

福岡女学院大学紀要 人文学部編 第24号
2014年3月

Naming and Action

Daryl Sherriff

Naming and Action

Daryl Sherriff

Abstract

This paper examines Krishnamurti's discussion of the naming process with particular regard to thoughts and feelings that appear in consciousness. It begins by pointing out that the cognitive act of naming is an almost instantaneous process that we are not aware of, which triggers a host of associated judgments in memory from which we act and which inevitably lead to conflict. We act, for example, from fear, anger, jealousy, pride and in the pursuit of pleasure, without understanding how these things work and the control they exert over us. By getting clearer about the naming process and the response which it triggers, and by becoming aware of the very feelings and thoughts as they arise, we can begin to know ourselves and free ourselves from a compulsion to act in ways which cause problems in relationship. This can open up a different way of looking at, and acting in, the world.

Krishnamurti often talks about naming things and says 'the word is not the thing'. Of course we understand this structure and the idea it expresses, verbally and logically. The cup in front of me is not the word 'cup', clearly, and yet we remain so firmly locked in words. They compose much of our waking life. Krishnamurti uses words to convey ideas but the words and the ideas are not the message. Just as the word is not the thing, neither are ideas ends in themselves.

We very quickly come to understand that words, symbols, and what they represent are different. We name things all the time and this is useful as a means of classification and for imparting information. It is an essential part

of recording and communicating in everyday life. However, understanding that we name things and seeing the importance and necessity of this is quite different from seeing the naming process in action. But it is this latter that is so very important in coming to understand many of the things that Krishnamurti talks about and it is this that we will be examining in this paper.

Indeed the first time that I saw the naming process in action it was a revelation and I was, quite simply, astounded. A pigeon I could see from my bedroom window suddenly defecated and I saw the word naming the resultant product form in my mind. It was almost instantaneous. The interesting and compelling thing was that I saw this in real time, completely unsolicited. It was observation of an involuntary kind, like being in a natural state of awareness.

Here the naming process is very straightforward. Something is seen. Memory is quickly invoked and naming takes place. It all happens so very quickly that we never usually think about focusing on the chronology of events as we move through the process. There has to be a sense of awareness to see it in action. Normally we are so focused on ends that we do not even think about looking at such processes. However, it is precisely such kind of observation that will be our main concern in the following discussion.

This simple example of the naming process has involved a relatively straightforward case: a physical object has been named and the act of naming has been seen. This connects directly to something that is central to what Krishnamurti wants us to see. No one will dispute that there are such things in the world as pigeons and trees, flowers, mountains as well as man-made artifacts such as tables and chairs. The naming of such objects is fundamental to the naming process itself and it is, perhaps, the prototype of what naming is.

Krishnamurti wants us to look at the naming process with regard to

what he calls 'facts' in consciousness, which is to say at the very movement of the content of consciousness. These 'facts' are feelings, emotions and thoughts that continually pass through us like passengers through a station ticket gate. Moreover the 'facts' Krishnamurti wants us to focus on are psychological in nature in that they relate to our sense of self. These 'facts' pass through us from moment to moment but we are not really alive to them. They range through fear, anxiety, regret, jealousy, hate, and anger as well as all the feelings associated with hope, desire and pleasure.

With this in mind let us look at something Krishnamurti talks about very often and which is directly connected to the sense of observation or looking that we will be inquiring into. He repeatedly asks us to see that: 'The observer is the observed' and in expressing this, he seems to be denying something that we all take for granted. He wants to point out that we are making a mistake in thinking that there is both an observer, the 'me' and something observed, and yet this seems so natural to us. Many of us believe, do we not that when someone says 'I am jealous', there are two things involved, an 'I' and 'jealousy'?

Similarly, the statement: 'I am angry' looks as if it has two elements, an 'I' and 'anger'. However, while this separation may seem very natural, Krishnamurti tells us that not only is it a mistake but that it is at the root of all conflict.

