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Questions to Which There Are No Answers: The Method Behind Jiddu Krishnamurti's Dialogue

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The mystic and thinker Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895–1986) engaged in numerous group conversations and one-on-one dialogues with a great diversity of discussants, including disciples, scientists, philosophers, psychologists, and theologians. Behind these dialogues, I suggest, there is a distinctive method, which I term the *Krishnamurti dialogue*. This method, whose existence has evaded Krishnamurti's followers and scholars alike, is as innovative as what has become widely known as the Socratic method and should be considered Krishnamurti's greatest contribution to the field of religious thought. In this article, I aim to unveil the persistent methodology that enables Krishnamurti's dialogue to accomplish its transformative goals. Based on Pierre Hadot's hermeneutic approach, I scrutinize the early development of Krishnamurti's dialogical methodology as well as recurring structures in two sample dialogues. Most of my attention will be devoted to what I deem his two most revolutionary tools of investigation: an unconventional use of questions and an innovative employment of the mystical principle of negation, or the *via negativa*.

1 Introduction

The mystic and thinker Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895–1986) engaged – from 1948 to 1985, a year before his death – in numerous dialogues. These were either group conversations or one-on-one dialogues, and the great diversity of discussants included disciples, scientists, philosophers, psychologists, theologians, and politicians, as well as religious leaders and wandering monks (sadhus), and even schoolteachers and schoolchildren. In this article, I intend to establish that although Krishnamurti did not recognize this reality – recognizing it would have implied going against his own credo as a teacher – there is a distinctive and unparalleled method behind his dialogue form. This method, whose existence has evaded Krishnamurti's followers and scholars alike, is, I argue, as innovative as what has become widely known as the Socratic method. For this reason, I shall refer to it as the *Krishnamurti dialogue*, notwithstanding the fact that this term does not exist elsewhere. Intriguingly, Krishnamurti's method and the Socratic method seem to share important common features, the most striking being the fact that they centered on teaching the discussant *how* to think rather than *what* to think [1].

Based on Pierre Hadot's hermeneutic approach, which will be explicated below, I shall unveil the persistent methodology that enables Krishnamurti's dialogue to accomplish its transformative goals. My starting point will be to introduce the way that Krishnamurti began, quite unintentionally, to develop his dialogical methodology together with some of his closest students. I will extricate from these spontaneous group discussions the major tools and purposes of the Krishnamurti dialogue, which were evident even in those early days of hesitant manifestation. This will be followed by analyses of two dialogues, from which I shall deduce the major components of Krishnamurti's method. Nonetheless, I have restricted myself to group and one-on-one discussions with disciples. My reason for doing so has been that it is reasonable to expect that the method found its freest, most fulfilled expression with interlocutors who were genuinely and expressly eager to be guided and changed through it. Most of my attention will be devoted to what I deem his two most revolutionary tools of investigation: an unconventional use of questions and an innovative employment of the mystical principle of negation, or the *via negativa*. By placing these two tools in broader philosophical and mystical contexts, I hope to highlight the uniqueness of Krishnamurti's approach.

In my reading of Krishnamurti's dialogues, I have adopted a hermeneutic approach following the methodological tradition of Pierre Hadot (1922–2010), who claimed to have resolved the apparent incoherences and contradictions of the ancient Greco-Roman texts by choosing to read them as texts whose purpose had been not to lay out systematic theories but to "*lead disciples along a path of spiritual progress*" (Hadot 2009, 52–53, 90). Hadot's interpretive principles have later been applied to a more effective reading of Hindu and Buddhist texts by scholars of Asian philosophies (e.g., Apple 2010; Ganeri 2013; Nicholson 2015; Fiordalis 2018).

Hadot himself was inspired by Victor Goldschmidt's formula, originally applied to Plato's dialogues, that "*these dialogues aim not to inform but to form*" (Hadot 2009, 91). Functioning as a spiritual exercise (Gr. *áskēsis*), a practice designed to "*pro-*

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duce a certain psychic effect in the reader or listener" (Davidson 1995, 19–20), the discourse should be read as a dialectical process whose methodological tools, including its method of rational and systematic presentation and way of argumentation, are designed to shape the mind and to prepare the novice for a philosophical way of life.

The limitation of Hadot's hermeneutic approach is known: Hadot insisted on including even theorists like Aristotle in his way of reading, assuming that all ancient texts should be understood as spiritual exercises rather than attempts at establishing a metaphysics. Nonetheless, in the case of Krishnamurti, who outspokenly objects to the philosophical project of theory-building (Rodrigues 2001, 29–30, 200), it is reasonable to assume that this type of methodological approach would enable an optimal understanding of the text. Since Krishnamurti's declared goal as a philosopher – a "philosopher" in the Hadotian sense but not in the contemporary academic sense – is the transformation of the human mind, I read his dialogues as a development of the tradition of the ancient transformative dialogue or simply put, as spiritual exercises: dialectical processes whose methods are employed not for the presentation of ideas but for facilitating an instantaneous and experiential insight. Moreover, I argue that interpreting Krishnamurti's discourse as a metaphysical presentation, thus departing from his own clear intention, significantly hinders our ability to understand it.

