when we attain a certain freedom, “the observer is the observed image, there is no conflict between himself and the image. He is that! He is not separate from that.”¹⁰⁸ This awareness opens up for something new, it is “the experiencing of the action of the self, and in this experiencing there is neither the experiencer nor the experienced.”¹⁰⁹ Although the *via negativa* seemed to empty the brain without any action at all, we now see an affirmative action which he sometimes calls transformation of energy. Krishnamurti makes a distinction between the safety of the idea and the danger of action:

Idea becomes a factor in action in order to modify it, to control it, to shape it; but idea is not action...Action implies insecurity, vulnerability to the unknown...The action of the unknown is beyond the action of thought; and thought, being aware of this, consciously or unconsciously clings to the known.¹¹⁰

The affinity between the path of Zarathustra and Krishnamurti’s freedom as action should come as no surprise. With his ambiguous language, Nietzsche lets Zarathustra encounter a young, crying man in the mountains, who is told that freedom is needed not only for his spirit, but also for his innermost feelings:

‘You are not yet free, you are still *seeking* freedom. Overly tired your seeking has made you, and over-wakeful.

‘You aspire to the free heights, your soul thirsts for stars. But your wicked drives, too, thirst for freedom.

‘Your wild dogs want their freedom; they bark with delight in their cellar when your spirit strives to break open all prisons.¹¹¹

In pointing to the darker sides of our personalities, our inner feelings, Nietzsche is not just asking where this “action” comes from. In this publication, one of his personal notes is transcribed as follows: “I still have all these wild dogs within, but in my cellar. I don’t want to hear them barking.”¹¹² As subjects with body, brain and mind, human beings are essentially characterized by diversity. Often, in *Zarathustra*, the criticism against human beings points to the fragmentation of their minds, and the search for Nietzsche’s visionary human, the ‘Overhuman’, can be interpreted as a vision of a complete, whole, and integrated person:

‘I see and have seen worse things...namely, human beings lacking in everything except one thing of which they have too much...inverse cripples I call such beings. / ...

‘This is to my eye the most terrible thing: that I find human beings in ruins and scattered as if over a battle- and slaughter-field.¹¹³

¹⁰⁷ Rodrigues p 164.

¹⁰⁸ Krishnamurti (2000) p 135. Talk at Saanen on August 7, 1967.

¹⁰⁹ Krishnamurti (1956) p 68. *Meditation*.

¹¹⁰ Ibid p 139, *Challenge and Response*.

¹¹¹ Nietzsche (1885) p 38, *On the Tree on the Mountainside*.

¹¹² Ibid p 293.

¹¹³ Ibid p 120, *On Redemption*.

This diversity of the self is something that Nietzsche seeks to embrace and balance. We might interpret the will to power as lying somehow underneath our suffering and thinking, as “the unexhausted procreative life-will”, the “will to be master” which shows little sign of the stillness of awareness.¹¹⁴ My interpretation is that will to power, for Nietzsche, represents an intent to express a unified source of our fragmented beings; “All “It was” is a fragment, a riddle, a cruel coincident – until the creating will says to it: “But thus I willed it!”¹¹⁵

For Krishnamurti, the unknown reality is the “what is”, as the movement of every moment. From the previous section, we recall the interpretation of Kalsi’s “non-action”, which transforms “action” and “inaction” to something new. For Krishnamurti, the source for this true action – “non-action” – is the Mind, for which we need an amnesic mind of stillness, which is sensitive. Then, the (individual) mind can have contact with the unknown reality, and be free. In this way, the nondualism of the freedom as self-knowledge, in my interpretation, holds.

The function of thought is to create a pattern for so-called action, and thereby to kill action. Most of us are concerned with the killing of action; and idea, belief, dogma, help to destroy it. Action implies insecurity, vulnerability to the unknown; and thought, belief, which is the known, is an effective barrier to the unknown.¹¹⁶

The concepts of both “reality” and “will to power”, I believe, can be interpreted as holistic intents to search for a fundamental reality which, ultimately, is unknown.¹¹⁷ However, for Nietzsche, the claim for a human drive as will to power seems to keep his philosophy within the already mentioned cage of unconsciousness. Krishnamurti’s action is the transformative key to freedom found in the pathless land, whereas Nietzsche’s action seems to fall short of reaching freedom’s gate since the duality of the subject and the world persists.

Nietzsche’s writings, including the poetic and rhythmic stories of *Zarathustra*, tend to be polysemous. For example, in an essay about the adoration and praise given to the heaven in the section *Before the Sunrise*, Hans Ruin concludes that we cannot say if Zarathustra is a religious thinker or not. The moment before the morning sun is, in Ruin’s interpretation, the arrival of something entirely new just before the light, as “an affirmation to a truth which seems to contain a holding back of truth itself.”¹¹⁸ Is this not another way of saying that the true reality will always be unknown, moving and immeasurable?

Lastly, on the concept of action we now refer to Arendt’s notion, which we can appreciate from a new perspective as a meeting point of all three of them:

In the birth of each man this initial beginning is reaffirmed, because in each instance something new comes into an already existing world which will continue to exist after each

¹¹⁴ Ibid p 98-100, *On Self-overcoming*.

¹¹⁵ Ibid p 122, *On Redemption*.

¹¹⁶ Krishnamurti (2000) p 47.

¹¹⁷ The will to power can be interpreted as cosmic and non-anthropocentric (Nietzsche 1885 p xx, introduction by Graham Parkes).