So what exactly does Krishnamurti mean by saying the observer is the observed and how does it relate to the naming process we have been talking about? These two points are intimately connected but first of all we need to understand what Krishnamurti means by observing 'facts' in consciousness. He gives a clear example:¹

When you observe a particular feeling, what is important is to

find out how you observe it. Please follow this. Do you see the feeling as something separate from yourself? Obviously you do. I do not know if you have experimented and have found out that when you observe a feeling, that feeling comes to an end. But even though the feeling comes to an end, if there is an observer, a spectator, a censor, a thinker who remains apart from the feeling, then there is still a contradiction. So it is very important to understand how we look at a feeling. Take, for instance, a very common feeling: jealousy. We all know what it is to be jealous. Now, how do you look at your jealousy? When you look at that feeling, you are the observer of jealousy as something apart from yourself. You try to change jealousy, to modify it, or you try to explain why you are justified in being jealous, and so on and so forth. So there is a being, a censor, an entity apart from jealousy who observes it. For the moment jealousy may disappear, but it comes back again; and it comes back because you do not really see that jealousy is part of you. You are jealousy, that feeling is not something outside of you. When you are jealous, your whole being is jealous, as your whole being is envious, acquisitive, or what you will. Don't say, "Is there not a part of me which is heavenly, spiritual, and therefore not jealous?" When you are actually in a state of jealousy, there is nothing else but that. (1962, p 5)

Krishnamurti is surely right in predicting how we observe. There is indeed a separation is there not, a duality, in our thinking between a 'me' which looks and 'something' which is seen? For the most part we do respond as he says and perhaps we feel justified in so doing. This kind of separation is, after all, something we may have spent most of our lives engaged in. Although, perhaps we do not want them to, such feelings do indeed return and many of us may experience them countless times. Krishnamurti is implying that these feelings come back because we do not really see them for

¹ What follows here is closely connected to some points I made in: *A Fundamental Flaw in Thinking*, Fukuoka Jo Gakuin Bulletin No 23, p1-23, 2013. However this paper goes on to develop the points arising in a different way, albeit one which coheres with the main points of that paper.

what they are and that if we did, we might be free of them. This may seem an interesting suggestion or hypothesis, except that Krishnamurti is not interested in suggestions or anything hypothetical whatsoever. He wants us to find out if what he is saying is the case and to do that we have to examine and do so with passion. So, how do we look? Are we separating the feeling and the self? Is that what we are doing? The willingness to look, to examine, if we may call it that, is quite significant, because it illustrates that we are already in a different frame of mind, without which observation is not really possible. At this stage, it is how we continue that really matters. He says:

So it is very important to find out how to look, how to listen. I will go into it a little bit more. When one is jealous, observe what is taking place. My wife or my husband looks at somebody else, and I have a certain feeling which goes with all that nonsense we call love. Or perhaps somebody else is cleverer than I, or has a more beautiful figure, and again that feeling arises. The moment that feeling arises, I give it a label, a name. Please see what is taking place, just following it step by step. It is a fairly simple psychological process, as you will know if you have observed it in yourself. I have a certain feeling and I give it a name. I give it a name because I want to know what it is. I call it jealousy, and that word is the outcome of my memory of the past. The feeling itself is something new, it has come into being suddenly, spontaneously, but I have identified it by giving it a name. In giving it a name I think I have understood it, but I have only strengthened it. So what has happened? The word has interfered with my looking at the fact. I think I have understood the feeling by calling it jealousy, whereas I have only put it in the framework of words, of memory, with all the old impressions, explanations, condemnations, justifications. But that feeling itself is new, it is not something of yesterday. It becomes something of yesterday only when I give it a name. If I look at it without naming it, there is no centre from which I am looking. (Ibid, p 6)

“There is no ‘centre’, no ‘me’, from which I am looking.” This is crucial. Something, a feeling, pops up in consciousness and what happens? The feeling gets named, does it not? Cognition takes place and our mechanism for categorizing things comes in to play. At this stage Krishnamurti is only interested in us seeing this in action, seeing this as it happens – which is surprisingly difficult. Krishnamurti knows that for ordinary technical and everyday matters the naming process is completely acceptable. He is chiefly interested in this process where it concerns psychological matters that relate to our sense of self. In giving the feeling a name – here *jealousy* – we invoke a whole framework of linguistic history that has its roots in the past. Cognition takes over and the raw feeling that gave rise to it has been superseded. The feeling is new but we interpret it in terms of what we know, which is in terms of the past and this delicate feeling ‘becomes something of yesterday’. Can we, he asks, look at this ‘fact’ in consciousness, this feeling, without naming it? As I mentioned earlier in regard to the pigeon, the naming process is almost instantaneous and seemingly automatic. Can there be a space in which the feeling is suspended without the naming process kicking in? And can we be sensitive to this space?