But before beginning to delve into the origins of the method, I feel compelled to address one potential criticism of my venture. One may justifiably ask how it is possible to unveil a system behind a process that is founded on the premise that it has no system and moreover, that it is an anti-system [2]. After all, it was Krishnamurti's profound conviction that whenever he entered into dialogue, he was capable of listening and responding to questions posed by either his interlocutors or himself from a completely fresh state of mind, unencumbered by memory, time, past experience, or prior discussions (Jayakar 1986, 327). Nonetheless, this assertion, which has generally been uncritically accepted by his followers, should be seriously questioned, since, as Hunter (1988, 52–53) correctly observes, "*repetition was a key factor in Krishnamurti's teachings,*" so much so that "*the essentials of his teaching could certainly be grasped from a careful study of a few series of talks*." In anything repetitive, one can identify hidden but stable patterns – even in a self-recognized anti-system, since a piecemeal negation of all methods is also, in the end, a method.

2 The Birth of a New Methodology

Soon after Jiddu Krishnamurti embarked on his independent teaching career in 1929, he began to develop a unique form of public presentations that were essentially and ethically dialogical. Krishnamurti seemed to position himself primarily as a questioner: every lecture was, in effect, a half-audible dialogue whose fulfilment entirely relied on the hearer's internal response. His method, as Hunter (1988, 52) points out, was to introduce a series of probing, exploratory questions to his audience, urging them to find an answer within themselves, and to then go on by further developing the questions or by taking a sudden turn to another topic, which would be approached in a similar way. This baffling process of repeated, answerless exploration of questions was designed to lead the listener to an experiential insight.

But in addition to this indirect type of dialogue, it is worthwhile to closely inspect the significant development that took place in his teachings during the year 1948. It was then, during his long stay in Bombay, that Krishnamurti seemed to move away from the more traditional, guru-oriented group discussions that he had practiced with his students until then (Jayakar 1986, 117). According to Williams (2015, 671), Krishnamurti's guru-oriented dialogues were in line with the Indian dialogical tradition that took the form of a brief question and a long answer or discourse. This type of dialogue, which we often find in the Upanishads or in the Pali Canon, was a framework that enabled the student to elicit the direct, oral teachings from the master. The 1948 shift, however, marked a transition to an altogether different form that was closer in structure and spirit to the rapid, dynamic, and analytical exchanges between master and disciple known to us from those Platonic dialogues that seem to capture the Socratic method (Gr. *elenchus*).

My only source for the documentation of this shift is Pupul Jayakar's *J. Krishnamurti: A Biography*. Jayakar (1986, 110) mentions that in later years, Krishnamurti was to say that his full mystical awakening came about in India between 1947 and 1948. The fact that the internal shift took place around the same time is, I believe, meaningfully related to his ability to bring forth the new dialogue, since in so many ways, this method was the fully realized expression of the unique position he took after leaving behind his role as a theosophist leader. To begin with, this was the last, and perhaps inevitable, step he felt he had to take in order to withdraw from the authoritative role of the teacher as a knower: placing himself as the questioner within a dynamic dialogical structure (Williams 2015, 666).

It is not difficult to surmise what factors were involved in the spontaneous development of Krishnamurti's dialogue form in 1948. First, his vehement rejection of the traditional teacher–student relationship and his insistence on the listener's self-inquiry were less effective as long as he sat on a distant podium and guided a passive audience. Krishnamurti the speaker could urge participants to make the questions he posed their own, but as a persistent questioner in dialogue, he could make it clear to the discussants that facing the questions was their exclusive struggle. Jayakar (1986, 121) was conscious of this when she told Krishnamurti that in personal discussion with him, "*there is nothing except 'what is' as reflected in oneself. You throw back on the person exactly 'what is,'*" to which he replied, "*[b]ut when K throws back, it is yours*" [3]. Another advantage was that Krishnamurti's conviction that for the mind to mutate, all avenues seeking an answer must be shut off, could be fully exercised in this rapid exchange. Like Socrates in the agora, Krishnamurti actively cornered the interlocutor's mind, preventing it from rushing to its familiar escape routes and exposing the falsity of its apparent knowledge with razor-sharp precision.

Jayakar's relatively brief account already unveils many of the hidden guidelines of the Krishnamurti dialogue. Perhaps most importantly, the dialogue is propelled and sustained by a primary question that is "*kept rolling,*" while being repeated occasionally after some swift exchanges (Jayakar 1986, 473). Often it is Krishnamurti who formulates the question, based on initial remarks by the group discussion members. The questions chosen are metaphysical and broad by nature, though there seems to be a general agreement between him and the other discussants that the questions should be approached not merely as abstract riddles, but also as pressing human realities that inevitably engage the heart. Nonetheless, the questions play an ironic role in the dialogue, since Krishnamurti does not deploy them to lead to any clear metaphysical or instructive formulations. In fact, he does not even believe that life's fundamental questions can be answered at all; rather, because these questions are unanswerable, they throw "*man back on himself and the way the structure of thought operates*" (Jayakar 1986, 298). As soon as the question has been raised, the listener's mind is tempted into the trap, but it is the dynamics of one's attempts to provide a conceptual answer that make thought grow aware of its own mechanism, since in its search it can only move within the confines of its own hall of mirrors. Thus, the metaphysical question is utilized to expose *what is,* the reality of the conditioned mind, which is the struggling questioner themselves.