¹¹⁸ Ruin (2021) p 152, my translation; “Det är nämligen ett ja till en sanning som tycks inbegripa ett tillbakahållande av sanningen själv.”

individual's death. Because he *is* beginning, man can begin; to be human and to be free are one and the same.¹¹⁹

Third, there is *destruction* and *renewal* in the unknown. Far from contemplation and religious ascetism, Krishnamurti's freedom is affirmative in the sense that "action is revolution, not the reconciliation of effects."¹²⁰ Freedom is ever-new, constantly moving and the awareness of what *is*; "By allowing each phenomenon to fully blossom, one allows it to die. Death destroys continuity and allows the new to arise. Death is the ending of time."¹²¹ *Zarathustra* is indeed full of verses that affirm the perishing and the death of the individual, for example: "With my tears go into your isolation, my brother. I love him who wants to create beyond himself and thereby perishes."¹²² In Kalsi's words:

Creativity is the process of birth and death, where the birth of the 'new' is only possible with the death of the 'old'. There cannot be birth until there is death, and creation is the very movement of death and birth. Death and birth are seen as a conjoined movement.¹²³

Krishnamurti's *via negativa* is action, or existentially non-action in the sense that it is neither thought's action, nor thought's inaction. To psychologically be liberated from time is, then, not only to be in the moment, but also to be in a destructive eternity. "[Y]ou eternal ones, love is eternally and for all time: and even to woe you say: Be gone, but come back! *For all joy wants – Eternity!*"¹²⁴ It can even be interpreted that Zarathustra himself represents this eternal recurrence as a circle of life, when he is named as "the advocate of life, the advocate of suffering, the advocate of the circle".¹²⁵ In comparison with Nietzsche's *affirmative* action, Krishnamurti's amnesic stillness resembles a *non-mental, transformative meditation* on the will to power, rather than the realization of it. In the end, Krishnamurti's freedom as unknown reality is beyond thought and time, yet it is still comprehensible for the mind that reaches this existential action of non-action.

3. Summary

In this thesis, I have identified and disclosed Krishnamurti's philosophy of freedom as a threefold path to a pathless land. The interpretation of successive steps seems reasonable, although he never made any such systematized presentation. Throughout the analysis, I have shown that *via negativa* is at the core of this philosophy, meaning that Krishnamurti does not exactly tell us what freedom is, but rather what it is not. Also, there is a difference between saying "freedom cannot be grasped" and "truth, as freedom, is a pathless land". In my interpretation, the first is *undecidability*, the second is negative *affirmation*. Krishnamurti's *via negativa* functions both as dialogue and open-ended searching – as a "deconstructive",

¹¹⁹ Arendt (2006) p 166.

¹²⁰ Krishnamurti (1956) p 159, *Thought and Consciousness*.

¹²¹ Rodrigues p 136.

¹²² Nietzsche (1885) p 56, *On the Way of the Creator*.

¹²³ Kalsi p 132.

¹²⁴ Nietzsche (1885) p 283, *The Drunken Song*.

¹²⁵ *Ibid* p 188, *The Convalescent*.

existentialistic undecidability – and as an “epistemological” affirmative negativity, through which he points to the pathless land of freedom by saying what freedom is not.

Turning to my research questions, first, freedom from suffering is attained through *self-knowledge* and observation of what *is*, which leads to nondualism. At this step, Krishnamurti advocates negative thinking as affirmation and Nietzsche rather as undecidability. Second, *amnestic stillness* is the awareness of the movement of psychological facts and we saw that, again, Nietzsche tends to use negative thinking as undecidability, while Krishnamurti uses both functions. We noted a potential place for rational thought within the concept of “awareness”, and in the wake of Krishnamurti’s ambiguity on this, I consider it an open question. It seems reasonable that he does leave a limited space for thought within a hierarchy, where the brain can be used by the mind once it is free. Furthermore, his method of going beyond opposites – for example with “passive yet alert” awareness – can not only be interpreted as undecidability, but as representing a more positive affirmation. In this way, the paradoxical “path to the pathless land”, in his own description of the core of the philosophy, means that “[t]otal negation is the essence of the positive.”¹²⁶ Future studies could elaborate more on this question: is this, in the context of freedom, a path to the positive through the negative? Third, *unknown reality* unveiled the distinction between brain and mind, leading to Krishnamurti’s somewhat paradoxical concept of action as non-action. *Via negativa* is not the opposite of thought or time, but a transformative state of freedom.

We should not expect to find much help in Berlin’s important essay in order to understand Krishnamurti’s notion of freedom. For Krishnamurti, the need for freedom is at the very root of being human, and not a political construct or solution to people’s other needs. There is, however, some resonance between Arendt’s concept of freedom as action and Krishnamurti’s idea of Mind, as the latter opens up relationships, including spiritual ones.

If there is one expression being associated with Krishnamurti, it would probably be that *truth is a pathless land*. In his perspective, emphasis must be put on understanding “what *is*” – in contrast to “what should be” – mainly without thinking, and on understanding one own’s shortcomings. Normally, this contrast may provoke conflict in many of us, since we are hesitant to accept any of these claims: that truth cannot be traced and found through cognitive searching, and that we need to understand our limitations before we can approach freedom. Throughout the thesis, freedom has been the object of analysis, and we have seen that it makes a good candidate as a synonym to “the truth” or “the unknown”.

For future investigations, I believe there is more to analyse through the dialogue between Krishnamurti and Nietzsche. One interesting interpretation concerns the question of one’s responsibility for growth. Krishnamurti would join Nietzsche in claiming that freedom is the responsibility of each one of us, and through the “crack” of differences between their views on personal and impersonal “mind”, it would be interesting to analyse this further. Also, Nietzsche’s “line of distinguishment” between remembrance and forgetting, as a creative force of life, could be analysed more closely in the light of Krishnamurti’s idea of our constant relating to each other.

¹²⁶ Krishnamurti (1980a) p 6.

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