What I am saying is that the moment you give a name, a label to that feeling, you have brought it into the framework of the old; and the old is the observer, the separate entity who is made up of words, of ideas, of opinions about what is right and what is wrong. Therefore it is very important to understand the process of naming, and to see how instantaneously the word ‘jealousy’ comes into being. But if you don’t name that feeling – which demands tremendous awareness, a great deal of immediate understanding – then you will find that there is no observer, no thinker, no centre from which you are judging, and that you are not different from the feeling. There is no ‘you’ who feels it. (Ibid, p 7)

We name the feeling, the fact, *jealousy* and as we do so all of the associations and judgments connected with that word are brought in. With a word like *jealousy* these are psychological and judgmental in nature. This, Krishnamurti tells us, is the observer, the self, in the form of memory coming in, taking over and directing operations. The naming process is almost instantaneous and up to now has gone on unconsidered and unobserved. But we are now quietly looking at this process, observing, watching. Can there be a space where the feeling hovers like a helicopter and is observed in all its glory? In this state there is only the observed, only the 'fact' in consciousness. If there is great sensitivity, cognition need not become activated, which means the past and everything associated with the word does not start to feature. We are then left with the pure feeling, which can wither and die. The question that remains for most of us is: Are we willing to look?

Jealousy has become a habit with most of us, and like any other habit it continues. To break the habit is merely to be aware of the habit. Please listen to this. Do not say, "It is terrible to have this habit, I must change it, I must be free of it", and so on, but just be aware of it. To be aware of a habit is not to condemn it, but simply to look at it. You know, when you love a thing you look at it. It is only when you don't love it that the problem of how to get rid of it begins. When I use the word 'love' with regard to the feeling which we call jealousy, I hope you see what I mean. To 'love' jealousy is to not deny or condemn that feeling; then there is no separation between the feeling and the observer. In this state of total awareness, if you go into it very deeply without words, you will find you have completely wiped away that feeling which is habitually identified with the word 'jealousy'. (Ibid, p 7)

Krishnamurti asks us to be aware of the habit, be aware of the feeling, but this is no ordinary awareness and is not easy to do. Can there be a space

before the reaction zooms in? How we observe here is crucial. If we condemn, that is the censor intervening and impartial observation becomes impossible. So, can we remain alive to all this and to the feeling without naming it? Without the naming process and the input of all the associated judgments, without the criticism, the justifications or the disapproval, is there is a pure state where there is only the raw feeling? Does it wither and die? Clearly we have to look to find out.

Krishnamurti tells us that the naming of psychological facts brings in all the cognitive data built up and stored in memory. And he means this to be true of all psychological facts be they jealousy, anger, hate, envy, pain, sorrow or fear to say nothing of the more so-called 'positive' facts of anticipation, desire, and pleasure.

Moreover, and this is the crucial point, he says that the naming process triggers the response of the self and all that it has learnt. This is the switch that brings in the so-called 'observer', which is where conflict is harboured. Thought comes in and takes over, and so it is that the self is strengthened and our problems compounded. Krishnamurti exhorts us to get clear about this mechanism otherwise we are condemned to remain in the grip of habit. None of this is to deny that there are countless times when thought is incredibly useful, for example, in engaging in practical tasks in everyday life. However, if where emotions are concerned, thought in connection with the naming process begins to control or dictate our actions, then surely we must get clear about this. Especially, if Krishnamurti is right when he says that it is this that prevents radical change and which up to now has caused all of our problems in relationship.