Since there are no answers to life's great questions, whatever answers may arise are, as a rule, rejected regardless of their specific quality or depth of argumentation. It is Krishnamurti's contention that the answers that seek to end the probing are limited in that they emerge as verbal reactions deriving from the storehouse of memory and prior knowledge (Jayakar 1986, 478). Thus, although the intellectual instrument is not put aside, it is, in a sense, employed against itself, since it is limited to the rejection of all accumulated knowledge. Furthermore, one should repudiate the entire process of thought, that is, not only its attachments and resulting suffering but also the complementary half of its search for redemption and elevation, since "*the hand that seeks to throw away or reject is the same hand that itself holds*" (Krishnamurti in Jayakar 1986, 298) [4]. But the repudiation in the dialogue takes place not as an opposing act; upon seeing the false movement of thought, nothing can be done, since any further internal movement one may make is again the continuation of thought. Thus, seeing is taken to be the only possible transformative "action" (Jayakar 1986, 120).

Aside from mirroring the avenues of thought, the Krishnamurti dialogue makes use of questions to generate intense energy of awareness. This energy does not arise in spite of the reflexive answers but as a direct outcome of negating these answers. Through the repetition of the questions, followed by an insistence on their urgency and at the same time a refusal to permit any mental dissipation, the mind's ordinarily scattered attention is gathered and becomes available for the potential breakthrough of insight. Insight, however, is not necessarily an object of discovery but, more fundamentally, a form of awakened intelligence: a state of mind in which there is no remembrance, conclusion, or reaction (Jayakar 1986, 327). As the latter, the term seems to be used interchangeably with listening, a quality of mind that arises through and as a result of the act of total negation and concentrated energy (Jayakar 1986, 327). At this stage, the question, met with non-conceptualizing minds, leads to increasing openness rather than the sense of closure that characterizes confident answers.

This openness facilitates different possible experiences. The most significant potential experience, however, is that of the transmutation of the brain (Jayakar 1986, 121). The ongoing invalidation of all answers prevents the mind from moving in its familiar directions; thus, such a mind can no longer be in a state of psychological search (Jayakar 1986, 118–119). But in the Krishnamurti dialogue, the mystic's tireless questioning keeps pushing the discussants to supply him with

an answer while swiftly disproving any of their statements. This paradoxical condition puts unusual pressure on the brain, which is accustomed to "*movement in time*"; thus, in the absence of movement, there is tremendous focus of energy, which, according to Krishnamurti, causes the brain cells to mutate in order to conduct this extraordinary state of undirected awareness (Jayakar 1986, 121). This mutation, which constitutes the basis of "*total insight*" and the discovery of reality beyond thought (Rodrigues 2001, 112–119), can be understood as the ultimate purpose of Krishnamurti's method, as well as the new dimension that he added to the field of religious inquiry.

3 First Dialogue Analysis

The Krishnamurti dialogue continued to evolve "*in subtlety and insight*" after the 1948 shift (Jayakar 1986, 117). Its major characteristics, as outlined above, nonetheless persisted, regardless of the identity of the discussants, specific locations, periods, or subjects of discussion. To demonstrate this consistency, I shall analyze two sample dialogues derived from different sources and contexts: the first took place in Ojai, California, in 1977 (Krishnamurti 1996, 227–236) and the second is a dialogue from 1980 with friends and associates in Delhi, India (Jayakar 1986, 385–391).

The first dialogue revolves around the question: *What is the relation between Krishnamurti's teaching and truth?* This discussion is particularly revealing, since the way Krishnamurti treats a subject that calls for a reflection on the objective validity of his teachings greatly emphasizes his method of turning the question into an intense self-observation of the questioner themselves. In addition, the epistemological nature of the question – *how do we know Krishnamurti is telling the truth?* – is employed by Krishnamurti to evaluate the epistemological tools one has at one's disposal when one approaches such inquiry.

The dialogue commences when two anonymous discussants introduce the question in the presence of a small group of disciples. In response, Krishnamurti asserts that there are only two possibilities: he is "*either talking out of the silence of truth*" or "*out of the noise of an illusion*" (Krishnamurti 1996, 227); but quickly thereafter he asks his companions: "*So which is it that he is doing?*" (Krishnamurti 1996, 227). From then on, although both discussants and readers can still recognize the authoritative figure in this conversation, it is the questioners' question. The mystic is determined to "*go slowly, for this is interesting*" (Krishnamurti 1996, 227); there is no rush, since the transformation does not lie in supplying an answer but in the tortuous unfoldment of the question and the ways in which the brain handles it. Aware of criticism of his work – that his approach could be a mere reaction to a conditioned childhood – Krishnamurti challenges his interlocutors by asking them: "*How will you find out? How will you approach this problem?*" This is an obvious trap, since one of the most consistent principles of Krishnamurti's method is that the very search for "*how*" is inherently flawed, an expression of a fragmented thought (Jayakar 1986, 119).

"*I am asking what you do,*" Krishnamurti states, pressing his companions to shift the focal point of the inquiry to the mind of the one who listens to his teaching (Krishnamurti 1996, 227). Now what is scrutinized is not the truthfulness of the discourse but the quality of the mind that assesses what it hears: "*Am I listening to him with all the knowledge I have gathered… or what my own experience tells me?*" (Krishnamurti 1996, 228). And then: "*Am I capable of listening to what he is saying with complete abandonment of the past? Are you?*" (Krishnamurti 1996, 229). We started by asking whether the speaker speaks out of silence, but this is useless, Krishnamurti indicates, since what should trouble us is whether the evaluating faculty is too conditioned to tell the difference. Impressively, he advocates cultivating a skeptical mind, in the sense of questioning *both* everything that is being said by him, the teacher, and one's own prejudice (Krishnamurti 1996, 228).