Krishnamurti offers countless examples of how psychological 'facts' in consciousness, in connection with the naming process, are self-perpetuating and lead to conflict, but let us consider briefly, one more: fear, which plays a

dominant role in the lives of each one of us:

Thus it is the mind that creates fear, the mind being the process of thinking. Thinking is verbalization. You cannot think without words, without symbols, images; these images, which are the prejudices, the previous knowledge, the apprehensions of the mind, are projected upon the fact, and out of that there arises fear. There is freedom from fear only when the mind is capable of looking at the fact without translating it, without giving it a name, a label. This is quite difficult, because the feelings, the reactions, the anxieties that we have, are promptly identified by the mind and given a word. The feeling of jealousy is identified by that word. Is it possible not to identify a feeling, to look at that feeling without naming it? It is the naming of the feeling that gives it continuity, that gives it strength. The moment you give a name to that which you call fear, you strengthen it; but if you can look at that feeling without terming it, you will see that it withers away. Therefore if one would be completely free of fear it is essential to understand this whole process of terming, of projecting symbols, images, giving names to facts. There can be freedom from fear only when there is self-knowledge. Self-knowledge is the beginning of wisdom, which is the ending of fear.(1954, para 384)

We need to be clear here. We are not being asked to give up thinking which would be ridiculous. As we have already said thought is an extremely powerful and important tool and everyday life as we know it would be impossible without it. The huge strides in technology are a direct result of it. The type of thinking Krishnamurti wants us to examine is thought connected intimately with the self, psychological thought grounded in memory: the stuff that springs up in our reactions. This is why he focuses on fear, jealousy, pleasure, desire, etc.

In particular, we are examining the naming process with regard to feelings or 'facts' as he calls them. And here he is taking fear as an example.

The naming process, as we have seen is a delicate mechanism, which seemingly operates independently and instantaneously. It is as if nothing can stop it and most of us may freely admit to not being aware of it. The question remains: can there be awareness of the feeling without naming taking place?

Krishnamurti is simply bringing the issue to our attention but he is doing so with passion. It burns within him and he exhorts us to look because if we do not we will continue as now in the same old conditioned way: violent, brutal, aggressive, competitive, full of fear and in conflict. To break through this something radical needs to take place.

One reason perhaps why we do not look at the naming process or observe in the way that Krishnamurti suggests is that it simply does not occur to us, while another reason may be that we have become insensitive and these points are clearly related. Krishnamurti draws our attention to this insensitivity in the following passage:

Please watch yourself. See how insensitive your mind has become. When you have a feeling of pleasure, pain, of a spontaneous joy of something, the moment you feel it, there is an immediate response to it by naming it, you name it instantly. Please follow this, observe it in yourself. Because all of this if you don't follow, when I talk about freedom, it will mean nothing to you. I am talking about a mind that does not name. When you have a feeling, you name it instantly, you give it a name. The very process of naming it is the state of non-observation. And you name it in order to fix it as an experience in your memory; and then, the next day, that memory which has become mechanical, wants it repeated. Therefore when you look at – for example – the sunset the next day, it is no longer the thing that you looked at spontaneously, the first day. So the naming process of any feeling, in any observation, prevents you from looking. (1964 para 16)

This is interesting. In one sense Krishnamurti is unfair. Human beings in

their everyday jobs actually examine any number of things quite minutely, from dense legal documents to detailed scientific enquiries. This ability has enabled us to make computers, mobile phones, rockets that can reach the moon as well as, sadly, weapons that can destroy the world a thousand times over. This has required tremendous attention to detail performed with great meticulousness and rigour. We are masters at it. And yet in terms of observing ourselves and the myriad of thoughts and feelings that flow through us, we are complete amateurs. This is why Krishnamurti says we are insensitive and that the state of naming is non-observation. We are in pilot mode and function like automatons; it is a smooth running mechanical process and we are oblivious to it. For everyday technical matters like driving to work, doing one's daily tasks, calculating, etc., this does not matter and in actual fact may lead to efficiency and economy. But with feelings and emotions, as we have been discussing, the naming process acts as a strengthener, which in turn increases the hold or control of those feelings, making it difficult to be free of them, which means that we will continue to act from conflict and accordingly increase such conflict in the world. The irony is that it is such a useful mechanism that serves us very well in ordinary everyday activities

Krishnamurti offers a simple example of how the naming process prevents real looking. Unexpectedly we see a sunset. The spectacle overwhelms us and we exclaim: "How lovely!" We move away from the spectacle and language takes over. We tell friends what we have seen and perhaps plan to see it again the next day. It has become an experience and is recorded in memory. Krishnamurti is not saying we should not record experiences. That is what we do all the time. He wants us to see the process in action, wants us to see how mechanical it is and wants us to see how the naming process prevents us from actually looking.