From here on, Krishnamurti progresses carefully, tirelessly returning to the question "*[h]ow would you answer this question?*" (1996, 229), while blocking all mental pathways and angles and building up the energy in the room by fending off gratifying answers. He rejects even reasonable statements, ones he himself is likely to voice later on – i.g., "*[w]hen I have come to the conclusion that it is the truth, then I am already not listening*" (Krishnamurti 1996, 229). We can only assume that he rejects them on the grounds that they are derived from the storehouse of memory and are driven by the wish to diminish the intensity of what is happening. More generally, he begins to deploy his method of inclusive negation, which, in this dialogue, is aimed at repudiating all the different epistemological tools, one after another.

After the teacher has negated past knowledge as a tool of evaluation, he points out that the logical instrument, one's sensitivity to false or incoherent statements, can be "*very false*" in itself (Krishnamurti 1996, 229) [5]. Soon after, he negates one's deepest feeling, intuition, and self-verification based on direct experience of change in response to the teaching, since "*it may be self-evident to you and yet an illusion*" (Krishnamurti 1996, 230). The skepticism he demon-

strates is, again, justified, since many people have verified extremely unsound and even damaging "*truths*" within themselves. Thus, both logic, as the measure that is supposed to safeguard us from unstable subjective truths, and one's most intimate truths are rejected. In the same way, Krishnamurti regards one's ability to trust the truthfulness of the speaker's words based on a solid relationship of love and affection as a "*very dangerous thing too*" (Krishnamurti 1996, 231). And when a discussant suggests that it is the sense of silence that permeates the teacher's presence that evidences where the teaching comes from, Krishnamurti alerts them to the fact that even a silent mind can be self-created rather than genuinely spontaneous, as a result of great discipline (Krishnamurti 1996, 231). Last, even mystical direct perception, an insight into the teacher's transmission, is denied, since devout Christians and disciples of gurus would also testify to the very same truthfulness (Krishnamurti 1996, 233).

Having relentlessly negated all these options, Krishnamurti keeps on asking: "*How do you in your heart of hearts… know that he is speaking the truth?*" (1996, 232). It is a tremendous question, he says, not "*just a dramatic or intellectual question,*" and it must be answered urgently, even though he deems all answers futile and all the familiar tools of investigation useless (Krishnamurti 1996, 232). Clearly, his aim is to keep the discussants' minds in a state of unusual pressure. When, overwhelmed by the paradoxical situation, a discussant asks whether "*one can ever get an answer*" or whether perhaps this is a "*false question,*" Krishnamurti compels the questioner to resolve even this puzzlement by themselves (Krishnamurti 1996, 233). At certain points he seems to adopt an approach that resembles Socratic irony [6], pretending to be guided by the other's more confident wisdom and even helping to develop the other's answer only to refute the statement even more sharply (Krishnamurti 1996, 233). And the way that the discussion finally reaches a "positive" conclusion – ironic in nature, as we shall see – is Socratic as well, since Krishnamurti extricates the answer from one of the questioners, thus making it *their* answer (Krishnamurti 1996, 234):

K *Isn't there a terrible danger in this?*

Q *I am sure there is a danger.*

K *So you are now saying that one has to walk in danger.*

Q *Yes.*

K *Now I begin to understand what you are saying.*

We also realize at this stage what Krishnamurti was endeavoring to achieve. Having negated the entire range of epistemological instruments, one is left to conclude that Krishnamurti's teaching offers no security – as opposed to the confident reliance on gurus and priests (Krishnamurti 1996, 235). It is, Krishnamurti says, a path "*full of mines, the razor's edge path*" (Krishnamurti 1996, 234). This is strikingly similar to the Lord of Death's words to Nachiketa in the Katha Upanishad: "*Sharp like a razor's edge, the sages say, is the path, difficult to traverse*" (Upanishads 2007, 82).

What Krishnamurti advocates is a dynamic state of total awareness without ever settling into any comfortably permanent position; again, a quality of mind rather than an answer. Since the answer is the unfolding probing itself, the dialogical process serves as an existential demonstration of the "answer" to the question. This dialogue shows both the discussants and the reader what it is like to be in an energetic, ceaselessly flowing state of inquiry. This is demonstrated even more clearly by the fact that after the probing into the primary question has "ended," the dialogue, very much like some of the anti-climactic endings of Plato's dialogues, moves on to a secondary question: "*Is perception continuous so that there is no collection of the debris?*" and, once again, the question is, in itself, a reflection of a dialogue that never accumulates debris (Krishnamurti 1996, 236). Krishnamurti's insight, therefore, is not a final state, since "final" indicates time; rather, it is a state that is completely outside of time.

Krishnamurti confirms a remark suggesting that the way of inquiry practiced by him is "*the way all science works,*" in that "*every statement must be in danger of being false*" (Krishnamurti 1996, 234). This is partly true: science is indeed a tireless exploration that strives to transcend belief, subjective perception, and absolute or final truths. In this sense, it can be proposed that Krishnamurti blends elements of scientific inquiry into his mystical exploration. However, whereas the Krishnamurti dialogue ambitiously declares that it is an anti-accumulative project, scientific paradigms constructively evolve throughout the centuries, building upon those discoveries that have survived a great deal of scrutiny while discarding those that have not withstood the test of time. Even the great leaps of insight taken by science every now and then have all been deeply rooted in the evolution of knowledge. Furthermore, the scientific way of inquiry not only negates what others have said but also consciously and positively communicates with previous and contemporary discussions. It also heavily relies on epistemological devices, such as logic and evidence, that Krishnamurti is willing to use only to a very limited degree (Krishnamurti 1996, 235).