In our current state, which Krishnamurti would say is one of insensitivity, when we go to see the sunset the next day, our memory of the previous day's event becomes part of the filter through which we look. We do not see the sunset with the same eyes; it doesn't seem quite the same, slightly less intense, perhaps. A comparison of sorts is going on. So we are unable to look, unable to observe. The naming mechanism with all of its cognitive associations becomes the lens through which we see the world. We do not see directly, and we are not aware that we do not.

Can awareness come? This may seem a curious form of expression but the point is that there can be no active mover; volition or motive cannot bring it about. Awareness must come of its own accord.

One has to look with eyes, with a feeling, with a mind, with a brain that is intensely active. And the brain ceases to be intensely active, the moment you name something, give it a symbol. A man who is studying himself who is observing himself, is not interpreting, is not comparing; he is merely observing. ... Listen to those crows cawing away, before they go to sleep; just listen to it, without resistance, without any urge to listen to the speaker and to resist the noise of those crows; just listen to everything. Then out of that listening you can pay attention to what you want to listen to. But if you resist the noise of the crows, then you are in conflict. Therefore you have no energy to listen. (Ibid, para 20)

Any resistance leads to conflict; we try to block things out or respond with internal irritation or perhaps a grimace. There is conflict between the reality and what we want. The resistance comes from the self, the censor, the thing making judgments. And these are all memory based, of the past. The looking, the sensitivity that Krishnamurti is talking about is in the present, vital and intense. One is aware of the present without the past impinging at

all. Like riding a bicycle along a difficult and bumpy road. One can be aware of every bump and crevice as one endeavours in the moment to keep cycling along. Attention can be localized to a particular rock or pitfall without there being any resistance to what is at the periphery. But to establish the truth of this one has to examine for oneself; it cannot come as the result of careful argument or based on the word of another. Sporting activities, or any activity that really occupies one, often give rise to this intense involvement with the present, but on most other occasions, language, ideas and judgments flood in. So again the question is can we be in the moment? Can we be in the moment and observe without a filter? This is an exhortation to look, not a mere conjecture. Krishnamurti reiterates what he means by reference to a flower:

Have you ever looked at a flower? There are two ways of looking at a flower: either botanically or non-botanically. When you look at a flower botanically, you know the species, the colour, the kind, what it is; when that interpretation comes in-between, you are observing it botanically; when that comes in, you can't see the flower. Please observe this. When you say, "That is a rose. How lovely!", you have already ceased to look at it. Because you have identified that rose with what you have already called a rose, that identification with the past prevents you from looking at the actual rose in front of you. Similarly, when you look at yourself, when you identify a particular feeling, a particular state, a particular experience, by naming it, you have identified yourself with that feeling through a name which is out of memory, from the past, and therefore you are incapable of looking, observing listening, seeing that feeling. So this identification, this naming, this symbol which has become so astonishingly important in your life prevents you from looking, feeling deeper completely. (Ibid, para 17)

As very young children our knowledge is extremely limited. The stock of thoughts confined to memory is quite small. Accordingly, when we look as

small children we do not invoke as complex a classification system as adults perhaps do and the looking may be different, closer to what Krishnamurti has in mind. Everything is fresh and full of wonder; we are fascinated by little insects and plants and all manner of things. There is an intensity and passion in what we do that is not simply cognition based. As we grow older, the stock of thoughts is much more complex and memory impinges all the time. For the most part we are not aware of this. We are focused on ends, not actual process. This makes it difficult for us to see what is before our eyes – the rose, for example – without simultaneously being bombarded with thoughts about it, in the way Krishnamurti mentions. However, on having this pointed out some of us may begin to look with renewed vigour, which is all that Krishnamurti asks.