4 Second Dialogue Analysis

The second dialogue (Jayakar 1986, 385–391) confirms the results of my exposition and analysis above, but since the inquiry it offers is a conscious reflection on Krishnamurti's unique method of total negation, it throws light on other dimensions of the Krishnamurti dialogue. One central dimension revealed through this group discussion is the dialogue as a mystical initiation. Jayakar (1986, 391), who attended this session, likens the experience to the Vedic tradition in which the guru holds the disciple in the "*darkness of the within,*" as if in an embryo, for three nights, while "*the gods gather to witness the birth.*" Similarly, she writes, Krishnamurti enabled his companions' minds to "*directly touch his mind*" (Jayakar 1986, 391). This sense of mystical initiation is explicitly pointed out by the teacher himself when he refers to a door that has to be opened as a result of their exploration: "*I have a feeling that there is something waiting to enter, a Holy Ghost is waiting; the thing is waiting for you to open the door, and it will come*" (Jayakar 1986, 386). And when the conversation came to a close, he remarked: "*I think we are opening the door slightly*" (Jayakar 1986, 391). This implies that Krishnamurti believed that his dialogical process had a considerable transformative and religious potential.

The gathering, which took place in Vasant Vihar, Delhi, in 1980, included close associates of Krishnamurti and centered on the higher educational aims of one of his Indian schools, the Rishi Valley School. As always, the expectation of the educators that the mystic would play his role as the school's founder by laying out an instructive vision is quickly thwarted when Krishnamurti assumes instead the position of a passionate questioner (Jayakar 1986, 385). Thus, the dialogue is inaugurated by a primary question that Krishnamurti formulates on the basis of some preliminary exchanges: "*How is Narayan* [note: a teacher at the Rishi Valley School] *actually going to help the students – not just talk to them, but to awaken intelligence, to communicate what it is to penetrate at great depth?*" (Jayakar 1986, 385). In this case, the primary question is already a "*how*" question, which, as we may recall, prompts the listeners to fall into the trap of answering from the field of experience and knowledge. Thus, the "*how*" itself is an invitation to the process of negation.

Unprepared for this sudden turnabout, Narayan suggests hesitantly that he would meet both teachers and students in small groups daily (Jayakar 1986, 385). But Krishnamurti rejects the option of external action, insisting that this could not bring about the element he most hopes for beyond all learning capacities and the cultivation of virtues: "*something totally unworldly*" (Jayakar 1986, 385). He thus develops the question further, moving away from the educational theme to a far broader metaphysical concern: "*What is the thing that changes the whole mind, the whole brain?*" (Jayakar 1986, 386). From this point onward, the way of inquiry and this fundamental question will become inseparable; the dialogical process will mirror the answer by offering an experiential initiation into this elusive factor that changes the brain. Accordingly, the conversation undergoes dramatic quickening just when the mystic begins to search for a state in which the brain is so quick that it never rests, but is only "*moving, moving, moving*" (Jayakar 1986, 385). It is intriguing to note that the Krishnamurti dialogue does not seek the well-known culmination of final inner rest, which is so common in East Asian mystical philosophies. Consider, for instance, the Katha Upanishad's statement according to which "*when the five senses are stilled, when the mind is stilled, when the intellect is stilled, that is called the highest state by the wise*" (Upanishads 2007, 91). For Krishnamurti, although one's awakened mind is steadfast "*like an immovable rock,*" it is also insatiably dynamic (Jayakar 1986, 391).

After referring to the door that "*needs to be opened by both of us*" – that is, through the act of dialogue – Krishnamurti begins to employ his usual method of total negation, this time repudiating the entire range of religious and mystical practices that have striven to engender this "*sense of benediction*" (Jayakar 1986, 386). This negation of all possible movements toward the sacred strongly echoes his 1929 declaration that "*truth is a pathless land.*" However, the dialogical procedure enables Krishnamurti to actively prevent his listeners' minds from traversing these pathways. By rejecting widely accepted spiritual exercises such as meditation and self-observation as insufficient and limited, while deploying the question to grope for that subtle transformative factor, Krishnamurti gathers and deepens the energy in the room (Jayakar 1986, 387). And when he is asked about the nature of the door that has to be opened, he evades the pitfall of forming a constructive statement and goes on with his negatory dialectic (Jayakar 1986, 387).

While the intent behind the negation of all religious and mystical practices is quite clear – discovering truth's pathless land by rejecting all paths leading to it – the reasons Krishnamurti offers for the invalidity of the ancient paths are less convincing. First, he measures their potency according to their results, arguing that "*millions have meditated*" but failed to evoke benediction (Jayakar 1986, 386). But Krishnamurti never recognized even a single person as having attained this benediction as a result of his method of negation (Jay-

akar 1986, 280), whereas in this dialogue he mentions that in the Buddha's case, after fifty years there were two, Sariputta and Moggallana, who accomplished the ultimate state (Jayakar 1986, 387). This implies that well-paved paths may lead to the sacred, and more successfully than Krishnamurti's anti-path. Second, his statement that he himself did not need to go through "*all these disciplines*" (Jayakar 1986, 391) certainly does not prove that outside of Krishnamurti's individual case, paths leading to the sacred are inherently wrong. Krishnamurti's highly subjective conclusion may lead us to infer that his notion of religion is rooted in his personal transformational experience, and that it should be classified accordingly, within the framework set by Ninian Smart's six elements of religious traditions, as a sharing rather than an actual teaching (Rodrigues 2001, 202).

While the claims that Krishnamurti makes about the ineffectiveness of all paths are questionable, his main argument in this dialogue, which is also his justification of the methodless method of total denial, is more substantial. Krishnamurti asserts that there is an as-yet-unattempted possibility – a chapter that "*has not been studied so far*" (Jayakar 1986, 391) – in the field of mystical pursuit. To grasp this possibility, it should be noted that for Krishnamurti, human thought is not limited to the individual brain's mental creation and image-making activity, since everyone's brains are also products and storehouses of the accumulated experience and knowledge of humanity as a whole (Kumar 2015, 86). This leads the mystic to conclude that "*because my mind is the human mind which has experimented with all that and yet has not come upon this benediction… I won't touch all that*" (Jayakar 1986, 387). His method of total negation is therefore rooted in the logic that all optional pathways of religious search, which appear to be outside the seeker, already exist in their brain, and so there is no need to take these paths that, at least unconsciously, have already been taken. This is also the one factor that he believes changes the whole mind, since now, by negating all forms of human search, the mind can attain the very state it has sought for countless millennia. Krishnamurti's innovation is his proposition that even the noblest traditions of mystical transcendence are now registered as knowledge within the brain and, as such, that repeating their practices can only perpetuate the mind's conditioning. Nonetheless, this unprecedented form of renunciation that Krishnamurti offers to his discussants seems highly unrealistic in light of its prerequisite that one should already be established in a state of unity consciousness. After all, how many people can proclaim, as Krishnamurti does in this dialogue, that *"I am the saint; I am the monk; I am the man who says, I will fast, I will torture myself physically, I will deny all sex…*" (Jayakar 1986, 387)? Once again, we may wonder whether Krishnamurti's fiery meditation is, in effect, an inspiring sharing of his exceptional subjective reality, which was already remarkable in his childhood and which was spontaneously characterized by this mode of all-inclusive negation.

Nonetheless, Krishnamurti is adamant that this "*act of total denial*" can be shown and shared, and that it is the lack of total denial that keeps the door closed (Jayakar 1986, 389). Unlike many other dialogues, in which Krishnamurti repudiates answers suggested by discussants, here he plays a double role in that he is mostly the one raising the answers that he himself quickly rejects. After negating the path of the ascetic and its well-known practices of renunciation, celibacy, fasting, and solitude, he questions whether it is immense energy that opens the door, but considering the fact that missionaries possess great passion, he abandons this option (Jayakar 1986, 387). Similarly, it is not Krishnamurti's own passion and presence that can bring the student any closer to the sacred (Jayakar 1986, 387). In fact, one of the climactic moments in this dialogue is when the teacher demonstrates how he includes in his negation even his own teaching of self-knowledge, regarding it as yet another path that leads nowhere (Jayakar 1986, 388, 389). But Krishnamurti does not stop at negating religious forms of search: he goes on to deny all the experiments done by humans in the hope of attaining this blessedness, such as alcohol, sex, and drugs, but also study and knowledge (Jayakar 1986, 390). And when the main discussant, Narayan, is overwhelmed by the magnitude of this method, commenting that the "*lack of strength of the body and the mind creeps in,*" the teacher's reply is: "*I am eighty-five and I say, you have to deny*" (Jayakar 1986, 390).

It is not that Krishnamurti negates the various paths as a form of systematic skepticism. In his words, this is not a "*blind denial… the denial has tremendous reason, logic behind it*" (Jayakar 1986, 389). He is very far from negators such as the sixth-century-BC Indian ascetic Sanjaya, whose approach of giving negative answers to all questions while holding no view of his own was rebuked by the early Buddhists (Raju 1954, 694). In this dialogue, Krishnamurti not only proves that his negation has a positive end, but also establishes negation as his pathless path [7]. In light of this, it is clear that the criticism made by the Indian saint Ānandamayī Mā (1896–1982) that "[note: Krishnamurti] *has one fault: while his way is certainly valid he does not accept the validity of approaches other than his own*" (Anandamayi Ma 2020) is rooted in a misunderstanding: he could not have accepted other

paths since this *is* his path. His all-inclusive denial is an exercise in the cessation of all movements of search, through which the mind is led to freedom from even the subtlest form of experimentation (Jayakar 1986, 389–390). In this respect, we can say that negation is Krishnamurti's unique form of internal renunciation.

Krishnamurti is fully aware that this total negation requires an unusual degree of maturity compared to what he observes as the immaturity characterizing guru followership (Jayakar 1986, 388). He also understands how delicate this act is, since upon negating all paths, one may easily abandon the urgency of one's search and sink into spiritual lethargy (Jayakar 1986, 388). His negation is an uncommon type of middle path that retains the exigency of the search while keeping its energy unwasted and undirected, gathering it instead for the state of insight (Jayakar 1986, 391):

> '*Where do you get your perceptions?' asked Narayan.*
> *Krishnaji said, '[b]y not doing any of this.'*
> *'By not doing will I get it?' asked Narayan.*
> *Krishnaji's voice came from depth, it was held in eons. 'No.'*