Krishnamurti is urging us to observe the naming process with regard to what he calls 'facts' in consciousness, whether these be feelings, emotions or thoughts. He wants us to do this in part to be aware of how we function, but also because such awareness can impede the naming process and perhaps sever the link completely, making us less mechanical, freeing us from a compulsion to act in a conditioned way, driven by certain emotions, which lead to conflict and confusion. He says being aware of such processes, in the moment, requires a heightened sensitivity and is actually self-knowledge or self learning. And he is scathing of the position we occupy without such learning:

So one has to be extremely alert when one watches oneself. Because without knowing yourself, you can't live; you are a dead entity. You are talking, you are reading a book and repeating the book endlessly – the Gita, the Upanishads, or any other 'silly' book. You follow? I said any other 'silly' book because the moment you repeat, you have ceased to understand, you have dissociated it from your actual daily living.

What matters is not the book but your daily living, daily feelings, daily anxieties, miseries, the way you think. So you have to know that. Because, without knowing that, you have no foundation, you have no basis for any thought, for any reason; then you are merely functioning mechanically or neurotically. And to know yourself is the most arduous task that you can set to yourself. You can go to the moon, you can do everything in life; but if you don't know yourself, you will be empty, dull, stupid; though you may function as a prime minister or a first-class engineer or a marvelous technician, you are merely functioning mechanically. So feel the importance, the seriousness of knowing yourself. Not what people have said about yourself, whether you are the supreme self or the little self – wipe away all the things that people have said, and observe your own minds and your own hearts, and from there function. (Ibid, para 19))

Strong words indeed. Unless we are extremely alert we are merely the living dead. We are like automatons without any sensitivity to what we are doing. Following the way of a respected book or culture is of no help either. These serve merely as guides or blueprints for action and make us secondhand human beings, just going through the motions. We have to see ourselves as we are, and more importantly have to see the necessity of doing this. We have to examine our feelings, anxieties, miseries and the way we think, which at the moment most of us are not doing. Instead we simply react to these feelings as they arise, like a grandfather clock striking the hour when the lever moves into the appropriate position, and this makes us mechanical. See these feelings as they arise, see them in all their glory, in the moment, and there may no longer be the compulsion to react, to respond in ways that we have done up until now.

We meet the new with an ideology, with a set of ideas, beliefs and experiences – in short, memories that have been built up over years. This is our past and this vast store of memory greets the present as it happens. We

are forever interpreting the new in terms of this vast store. In technical matters this need not be a problem but when psychological factors become involved, which is to say when we look from the point of view of the self, this is when problems arise. It is this aspect that Krishnamurti wants us to examine and to do so we have to look at the 'facts' in consciousness and see what they give rise to. See your responses and more importantly, see what triggers them and of what that trigger comprises. The message is: know yourself.

To know oneself, knowing, is the active present; and what you have learned, knowledge, is the past. The past cannot dictate to the active present. When it does, you create more conflict. But you cannot reject the past either; it is there, in the conscious as well as in the unconscious. And you have to have knowledge. It would be absurd for a scientist to wipe away all the things that he has learned, accumulated, through centuries; it would be absurd for an artist to wipe away his knowledge of how to mix colors and all that. But not to let the past interfere with the active present – that is what we have to understand. (Ibid, para 20)

This is an extremely important passage and it is imperative that we understand it if we are to get close to what it is that Krishnamurti is talking about. We are rarely in the active present and when we are, we are often not aware of it. A clear case of when we are aware is when there is some urgency to the situation. This might involve a case where we sense danger of some kind or where we think it wise to be cautious.

A simple everyday case might involve those who like to take a very hot bath. A foot tests out the temperature initially and we move slowly and carefully as we lower ourselves into the hot liquid. At such times we are almost completely in the moment, which is not to say that thought does not

enter but it is closer in kind to what we are being asked to do. Where thought is absent we have only the pure sensation of heat and its presence is clear. But on most occasions thought zooms in without invitation and we are off into the world of comparisons and judgments either positive or negative. The reactions are what occupy us, our responses, which give rise to further reactions, which reverberate without us really knowing why. Let us take anger again as an example. Something is said and one feels anger. There is conflict between the sense of self and what is articulated. This response of anger, which springs from the past, is a reaction to the new, to the present, and as a result of this anger something further may be said which may serve to add to the tension. Even if nothing is explicitly said in response, the feeling is clear and it immediately gets named, and so it is that there is a separation between the sense of self and the anger. That is the first wedge and it can be quickly followed by other reactions. There may be regret or vindication on one's own part; the first feeling gives rise to conflict in oneself, whilst the second strengthens the division and increases the conflict in the world. But in both cases we have moved away from the feeling, moved away from *what is* and lost the chance to understand in the moment.