Since this is a mystical transformative dialogue, Krishnamurti expects his students to "see" that the brain has already tried all of these pathways and need not repeat any of them, and, in this very act of seeing, to jump out of the "*circle which man has woven around himself*" (Jayakar 1986, 391). After all, any movement that the mind would make is another expression of the activity of searching; thus, an unobstructed perception of the illusory is the only available action of the negating mind. In actuality, even within the intense setting of this dialogue form, which enables Krishnamurti to instantly block all mental routes of escape, his associates seem unable to face the absolute negation promoted by him. "*Please answer me,*" Krishnamurti implores them, "*[t]his is a challenge. You have to answer. Are you still experimenting?*" (Jayakar 1986, 389). But near the end of the discussion, his companions begin to withdraw from the unwavering focus and their comments are mainly attempts to diffuse the gathered energy by returning to opinion-based exchanges and balancing views (Jayakar 1986, 391). Is this because they have not truly dared to give it a try, or is it that the Krishnamurti dialogue, this example in particular, puts an unrealistic pressure on the listener to remain so incredibly awake without relief? Needless to say, Krishnamurti himself remains fully capable of holding the question: as he often does, he concludes the dialogue by leaving a question to hang in the air.

5 On Krishnamurti's Question and Negation

The close analyses of the early group discussions from 1948, as well as the two mature demonstrations of the process, have indeed unveiled recurring structures in the Krishnamurti dialogue. Among these hidden structures, however, we can identify two major methodological components that deserve greater attention, since they are, I suggest, Krishnamurti's most notable contribution to the field of religious and mystical thought: unanswerable questions and methodological negation. It should be remarked that if we examine Krishnamurti's philosophical constructs in isolation from his methodology, we may come to the conclusion that his metaphysics is not only unoriginal but also fundamentally feeble. However, expecting Krishnamurti's statements to measure up to academic or even purely logical standards is, in itself, an error, since his innovation has been in offering new tools of inquiry, that is, teaching us not what to think but how to stop thinking altogether.

First, we should consider Krishnamurti's tool of *unanswerable questions*, which derives from such an unorthodox perspective that it brings us to reflect more generally on the philosophical and mystical functions of questions. Krishnamurti's method shows us that one can deploy a question not for the sake of obtaining information and not even for the sake of true knowledge or solid metaphysical truths (if we consider questions in the philosophical and mystical domains as a knowledge-seeking act). It further demonstrates that a question can be practiced with the intention to eliminate existing information and even as a part of a general attempt to transmute the memory-based brain altogether.

The history of philosophy has shown us another prominent figure who often employed questions to reveal the limits of knowledge and to destroy unchecked mental certainties: Socrates. Nevertheless, what Socrates attempted to achieve through his elenchus greatly differed from the motivation behind Krishnamurti's questioning. The real difference between the two systems lies not in structure but in purpose: *elenchus* aims at disproving a given thesis, typically the interlocutor's answer to the principal question (Hintikka 1993, 8), whereas Krishnamurti was not looking to detect and refute logical incoherencies, but to enable the question itself to meditatively operate on the discussants' minds. Rather than a logical entity whose role is to lead to judgment, the question is practiced as the compulsive drive to face and explore the existential mystery, a drive that is so primordial that it resides at the core of the mind and only takes the shape of verbal questions. Ordinarily, this driving force behind all

human search for transcendent knowledge becomes limited, since the brain responds to the presence of a question in the habitual way of finding a confident answer within the field of the known, that is, memory, prior experience, and ready-made authoritative formulations. Since the seeking and the finding are carried out by the same conditioned activity of human thought, such answers, Krishnamurti tells us, can only lead us in the opposite direction to that which we were striving to achieve in the first place.

Thus, the Krishnamurti dialogue demonstrates the way that a question can liberate the mind and open it widely so that it becomes genuinely capable of contacting that which exists outside of thought's domain. Questions, as the truth-seeking mechanism, release their potential transformative power only as soon as we have blocked all pathways of false finding. They have subtler activities, such as leading the questioner beyond the division of subject and object, inquirer and object of inquiry, and they are unanswerable in the sense that they forever uncover a living truth that cannot be appropriated by thought. This renders all accumulated answers, including the noblest ones, meaningless, and for this reason, important questions should be asked every time anew.

In addition to the tool of unanswerable questions, the other major tool of the Krishnamurti dialogue is what I term *methodological negation*: a transference of the principle of mystical negation from the realm of metaphysics and epistemology to the realm of methodology. According to Jones (2016, 229), the approach of negation is one of the elements that distinguish mystics from theists: the theist ascribes positive features to God, whereas the mystic perceives the negative way as a corrective to positive depictions, which by their nature can only be borrowed from the phenomenal realm [8]. It is thus both a device utilized by those attempting to convey their mystical experiences (Blackwood 1963, 202–206) and a "*speculative theological strategy*" for figuring out the logic of notions about the supreme being (Jones 2016, 229). Negation as an epistemic act has been broadly used by East Asian mystics. We find its earliest expressions in the sixth-century-BC Sanjaya, who employed negation as a tool of skepticism in a way that perhaps inspired the Greek philosopher Pyrrho (Raju 1954, 695, 703), but also in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, where the reality of Brahman is famously described as "*not this not that*", or "*neti neti*" (Upanishads 2007, 105–106). However, negation was also introduced into the Western theistic tradition through the *via negativa* approach of Neoplatonism, most notably represented by Plotinus, which later influenced mystical thinkers such as Augustine and Eckhart (Jones 2016, 226).

The type of negation expressed in the Krishnamurti dialogue cannot be adequately placed within the framework of metaphysical and epistemological negation. Krishnamurti did not devise an analytical tool for the evaluation of the ontological status of certain realities or entities. The problem that his dialectical negation tackles is of time, memory, accumulation, and conditioning. In other words, what he negates is the past, in which any existing religious or mystical path is inevitably included, since humanity's past as a whole is ingrained in one's brain as thought-forms. This form of negation as a radical position of the mind, or as the vitality of the unconditioned brain, can be considered his unique contribution to the *via negativa* approach.

One may surmise that in developing his negation, Krishnamurti was seeking out a method that could do the impossible: avoiding even the subtlest action of the dualistic, self-enhancing mind by leading the mind itself to realize the futility of its action (Shringy 1977, 202). Since the problem of human existence is action based on idea, any "positive" or constructive approach involving will and self-interest merely perpetuates our conditioning in a modified form (Shringy 1977, 193, 198). Thus, the negative approach is the only available one: in its non-fragmented awareness, it "*breaks the circle of ignorance from within, as it were, without strengthening it*" (Shringy 1977, 199). In Krishnamurti's eyes, what appears to be a positive approach is, in effect, a negative one, since it ultimately reaffirms the false, while his way, which consists entirely of seeing the false, is "*not negation. On the contrary; this awakening of creative intelligence is the only positive help that I can give you*" (quoted in Shringy 1977, 197–198). Moreover, what methods and techniques can be relevant in light of the fact that the unconditioned reality is only discovered as a result of the shedding of the false? (Shringy 1977, 203).

6 Conclusion

Krishnamurti's unique form of dialogue can be generally defined as *a process of questioning designed to block all ordinary pathways of thought with the intention to prepare the mind for an unfamiliar condition in which the activity of insight is made possible*. The dynamic and rapid sequence of question and negation constitutes the main part of any Krishnamurti dialogue. The process itself can be described as a living demonstration of the activity of thought through the persistent mirroring effect of question and negation, with the intention of leading to the collapse of this activity. The way Krishnamurti goes into thought and gets to the end of it is by formulating a transformative question, repeating it frequently, and utilizing the paradoxical technique of demanding an answer while negating nearly all suggested answers as useless memory or conditioned reaction. This technique, Krishnamurti believes, puts great pressure on the participants' minds, pressure whose purpose is ultimately constructive.

This rapid shift from the traditional guru position to the Socratic-like approach of passing the responsibility on to one's interlocutor is a persistent feature of the Krishnamurti dialogue: in this context, the function of the unanswered question is to throw his discussants back upon themselves. Furthermore, questions to which there are no answers force the mind to move away from the field of the known, and when held indefinitely, they gather energy that then operates on the brain. Lastly, this type of question, which naturally declines all answers, inaugurates and propels the process of negation. The process of negation in the Krishnamurti dialogue completes the act of holding questions and delaying reactions. The unanswerable question functions as a looking glass that motionlessly reflects the mind's struggle to provide an unconditioned answer, whereas the active repudiation of the answers aims to empty and purify the mind. By energetically disconfirming nearly all of the interlocutors' suggestions, Krishnamurti attempts to block the brain's movement along its familiar mental circuits, thus prompting it to rise to a different type of intelligent activity. To borrow Platonian terminology, the negation is intended to lead to a state of transformative *aporia* (philosophical puzzlement): the brain that comes up against its own limits finds itself unable to move and its only way out is by leaping to a transcendent insight. Above all, Krishnamurti's negative approach is founded on the premise that only through a rigorous negation of all knowledge and experience can one come upon the positive.

The Hadotian reading of the two sample dialogues illuminates Krishnamurti's method as a system that has no philosophically constructive ambitions but rather mystical and transformative ones. Although the method does engage certain elements of the philosophical mind, in terms of theory-building it is exclusively concerned with destroying existing mental structures, while its only positive end is the potential emergence of a new state of mind. It may thus be proposed that the Krishnamurti dialogue functions as a *transformative mystical dialogue*. Nevertheless, the method does not aim to accomplish a total or instantaneous insight; rather, it is designed for the "*awakening of creative intelligence*" (Krishnamurti in Shringy 1977, 197–198) by which one may achieve total insight. It was for this reason that the confusion and helplessness expressed by many participants were of no concern to Krishnamurti: his dialogue was primarily meant to provoke, agitate, and revolutionize, and in this respect, it was a successful transmission.

Notes

[1] Martin (1997, xi–xii) observes that both Socrates and Krishnamurti employed the dialogue form in order to encourage their hearers to examine critically the assumptions on which their beliefs and their very experience of themselves depended.

[2] It seems that every Krishnamurti scholar (e.g., Rodrigues 2001, xiii) finds themselves in the position of defending the scholarly attempt itself to study his teachings systematically.

[3] In the last phase of his life, Krishnamurti often referred to himself in the third person as "K."

[4] This rejection of both attachment and the search for liberation can be construed as a development of the Buddhist middle path, beyond the Buddha's ethical middle path and Nagarjuna's metaphysical middle path (see Raju 1954, 702).

[5] Krishnamurti does employ logic from time to time to expose false statements, as a part of his method of negation (e.g., Krishnamurti 1996, 230, 233). However, for him, the heart of the failure of every statement is the fact that it has emerged from the field of knowledge.

[6] Based on Hadot's (2002, 25, 27) definition.

[7] In this sense, Krishnamurti's negative approach, whose essence is affirmation of transcendent reality, is in line with the mystical *via negativa* – ultimately, there is a negation of negation (Jones 2016, 227–228).

[8] Nevertheless, Jones's depiction of the mystic applies to apophatic theists as well.

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