So can we stay with the feeling as it arises? Can we stay with *what is*, this feeling or fact in consciousness, without responding? This is the task.

So, what is important is to be capable of observing actually *what is* – whether you are angry, lustful, wanting this and that. You know what human beings are inwardly. To observe it without naming it, without saying, “I am angry, I must not be angry”, but just to observe it; to know what it means, the depth, the extraordinary feeling that lies behind all the subtleties, the secrets – if you so observe, then you will see that out of that observation there is freedom, and out of that freedom there is action immediately.

Because action means action in the present, not tomorrow.

Action means the active present. And the active present can only act in the present, when there is not all this immense burden of fear, of guilt, of anxiety. Therefore it is very important to understand the whole psyche, the whole consciousness of yourself. As I was pointing out earlier this evening, if one observes, one will find that the mind, not only the brain but the totality of the mind, is emptying itself. (Ibid, para 22)

Be in the present! A little bird alights on one's bare shoulders and one is immediately aware of its tiny claws rough-edged and scratchy against the skin. One is alive to its movement and feels its every touch. A moment later it is off, gone, perhaps never to return. One was aware of its arrival, its short presence and its departure, all over in a few seconds. A rare event, one that not only activated all of the senses but one that brought acute awareness. Can we be similarly sensitive to the feelings and thoughts that flow through us? This is our task. If the bird, or even birds were regular visitors our sense of awareness would surely fade and the likelihood is that we would not even notice their presence, perhaps saving our reactions for different things. Feelings and thoughts are constantly arriving and departing perhaps similar in a way to our second scenario with the birds. We are not really aware of them with any clarity and focus; energy is given only to our response and perhaps we are not really aware of even that. Can we be aware of these things as with the first arrival of that little bird?

This is what it is to be aware of *what is*. It is something that we have not done, something that we have not even thought of doing. And so it is that we have good moments and bad, ups and downs and good days and bad days. One's mood varies from moment to moment and from day to day and we have no real idea why. And from this state of confusion we act in the world, causing more confusion. On having this pointed out to us, how many will say

they are not interested in finding out how this mechanism operates, how we, indeed, operate? Krishnamurti asks us to observe this traffic through us, which at times seems like rush hour in a major city. He asks us to observe *what is*, these phenomena in consciousness, with wonder and interest but without judgment or attempt to name. And this is no easy thing. Tremendous energy must be put into this, like running marathon after marathon, with no guarantee of any result. One must go at it as if one's life depended on it. Many of those willing to look will quickly fall asleep as it were and drift off into automatic response, which is our usual lot. But anyone willing to look is already in a different state, observing process. Krishnamurti tells us that by so observing, the facts themselves may wither and die, extinguishing at once any need to respond. Freedom is freedom from these facts. We feel the bird on the shoulder but there is no reaction, except for perhaps a smile as it goes on with its journey. It is the psychological facts in consciousness that cause problems, that lead to conflict, and these facts all relate to our sense of self.

Now, when you observe yourself, there must be space between yourself and that which you observe. And generally we do not have that space; we have crowded it with our ideas, with our opinions, with our judgments. So there must be space. And the mind must have space within itself. It is only in the space within the mind that there can be a mutation, that a new thing can be born. Surely, that space in the mind is when the mind is innocent.

Most of us live at the conscious level, very superficially. Because most of us are occupied with our jobs, with our family, with our immediate necessities. We live on the surface. Society, education, the world – they all demand that you live on top. Below that top there is the great depth of your traditions, of your hopes, of your fears, of your gods; all the murky existence of your being is there – and you have to understand that too. So, for a mind that wishes to understand the unconscious, the conscious part has to be quiet for some time, or all the time; and

then only all the unconscious begins to tell its story. To understand the unconscious, either you go through the process of analysing and so on, indefinitely, or you cut through it. And you cut through it, when you see the whole activity of yourself, without naming it, immediately. (Ibid, para 24)

When we are engaged in technical matters like using a computer, writing a report, constructing things, preparing dinner etc., we can remain to a large extent free from self concern and focus totally on the task in hand. At such times, while things run smoothly, we may feel rather relaxed and free from care. However, when things go wrong, when we are challenged in some way or, indeed, when praise is forthcoming, the self appears in the reactions that are generated and it is this aspect of ourselves that we are being asked to observe. However, as should be clear by now this is not a case of one thing observing another but whether there can be complete awareness of what is happening. Can we be aware of the chronological movement of thought? Can there be awareness of a comment by another – one that normally might produce say, anger – can we see the reaction arising in ourselves and watch that, be aware of that, without reacting further? There must be an awareness of what is happening, a complete awareness, and this is a kind of looking, a kind of observation, but it is definitely not looking through the eye of a telescope. To observe this psychological aspect we must be naturally quiet, which is something that many of us for the most part are not. In our dealings in the world our heads are full of ideas, plans, hopes, wishes, regrets and reactions to whatever impinges on our senses. And from this state we act.

To observe is to be aware of this movement. Krishnamurti is not putting forward an academic argument designed to persuade or convince. His is a practical concern. He is simply asking us to examine how we work, how we

function and to do this we must observe without judgment, which means uncluttered by thought. There must be a space, there must be a silence around what we observe. If we crowd it out with other ideas or sounds, observation becomes impossible.

So we become aware of the noise, of the ideas, of the crowding out and as we do so things start to slow down, do they not? To watch this movement, to be aware of its flow is to enter another state. We are as if on a cliff edge negotiating terrain; we are detonating a bomb; we are bringing a plane into land for the first time following instructions from another. All senses are heightened; this moment is all that there is. We see and feel directly without judgment. Free from reaction, we are alive in the moment.

And therefore freedom is not a reaction. Freedom is a state of being. Freedom is a feeling. You have to liberate yourself, free yourself, even in little things – you dominating your wife. or your wife dominating you, or your ambitions, your greed, your envy. When you cut through all that, not taking time and discussing about it, then you will see that, without analysis, without introspective moods and demands, to observe – to see things as they are without self-pity, without the desire to change; just to observe – is to have that space. (Ibid, para 26)

Freedom is a state of being. We are free from reactions, free from rationalisations; we see these things as they arise and are not controlled by them. Freedom is to be aware and in the present. Then action is not based on an idea, not based on conclusions rooted in the past. Freedom comes from seeing what drives us, from seeing what springs up in our minds when we meet something new and yet not being governed by this: “When you cut through all that, not taking time” then you are truly in the moment.

You are in the moment when you observe facts in consciousness and

naming does not take place – or that if it does, one sees that too. In this state, one is aware of *what is* – the fact – and it no longer dictates or holds one captive. Then action is not based on the past. One sees clearly what to do and one acts with clarity and compassion.

And the moment there is that space untouched by society, then in that state there is a mutation, a mutation takes place. And you need a mutation in this world, because that mutation is the birth of the individual. And it is only the individual that can do something in this world, to bring about a complete revolution, a complete change, a complete transformation. What we need in this world at the present time, is an individual who is born out of this emptiness. (Ibid, para 28)

Notes and references

- Krishnamurti, Jiddu. *The First and Last Freedom*, London: Gollancz and Harper, 1954.
- *The Brockwood Park Talks and Discussions*, 1969, London, Servire, 1970
- *The Urgency of Change*, London, Gollancz and Harper, 1971.
- *Beyond Violence*, London, Gollancz, 1973.
- *Krishnamurti on Education*, London, Harper &Row, 1977
- *The Wholeness of Life*, London, Gollancz, 1978
- *Krishnamurti to Himself*, His Last Journal, Gollancz, London, 1987
- *The Future is Now*, London, Gollancz, 1988.
- *The impossible question* London, Arkana, Penguin Group, 1991
- *Meeting life*, London. Arkana, Penguin Group, 1991
- *The last talks*, Krishnamurti Foundation India. 1992
- *You are the world*, Krishnamurti Foundation India. 1992

CD ROM

Krishnamurti, Jiddu. "4th Public Talk, Saanen, July 1962"

Krishnamurti, Jiddu. "3rd Public Talk, Bombay, February 1964"

Naming and Action (Sherriff)

The Krishnamurti text collection & the complete published works 1933-1986, CD ROM,
The Krishnamurti Foundation Trust, Brockwood Park, UK, 1991.